

# **The Guardian view on the Rosetta mission: a human ingenuity triumph**

This great exploration has demanded unswerving tenacity, as well as Europe-wide cooperation

- o [The Guardian](#), Thursday 13 November 2014



European Space Agency employees cheer as the Rosetta spacecraft dispatches a robot to land on comet 67P's surface. Photograph: J Mai/ESA

Landing [a space probe on a comet](#) is a project that belongs on the same heroic scale as the great explorations of history. In terms of imagination and ingenuity and the particular kind of courage that is required to keep thinking the unthinkable, it is on a par with being first to circumnavigate the globe or climb the world's highest mountain. The [Rosetta mission](#) to track and take samples from comet 67P may have been controlled from the European Space Agency's centre in a small town in Germany, where physical adversity was probably limited to not enough sleep and too many pizzas. But since the idea was first conceived in the late 1970s – take [a posthumous bow, Colin Pillinger](#), who tried to land his Beagle 2 on Mars – Rosetta has demanded constant adaptation (for example, when it unexpectedly had to survive a prolonged spell in the shadow of Mars) and an unswerving tenacity, as well as Europe-wide cooperation.

And now, after a journey of 10 years, in the most audacious coup of all, its lander Philae has touched down on 67P, [a 4km-wide comet travelling at 135,000km an hour](#), that is 510m kilometres from earth. The pace of scientific discovery can sometimes seem to move so fast that it is taken for granted. But this voyage could revolutionise the understanding of the origins of the solar system and perhaps life itself. It is time to open, as one scientist said, a time capsule that's been locked away since time began.