

Australia offered role in Mars Mission Plan



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A new tyranny of distance for our grandchildren?

Australia is poised to participate in an international program developing the technologies necessary for human exploration and colonisation of Mars.

“Mars Society Australia has been offered one of four prototype Mars habitats,” said Dr Nick Hoffman, a spokesman for the Society. “It’s a unique opportunity to participate in the first great adventure of the 21st Century.”

Robert Zubrin, founder of the Mars Society and originator of the “Mars Direct” plan to get humans to Mars, offered Australia the habitat during the first Australian Mars Exploration Conference, held in Melbourne at the weekend.

Zubrin, in a conference call, told delegates that humans could get to Mars using technology already developed for the Apollo Program, but that Australia could help develop the technology needed for humans to survive there.

The first habitat is already operating at Devon Island in the Canadian Arctic, located in a cold dry desert impact crater similar to some environments found on Mars.

Australia also contains some unique Mars-like environments, with some of the world's best exposed fossil hot spring localities in red deserts of shifting sands. Fortunately, Australia is a bit warmer than Mars, which averages temperatures of -60°C, according to Dr. Nick Hoffman.

“We have several world experts in the field, and wide open spaces to do experiments,” says Hoffman. “The habitat has been offered and our members are ready to staff and resource the habitat. So Australia is well placed to participate in the human exploration and colonisation of the Red Planet.”

Mars Society Australia has already started developing and testing designs for future Mars rovers in Queensland – “Project MARSupial”. Project “Mars Skin” is experimenting with analogues of future space suits for living and working on Mars. The Society has booked space for communications equipment on the Australian satellite Jaesat in 2002. “People are rolling up their shirt sleeves and trying things out,” says Hoffman.

More volunteers and financial support will be needed to help construct the habitat when it arrives, according to Mars Society Australia technical director Jason Hoogland. Technical skills will be required to fit-out the new habitat and prepare it for the first crew of trial “Oztronauts”.

“The first manned mission to Mars will occur within the next 10-15 years. Australia has a role to play in that mission, and will derive considerable benefits in technical development, political standing, and national identity from doing so,” said Hoffman.

- **For information and interviews contact Nick Hoffman on 0438 397 366, Jason Hoogland on 041 3300 887 , Jennifer Laing on 0417 135 113, or log on to www.marssociety.org.au**
- **For background on the Mars Direct Plan go to Scientific American at <http://www.sciam.com/2000/0300issue/0300zubrin.html>**
- **For Arctic habitat information and images visit www.marssociety.org**