A new Forever stamp commemorates the Bennu sample delivery

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When the OSIRIS-REx spacecraft delivers its capsule filled with asteroid dust to a group of eager scientists in the Utah desert on Sept. 24, it will mark a milestone in American space exploration.

The next letter you send likely won't have the same impact on planetary science or the universe's origins, but it could help celebrate the University-led NASA mission to collect a sample from an asteroid.

The U.S. Postal Service is commemorating the delivery of the sample, from the asteroid Bennu, with a new Forever stamp design.[4]. The new stamp features an illustration of the capsule falling beneath a red and white parachute toward a rocky desert landscape.

The OSIRIS-REx mission,[5] led by the University in partnership with NASA and Lockheed Martin, is the first American mission to return a sample from an asteroid. When the mission was launched in 2016,[6] scientists set out to find clues about the origins of the solar system and life on Earth.

The mission will close its current chapter on Sept. 24 when the van-sized spacecraft sends the tire-sized capsule to Earth, floating by parachute to a salty, flat desert in central Utah at the U.S. Department of Defense Utah Test and Training Range.

The Postal Service will dedicate the new stamp[7] at an event at Clark Planetarium in Salt Lake City two days earlier, on Sept. 22. The stamp can be preordered now[8] and will be available to purchase the same day of the dedication.

Forever stamps are always equal in value to the Postal Service's current first-class mail rate for letters up to 1 ounce.

Antonio Alcalá, an art director for the Postal Service, provided the overall design concept for the stamp and the decorative grid of 20 stamps, called a pane. The pane is part of a larger sheet that includes illustrations of the mission's key milestones. Alan Dingman illustrated the stamp and pane using images supplied by NASA. Dingman is an illustrator and painter[9] who also designs book covers.

Carina Bennett, project manager on the OSIRIS-REx mission's sample analysis software engineering team, said she's already preordered one of the stamp panes and plans to have it framed.

"The release of the commemorative stamp was a surprise for the team, and everyone was so excited when it was announced," Bennett said. "The imagery captures a thrilling and important moment for the mission: It's after the final decision has been made to release the sample return capsule and before it's safely on the ground — when we'll all be watching and waiting together in anticipation of what Bennu has to offer."

The University has made its mark on space sciences stamps before

The OSIRIS-REx stamp marks at least the second time that the Postal Service has recognized the University's planetary science expertise with a stamp.

In 2016, the Postal Service released two Forever stamps[8] — featuring Jupiter and Uranus — using images taken by Erich Karkoschka[10], a senior staff scientist at the Lunar and Planetary Laboratory.[9]

The stamps were part of a special edition collection called "Views of Our Planets."

Karkoschka used an infrared camera — which University astronomers and engineers helped build — that was mounted on NASA's Hubble Space Telescope to take the Jupiter image on March 28, 2004. That day, the planet's moons made a rare alignment, casting shadows on the Earth-facing side of Jupiter to create a triple eclipse. Karkoschka took the Uranus image in 2003 using Hubble's Advanced Camera for Surveys.

Because both images were taken using infrared cameras, the planets appear much more colorful in Karkoschka's images than most others.

Postage stamps can be purchased through the Postal Store[10] by calling 844-737-7826, by mail through USA Philatelic[11] or at certain post office locations. The Postal Service also sells officially licensed collections on Amazon[12].


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