

Astronomy Talk 18th October 2016

The Cassini Mission

This talk was given by Colin Hooper. First Colin mentioned that Cassini had a 4 year planned life, but has ended up with 12. He showed us historical pictures from Earth and from the space probes Pioneer 11 and Voyagers 1 and 2.

We then looked at the Huygens lander on Titan, and problems that nearly made it unable to communicate. Cassini is powered by a plutonium power source, and fortunately one of these was left spare which was then used on the New Horizons Pluto probe. We looked at all the orbital manoeuvres that Cassini has done with very little fuel to enable it to visit so many moons, several of them many times.

We were then treated to many stunning pictures that Cassini has taken, showing us a large number of curious phenomena which even now we are struggling to understand. E.g. Saturn's north polar hexagonal storm, Enceladus's water jets and Iapetus's "wall".