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FROM RED CENTRE TO RED PLANET - AUSSIE SPACE SCIENCE IN THE OUTBACK

Mars Society Australia announced today that an Australian scientific team will travel to outback South Australia and the Northern Territory on October 27 to examine suitable sites for a Mars analogue research facility. The head of the Mars Society in the United States, Dr. Robert Zubrin, said earlier this year that Australia could be the recipient of U.S. hardware to build the facility, and the expedition will scout for potential locations in some of the most Mars-like terrain on our planet.

"This site survey expedition called Project Jarntimarra, lays important groundwork for the Mars Society Australia's innovative analogue research program," said President Guy Murphy. "It is generally accepted within the space community that a human mission to Mars will probably occur within the next 20 years. Before this can be undertaken, there will need to be a substantial program of research and training undertaken here on Earth in Mars analogue environments; special locations that have similar characteristics to the Martian surface. We hope that a Mars analogue research facility will eventually be located here in Australia, allowing research to take place that may one day play a part in sending the first human beings to Mars."

According to Mars Society Australia Technical Director Jason Hoogland, "Australia has some of the best field sites in the world for understanding how Mars and potentially Martian life may have evolved. It is also ideally suited to be a location for field simulations and testing in the lead up to the first human Mars mission. During Project Jarntimarra, we will survey and catalogue Mars-like areas for use in future Mars simulation and technology testing activities."

The first Mars Society research facility is located on Devon Island in the Canadian Arctic, with a second proposed for the U.S. South-West.

Project Jarntimarra is being sponsored by U.K. aerospace company Starchaser Industries, which began life as an experimental rocket test programme set up by founder Steve Bennett in 1992. Twelve out of thirteen of their rocket launches have been successful, and the Starchaser team officially entered the X-Prize competition in 1997 to build and launch a privately funded vehicle capable of lifting a crew of 3 to 100 kilometres altitude and returning them safely to Earth. "Starchaser have shown great vision and generosity in choosing to support this expedition," said Murphy.

The team of local and international scientists brought together by Mars Society Australia for the expedition includes Professor Malcolm Walter from the Australian Centre for Astrobiology in NSW, whose NASA-funded research has focused partly on the search for life on Mars, and Dr. Carol Stoker and Dr. Larry Lemke from NASA's Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California. Dr. Stoker and Dr. Lemke are involved in NASA's Haughton-Mars Project, studying the Haughton Crater site as a potential Mars analogue site, and have been members of crews using the Mars Society's Devon Island research facility.

The Aussie science expedition will leave Adelaide on October 27, 2001 and return there two weeks later, visiting such national landmarks as Alice Springs, Arkaroola in the Flinders Ranges, the Birdsville Track, Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta.

"Project Jarntimarra offers Australians the chance to participate in an international program to develop the technologies necessary for future human exploration and colonisation of Mars," said Hoogland. "We can play a small but vital role in the greatest adventure of the 21st century - human expansion into the Solar System."

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For further information on Mars Society Australia, visit <http://www.marssociety.org.au>

For information on Starchaser Industries and/or the X Prize, visit <http://www.starchaser.co.uk> or contact Adrienne Bennett at adrienne@starchaser.co.uk

Images of the Flashline Mars Arctic Research Station on Devon Island are available from:
<http://arctic.marssociety.org/images/2001/zubrin/>

Images of the Mars Desert Research Station are available from: <http://desert.marssociety.org/>

For a background to the Mars Analogue Research Station Project, visit
<http://desert.marssociety.org/about/background.html>