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Lunar orbiter spots Apollo landing sites

40 years after first moon landing, NASA probe sends proof in pictures

SPACE
updated 10:12 a.m. MT, Fri., July 17, 2009

For stubborn folks who still believe the Apollo astronauts never landed on the moon, NASA has new images — definitive proof — that clearly show the Apollo 11 lander that carried the first astronauts to the lunar surface 40 years ago.

The images were taken by NASA's first lunar scout in more than a decade, the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter. They **show the Eagle lunar lander** at Tranquility Base, where Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin **landed on July 20, 1969**. They were snapped between July 11 and 15 of this month and released by NASA on Friday.

The image does not reveal whether the U.S. flag planted there **is still standing or not**.

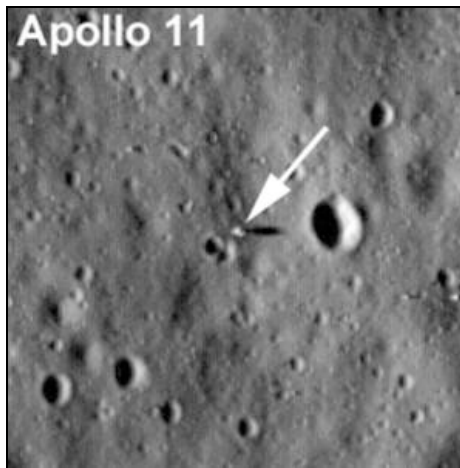
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This labeled image from NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter shows the Apollo 11 lunar module at the center, with a shadow extending to the right.

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The **Apollo 11** landing site wasn't the only one that the LRO's camera system (dubbed LROC) photographed: It also snapped pictures of the landing sites of the other five Apollo landings. (The remaining site, for Apollo 12, is expected to be photographed in the coming weeks.) The lunar modules for all of these sites imaged are visible as small dots; their shadows can also be

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visible as small dots; their shadows can also be seen. A few more details can be seen in the image of the [Apollo 14 landing site](#), including scientific instruments and astronaut footprints.

"The LROC team anxiously awaited each image," said LROC principal investigator Mark Robinson of Arizona State University. "We were very interested in getting our first peek at the lunar module descent stages just for the thrill - and to see how well the cameras had come into focus. Indeed, the images are fantastic and so is the focus."

As LRO gradually descends to a lower orbit, the images will improve and provide closer looks at the lunar landing sites.

The images of these sites **are expected to show scientists** how the sites have changed since the astronauts trod across them, whether there are any new craters and how the leftover human artifacts have fared in the lunar environment.

About the size of a Mini Cooper car, the \$504 million LRO probe, an orbiting satellite, launched toward the moon on June 18. The probe is expected to spend at least one year mapping the moon for future manned missions, as well as several more years conducting science surveys.

Some people have questioned whether NASA really went to the moon or if the **whole thing was faked**. No serious and level-headed historian, researcher or space industry analyst doubts the moon landings, however.

THE MOON: Then, Now, Next

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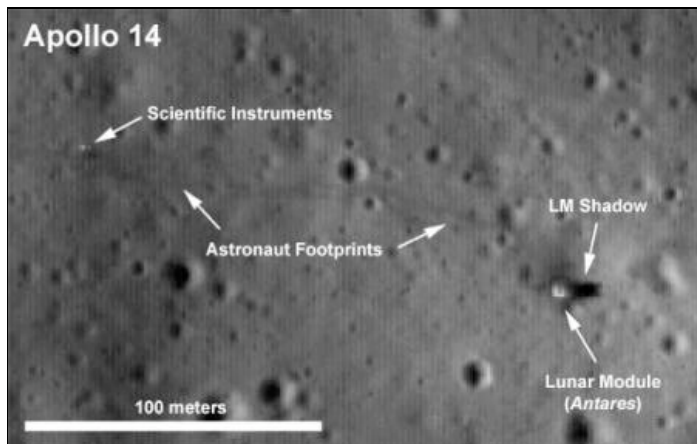
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A labeled image shows the place where the Apollo 14 lunar module set down in 1971, as well as the location where scientific instruments were set up and the footprints of the astronauts leading from one site to the other.

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