

# Lecture: Exploring Mars: Humankind's Quest to Understand our Planetary Neighbor

with Ashwin Vasavada

Monday, September 29, 2008, 7:00 p.m.

Gualala Arts Center

Gualala Arts will host a lecture titled "Exploring Mars: Humankind's Quest to Understand our Planetary Neighbor" by Ashwin Vasavada on Monday, September 29 at 7:00 p.m. A \$5 donation is requested.

Mars, the Red Planet, has captured the imagination of humankind throughout history. Once seen as an omen of evil and a source of alien invaders, it is now the focus of an intense international program of scientific exploration.

Our planetary neighbor is the most Earth-like planet in our solar system, making it both interesting and accessible. But perhaps the most compelling reason we explore Mars is to determine whether it ever supported life. Almost forty years of exploration by robotic spacecraft have taught us that answering this question is much more challenging than we could have imagined.

Recent spacecraft continue to reveal Mars to be a fascinating place, with a diversity of geography and a dramatic history. The upcoming 2009 Mars Science Laboratory rover mission is NASA's most ambitious attempt to understand the history, geology, and potential habitability of Mars.

## About Dr. Ashwin R. Vasavada

Dr. Vasavada is a planetary scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. His research interests include the climate history of Mars, the weather on Jupiter and Saturn, and the possibility of ice at the poles of the Moon.

He has participated in the operation and analysis of data from several NASA spacecraft missions, including the Galileo mission to Jupiter and the Cassini mission to Saturn.

In his present role, he helps lead the international team of scientists who will participate in the Mars Science Laboratory rover mission, scheduled for launch in 2009. He holds a Bachelor of Science from UCLA and a Ph.D. from Caltech.

In his spare time, Ashwin enjoys spending time in the Sierra as well as his parents' guest bedroom in Sea Ranch.

