

Telling the Science Story on the Web: Spotlight on Ocean Topography

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The Internet provides an opportunity to reach a variety of audiences with interesting, useful, and educational information about the TOPEX/Poseidon and Jason-1 missions and the many applications of sea-surface topography data.

This poster presents examples of the different kinds of TOPEX/Poseidon and Jason-1 stories that have been featured on the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's home page. These include press releases, feature stories, and profiles of individuals. This site has recorded more than 8 million viewer sessions from January to September this year.

The poster will focus on Web "spotlights." These range from "hard" science to human interest stories accompanied with visuals (photographs, animations, video) and often audio (music, narration). Its purpose is to illustrate the wide range of possibilities--both in form and content--that the Web offers for telling ocean science stories directly to the public. It will also show how different institutions and researchers can work together on Web-based stories to reach new audiences.

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The Internet provides an opportunity to reach a variety of audiences with interesting, newsworthy, and educational information about the TOPEX/Poseidon and Jason-1 missions and the many applications of sea-surface topography data.

The Jet Propulsion Laboratory's home page regularly presents different kinds of TOPEX/Poseidon and Jason-1 stories including press releases and feature articles. The page averages more than a million viewer sessions each month. Stories from this site often appear on the NASA home page and other NASA sites, gaining wider exposure.

Web "spotlights" are a new focus for the JPL site. These multimedia features range from hard science to human-interest stories combined with appealing visuals (flash presentations, images, animations, video) and audio (music and narration). This format offers a wide range of possibilities—both in form and content—for telling ocean science stories. It also provides a way for different institutions to work together on Web-based stories to reach new audiences.

The JPL Media Relations Office and the Earth Science Outreach Team are always looking for new and interesting TOPEX/Poseidon and Jason-1 stories and visuals. Researchers are encouraged to contact them directly to discuss story ideas and ways of presenting their work to the public.

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Spotlight:
Celebrating Ten Years of Ocean Observations

Topex/Poseidon is a little satellite that could have been launched on August 10, 1992, the joint U.S.-French space shuttle was designed to fly for three to five years. This week it celebrates its 10th anniversary and is still going strong.

When it turns 10, Topex/Poseidon will have made 46,763 trips around Earth measuring the height of the oceans to within 4 centimeters (less than 2 inches). Since launch, it will have faithfully provided more than 98 percent of the science data it was designed to collect despite technical and mechanical challenges, and its advancing years.

A successful mission is a combination of hardware, software and people. One key member of the Topex/Poseidon team is Parag Vaze, deputy manager for Earth sciences mission operations at JPL.

Related links
Go to Flash: how data is used
Fish image (enlarged)

Spotlight:
Seals, Sea Lions and Satellites

Figuring out what a northern fur seal has eaten recently can be a messy business, says fisheries biologist Jeremy Starling of the National Marine and Fisheries Administration's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Washington, D.C. Mammal Laboratory in Seattle, Wash. Determining where they have been eating is a bit more high tech.

The Alaska Ecosystems Program, which includes Starling and more than a dozen other researchers, has been using satellites to track northern fur seals and Steller sea lions in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea for nearly a decade. With a transmitter attached to an animal's back, sending signals to the Argos instrument on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's polar-orbiting satellite, the scientists can record the marine mammal's path as it swims hundreds of kilometers from land foraging for food.

Related links
Northern fur seal bull
Satellite tracking
Image gallery

Spotlight:
Earth's Coral Reefs in Danger

Flooding, mud slides and destructive storms of the great El Niño of 1997-98 made the headlines, but some of the worst devastation took place quietly out of sight under water on the world's coral reefs. With their amazing diversity, they are often called the rainforests of the ocean floor. They are home to a tiny fraction of the planet's plants and animals, but millions of species.

Reefs face a double whammy—mother nature and human nature. When nature dished out unusually warm ocean temperatures and high sea levels as it did in 1982-83 and again in 1997-98, the result was a massive die-off of corals around the globe. Meanwhile, humans continue stressing the fragile ecosystem with pollution, over-fishing and development.

Related links
Bleached coral
Image gallery

Surfing Ocean Satellite Data

The world's most accurate sea level data is now available to the public. The TOPEX/Poseidon satellite has been orbiting Earth since 1992, measuring the height of the ocean's surface to within 4 centimeters. The data is now being used to study ocean circulation and sea level rise.

Related links
TOPEX/Poseidon
Jason-1
Sea Level Rise

