

Tempel 1 - Close-up of a Comet!

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On June 4, 2004 the Deep Impact spacecraft flew within 500 km of Comet Tempel-1 and created this image of its surface, before it began to eject huge plumes of gas to form its tail. The width of this picture is 8.0 kilometers.

Problem 1 - By using a millimeter ruler: A) what is the scale of this image in meters per millimeter? B) What is the approximate size of the nucleus of this comet in kilometers? C) How big are the two craters near the right-hand edge of the nucleus by the arrow? D) What is the size of some of the smallest details you can see in the picture?

Problem 2 - The white streak near the center of the picture is a cliff face. What is the height of the cliff in meters, (the width of the white line) and the length of the cliff wall in kilometers?

Problem 3 - The Deep Impact probe collided with the comet at the point marked by the tip of the arrow. By how many meters might the probe have missed the nucleus altogether?

Problem 1 - By using a millimeter ruler: A) what is the scale of this image in meters per millimeter? B) What is the approximate size of the nucleus of this comet in kilometers? C) How big are the two craters near the right-hand edge of the nucleus? D) What is the size of some of the smallest details you can see in the picture?

Answer: By using a millimeter ruler, what is the scale of this image in meters per millimeter? Answer: A) Width = 153 millimeters, so the scale is 8000 meters/153 mm = 52 meters/mm. B) Width = 147 mm x 110 mm or 7.6 km x 5.7 km. C) Although the craters are foreshortened, the maximum size gives a better indication of their 'round' diameters of about 7mm or 360 meters. D) Students may find features about 1 millimeter across or 50 meters.

Problem 2 - The white streak near the center of the picture is a cliff face. What is the height of the cliff in meters, (the width of the white line) and the length of the cliff wall in kilometers?

Answer: The width of the irregular white feature is about 0.5 millimeters or 26 meters. The length is about 15 millimeters or $15 \times 52 = 780$ meters.

Problem 3 - The Deep Impact probe collided with the comet at the point marked by the tip of the arrow. By how many meters might the probe have missed the nucleus altogether?

Answer: The picture shows that the shortest distance to the edge of the nucleus is about 20 millimeters to the right, so this is a distance of about $20 \times 52 = 1$ kilometer!

Note to Teacher: Since the distance to the Earth was about 100 million kilometers, the space craft orbit had to be calculated to better than 1 part in 100 million over this distance in order for the probe to hit Tempel-1 as planned.