





Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter

**May 12, 2008** -- A robotic probe designed to scout out a landing site for America's [return to the moon](#) is coming to life at a spacecraft factory in Greenbelt, Md.

The heart of the [Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter](#), called LRO, is a high-resolution digital camera that can capture lunar features less than a meter in size. NASA wants the detailed view before selecting where to send its next generation of lunar explorers.

The last time a person set foot on the moon was in 1972.

The camera, built at Arizona State University, will be set into the spacecraft on Tuesday, said Skip Derra, a spokesman with the Tempe, Ariz.-based school. It arrived at NASA's [Goddard Space Flight Center](#) in Maryland on Friday.

The imager is the fifth of six instruments to be installed on LRO. Already aboard:

- an ultraviolet spectrograph to search for [surface ice](#) and frost in the polar regions;
- a cosmic ray detector to assess the radiation environment around the moon;
- a sensor to measure surface temperatures as cold as minus 406 Fahrenheit (minus 243 degrees C);
- lasers to produce three-dimensional maps on a scale of inches rather than feet or miles of the moon's rough surface;
- a hydrogen detector to scout for surface water ice;
- a mini-radar system, flying as a technology demonstration, to look for subsurface ice.

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