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## Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter

A [good friend of mine Sarah](#) believes that the moon landings were a hoax. Despite being a [huge science geek](#), a [fan of NASA](#) and a [member of the planetary society](#) she subscribes to the idea that a man has not in fact walked on the moon, and the entire thing was a lie perpetrated in an effort to win the political war with the USSR. Or something along those lines.

Somehow this deeply disturbs me. Anything coming from Sarah carries considerable weight, so I can't just discard her opinion. How could it be that the same person avidly following the mars rover mission also believes that we couldn't land someone on the moon (or rather, didn't)? I can say that I have not watched/read/been brain washed by the same materials that she has, but I'm expecting to be convinced to do so after this post.

Skepticism is vitally important to science, no doubt. I think scientific thinkers must challenge anything that doesn't make sense to them. I myself am open to hearing the counter arguments, and I even spent a half hour or so reading the respective wikipedia articles on the matter...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo\\_Moon\\_Landing\\_hoax\\_accusation\\_s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo_Moon_Landing_hoax_accusation_s)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent\\_evidence\\_for\\_Apollo\\_Moon\\_landings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_evidence_for_Apollo_Moon_landings)

I also think while conspiracy theories are fun (x-files we miss you) they are also wrong 99.99% of the time. In a time where science is considered elitist and unnecessary in one of the most important political, economic and scientific centers on earth, and when NASA continues to face diminishing budgets and smaller mandates it seems terribly unproductive to undermine those efforts being made by real engineers and scientists by giving credence to crack pot theories about hoaxes.

Consider how difficult it is to keep a secret. Imagine the incentive to those cynical people out there who wish to undermine the real achievements of science. Remember the movie contact and [Ocham's Razor](#)? Do we make hundreds of assumptions about the ability for hundreds of people in the government, at NASA and elsewhere all keeping a secret about the landings? That the telemetry mirrors left behind were done by unmanned missions (and that we had the robotics capable at that time to do so?) That the long documentation trail left behind from all the steps leading up to Apollo 11 were somehow part of it? That the [FIVE additional moon landings](#) (after the public had already lost interest) were also faked just to add weight to the first faked landing? Or can we assume that no such plot exists and that NASA's account is roughly accurate? I realize you can flip this and play the other side, but you can read the articles for the details rather than me iterating through the arguments that have already been made on both sides.

I have to admit, I want to believe. I want to believe that we really did achieve the mantel of a moon landing. That we as a culture were able to step outside of our regular bullshit to come together and accomplish something truly spectacular for mankind.

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Comparing to another activity is useful if it helps you formulate questions, it's dangerous when you use it to justify answers.  
-Martin Fowler

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LRO - finally time to shut up the crackpots

In any case, the only real reason I started this post, besides to provoke you Sarah, was so that I could mention the upcoming [Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter](#), a mission I will be really looking forward to. It looks like we're going to get a lot more familiar with our friend the moon. This can only be a good thing as privatized space exploration steps up and produces more tourism and public interest in things beyond our humble planet. The moon may seem a bit provincial at this point, but if you were to seriously consider visiting it (when you make your millions on the internet) do you not get totally stoked? It seems like the next logical jumping point for our more grandiose visions. LRO is launching in early 2009 from Cape Canaveral this mission will include (from wikipedia)

- Selenodetic global [topography](#)
- Characterization of deep space [radiation](#) in Lunar orbit
- The lunar [polar regions](#), including possible [water ice](#) deposits and the lighting environment
- [High-resolution mapping](#) (max 0.5 m) to assist in the selection and characterization of future landing sites

And onboard instrumentation will most importantly include :

**LROC** — The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera (LROC) has been designed to address the measurement requirements of landing site certification and polar illumination.<sup>[11]</sup> LROC comprises a pair of narrow-angle cameras (NAC) and a single wide-angle camera (WAC). LROC will fly several times over the historic [Apollo lunar landing sites](#), with the camera's high resolution, the [lunar rovers](#) and [Lunar Module](#) descent stages and their respective shadows will be clearly visible. It is expected that this photography will boost public acknowledgement of the validity of the landings, and discredit the [Apollo conspiracy theories](#).<sup>[12]</sup>

It will be nice to put this to rest. Long live Elvis.

Posted on [Tuesday, November 11, 2008](#)

Labels: [opinion](#), [science](#)

2 comments:

[sarah](#) said...

I wonder if the NASA recon orbiter will manage to take as good of quality photographs as those professional photographers did on the moon all those years ago. I'm sure they will. I love NASA but years ago they had to do their duty to the country and give the American

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people a reason to feel patriotic, as well as prove their superiority to those pesky Russkies. So they made a "spaceship" out of tinfoil, paper mache and 7000 Erector sets and took incredibly beautiful photos of the craft on a soundstage (some suggest Kubrick had a hand - it looks like it!)

Do you believe that Lee Harvey was the lone gunman too?

lovelovelove,

The Crackpot

[November 16, 2008 11:41 AM](#) 

[Thomas Sullivan](#) said...

Excellent post and I would like to add the following. With LRO's launch set for April, 2009, at last we are taking the first steps back to the moon. LRO will be the first mission with a primary objective to implement the United States Vision for Space Exploration. The Vision for Space Exploration is the United States space policy announced on January 14, 2004 by U.S. President George W. Bush. I believe the LRO is a lot more significant then many people realize. At last, we are taking the first small steps of human exploration of space, and even though LRO is simply a non-manned probe for the acquisition of lunar data, it should lead eventually to sending humans back to the Moon, which is supposed to be a stepping stone for eventual Mars exploration. For more news about space visit [Space News](#).

[December 26, 2008 1:31 PM](#) 

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