

Saturn's moon Atlas shines between gas giant's rings

June 18 2014, by Elizabeth Howell



Saturn's moon Atlas peeks out between the rings in this Cassini shot taken Jan. 23, 2014. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/Space Science Institute

See that small pixel? That's an entire moon you're looking at! Peeking

between the rings of Saturn is the tiny saucer-shaped moon Atlas, as viewed from the Cassini spacecraft. The image is pretty, but there's also a scientific reason to watch the planet's many moons while moving around the rings.

"Although the sunlight at Saturn's distance is feeble compared to that at the Earth, objects cut off from the Sun within Saturn's shadow cool off considerably," NASA stated.

"Scientists study how the moons around Saturn cool and warm as they enter and leave Saturn's shadow to better understand the [physical properties](#) of Saturn's moons."

And if you look at Atlas close-up, it looks a little like a flying saucer! The moon is only 20 miles (32 km) across, which is a bit shy of the length of a marathon. The Voyager 1 team spotted the moon in 1980 when the spacecraft zoomed through the system. You can [learn more about Saturn's moons here](#).



Saturn's moon Atlas. Left image: viewed from the side, at a scale of 0.6 miles (1 km) per pixel. Right image: the mid-southern latitudes, at 820 feet (250 m) per pixel. The images are composite views from the Cassini spacecraft. Credit:

NASA/JPL/SSI

Cassini is still in excellent health (it arrived at Saturn in 2004, and has been in space since 1997), and scientists are eagerly getting ready for when Saturn gets to its [summer solstice](#) in 2017. Among the things being looked at is a hurricane at Saturn's north pole.

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