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## Moon Impact Mission Now Confirmed As Success

On the 9th of October this year, the Centaur rocket was launched towards the Cabeus crater on the Moon, by the Lunar CRater Observing and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS). It's mission was to impact the crater with as much force as possible, to create an explosion of debris, and the LCROSS was then supposed to record different types of enhanced images of that debris. The ultimate goal of this NASA mission was to further investigate if water exists directly under the Moon's surface, but the initial images relayed by LCROSS were not very promising, showing no debris from the impact. However, yesterday NASA released newly enhanced images which shows some sort of a plume developing over a few seconds after the impact. With that plume, NASA now have the data required to begin to work out if there is a layer of ice under parts of the Moon's crust, and while the Centaur rocket did not create the level of explosive impact NASA had hoped for, and the early signs show no signs of ice or water, this new data has already unlocked some very interesting facts indeed.

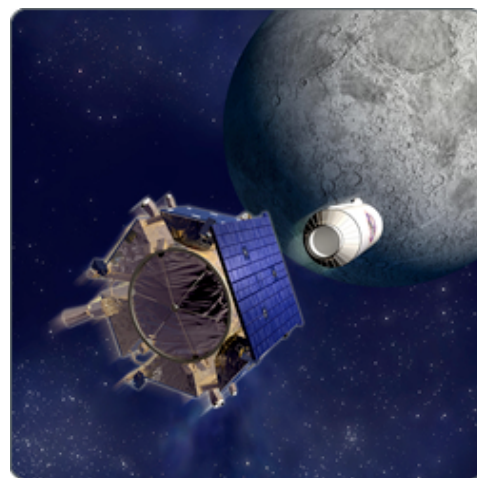
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October.17.2009 - George Valentine Corr, Blatant News Editor  
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#### IS THERE LIFE ELSEWHERE IN OUTER SPACE?

Are there life-supporting elements beyond Earth? There is a lot of talk about this subject over the past month in the mainstream media, due to some NASA missions to both the Moon and Mars. There have also been missions by ESA to Mars too, whilst Russia has remained busy in outer space, and some other countries are beginning to take more of an interest in space exploration, like India and China. There does seem to be a lot going on up there right now, and much of it revolves around finding out the physical make-up of planets and other objects floating around space, as well as dark matter. Our space agencies are beginning to take a real interest in the science of space, rather than just space travel, and this information is getting into the public domain pretty quickly, which means we can all participate to some degree, at least in the debate. It is no major surprise to see that 'water on the Moon' is one of the hottest subjects out there, and the interest in that began to take shape in 1999, when NASA's Lunar Prospector detected concentrated hydrogen signatures in permanently shadowed craters at the lunar poles. This suggests water may be present under the surface, and this exciting new information set off a whole raft of investigations into this area of science, along with a surge in public interest in the subject. Check the two images below to see what all the excitement was about in 1999.

