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NASA Probe Orbits Moon

The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter will spend the next year mapping Earth's satellite.

By [Paul McDougall](#)
InformationWeek

June 23, 2009 01:34 PM

A NASA spacecraft has started its one-year mission to map the moon.

The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter entered the moon's orbit early Tuesday following a four-and-a-half day journey from Earth, the space agency said.

The vehicle reached its destination following a midjourney course correction by NASA engineers on the ground at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md. The move allowed the LRO to drift toward a point above the moon's surface where it could be caught in the lunar orbit.

"Lunar orbit insertion is a crucial milestone for the mission," said Cathy Peddie, LRO deputy project manager at Goddard, in a statement.

"The LRO mission cannot begin until the moon captures us. Once we enter the moon's orbit, we can begin to build up the dataset needed to understand in greater detail the lunar topography, features, and resources," said Peddie.

The LRO will perform a series of four engine burns over the next four days to position itself for a "commissioning phase" orbit, during which time its seven onboard instruments will be brought online and checked out by engineers.

The LRO will transition to its primary mission orbit -- about 31 miles above the moon -- about 60 days later, according to NASA.

For the next year, the LRO will use an array of scanners and tools to create 3-D, high-resolution maps of the lunar surface while peering into some of the darkest corners of Earth's closest celestial neighbor.

NASA said it expects the LRO to return more data about the moon than any previous mission.

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