

# Bosnia village with link to Mars enthralled by rover landing

February 17 2021, by Almir Alic

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An aerial photograph shows the village of Jezero, Bosnia, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Bosnian villagers are setting up a video screen in the yard of the village's sole school so people can gather to watch NASA's Mars rover land Thursday in a crater of the Red Planet named after their small village. It will be a historic day for the 1,000 villagers, who hope that the landing of the Perseverance rover in a crater on Mars will also bring them some earthly rewards. (AP Photo/Almir Alic)

Bosnian villagers are preparing to gather in front of a video screen in the yard of their community's only school to watch NASA's Mars rover attempt a difficult landing Thursday in a crater on the red planet named after their small village.

It will be a historic day for the 1,000 villagers, who hope that [the planned landing of the Perseverance rover](#) in Mars' Jezero crater will also bring them some earthly rewards. Some are giving voice to feelings of pride, something rare amid the hardship and poverty that remains entrenched since the Bosnian war of the 1990s.

"When I first heard on TV that NASA named a crater on Mars after Jezero, I was surprised and I thought, 'something good is finally happening to us. After years of hardship maybe this is a sign we can finally move forward,'" said Milan Kotanjac, a Jezero villager.

"It is very important for our municipality, for our people," he added.

Many locals are hoping that the exploration of the Mars crater might inspire more attention and visitors to their own their small patch of the universe, a verdant Bosnian valley adjacent to the beautiful, river-fed Pivsko Lake.

NASA informed local authorities in 2019 of its plans to name a 28-mile (45-kilometer) wide crater on Mars after the village because it was once home to a river-fed lake like the one just outside Jezero, whose name means "lake" in the local language.



Residents are seen through a metal representation of planet Earth in Jezero, Bosnia, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Bosnian villagers are setting up a video screen in the yard of the village's sole school so people can gather to watch NASA's Mars rover land Thursday in a crater of the Red Planet named after their small village. It will be a historic day for the 1,000 villagers, who hope that the landing of the Perseverance rover in a crater on Mars will also bring them some earthly rewards. (AP Photo/Almir Alic)

The news was personally delivered in September 2019 by the U.S. ambassador to Bosnia, who presented the mayor with a letter from NASA's director of Mars exploration honoring the connection between the village and the red planet.

The rover named Perseverance is headed Thursday for a compact patch in the crater that is filled with cliffs, pits, sand dunes and fields of rocks. The area could hold evidence of past life, and the rover is expected to

gather samples at the spot for eventual return to Earth.

At first, there were some scattered negative reactions in the Bosnian village from those fearing it might be a distraction from the serious problems that remain unresolved so many years after the war, including poverty and a lack of job opportunities.

Most people simply joked that the mayor "will take us to Mars."



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But now a whiff of celebration hovers in the air as the big day approaches. It seems that hardly anyone has anything bad to say about NASA's mission to scour the dried-out Jezero crater for evidence of life.

"We are very happy that it has brought attention to us, to our Jezero," said villager Nedeljko Kovacevic.

Mayor Snezana Ruzicic said she hopes the new fame will allow the area to develop projects, such as youth camps devoted to space exploration for kids from across the country, which remains divided along ethnic lines.

Ruzicic said the coronavirus pandemic has forced her administration to scale back plans for a series of lectures for local youths on Perseverance's mission. The original aim was to tell youth about how the exploration of the Jezero crater might help humanity determine if there has ever been life on another planet.



Residents sit near a metal representation of planet Earth in Jezero, Bosnia, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Bosnian villagers are setting up a video screen in the yard of the village's sole school so people can gather to watch NASA's Mars rover land Thursday in a crater of the Red Planet named after their small village. It will be a historic day for the 1,000 villagers, who hope that the landing of the Perseverance rover in a crater on Mars will also bring them some earthly rewards. (AP Photo/Almir Alic)



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Mayor Snezana Ruzicic looks at the NASA webpage in Jezero, Bosnia, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Bosnian villagers are setting up a video screen in the yard of the village's sole school so people can gather to watch NASA's Mars rover land Thursday in a crater of the Red Planet named after their small village. It will be a historic day for the 1,000 villagers, who hope that the landing of the Perseverance rover in a crater on Mars will also bring them some earthly rewards. (AP Photo/Almir Alic)



Mayor Snezana Ruzicic speaks during an interview with the Associated Press in Jezero, Bosnia, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Bosnian villagers are setting up a video screen in the yard of the village's sole school so people can gather to watch NASA's Mars rover land Thursday in a crater of the Red Planet named after their small village. It will be a historic day for the 1,000 villagers, who hope that the landing of the Perseverance rover in a crater on Mars will also bring them some earthly rewards. (AP Photo/Almir Alic)

However, they did manage to organize an event in the center of the village last July for locals to jointly watch a live feed of Perseverance's launch to Mars from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, Ruzicic said. The children were invited to cover the village's main street with paintings of how they imagine Mars, and they happily obliged, she added.



"I am sure that in the future it could inspire some good projects, good events in the municipality of Jezero," Ruzicic said.

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Citation: Bosnia village with link to Mars enthralled by rover landing (2021, February 17)  
retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2021-02-bosnia-village-link-mars-enthralled.html>

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