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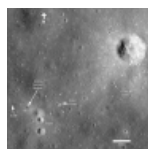
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LRO Image Shows Apollo 14 Landing Site
Even footprints can be seen

By Tudor Vieru, Science Editor
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ENLARGE

NASA's new Moon probe, the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO), has recently beamed back amazing images showing the landing site of the harsh Apollo 14 mission, as well as the tracks the two crew members left behind in their failed journey to a peculiar crater nearby. The landing took place on February 5, 1971, and featured astronauts Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell in their Antares lander, Space reports.

The new picture, which was released to the public on Wednesday, clearly shows that the astronauts made to about 100 feet (30 meters) of the peculiar Cone Crater, before having to come back to the lunar module. The Apollo 14 astronauts were charged with exploring the Fra Mauro highland, a rocky region with a lot of hills. Having already beamed back another image of this landing site, and of Tranquility Base – the site of the first Moon landing, by Apollo 11 astronauts – the LRO now used its main instrument, the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera (LROC), to snap a more detailed picture of the historic site.

The lower left side of the image reveals a scientific experiment that was set up by Shepard and Mitchell. The arrows stretching in the central side of the picture show the path that the two astronauts took on their way to Cone Crater. They are visible in slightly grayer nuances than the ground around them. What the image fails to show properly is the fact that the 1.4-kilometer trek to Cone is almost entirely uphill, and also that, in order to get there, the astronauts would have had to let the lander out of their sight.

Talking about the perils of the exploration journey, Shepard wrote, "Another problem was that the ruggedness and unevenness of the terrain made it very hard to navigate by landmarks, which is the way a man on foot gets around. Ed and I had difficulty in agreeing on the way to Cone, just how far we had traveled, and where we were." The Apollo 14 astronaut made the statement for NASA's History Office, in an account of the mission he gave a few years after the landing. He died of leukemia in Pebble Beach, California, on July 21, 1998.

"And then came what had to be one of the most frustrating experiences on the traverse. We thought we were nearing the rim of Cone, only to find we were at another and much smaller crater still some distance from Cone. At that point, I radioed Houston that our positions were doubtful, and that there was probably quite a way to go yet to reach Cone," he also wrote.

TAGS: Apollo 14 | Moon landings | astronauts | craters | NASA

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