



From the Editors

Learned societies, leadership, journals and the progress of planetary science

These are exciting times for our community. The NRC Decadal Survey of Solar System Exploration has been published, and it is clear that small body planetary science and sample return—the heart of Meteoritical Society interests—are front stage. The survey recommends a big mission to explore Europa, a medium-sized mission to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt, two medium class missions that will involve sample return and a third that can be considered a precursor to sample return. Who knows what small missions are in store, the decadal survey was asked not to address these, but small bodies have fared well in the Discovery competition to date, and the extraordinary *NEAR-Shoemaker* mission was surely a pathfinder for near-Earth asteroid sample return.

Just as the seventies were the decade for exploration of the planets, this decade will be the decade for small solar system bodies and sample return. It will be the decade for the Meteoritical Society and its research. The Meteoritical Society will have grown from a group that simply collects, labels and describes meteorites, to being major players in the human exploration of the solar system.

The traditional boundaries that separate asteroid astronomers from meteoriticists are fading, meteorite experts are becoming experts on asteroid geology. Once we have thoroughly understood the geology and astronomy of asteroids, will we be able to evolve to a new level of understanding the message meteorites have to tell us about the early solar system, the solar nebula and Sun–stellar relationships. Similarly, meteorite experts are becoming experts on martian geochemistry, just as in the days of Apollo they became lunar geologists.

These trends are inevitable. They are decreed by our Science. They are exciting and should be welcomed by everyone in our community, professional researchers, curators, dealers and amateur collectors alike. They enhance the scientific and monetary value of our meteorites.

The editors of *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* are very proud of the role the journal has taken in this process over the last decade. It is fitting that the present issue contains a major Invited Review of the geology of Eros by Mark Robinson and his colleagues based on the huge number of very exciting images. It remains, 2 years after the mission, a sobering thought that this is the type of surface from which the meteorites we have studied for 200 years came. If we could only relate these images to the rocks in our laboratories,

what new insights could be had into some of the most fundamental questions in solar system exploration. Our second invited review concerns an equally timely topic—Europa—with its exciting prospects of extraterrestrial life.

There are many journals in our research area, owned by other Societies or commercial publishers, but it is *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* that has taken the lead in nurturing the fusion of sample science with the missions to explore the solar system. It is a thoroughly worthwhile role and a contribution that can be uniquely made by a journal. It is to the benefit of the Society that it pursues this role. I step down from the editorship of *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* with this issue, but I wish the journal well in its continued pursuit of this objective. I know that the journal has many obstacles to negotiate, that scientific publication is a fiercely competitive business and that there are many commercial and other pressures to deflect it. But ultimately, the health of the journal is a reflection of the health of the Society and if the journal ever collapses, it will be because the Society is failing.

The journal and the Society are blessed with an editorial board of the highest caliber, of people of high stature who put the Science and the Society ahead of personal ambition and small objectives. I wish them all well. Present and past associate editors are named on the cover of the journal. This is probably the time to especially thank Rick Binzel, Joseph Goldstein, Kevin McKeegan, Ludolf Schultz, Paul Warren and George Wetherill, who have stepped down in the last year or two and not yet received my public appreciation. I also express my appreciation of the staff of the *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* office for the last 11 years, Joyce Roth, Gail Halleck, Mark Penrose, Suzanne Swift, Henry Turner, and, especially Hazel Sears, who brought it all together—mostly working voluntarily—and to whom the Society owes a far greater debt than it will ever realize. Then there are the authors and reviewers, who really dictate the quality of the journal and who entrusted their work and thoughts to us, and the many Society officers who provided the kind of leadership that is essential to the journal and the society, Presidents such as Ross Taylor, Heinrich Wänke, and Dieter Stöffler. It has been exciting. It has been professionally rewarding. It has inevitably earned me a few enemies, but it has earned me a great many more friendships. Friendships that I will always treasure.

Derek Sears
Editor