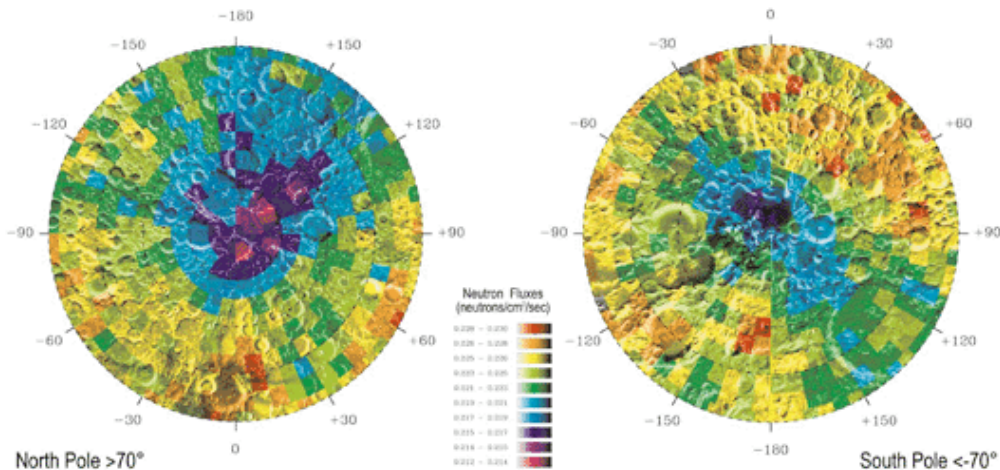


**Centaur separating from LCROSS**  
 image: NASA / Public Domain



**The gold part is the LCROSS Satellite**  
 image: NASA / Public Domain





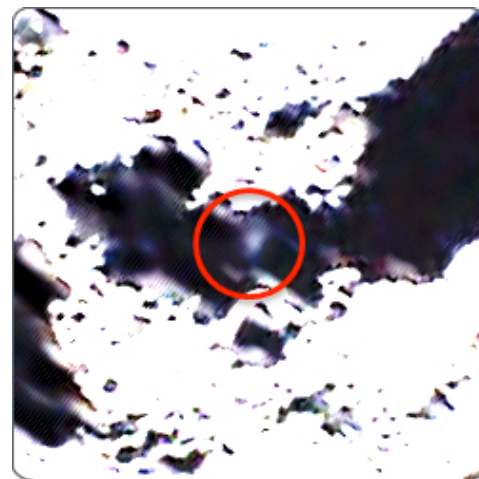
The dark blue and purple areas at the moons poles indicate neutron emissions that are consistent with hydrogen-rich deposits covered by desiccated regolith. These hydrogen signatures are possible indications of water in the form of ice or hydrated minerals (image: NASA / Public Domain)

**LETS DO THIS!**

Those images prompted many space agencies around the World to implement missions which would investigate whether there was water, or other resources, on the Moon. NASA introduced the **Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter** (LRO) with a primary objective to... "conduct investigations that prepare for future lunar exploration. Specifically LRO will scout for safe and compelling landing sites, locate potential resources (with special attention to the possibility of water ice) and characterize the effects of prolonged exposure to the lunar radiation environment. In addition to its exploration mission, LRO will also return rich scientific data that will help us to better understand the moon's topography and composition". They also added a low-cost mission called the **Lunar CRater Observing and Sensing Satellite** (LCROSS) which would... "confirm the presence or absence of water ice in a permanently shadowed crater near a lunar polar region", and it is from that mission which the pictures released yesterday originate. While the original pictures released directly after the October 9th impact did not appear to show anything at all, the newly enhanced pictures feature what looks like a plume, and NASA have provided many different types of images. They are all grainy, and in fairness the plumes could be mistaken for other objects which are in the pictures, if they were not so handily pointed out by NASA, but there doesn't seem to be any obvious reason why we should not believe in them.

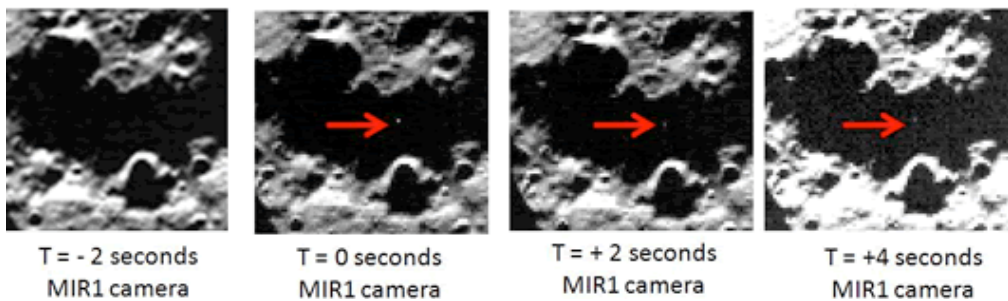


**Location of the Cabeus crater on the Moon**  
image: NASA / Public Domain



**6-8km wide plume, 15 seconds after impact**  
image: NASA / Public Domain

**Mid-Infrared Camera Images of Centaur Impact from LCROSS  
Shepherding Spacecraft**



A time series of images taken with the mid-infrared camera (MIR1). The first image (left to right) shows the Cabeus crater before impact, followed by images of Cabeus approximately zero, two, and four seconds after Centaur impact. The thermal signature of the impact is detected clearly by the MIR1 camera. The arrows point to the thermal signature of the impact as detected by the LCROSS spacecraft. Images are presented in grayscale (white = hot, black = cold) and are stretched to enhance contrast (image: NASA / Public Domain)

**WHAT DOES THE NEW DATA MEAN TO THE INVESTIGATION?**

So far, the biggest piece of news from the data is the lack of water found. It is now believed that there is little possibility of water or ice being present in that plume, which means that there was no water or ice directly under the surface at the site of impact, but there are signs of debris which looks suspiciously like large concentrations of iron and mercury. The crater left by the impact of the Centaur Rocket is thought to be 92ft (28m) wide, but it is not clear how deep the crater is. The idea of the impact was to get down as deep as possible under the crust, to see if there is any such ice directly under the surface of the Moon, and while the data so far indicates otherwise, this may change because the information returned by the LCROSS satellite is much more detailed than was previously envisaged by NASA. Anthony Colaprete, the LCROSS principal investigator and project scientist explains... "We are blown away by the data returned... The team is working hard on the analysis and the data appear to be of very high quality". There may be more chapters in this story to come, because we really are very new to this area of science, but it may take years

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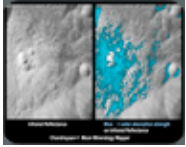
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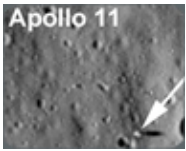
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