Spaceship scouting moon enters lunar orbit

Last Updated: Tuesday, June 23, 2009 | 1:08 PM ET **Comments*94*Recommend*48***
CBC News

NASA's unmanned lunar spacecraft is now in orbit around the moon after a 4½-day journey from Earth, the start of a mission to scout the moon's environment in preparation for future manned endeavours.

The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter entered orbit at 6:27 a.m. ET on Tuesday, but it will take the spacecraft close to two months before it enters its mission orbit of about 50 kilometres above the moon's cratered surface.

Once in mission orbit, the spacecraft will use its suite of scientific instruments to compile high-resolution, three-dimensional maps of the lunar surface. The probe will also map the moon's craters for permanently shadowed and sunlit regions, information useful for planning potential locations of a moon base.

In 2006, NASA laid out its ambitious plans to send people back to the moon in 2020 and begin work on a lunar base in 2024.

Several other countries with space ambitions, including China, Russia and Japan, also unveiled plans to establish their own base there and have begun work to analyze the moon's surface. Earlier this month, Japan crash-landed its Kaguya lunar probe after two years in orbit.

While NASA's lunar orbiter took less than a week to arrive at the moon, a second, smaller probe launched at the same time won't be coming to the moon until October. But when it does, it will, like Japan's probe, arrive with a bang.

The Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS) is currently in an elongated orbit around the Earth, building up speed to help propel the probe on a collision course with the moon's south pole in October.

NASA hopes the crash landing will be a spectacular smash-up, sending roughly 350,000 tonnes of debris into the sunlight that the space agency hopes to study to look for evidence of water ice, and get a better idea of the mineral composition of the moon beneath the surface.

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Story comments (*94*)

Sort: Most recent | First to last | Agreed
ArthurPaliden **wrote:**Posted 2009/06/24
at 11:10 PM ETIt will be great when they use these new photos to update Google Moon. By the way does any one remember using the original Google Moon. You were able to zoom in all the way down to a piece of Swiss cheese.

- 2
- 2

2Agree 2DisagreePolicy Report abuse
BC Mountain Man **wrote:**Posted 2009/06/24
at 10:40 PM ETPixelfix wrote: "We're going to need somewhere to go once we destroy the Earth..."

What, like a poorly lit, wind-battered rusted rock world of no real oxygen and an average surface temperature of -47C?

Nice "Plan B."

- 3
- 1

3Agree 1DisagreePolicy Report abuse
SensibleSam **wrote:**Posted 2009/06/24
at 7:28 PM ETorbiter wrote: I expect PETA to go ballistic sometime soon over NASA crashing a moon probe into the surface because it threatens moon bats.

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I'm not sure what you have against PETA.

The other day I had Philly Steak 'n' Cheese in a PETA,
I'd fly to the moon for another, it is made out of cheese isn't it?
I'd even open up a resteraunt up there,
except there'd be no atmosphere ,,,,

- 2
- 2

2Agree 2DisagreePolicy Report abuse
shaken not stirred **wrote:**Posted 2009/06/24
at 5:49 PM ETWhy didn't they send people? Was the first moon landing a hoax?

- 7
- 3

7Agree 3DisagreePolicy Report abuse
gglave **wrote:**Posted 2009/06/24
at 5:33 PM ETStoned Wrote:

>If I were a scientest, I would feel alot safer on
>the moon than floating in a tin can!!!.

@Stoned - If you were on the space station and was an emergency, you'd quickly make your way to the Soyuz lifeboat, detach from the station, do a de-orbit burn and after re-entry you're back on terra-firma.
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By contrast, if you had an emergency on the moon and wanted to evacuate you'd need to ascend from the surface, then start a 2 or 3 day journey home to earth, followed by the re-entry above... I'd argue the station is much 'safer.'

- *4*
- *0*

*4*Agree *0*DisagreePolicy Report abuse

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