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First thermal pictures of dark side of the moon

The world's first thermal images of the dark side of the moon have been unveiled.

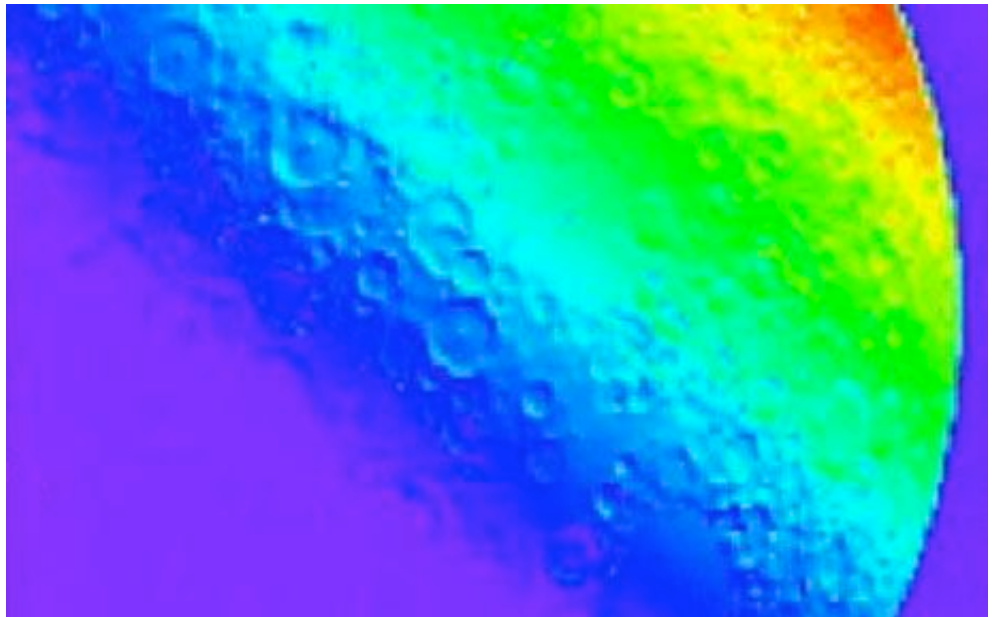
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The pictures were captured by a specialist thermal camera as part of a Nasa mission to search for the presence of water on the moon.

The Thermoteknix camera also took photos of the earth and moon at distances as great as 560,000km and 850,000 km away.

It is the first time a space craft has travelled to the far side of the moon with a thermal imaging camera.

"The camera has worked flawlessly for nearly 100 days, and counting, in interplanetary space," said Anthony Colaprete, payload manager and chief scientist for Nasa's LCROSS mission.



The world's first thermal images of the far side of the moon Photo: GEOFF ROBINSON

"It provided the first thermal images of the far side of the moon and also images of Earth and the Moon from distances as great as 560,000km and 850,000 km away, respectively."

The MIRICLE camera was developed by pioneering thermal imaging company Thermoteknix Systems, based in Cambridge.

Dr Richard Salisbury, managing director of Thermoteknix, said: "We are delighted to have been selected to play a critical part in Nasa's important mission to find water on the Moon, which is vital for the future of long-term space exploration.

"We are all very proud of this achievement."

A Centaur spacecraft launched from the orbiting LCROSS craft is scheduled to make a direct vertical impact on the moon on Friday.

This is expected to create a huge plume of dust which will be analysed for water by different instruments including the Thermoteknix camera, which will follow the Centaur down four minutes later.

The debris plumes are expected to be visible from certain Earth and space-based telescopes.

The Centaur impact will release materials from the lunar surface which will be analysed for the presence of hydrated minerals and will be a major step in seeing if there is water on the moon.

Discovering water on the moon is important for supporting prolonged manned visits to the moon.

Thermoteknix has twice been awarded the coveted Queen's Award – most recently in 2008 for its MIRICLE range of cameras.

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