



The Day the Earth Smiled



Something great, something big, something new and very special has just happened!

On July 19 2013, the Cassini spacecraft orbiting around Saturn, over a billion kilometres away, was turned around to snap a photograph of the Earth! The photo-shoot was timed perfectly so that the brilliant light of the Sun was blocked by Saturn itself.

The beautiful ringed planet looms large in the front of the picture, along with its entire ring system, and the Earth appears as a very distant 'pale blue dot'. The Earth has been circled in this picture because it's so tiny, you might miss it otherwise! It might be a very small picture, but we're all in it, the billions of us on Earth.

For the first time, this space photograph has captured the Saturn system with Earth in natural colour. So, it shows the view exactly as human eyes would see it from that distance!

The picture will join a legacy of space-based images of our fragile home. Others include the famous 'Earthrise' photograph taken in 1968 by an astronaut from about 380,000 kilometres during the Apollo 8 moon mission and the 1990 'Pale Blue Dot' image captured by Voyager 1 as it soared through space about 6 billion kilometres away from Earth!

The event was used as a great opportunity for everyone around the globe to savour just how special our beautiful blue-ocean planet is and how precious life is on it. So, what were you doing during this memorable moment? Were you smiling along with others around the world, at the sheer joy of simply being alive on this pale blue dot?

COOL FACT

It was a long 7-year journey from Earth to Saturn for the little Cassini spacecraft. It had to swing by several other planets to gain speed and energy, and ended up travelling nearly 3.5 billion kilometres before entering into Saturn's orbit!



More information about EU-UNAWA Space Scoop: www.unawe.org/kids/