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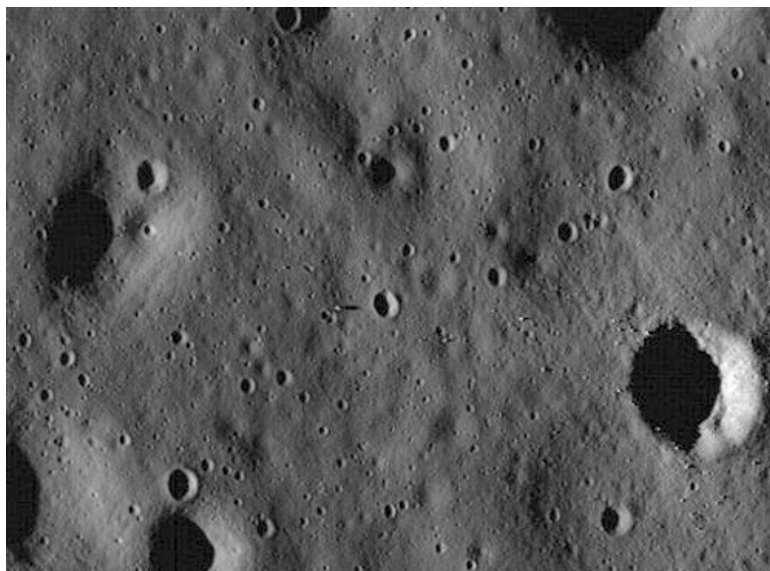
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I spy Apollo leftovers: NASA's new moon camera sees hardware left on moon by Apollo astronauts

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Take off!

This undated handout image provided by NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center/Arizona State University, taken by NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO), shows the Apollo 11 landing site on the moon. (AP Photo, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center/Arizona State University)

SETH BORENSTEIN, AP Science Writer
6:30 PM PDT, July 17, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) — New NASA photos of the moon show the leftovers from man's exploration 40 years ago.

For the first time, photos from space pinpoint equipment left behind from Apollo landings, and even the well-worn tracks made by astronauts on the moon surface. The images are from the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, which was launched last month and now circles the moon in search of future landing sites.



The photos were released Friday, in time for the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing on July 20, 1969. A picture of the Apollo 11 site shows the Eagle lunar module used by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

"It was really great to see the hardware sitting on the surface, waiting for us to come back," said Arizona State University scientist Mark Robinson, who runs the camera on the orbiter. "You could actually see the descent module sitting on the surface."

But that's only if you know where to look. NASA helps out by putting a giant arrow on each photo. The lunar landers look to be square white blobs; the Eagle is a fuzzy image near

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a crater.

NASA landed on the moon six times, but the orbital camera so far has only photographed five of the landing sites. Apollo 12 will be done later. That leaves Apollo 11 and Apollo 14 through 17. Apollo 13 never landed on the moon because of an explosion on board the ship on the way to the moon.

The images for Apollo 14 are the best so far. Taken on Wednesday, they show the path made by astronauts Alan Shepard Jr. and Edgar Mitchell as they went back and forth from the lander to the work site.

Robinson said the route was "a high traffic zone, sort of like when you go in an old building and the carpet is worn down." A similar but lighter path could be seen at the Apollo 17 site.

Also at the Apollo 14 site, a close examination shows a trail made by the cart used to carry tools, Robinson said.

The photos varied in quality based on how high up the satellite was and the angle of the sun. For Apollo 11, the spaceship was taking pictures from 70 miles above. For Apollo 14, it was six miles closer.

In the next couple months, as the lunar satellite starts its mission to map the moon for future landing sites for astronauts, it will get much better photos, Robinson said. The mission is a first step in NASA's effort to return humans to the moon by 2020.

Other robotic probes, including those launched by Japan and India, have looked for signs that man was on the moon, but their cameras weren't strong enough, NASA officials said.

The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter was launched with a second spacecraft that was designed to crash into the moon in the fall to try to find buried ice. The total cost of the mission is \$583 million.

On the Net:

NASA's LRO site: http://www.nasa.gov/mission(underscore)pages/LRO/main/index.html

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