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Comet Discoverer Shoemaker Dies

From: RSchatte@aol.com
Date: Fri, 18 Jul 1997 22:16:47 -0400 (EDT)
Fwd Date: Fri, 18 Jul 1997 22:51:42 -0400
Subject: Comet Discoverer Shoemaker Dies

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Subj: Comet Discoverer Shoemaker Dies
Date: 97-07-18 21:25:46 EDT
From: AOL News

.c The Associated Press

By MATT KELLEY

PHOENIX (AP) - Astronomer Eugene Shoemaker, who co-discovered the comet that slammed into Jupiter in 1994, was killed in a car accident Friday in Australia during an annual trip to search for asteroid craters. He was 69.

Shoemaker died in a two-car accident near Alice Springs, Australia, said Edward Bowell, a fellow astronomer at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff. His wife, Carolyn, another Lowell Observatory astronomer who shared in the Jupiter comet's discovery, was injured, Bowell said.

Shoemaker was perhaps best known for helping to discover comet Shoemaker-Levy 9, which broke up and spectacularly slammed into the giant, gaseous planet in 1994. Amateur astronomer David Levy was also on the team.

A geologist by training, Shoemaker was also a leading expert on craters and the interplanetary collisions that caused them. He lived just a short drive from Arizona's famous Meteor Crater and first proved to the scientific community that it was indeed the result of an asteroid, said University of Arizona planetary scientist Larry Lebofsky.

The Shoemakers had been in Australia for about two weeks on an annual trip to search for asteroid impact craters in the outback, Bowell said.

Bowell said Shoemaker ``more or less single-handedly created the field of impacts ... and he was the one who started bringing to other scientists' and the public's attention the danger of the impacts of comets and asteroids on the Earth.''

Shoemaker founded the U.S. Geological Survey's Center of Astrogeology in Flagstaff in the early 1960s and served as the center's chief scientist. He also taught at the California Institute of Technology from 1969 to 1989.

``Any area he went into, his contributions stood in mammoth proportion above the rest of us mortals,''' said Laurence Soderblom, a college of Shoemaker's who is working on the Mars Pathfinder mission. ``No one else has the natural ability to see into a complex problem and dissect it with the clarity of Gene

Shoemaker.'

Shoemaker also was involved in several U.S. space missions, including the Apollo missions to the moon - he taught the astronauts about craters before they left Earth. Shoemaker had wanted to be an astronaut but was rejected because of a medical problem, Bowell said.

'I think that was the greatest disappointment of his life, that he failed to be standing on the moon with his geological hammer tapping on the rocks,' Bowell said.

In an interview last year, Shoemaker said he hoped for more manned space missions soon - to nearby asteroids, if not to the planet Mars.

'I don't think I will live long enough to see us get to Mars,' Shoemaker said.

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