



## A COMMUNICATIONS BREAKTHROUGH

### SPSR Members Meet with NASA Officials

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#### The Formation of SPSR

In 1993, after the publication of The McDaniel Report, a group of scientists and professionals organized under the title Society for Planetary SETI Research (SPSR). Included in this group were all the academically or professionally qualified researchers who had worked on the Mars anomaly question since the Viking missions of 1976. These were joined by a number of new scientists with an interest in the Cydonia area of Mars. The group emphasized an interdisciplinary approach to planetary SETI (the search for signs of intelligence on planets of the solar system). Included were not only image processing specialists, geologists and astronomers, but also representatives of archaeology, philosophy, physics, anthropology, and International Space Policy.

This group had two main purposes: to extend the boundaries of Mars anomaly research using all available existing data, and to put the question of the Mars anomalies into a carefully reasoned scientific framework that could be appreciated by the larger scientific community. In doing so, SPSR necessarily had to distinguish genuine scientific appraisal of the data from unwarranted speculation and frequently faulty image manipulation often used to support claims of ancient civilizations on Mars -- as well as the sometimes corrupted or amateurish images used by hidebound skeptics to debunk Mars anomaly research.

Four years of intensive work on the part of the chief SPSR scientists have led to significant probability studies and image detail clarification, with two main conclusions. First, there are elements of detail in the Face at Cydonia that are extremely difficult to explain by appealing to simple geological factors such as "differential erosion" and are more consistent with the concept of a deliberately sculptured structure. Second, four separate techniques of probability analysis indicate a reasonably high likelihood that at least some formations in the area are either artificial, or are the result of some highly anomalous natural mechanisms. In either case it has become obvious that the area deserves a high priority for Mars exploration.

But as we moved past mid-1997, it seemed increasingly clear that NASA had no serious interest in this area. Although Administrator Daniel Goldin stated in late 1996 that NASA would attempt to photograph the Face using the Mars Global Surveyor, his comments seemed focused only on the single object, made no reference to priorities, and did not specify whether he referred to the low-resolution mapping camera or the high-resolution narrow angle camera. This situation was complicated further by statements of Asst. Administrator Alan Ladwig, who was reported as saying that although the MGS would photograph the Face, high resolution images would be "unlikely." Again only the Face, and not the entire area, was mentioned.

#### A Call for Communication

Alarmed by this situation, in the special Mars Anomaly issue of the British science magazine QUEST for Knowledge (Vol 1 No. 3), I contributed an editorial titled "A Call for Communication." In that editorial I stated:

**"What is needed, then, is to open the doors of communication *now* between NASA scientists involved in the Global Surveyor project, and the legitimate independent researchers. Against the tide of ignorance, we call for such communication to be initiated before it is too late. Humanity must not be left in the dark for decades to come regarding a possible extraterrestrial civilization that once may have flourished on Mars."**

## First Efforts Rebuffed



Dr. Horace W.  
Crater

In pursuit of such communication, SPSR President Dr. Horace W. Crater of the University of Tennessee Space Institute sent letters to NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin asking for an opportunity for SPSR scientists to present the results of their research to NASA for evaluation. Dr. Crater's requests, answered by Asst. Administrator Wesley Huntress, were refused. Mr. Huntress appeared to have misunderstood these requests as a proposed research project rather than as an offer of information that might be useful in re-evaluating NASA priorities. A total of five letters were exchanged with no progress being made.

This negative situation was not helped by the pronouncements being made on his web page by Dr. Michael C. Malin of Malin Space Science Systems, who is the principal investigator for the Mars Global Surveyor (MGS) camera. Dr. Malin continued to present his long-standing, but mistaken, view that any interest in Cydonia is solely the purview of "tabloid" sensationalism and bad science. The appearance was that Dr. Malin, even though he is actually a private contractor, was the primary NASA spokesperson where the anomalies are concerned. SPSR members were not convinced, however, that Dr. Malin's personal views necessarily coincided with the perspectives of all NASA scientists.

## The Breakthrough: Communication is Established

SPSR therefore continued its efforts to assure NASA that there exists a legitimate body of research deserving of attention. Dr. John E. Brandenburg, one of the original Mars anomaly researchers, contacted the Acting Director of Solar System Studies at NASA, Dr. Carl Pilcher, requesting a meeting to present our case. On Thursday, November 20, Dr. Pilcher's secretary called back. Dr. Pilcher had agreed to a meeting with SPSR scientists on Nov. 24.

The meeting took place that Monday morning in Dr. Pilcher's offices at NASA HQ in Washington, D.C. Also attending was NASA scientist Dr. Joseph Boyce. Six SPSR members were present: Mr. Vincent DiPietro, Dr. John E. Brandenburg, Dr. Mark J. Carlotto, Dr. Horace W. Crater, Dr. David Webb, and myself.

