

Dawn spacecraft captures video of asteroid approach (w/ video)

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Scientists working with NASA's Dawn spacecraft have created a new video showing the giant asteroid Vesta as the spacecraft approaches this unexplored world in the main asteroid belt.

The video loops 20 images obtained for navigation purposes on June 1.

The images show a dark feature near Vesta's [equator](#) moving from left to right across the field of view as Vesta rotates. Images also show Vesta's jagged, irregular shape, hinting at the enormous crater known to exist at Vesta's [south pole](#).

The images were obtained by a framing camera during a 30-minute period and show about 30 degrees of a rotation. The pixel size in these images is approaching the resolution of the best [Hubble Space Telescope](#) images of Vesta.

Video: This movie shows surface details beginning to resolve as NASA's Dawn spacecraft closes in on the giant [asteroid Vesta](#). The framing camera aboard NASA's [Dawn spacecraft](#) obtained the images used for this animation on June 1, 2011, from a distance of about 300,000 miles (483,000 kilometers).

"Like strangers in a strange land, we're looking for familiar landmarks," said Jian-Yang Li, a Dawn participating scientist from the University of Maryland, College Park. "The shadowy spot is one of those -- it appears to match a feature, known as 'Feature B,' from images of Vesta taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope."

Before orbiting Vesta on July 16, Dawn will gently slow down to about 75 mph (120 kilometers per hour). NASA is expecting to release more images on a weekly basis, with more frequent images available once the spacecraft begins collecting science at Vesta.

"Vesta is coming more and more into focus," said Andreas Nathues, framing camera lead investigator, based at the Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, Katlenburg-Lindau, Germany. "Dawn's framing camera is working exactly as anticipated."

Provided by JPL/NASA

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