

Professor to lecture on the possibility of life on Mars

■ **MARS:** The discussion will cover recent evidence and whether conditions could have supported life there

By Tamyra Howser
Higher Education Reporter

The tantalizing evidence that the Martian meteorite harbors fossilized bacteria is exciting, but still not conclusive, said University physics Professor Greg Bothun.

Bothun, who also serves as director of the University's Pine Mountain Observatory, will ex-

amine the issue "Did Mars Harbor Early Forms of Life" at a public lecture held tonight at the Lane ESD Planetarium.

"[Life] can't be ruled out," he said. "[But] I was thinking it was pretty suspect timing. We have had several announcements of ...the discovery of new planets. That's all great; that's all real. This comes right out on the heels of that, and it's just suspect. The [Martian] meteorite has been around for 12 years. The timing is just odd."

The meteorite, originally found in the South Pole during the sum-

mer of 1986, was born 4.5 billion years ago, not much older than Earth's oldest known rock of 3.8 billion, Bothun said.

"That's what is so curious about this," he said. "That the clock is about the same."

Bothun will also discuss Mars' geological and atmospheric conditions 4 1/2 billion years ago and whether the conditions were favorable enough to support primitive life and water bodies. Scientists speculate that Mars was once warm and wet, compared to its present dry and inhospitable environment.

The Earth receives 10 times more sunlight than Mars, which has a much colder atmosphere, Bothun said. Over the course of a few million years, whatever water vapor it initially had in the atmosphere has frozen onto the poles.

Mars is also a small planet with half the gravitational pull of the Earth's atmosphere, he added. It couldn't have held onto water vapor for very long and lost its atmosphere after a period of time.

Although Bothun is highly skeptical life on Mars exists, he said he wouldn't be surprised if life was discovered under the vol-

canic vents.

"That's actually a distinct possibility," he said. "When you go to the bottom of the ocean, near volcanic vents, there's some weird stuff there."

While the magma has probably cooled off by now, three billion years ago, life could have been possible, Bothun said. Thermal processes can produce some sort of bacteria.

Soaring through Mars and into the deeper reaches of space, another galaxy similar to the Milky Way was discovered in the last year — nine planets orbiting around stars. These are the places Bothun said he believes the "chances that primitive life in the galaxy are extremely high."

"There are 100 billion potential planets in the galaxy," he said. "If there's a million intelligent civilizations in the galaxy, that's only one per 100,000 stars. The nearest civilization would be 1,000 light years away."

The lecture will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Lane ESD Planetarium, 2300 Leo Harris Parkway. Admission is \$3 for adults and \$1 for children 12 and under. For more information, call the Planetarium's recorded information line at 687-7827 or the business line at 461-8227.

UNIVERSITY

briefly

Students from **OSPIRG** chapters at Lane Community College and the University, as well as the **Jewish Student Union**, will be trick-or-treating for food donations for Food for Lane County.

At least 50 students are currently volunteering for the project.

All those interested in participating should meet at the OSPIRG offices in Suite 1 of the EMU on Thursday. Trick-or-treating will happen from 4:30 to 7 p.m.

Those interested can contact the OSPIRG offices at 346-4377.

Land Air Water and Friends of Land Air Water will be sponsoring the first workshop in the series, "Free Community Legal Education" tonight at 7 p.m. in Room 125 of the Law School. Tonight's subject will be about using the Freedom of Information Act.

Speakers will discuss information rights and information request procedures.

Admission is free. For further information, call 346-3828.

compiled by Kristin Bailey and Tom Potter



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