Where is Beagle 2? The search continues

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H20 crater. Credit: NASA&acutes Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter

NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) spacecraft has used its onboard High Resolution Imaging Science Experiment camera (HiRISE) to take a colour image of a region of Mars in the vicinity of the intended landing site of Beagle 2.

Included in the image is new coverage of the crater H2O which was considered by the Beagle 2 team as unique in the area that had been searched for evidence of the missing Lander. Beagle 2 was targeted to land in an ellipse approximately 50km x 10km in size.

The new image does not show any features inside the crater that can be reconciled with peculiarities (i.e. possible components of the entry descent and landing system) encountered in the two previous lower resolution images taken soon after Beagle 2 was due to arrive on Mars in December 2003. The previous images were captured by the Mars Orbiter Camera on NASA's Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft.

Commenting on the latest image, Prof Colin Pillinger of the Open University and lead scientist for Beagle 2, said "Of course this is disappointing. We had hoped that the HiRISE camera would clarify the oddities we had seen in the crater but this is not the case. Nevertheless, I am extremely grateful to the camera team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the University of Arizona for trying and congratulate them on the exceptional quality of the images. I remain optimistic that future images may yet show us where Beagle 2 finally came to rest."

Source: PPARC