

Spacecraft Launched On Mission to Pluto

The New Horizons spacecraft blasted off January 19 on a trip to learn about the planet Pluto, its moon called Charon, and other distant parts of the solar system.

This is the first mission to study Pluto, which is the furthest planet from the sun. It will take New Horizons almost *ten years* to travel the 3 billion miles to Pluto. The spacecraft is expected to reach Pluto in July 2015.

New Horizons is carrying equipment to study the environment and surface of Pluto and its moon. Pluto may have two smaller moons as well, and scientists hope New Horizons will take pictures of those, too.

Scientists also want New Horizons to send back photos of a part of the solar system called the Kuiper (pronounced KY-per) Belt. The Kuiper Belt is an area of icy rocks outside the orbit of the planet Neptune. Scientists think those rocks are left over from a time more than 4 billion years ago when the planets formed.



NEWS WORD BOX

Pluto	Charon
atmosphere	surface
solar system	mission

New Horizons is the fastest spacecraft ever launched. At one point it will be traveling 47,000 miles per hour, which is ten times as fast as a speeding bullet.

MORE FACTS ABOUT THE MISSION TO PLUTO

- Pluto was discovered in 1930. An 11-year-old English girl suggested the name. Pluto was a Roman god. Pluto's father was named Saturn, and his brothers, Neptune and Jupiter.
- In 1969, it took the *Apollo 11* spacecraft three days to reach the moon. New Horizons passed the moon nine hours after it was launched from Earth.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

Some people say we should not be spending money on space missions such as this one. We should be using that money to solve problems on Earth, they say. What do you think? What are some good reasons to learn more about space?