

Australian scientists celebrate 'textbook' Mars landing

August 6 2012

Australian scientists involved in the successful landing of NASA's Mars Science Laboratory and Curiosity rover on the Red Planet hailed the [touchdown as "textbook" on Monday](#).

Three antenna dishes at the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex close to the national capital received the signals for the entry, descent and landing of the mission.

"It couldn't have gone better. It was literally a textbook landing," said Glen Nagle, spokesman for the complex which is managed on NASA's behalf by the Australian government science body CSIRO.

Nagle said about 400 people crammed into the visitors centre of the complex at Tidbinbilla, about 35 kilometres (22 miles) from Canberra city, to watch the landing, among them retired tracking staff who had worked on previous NASA missions.

"When the signal came through... the place erupted. People were just over the moon... they were literally joyous," he told AFP.

"For a lot of people who were too young to be around at the time of Apollo, this was their moon landing."

The complex is one of three tracking stations in NASA's [Deep Space Network](#) but was the only one involved in Monday's landing. The others are in Madrid, Spain and Goldstone, California.

About 80 people were on duty in Canberra as part of the team listening for a series of distinct tones from the spacecraft as various steps in its complicated landing process were activated.

The most important tone confirmed the rover had landed safely on Mars.

Elsewhere in Australia, the CSIRO's [Parkes radio telescope](#) was to record the tones which were transmitted as a UHF [radio signal](#) in the first minutes of the spacecraft's entry into Mars's atmosphere.

Another smaller antenna managed by the [European Space Agency](#) at New Norcia, near the Western Australian capital Perth, would also to receive signals from the spacecraft, officials said.

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