

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Calling Planet Earth - Space Outreach to the General Public (6)

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EXTREME EXPLORATION AND OUTREACH: PLUTO AND ULTIMA THULE

Abstract

Three billion miles from Earth, NASA's New Horizons spacecraft moved at speeds that would get it from New York to Los Angeles in about four minutes and was focused on Pluto and its moons – distant worlds that humankind had never seen up close – recording hundreds of pictures and other data that would forever change our view of the outer solar system. The historic 2015 flyby of Pluto by the New Horizons spacecraft culminated in a wealth of remarkable imagery and other scientific data, generating headlines worldwide and setting records for both the farthest planet ever explored and arguably the largest public engagement of any NASA science mission in history. From Plutoploozas; working with museums, science centers, planetariums, and libraries; and PlutoTime to social media campaigns, documentaries, and live television broadcasts the goal was to engage the public in this great voyage of exploration. The engagement and communications program for the mission began long before the spacecraft was launched and had to generate awareness and maintain momentum through a long, almost 10-year cruise to Pluto, all leading up to the historic flyby on July 14, 2015. These programs engaged the public throughout the history-making New Horizons Pluto system flyby and inspired the next generation of explorers. The excitement and engagement continued on into the Kuiper Belt with the historic flyby of Ultima Thule. Taking the best practices and lessons learned from the Pluto flyby and applying those to ideas for the world's first-ever KBO encounter – January 1, 2019, we set another record – for exploring the farthest world ever explored, over 4 billion miles from Earth! Since there are no planned missions after New Horizons to explore worlds in the Kuiper Belt, it's anyone's bet how long it will be before our record is eclipsed.