

Festoons And Ferric Sulfate Salts Keep Rovers Occupied

January 23 2006

Good stuff is happening on both sides of the planet. At Meridiani, the main source of excitement continues to be the festoons. The low-light imaging we've been doing is great for bringing this stuff out, and we've come to realize that it's present in a whole lot of the rocks around us.

The real news, though, is that it looks like we're finally about ready to move the rover again. I can't give you a definite date, but I'd say that sometime next week is very likely. Our first move, of course, is going to be to get into position to get some nice MI mosaics on the festoons. The rock we're going after first is one called Overgaard.

At Gusev, a funny thing happened on the way to Home Plate. We swore we were just going to sprint for Home Plate and not stop for anything unless something extraordinary popped up. Then something extraordinary popped up. On our most recent drive, we hit some pretty soft soil and churned it up a bit. And when looked at the disturbed soil, we realized it was bright... really, really bright. Somehow our churning dug up something very different from everything around it.

Something like this has happened to us once before, at a spot just below Larry's Lookout that we named Paso Robles. Paso Robles was one of the most extraordinary finds of Spirit's mission to date. It was very light-toned soil dug up from just beneath the surface, and when we measured its composition we found that it was more than fifty percent salts. Most of it was ferric sulfate salts, and there were also some phosphate salts as well.

So what is this new stuff (which we have named Arad)? The same kind of salt? Something different? Similar concentration or even saltier? It was too tempting a target to pass up, and we're going to spend the weekend doing IDD work on it before moving on.

And then we'll be off to Home Plate again... really!

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