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## NASA's LRO Returns First Images Of The Moon

Posted on: Thursday, 2 July 2009, 12:40 CDT

NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter returned its first images to Earth since launching toward the moon on June 23, the space agency said on Thursday.

The two cameras aboard the LRO were activated on Tuesday, and have since returned the first images of a region in the lunar highlands south of Mare Nubium, or Sea of Clouds.

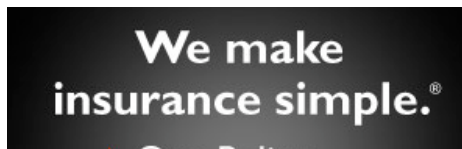
"Our first images were taken along the moon's terminator - the dividing line between day and night - making us initially unsure of how they would turn out," said principal investigator for the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera, Mark Robinson, of Arizona State University.

LRO represents NASA's plans to send man back to the moon. The orbiter will seek out safe landing sites, locate potential resources – including water ice – and characterize the effects of prolonged exposure to the lunar radiation environment, according to the space agency.

"Because of the deep shadowing, subtle topography is exaggerated, suggesting a craggy and inhospitable surface. In reality, the area is similar to the region where the Apollo 16 astronauts safely explored in 1972. While these are magnificent in their own right, the main message is that LROC is nearly ready to begin its mission," said Robinson.

LRO will use its seven instruments to gather data from the moon such as imagery, topography and temperature.

"Instruments expected to be activated during the next week and calibrated are the Lunar Orbiter Laser Altimeter, designed to build 3-D topographic maps of the moon's landscape; the Diviner Lunar Radiometer Experiment, which will make temperature maps of the lunar surface; and the Miniature Radio Frequency, or Mini-RF, an experimental radar and radio transmitter



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radio frequency, or WIMPER, an experimental radar and radio transmitter that will search for subsurface ice and create detailed images of permanently shaded craters," NASA said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are returning to the moon as humankind's first step in leaving planet Earth to explore the Solar System. Learning to live and work on the moon will allow us to build the skills and technologies to take the next steps to Mars, the asteroids, and beyond," Robinson said prior to the spacecraft's launch.

The orbiter was launched via an Atlas V rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida along with the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS), which was designed to be directed to an impact in a crater at one of the moon's poles in order to stir up a plume of debris of more than six miles in height.

"Accomplishing these significant milestones moves us closer to our goals of preparing for safe human return to the moon, mapping the moon in unprecedented detail, and searching for resources," said LRO Project Scientist Richard Vondrak of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

The new images come as NASA prepares to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the historic Apollo 11 lunar landing.

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**Image Caption: This image shows a cratered region near the moon's Mare Nubium region. Credit: NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center/Arizona State University**

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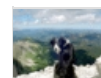
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