



America's First Female Astronaut Dies

Sally Ride, America's first woman to go to space, died July 23rd at age 61, after battling pancreatic cancer. Ride's contribution to America's space program continued right up until her death. After two trips to orbit aboard the shuttle, she went on to an award-winning academic career where her expertise and wisdom were widely sought on matters related to space. She holds the distinction of being the only person to serve as a member of both investigation boards following NASA's two space shuttle accidents.

"The fact that I was going to be the first American woman to go into space carried huge expectations along with it," Ride recalled in a NASA interview for the 25th anniversary of her flight in 2008.

"On launch day, there was so much excitement and so much happening around us in crew quarters, even on the way to the launch pad," Ride said. "I didn't really think about it that much at the time . . . but I came to appreciate what an honor it was to be selected to be the first to get a chance to go into space."



Perseid Meteor Shower

The really big meteor event of any Northern Hemisphere summer is always the Perseid meteor shower. It's reliable, and rich with meteors that fall in many colors. The Perseids will peak on the mornings – not the evenings – of August 12 and 13 in 2012. The moon will be in a waning crescent phase, rising around midnight. While the moon will somewhat obscure the 2012 Perseid display, it won't hinder the Perseids nearly as much as the Supermoon obscured the last meteor shower, the Eta Aquarids, in May.

The Perseids radiate from a point in the constellation Perseus the Hero. You don't need to know Perseus to watch the shower because the meteors appear in all parts of the sky. The Perseids often peak at 50 or more meteors per hour in a dark sky. The Perseids tend to strengthen in number as late night deepens into midnight, and typically produce the most meteors in the wee hours before dawn. These meteors are often bright and frequently leave persistent trains. Read more about the 2012 Perseid meteor shower [here](#).

Ride joined NASA as part of the 1978 astronaut class, the first to include women. Ride trained for five years before she and three of her classmates were assigned to STS-7. The six-day mission deployed two communications satellites and performed a number of science experiments.

Read more about her life and contributions [here](#).

Looking for a great dark sky location to watch the meteors? Check out your nearest [state park](#) or local astronomy club. We recommend the [Texas Astronomical Society](#) or the [Fort Worth Astronomical Society](#).



Pluto's Fifth Moon

A team of astronomers using NASA's Hubble Space Telescope is reporting the discovery of another moon orbiting the icy dwarf planet Pluto.

The moon is estimated to be irregular in shape and 6 to 15 miles across. It is in a 58,000-mile-diameter circular orbit around Pluto that is assumed to be coplanar with the other satellites in the system.

"The moons form a series of neatly nested orbits, a bit like Russian dolls," said team lead Mark Showalter of the SETI Institute in Mountain View, Calif.

The discovery increases the number of known moons orbiting Pluto to five.

The Pluto team is intrigued that such a small planet can have such a complex collection of satellites. The new discovery provides additional clues for unraveling how the Pluto system formed and evolved. The favored theory is that all the moons are relics of a collision between Pluto and another large Kuiper belt object billions of years ago.

The new detection will help scientists navigate NASA's



Landing Curiosity

NASA's next Mars rover, Curiosity, is slated to land on the Red Planet on August 6, 2012 at 12:31 a.m. CDT. Watch a real-time visualization of its journey through space and get up-to-date data sets using NASA's [Eyes on the Solar System](#) 3-D interactive.

With its rover named Curiosity, Mars Science Laboratory mission is part of [NASA's Mars Exploration Program](#), a long-term effort of robotic exploration of the red planet. Curiosity was designed to assess whether Mars ever had an environment able to support small life forms called microbes. In other words, its mission is to determine the planet's "habitability."

As NASA's Mars Rover Curiosity prepares to land on Mars, public audiences worldwide can take their own readiness steps to share in the adventure.

Martian fans can help NASA test-drive a new 3-D interactive experience that will allow the public to follow along with Curiosity's discoveries on Mars. Using Unity, a game development tool, NASA is pushing new limits by rendering high-resolution terrain maps of Gale Crater, Curiosity's landing site, collected from Mars orbiters. A 3-D "virtual

New Horizons spacecraft through the Pluto system in 2015, when it makes an historic and long-awaited high-speed flyby of the distant world.

Find out more about this discovery and NASA's New Horizons Mission [here](#).

rover" version of Curiosity will follow the path of the real rover as it makes discoveries.

Find out more about the game [here](#).

More information about the Mars Science Laboratory can be found on [NASA's Mission Site](#).