

Pluto probe to be launched in 2 weeks

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NASA's unmanned first flight to Pluto is set for launch on Jan. 17 and if all goes well will be back with a load of scientific goodies in July of 2015.

The \$700 million flight, dubbed New Horizons, will be not only the first flight to Pluto but NASA's longest mission ever planned in its quest to reach the farthest planet from the sun with the fastest spacecraft ever.

Thanks to that distance and Pluto's tiny size, even the Hubble Space Telescope has managed only the crudest images of the planet's mottled surface, the Baltimore Sun said.

It's mostly rock, water, nitrogen, carbon monoxide and methane, all frozen at minus 387 degrees Fahrenheit.

The mission's top scientist, Alan Stern, 48, of Southwest Research Institute in Boulder, Colo., described Pluto as "a scientific wonderland for atmospheric scientists."

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