

New project manager for long-lived Mars odyssey

October 18 2010, By Guy Webster



Mars Odyssey Project Manager Gaylon McSmith, of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory Image Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

The new project manager for the longest-working spacecraft currently active at Mars, NASA's Mars Odyssey, has a long track record himself.

He is Gaylon McSmith, a former pilot of U.S. Air Force fighter jets and Continental Airlines airliners. At NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif., he has been a leader on the Odyssey team since two months after the spacecraft began orbiting [Mars](#) in October 2001.

On Dec. 15 of this year, Odyssey will break the record for the longest-working spacecraft ever at Mars, surpassing the mark set by NASA's Mars Global Surveyor, which operated in orbit from 1997 to 2006. Odyssey completed its prime mission in 2004 and has operated on an extended-mission basis since then.

"The spacecraft continues to be a very reliable platform that conducts its own science investigations, plus important support for other Mars missions," McSmith said. "It's a great honor for me to work with the Odyssey team."

Odyssey's science instruments have discovered vast supplies of frozen water just beneath the surface; run a radiation-safety check for future astronauts; and mapped surface textures, minerals and elements all over Mars. Its camera has provided the highest-resolution map of the entire planet.

Observations by Odyssey have contributed to selection and analysis of landing sites for four Mars surface missions. Thousands of students have participated in a groundbreaking educational program enabling them to select Odyssey imaging targets on Mars and conduct real scientific investigations.

In addition to its own science, Odyssey has relayed to Earth nearly all of the data provided by NASA's Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity. It provided relay service for the [Phoenix Mars Lander](#) and will be in position to do so for the Mars Science Laboratory mission during and after the 2012 landing of the mission's rover, Curiosity.

Odyssey's [Thermal Emission Imaging System](#), Neutron Spectrometer and High Energy [Neutron Detector](#) continue examining Mars.

McSmith joined the Odyssey team as manager of the mission's science office in 2001. He served as mission manager from 2008 until this month, when he succeeded Phil Varghese as project manager. Varghese had become project manager for NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter.

McSmith, who now has a home in Pasadena, grew up in the Eagle Rock district of Los Angeles, a few miles from JPL. He graduated from

California State University, Fresno, in 1970, with a degree in computer sciences. After service with the U.S. Air Force and eight years as an airline pilot, he came to work at JPL on an aviation weather project supported by the Federal Aviation Administration. Subsequently he worked on the Deep Space 1 mission to comet Borrelly and the Galileo mission to Jupiter.

Provided by JPL/NASA

Citation: New project manager for long-lived Mars odyssey (2010, October 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-long-lived-mars-odyssey.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.