

## **INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION DELAYS DESIGNATION OF CRATERS TO HONOR FALLEN COLUMBIA ASTRONAUTS**

*Lunar Republic proposal expected to be considered again during 2006 IAU General Assembly following standard waiting period for crater designation.*

NEW YORK (15 August 2003) — Lunar Republic, an international organization advocating the privatized exploration, settlement and development of the Moon, has received notification that its proposal for the designation of craters to honor the fallen crew of the Space Shuttle *Columbia* (STS-107) will not be considered this year.

The proposal, which Lunar Republic had expected to be presented at the International Astronomical Union's recent General Assembly in Sydney, Australia, called for the designation of seven craters in the territory near Crater Colombo on the Moon's visible side. The IAU reportedly was considering an alternative proposal to designate a group of craters on the so-called Lunar farside in the Apollo Basin.

The IAU has previously selected craters in the Apollo Basin as the location for astronaut and cosmonaut memorials due to its abundance of large unnamed craters. American astronauts Virgil (Gus) Grissom, Ed White and Roger Chaffee, who perished in the 1967 launchpad fire aboard the first *Apollo* spacecraft, are honored with craters in this area, as are the crew members of the ill-fated 1984 Space Shuttle *Challenger* mission, which included the first teacher-astronaut, Christa McAuliffe.

The Apollo Basin is also the home of three craters named for three living astronauts — Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Bill Anders — who were the first humans to view the far side of the Moon aboard the 1968 flight of *Apollo 8*.

The Lunar Republic proposal before the Lunar Task Group of the Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature requested consideration for seven small craters surrounding Crater Colombo, which was named for the Italian explorer known familiarly as Christopher Columbus. The Space Shuttle *Columbia's* name is derived from that of Columbus.

The craters selected by Lunar Republic to receive designation are currently identified by letters as "child craters" to the larger Colombo, which spans a diameter of 76 kilometers. The craters are intended to honor the memory of *Columbia* crew members Rick D. Husband (mission commander), William C. McCool (pilot), Michael P. Anderson (payload commander), David M. Brown (mission specialist), Kalpana Chawla (mission specialist), Laurel Blair Salton Clark (mission specialist) and Ilan Ramon (payload specialist). The crew perished when their spacecraft disintegrated during re-entry on February 1, 2003.

The International Astronomical Union will reportedly consider *Columbia* memorial proposals at its General Assembly in 2006. IAU protocol generally calls for a three-year waiting period following the death of an individual before consideration is given for naming craters after that person.

At its most recent General Assembly in Sydney, the IAU accepted re-designation of seven asteroids in honor of the *Columbia* crew. Located in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, the seven small, rock-like bodies are estimated to be between five and seven kilometers wide.

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