## Research Results Presented



Vincent DiPietro

The 1-hour meeting was cordial and welcoming. Drs. Pilcher and Boyce were most attentive as research summaries were presented by DiPietro, Carlotto, and Crater. The NASA officials showed a great deal of interest in the image processing results of Carlotto and DiPietro. Copies of peer-reviewed scientific papers by the researchers were handed to Dr. Pilcher. At the close of the meeting, Dr. Pilcher stated that he was impressed by the seriousness of SPSR research.

In answer to our questions, Dr. Pilcher assured us that re-imaging the entire area of Cydonia in question with the MGS high-resolution camera, using the camera "strip" capability on every pass over the area during

the mapping phase of the mission, is now "official NASA policy." He stated that Glenn E. Cunningham, MGS mission director at JPL, was in full agreement with this policy and that Dr. Malin had accepted the policy. All of the SPSR members were greatly impressed with Dr. Pilcher's evident sincerity, particularly in the light of the considerable interest the NASA officials were showing in the research results. It was clear to us all that some or perhaps most of this research material was previously unknown to NASA.

The MGS mapping phase is expected to begin about 1 year from now. There is a possibility that some images could be obtained prior to then, and Dr. Brandenburg urged NASA to take such "contingency" images due to the possibility that the spacecraft, with a damaged solar panel, could fail. It remains for us to hope that NASA engineers can maintain the health of the spacecraft long enough to complete the mission and deliver the desired images.

## Assessment

I came away from this meeting with a feeling of completion. At long last, the legitimate Mars anomaly research has been brought to the attention of rational, perceptive administrators and scientists within NASA. It is clear that Dr. Malin's personal views regarding the anomaly question are not official policy, and that NASA has decided to be fully responsive to the concerns of the public and of SPSR scientists that high resolution images must be obtained. This is the responsible policy that Administrator Daniel Goldin called for in November of 1996, and Dr. Pilcher has now given us assurances that this is the operative policy for the global surveyor mission.



Dr. John E.  
Brandenburg



Dr. Mark J.  
Carlotto

SPSR member Dr. David Webb, an internationally known consultant on space policy and former director of Space Education, Research, and Technology at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida, had the following to say about the meeting: "I believe, without any qualification, that the meeting was a great success at many levels...This is the first unambiguous promise made by any Nasa official (as far as we are aware) that Cydonia is slated for hi-res imaging."

In my lecture at Manchester, England just one year ago today (Dec. 7, 1996) I pointed out that NASA's promises to "try" re-imaging Cydonia were said to be based on public interest, but not *scientific* interest. Because priorities are determined by *scientific* interest, I had little hope that NASA would assign any reasonable priority to the Mars anomalies. Now, however, Dr. Pilcher has made it clear that there are scientists within NASA who have a scientific interest in the outcome, whatever it may be. This new statement of motivation within NASA, I believe, establishes a reasonable priority for the imaging of Cydonia.

As to the accusations of "conspiracy" that have been leveled at NASA by some individuals, I must admit that while I never accepted this view I had been puzzled by NASA's apparent behavior regarding the anomalies over the past years. It now looks to me as though the administrative levels of NASA were never fully aware of the nature of the research and the sincerity of the researchers, but were instead influenced by the views of a few NASA and NASA contracting scientists who had chosen to define the issues as one for the tabloids. This situation, I believe, has now come to an end.

My conclusion after attending the meeting with Dr. Pilcher, and because of the simple fact that the meeting took place at all, is that there is no NASA "conspiracy" to "cover up" an ET discovery. Instead, there were ongoing misunderstandings largely due to the manner in which the Cydonia issue had been treated historically. It took the banding together of serious scientists in the SPSR to finally bring the real research, and the careful hypotheses based on that research, to the attention of responsible individuals within NASA.

### The Question to be Answered

Regarding those hypotheses, at our meeting with Pilcher and Boyce two primary views were expressed by SPSR scientists. Dr. Brandenburg and Vincent DiPietro have put forward their expectation that the Face will turn out to be artificial, and that its builders were likely to have been members of an indigenously evolved Martian civilization that existed in the distant past. This perspective has been supported in recent months by the continuing revelations of bacterial remains in Martian meteorites as well as the Mars Pathfinder results indicating a former life-favoring environment on Mars.

On the other hand, Dr. Horace Crater and myself put forward only the claim that there exists at Cydonia a radical statistical anomaly in the configuration of 12 small "mounds," which cannot be explained by conventional geology and which may be a result of deliberate construction. We do not claim any sort of "proof" of artificiality, but we do point out that Dr. Crater's statistical analyses have been thoroughly critiqued by knowledgeable statisticians and have not been found to contain any fallacies. Similarly, Dr. Carlotto's probability calculations have also passed through the test of peer-review and are supportive of the existence of radical anomaly at Cydonia.

Does the answer to the Cydonia anomalies lie in the activity of intelligent beings, or in geological processes hitherto unknown? The world waits, with NASA, to discover the answer to this all-important question.

