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## U.S. Moon exploration begins with LRO/LCROSS liftoff

by William Atkins

Saturday, 20 June 2009

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The NASA LRO/LCROSS mission lifted off from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, in Florida, at 5:32 p.m. EDT on Thursday, June 18, 2009, for its robotic mission to the Moon. The lunar mission will collect more data about the Moon than any other previous mission, and it is the first U.S. unmanned lunar mission of the 21st century, leading to the NASA manned missions of the Constellation program.

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The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and its Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS) was launched from an Atlas 5 rocket at 2132 GMT (5:32 p.m. EDT) on June 18, 2009. For its primary mission objectives, it will search for water ice and landing spots on the lunar surface.

A launch video is available on the [UniverseToday.com](http://UniverseToday.com) website.

According to the NASA press release, [NASA returning to the Moon with first lunar launch in a decade](#), "The orbiter, known as LRO, separated from the Atlas V rocket carrying it and a companion mission, the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite, or LCROSS, and immediately began powering up the components necessary to control the spacecraft."

The ground control team issued the deployment command of the LRO's solar array at 7:40 p.m. EDT, about two hours after

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launch, in preparation for its trip to the Moon. Subsystems of the spacecraft are being checked out , too, along with activities in preparation for a mid-course correction maneuver.

The mission is an important first step for the United States to return to the Moon. Doug Cooke, associate administrator for NASA's Exploration Systems Mission Directorate, stated, "This is a very important day for NASA. We look forward to an extraordinary period of discovery at the moon and the information LRO will give us for future exploration missions."

When the spacecraft arrives at the Moon it will be inserted into a very low orbit about the Moon—only 31 miles (50 kilometers) above its surface.

During its one-year mission, it will gather high-resolution, three-dimensional images of the lunar surface, along with analyzing the lunar surface from many different parts of the electromagnetic radiation spectrum.

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