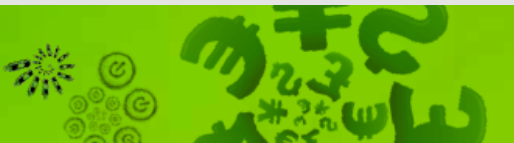


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NASA: One satellite starts orbiting moon as second snaps pics

Two satellites beginning mission to gather detailed information about the moon

By Sharon Gaudin

June 23, 2009 02:03 PM ET

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Computerworld - Four and a half days after [blasting off from Earth](#), two NASA lunar satellites are now on the job -- one is now in orbit around the moon, and the other has snapped its [first photographs](#).

The [Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter](#) entered the moon's orbit at 6:27 a.m. EDT today. The satellite is expected to orbit about 31 miles above the surface of the moon for the next year as part of an effort to map the moon's surface and find a good landing site for future [NASA manned missions](#) there.

The orbiting satellite has entered a 60-day testing phase in which each of its seven scientific instruments will be checked out and brought online, according to NASA. Once fully operational, the orbiter will

compile high-resolution 3-D maps of the moon's surface and survey it at many different spectral wavelengths.

The orbiter, along with its partner, the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite, lifted off from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida last Thursday.

"Lunar orbit insertion is a crucial milestone for the mission," said Cathy Peddie, a deputy project manager at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, in a statement. "The mission cannot begin until the moon captures us. Once we enter the moon's orbit, we can begin to build up the data set needed to understand in greater detail the lunar topography, features and resources."

The second spacecraft, the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite, this morning completed what NASA is calling a "swing by" of the

moon. This spacecraft, which won't travel back toward the moon until this October, took its first [images of the moon](#) using its visible-light camera. The satellite has nine different instruments onboard.

The Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite is scheduled to purposefully crash into the moon on Oct. 9. NASA scientists are hoping the impact will kick up surface material that researchers can study in an effort to find evidence of water.

The launch of these two satellites marks the first phase in NASA's



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long-term mission to send humans back to the moon.

NASA is hoping not only to return astronauts to the moon, but also to build a lunar outpost there by 2020. The plan includes the use of [next-generation robots](#) and machines to help prepare a landing area, as well as to establish a base where humans can live once they arrive.

Researchers at [Astrobotic Technology Inc. and Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute](#) announced earlier this year that robots the size of riding lawn mowers could be used to start building a lunar outpost before humans make their next trip to the moon.

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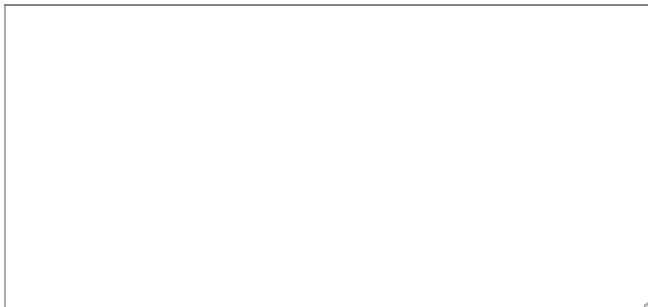
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