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The Mars Society Australia

Aussie Teachers Join NASA Namibian Desert Expedition

Australian science teacher Mark Gargano will be participating in a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Spaceward Bound expedition to Namibia later this month, between the 18th and 26th of April.

Mr Gargano, Science Coordinator at St Joseph's School in Western Australia and Education Director of Mars Society Australia, will be a part of the expedition's science and education team. The expedition will be focussing on geological formations, desert microbial life and examining the conditions for life in extreme locations. The field work and analysis will be conducted at Gobabeb Training and Research Station, around 120 km inland from the west coast of Africa and is being lead by a range of scientists and engineers who are actively engaged in current planetary research and upcoming robotic missions to Mars.

"Spaceward Bound is about science teachers joining planetary scientists as they do field research and then bringing the excitement of their work back into the classroom" says Mr Gargano.

Mark Gargano has attended 2 previous NASA Spaceward Bound expeditions, one to the Mojave Desert in California and another to the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. Mark was the Education Lead for the South Australian expedition, which received support from the CSIRO and the University of South Australia. In Namibia, Mark will be working with teachers from the United States, South Africa and the host country, as well as an international crew of planetary scientists. The research phase and academic programme is being hosted by the University of the Western Cape in consultation with the Principal NASA Investigators in each of the key study areas.

"Planetary scientists can learn a lot about what life on other planets might be like by studying life in extreme environments on Earth, such as in places that are extremely dry, cold, salty and dark. By studying the chemical processes hardy life-forms use to survive in these places on Earth use, scientists can predict what tricks life on places like Mars might use to survive." says Mr Gargano.

Mark will be joined in Africa by the other Australian, Ms Janine Slocombe, the Sustainability and Environmental Systems Coordinator from the University of South Australia. Upon return, Mark and Janine will be making presentations, their experience to enhance science courses and curriculum resources for middle and senior school students in Australia and overseas.

"Educators get first hand exposure to the knowledge and skills of real 'hands on' science. They can then help their students undertake similar kinds of experiments in their classrooms and laboratories, producing a much richer educational experience."

Mark adds "It is important for students to see what they are doing in the classroom is relevant, that they have choices about where their studies can lead. The contact with the scientific community that teachers receive on the expedition enables them to tell students personal stories about how people can build careers in science."

To find out more visit the expedition website at http://quest.nasa.gov/projects/spacewardbound/

For further information about Spaceward Bound;
http://quest.nasa.gov/projects/spacewardbound/

For further information about Mars Society Australia;
http://www.marssociety.org.au/

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