Asteroids were first discovered about 200 years ago, however, their importance was not realized until the dawn of the space age forty years ago. Imaging of the planets and their moons revealed asteroid impacts to be one of the most powerful shapers of planetary landscapes. Over the past twenty years, scientists have begun to understand that asteroids and their cousins, comets, may have assisted in the development of life on Earth. It now appears that asteroids and comets impacting into the Earth have most likely caused large-scale climate changes and mass extinction events.

Our first close-up look at an asteroid was provided by the Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) Shoemaker spacecraft. This small, yet amazing spacecraft orbited the asteroid "Eros" for a year collecting a wealth of scientific measurements before landing on the surface.

The spacecraft’s comprehensive first look at an asteroid brings into focus many questions. Are asteroids really a hazard to life on Earth and, if so, can we protect ourselves? Can asteroids be used as a resource for future space explorers? Do primitive asteroids hold the key to unlocking the secrets of Solar System formation? This talk will present an overview of the NEAR results in the context of asteroid interactions with other bodies, especially the Earth.

Wednesday ~ March 5, 2003
6:30 - 7:30PM

Technological Institute Building
2145 Sheridan Road, Evanston
Room L211

The maps to the location of the Technological Institute Building and the room can be found at:
http://www.mccormick.northwestern.edu/facilities/roomfinder.html