



The Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature (WGPSN) of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) has officially approved the naming of fourteen features on the surface of Pluto. These are the first geological features on the dwarf planet to be named following the close flyby by the New Horizons spacecraft in July 2015.

The IAU has assigned names to fourteen geological features on the surface of Pluto. The names pay homage to the underworld mythology, pioneering space missions, historic pioneers who crossed new horizons in exploration, and scientists and engineers associated with Pluto and the Kuiper Belt. This is the first set of official names of surface features on Pluto to be approved by the IAU, the internationally recognised authority for naming celestial bodies and their surface features.

NASA's *New Horizons* team proposed the names to the IAU following the first reconnaissance of Pluto and its moons by the New Horizons spacecraft. Some of the names were suggested by members of the public during the [Our Pluto](#) campaign, which was launched as a partnership between the IAU, the *New Horizons* project and the SETI Institute. Other names had been used informally by the *New Horizons* science team to describe the many regions, mountain ranges, plains, valleys and craters discovered during the first close-up look at the surfaces of Pluto and its largest moon, Charon.

*"We're very excited to approve names recognising people of significance to Pluto and the pursuit of exploration as well as the mythology of the underworld. These names highlight the importance of pushing to the frontiers of discovery,"* said Rita Schulz, chair of the IAU Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature. *"We appreciate the contribution of the general public in the form of their naming suggestions and the New Horizons team for proposing these names to us."*

More names are expected to be proposed to the IAU, both for Pluto and for its moons. *"The approved designations honour many people and space missions who paved the way for the historic exploration of Pluto and the Kuiper Belt, the most distant worlds ever explored,"* said Alan Stern, New Horizons Principal Investigator from the Southwest Research Institute (SwRI) in Boulder, Colorado.

The approved Pluto surface feature names are listed below.

**Tombaugh Regio** honours Clyde Tombaugh (1906–1997), the U.S. astronomer who discovered Pluto in 1930 from Lowell Observatory in Arizona.

**Burney crater** honors Venetia Burney (1918–2009), who as an 11-year-old schoolgirl suggested the name "Pluto" for Clyde Tombaugh's newly discovered planet. Later in life she taught mathematics and economics.

**Sputnik Planitia** is a large plain named after Sputnik 1, the first space satellite, launched by the Soviet Union in 1957.

**Tenzing Montes** and **Hillary Montes** are mountain ranges honouring Tenzing Norgay (1914–1986) and Sir Edmund Hillary (1919–2008), the Indian/Nepali Sherpa and New Zealand mountaineer who were the first to reach the summit of Mount Everest and return safely.

**Al-Idrisi Montes** honours Ash-Sharif al-Idrisi (1100–1165/66), a noted Arab mapmaker and geographer whose landmark work of medieval geography is sometimes translated as "The Pleasure of Him Who Longs to Cross the Horizons."

**Djanggalawul Fossae** defines a network of long, narrow depressions named for the Djanggalawuls, three ancestral beings in indigenous Australian mythology who travelled between the island of the dead and Australia, creating the landscape and filling it with vegetation.

**Sleipnir Fossa** is named for the powerful, eight-legged horse of Norse mythology that carried the god Odin into the underworld.

**Virgil Fossae** honors Virgil, one of the greatest Roman poets and Dante's fictional guide through hell and purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*.

**Adivun Cavus** is a deep depression named for Adivun, the underworld in Inuit mythology.

**Hayabusa Terra** is a large land mass saluting the Japanese spacecraft and mission (2003–2010) that returned the first asteroid sample.

**Voyager Terra** honours the pair of NASA spacecraft, launched in 1977, that performed the first “grand tour” of all four giant planets. The Voyager spacecraft are now probing the boundary between the Sun and interstellar space.

**Tartarus Dorsa** is a ridge named for Tartarus, the deepest, darkest pit of the underworld in Greek mythology.

**Elliot crater** recognises James Elliot (1943–2011), an MIT researcher who pioneered the use of stellar occultations to study the Solar System — leading to discoveries such as the rings of Uranus and the first detection of Pluto's thin atmosphere.

## More information

The IAU is the international astronomical organisation that brings together more than 10 000 professional astronomers from almost 100 countries. Its mission is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects through international cooperation. The IAU also serves as the internationally recognised authority for assigning designations to celestial bodies and the surface features on them. Founded in 1919, the IAU is the world's largest professional body for astronomers.

The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland, manages the New Horizons mission for NASA's Science Mission Directorate. Alan Stern of SwRI is the principal investigator and leads the mission; SwRI also leads the science team, payload operations, and encounter science planning. New Horizons is part of the New Frontiers Program managed by NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

The New Horizons spacecraft — built and operated at APL with a payload and science investigation led by SwRI — performed the closest flyby of Pluto. During the encounter, New Horizons collected more than 1200 images of Pluto and tens of gigabits of data.

## Links

- [IAU](#)
- [NASA's New Horizons Mission](#)
- [SETI Institute](#)
- [Our Pluto](#)
- [History of Planetary Nomenclature](#)

## Contacts

Rita Schulz  
Chair, IAU Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature / ESA  
Netherlands  
Tel: +31 71 565 48 21  
Email: [rschulz@cosmos.esa.int](mailto:rschulz@cosmos.esa.int)

Lars Lindberg Christensen  
IAU Press Officer  
Garching bei München, Germany  
Tel: +49 89 320 06 761  
Cell: +49 173 38 72 621  
Email: [lars@eso.org](mailto:lars@eso.org)

