

Spirit Scampering Up Husband Hill

July 25 2005

by Steve Squyres

Spirit has had a pretty remarkable week. Back when we were climbing the lower reaches of Husband Hill, getting anywhere was a real struggle. The terrain wasn't all that steep, but the soil was very loose and slippery. Five meters of forward progress was a good day, and some days it was less than that as we slipped and slid and clawed our way up the slope.

Fast forward eight or nine months... we had a drive this week in which we covered five meters vertically. That's five meters of elevation gain, over a drive that totaled something like 30 meters horizontally. It's amazing to me how solid the ground has gotten as we've begun to approach the summit of the hill. The terrain is pretty steep here, and I thought this could be one of the hardest parts of the climb. Instead, Spirit has been scampering up it.

Covering all that ground, of course, offers the chance to find new things, and if you've looked at the most recent images you've seen that we've happend upon yet another nice outcrop... a pretty big one this time. So we're going to stop and work it over a little bit before we move on.

As always, we've been having fun lately naming things. In our big Independence Day panorama, all the rocks were named after different kinds of fireworks. Since then, starting around July 14th, we've been using mostly French names, in honor of Bastille Day. So the outcrop we've just arrived at has been named Voltaire. After we're done with Voltaire, we'll resume the push to the summit. The plan is to name the rocks we begin to see next after famous mountaineers.

Meanwhile, over at Meridiani, you look at the latest pictures and they're enough to make you think we're ready to shout "Land Ho!". We're covering a solid 30 meters a sol with our new drive techniques now, and as we look around us we're starting to see more and more little tiny outcrops of rock. The big expanses of rock we're hoping for aren't in view yet, but still... we feel like sailors who have been at sea for months, starting now to see driftwood and bits of seaweed that are telling us that solid ground may not be far over the horizon.

Oh yeah, and we've just had another one of our lovely "cleaning events", with gusts of wind sweeping dust off of Opportunity's solar arrays. So both rovers are now in very solid shape power-wise. It was a good week on Mars.

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