

SCIENCE

Following New Horizons' Long Mission, Pluto Gets a Forever Stamp

Trilobites

By NICHOLAS ST. FLEUR MAY 31, 2016

When the New Horizons spacecraft launched in 2006, it left with a 29-cent hitchhiker: a 1991 stamp that read “Pluto: Not Yet Explored.”

Nine years and 3 billion miles later, the craft carried its postage passenger past the dwarf planet, making history along the way.

Now, New Horizons has a stamp of its own — and it's part of collection called “Pluto — Explored!”

NASA and the United States Postal Service released two new Forever 47-cent stamps commemorating the voyage on Tuesday. The stamps feature an artist's rendering of the yellow probe and a color-enhanced, composite image of Pluto taken during the flyby that prominently features its heart-shaped mark.

“The 1991 stamp that showed Pluto ‘not yet explored’ highlighted some important, unfinished business for NASA's first exploration of the planets of our solar system,” S. Alan Stern, the principal investigator for the New Horizons mission, said in a statement.

“I’m thrilled that 25 years later, these new stamps recognize that Pluto has indeed been explored by the New Horizons spacecraft and revealed to be a complex and fascinating world.”

NASA and the Postal Service also released a stamp collection called “Views of our Planets,” which showcase our solar system’s eight planets (Pluto was downgraded to a dwarf in 2006).

Some of the photos featured on these stamps came from New Horizons’ predecessors, like the Messenger spacecraft for Mercury and Voyager 2 with Neptune. The images of Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus came from the Hubble Space Telescope. Earth’s “Blue Marble” was made using the weather satellite Suomi NPP, which orbits the planet 14 times a day.

The post office issued the stamps on the occasion of the World Stamp Show-NY 2016, an international conference that draws an estimated 250,000 stamp collectors.

If you’re a philatelist or astronomy enthusiast you can snag sheets of the stamps online. Or just wait until the individual stamps journey to your mailbox — which shouldn’t be more difficult than traveling to Pluto, right?

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