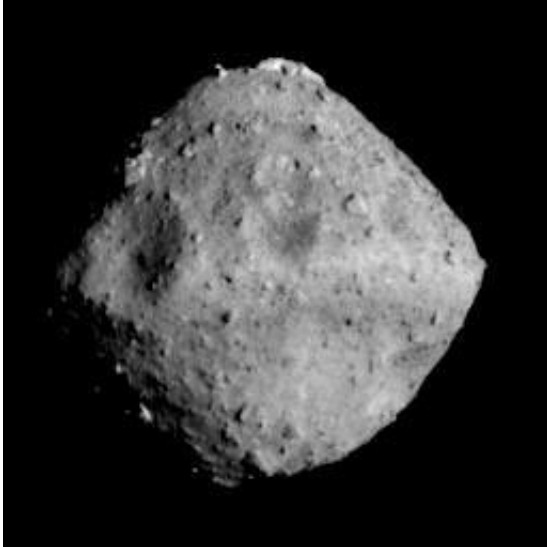


Image: Asteroid 162173 Ryugu

June 28 2018



Credit: JAXA, University of Tokyo, Kochi University, Rikkyo University, Nagoya University, Chiba Institute of Technology, Meiji University, Aizu University, AIST

After a 42-month journey, Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft arrived at asteroid 162173 Ryugu, 300 million km from Earth, on 27 June at 02:35 CEST (00:35 GMT).

This remarkable achievement was confirmed when the spacecraft closed to just 20 km from the 1 km-diameter asteroid's surface, having entered a critical phase of this ambitious mission.

This image was taken on 24 June, as the craft nosed up to the asteroid,

from a distance of about 40 km.

Hayabusa2 aims to study Ryugu in detail, deposit a European and a series of Japanese landers on the surface and return a sample of ancient rock to Earth in 2020.

"Together with all of you, we have become the first eyewitnesses to see asteroid Ryugu. I feel this amazing honour as we proceed with the mission operations," said Yuichi Tsuda, project manager from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

In 2014-17, during Hayabusa2's cruise phase from Earth toward the asteroid, ESA's deep-space ground [station](#) at Malargüe, Argentina – part of the Agency's worldwide ESTRACK network – provided crucial communication support to the mission.

In July this year, Malargüe will resume support, providing one communication contact session per week together with ESA's Cebreros station in Spain. Malargüe station will also support the ESA-JAXA BepiColombo [mission](#), due for launch in the autumn.

Provided by European Space Agency

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