

Sept. 24, 2008

Rachel Prucey
Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, Calif.
650-604-0643
rachel.l.prucey@nasa.gov

Michael Braukus
NASA Headquarters, Washington
202-358-1979
michael.j.braukus@nasa.gov

Clare Mattok
European Space Agency, Paris
33-1-5369-7412
clare.mattok@esa.int

MEDIA ADVISORY: M08-84AR

NASA ASTRONOMERS COMPARE METEORS TO SPACECRAFT RE-ENTRY

MOFFETT FIELD, Calif. -- A group of astronomers from NASA, the European Space Agency (ESA) and other institutions will take to the skies to observe the re-entry of ESA's "Jules Verne" Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) as it falls back to Earth from the International Space Station on Sept. 29, 2008.

An Ames research aircraft will take off from Moffett Field, Calif., and a Douglas DC-8 airborne laboratory will depart from NASA's Dryden Aircraft Operations Facility at Palmdale, Calif., on Friday, Sept. 26, 2008 to fly more than 30 scientists and their instruments over the South Pacific Ocean in ideal and virtually unchanging conditions far above light pollution and clouds.

NASA's primary goal during the lengthy airborne mission is to study the re-entry and fragmentation of ESA's "Jules Verne" ATV spacecraft to gain insight and find similarities to meteor fragmentation. This observation campaign is similar to the January 2006 Stardust and September 2004 Genesis spacecraft re-entry airborne campaigns, in which NASA scientists studied the levels of radiation, light and out-gassing of the descending spacecraft, to better understand meteor radiation mechanisms.

Another goal is to validate the computer models astronomers use to predict how an object will fragment and disperse as it enters Earth's atmosphere. NASA astronomers made similar airborne studies for the January 2008 Quadrantid and September 2007 Aurigid meteor showers to determine when they peaked and how they were formed.

Peter Jenniskens, the observation campaign principal investigator, at NASA Ames Research Center and the SETI Institute, Mountain View, Calif., and Dave Jordan,

observation campaign project manager, at NASA Ames will be available for telephone interviews, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. PDT, Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008. To schedule an interview please contact Rachel Prucey, public affairs specialist, at 650-604-0643.

For more information on NASA and its programs, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov>

For more information about the "Jules Verne" airborne observation campaign, visit:

<http://atv.seti.org/>

-end-