

Shoemaker, Eugene Encyclopedia Article

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Shoemaker, Eugene

American Astrogeologist 1928-1997

Eugene Merle Shoemaker was instrumental in establishing the discipline of planetary geology. He founded the U.S. Geological Survey's Branch of Astrogeology, which mapped the Moon and prepared astronauts for lunar exploration.

Eugene Shoemaker, here outside the Palomar Observatory near San Diego, is credited with originating the field of astrogeology within the U.S. Geological Survey.

Born in 1928, Shoemaker's early fascination with the Grand Canyon led him to recognize that the powerful tool of **stratigraphy** could be applied to unraveling the history of the Moon. His research at Meteor Crater in Arizona led to an appreciation of the role of asteroid and comet impacts as a primal and fundamental process in the evolution of planets.

Shoemaker contributed greatly to space science exploration, particularly of the Moon. Although he hungered to become an Apollo astronaut himself, that aspiration was unfulfilled. Shoemaker was part of a leading comet-hunting team that discovered comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 and charted the object's breakup. Pieces of the comet slammed into Jupiter in July 1994—an unprecedented event in the history of astronomical observations. That same year, Shoemaker also led the U.S. Defense Department's Clementine mission, which first detected the possibility of pockets of water ice at the Moon's south pole.

While carrying out research on **impact craters** in the Australian out-back in 1997, Shoemaker was killed in a car accident. A small vial of the astrogeologist's ashes were scattered on the lunar surface, deposited there by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Lunar Prospector spacecraft, which was purposely crashed on the Moon on July 31, 1999, after completing its mission.

See Also

Apollo (Volume 3); Asteroids (Volume 2); Jupiter (Volume 2).

Bibliography

Levy, David H. *Shoemaker: The Man Who Made An Impact*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.