IT WAS A LONG TRIP… BUT THE VIEW IS AWESOME!

VIAVI Staff October 20, 2020 1 Leave a comment

Hey Bennu, TAG!

Four years and roughly 2 billion miles ago, on a planet far, far away, a bold mission was initiated. NASA launched the Origins-Spectral Interpretation-Resource Identification-Security-Regolith Explorer, known as OSIRIS-REx, to analyze and sample the asteroid Bennu. Traveling onboard the spacecraft is a tiny, but highly sophisticated VIAVI optical filter array that is playing a key role in the important mission.

For the past 22 months, OSIRIS-REx has been orbiting Bennu, studying and mapping the surface to send home valuable scientific data. For example, data revealed the presence of oxygen and hydrogen atoms bonded together, meaning that at some point, Bennu's rocky material interacted with water. The mission also has already identified the composition of some boulders on the surface to deliver significant insights into Bennu's violent origins.

This chemical survey of Bennu's surface was made possible due to the OSIRIS-REx Visible and Infrared Spectrometer (OVIRS) — that's where our optical filter comes in. These OVIRS images also have helped mission scientists select the best sample site for the spacecraft to descend to Bennu's surface and perform a "Touch-and-Go" (TAG) maneuver to collect a sample of the asteroid before making the long trip back home.

And today is the day, at long last.

The sample collection attempt is scheduled to take place today at 6:12 p.m. Eastern US time. And we can all go along for the ride as NASA broadcasts the TAG maneuver.

OSIRIS-REx isn't expected to return home with its payload until late 2023. But with its relative proximity to Earth, it's believed that the asteroid's composition may record the earliest history of our solar system, so it most certainly will be well worth the trip.