

power of reason, that on balance the reader will become aware there is something seriously wrong with the official picture we have been given concerning the reality of life in our universe, our own solar system and in this particular study, on our own planetary neighbour Mars.

The possibility that the Americans would want to hold back such an enormous and world-changing discovery is a deeply disturbing one, and the potential consequences and ramifications for such deception are huge. And maybe it would be unfair to pile the whole blame on that nation's shoulders, in as much as a deception of this magnitude may well be found to be sourced to an international accord and agreement to which America is but one signatory. It may just be so that because the United States of America has the most advanced space programme in the world it now finds itself in the firing line.

We will see.

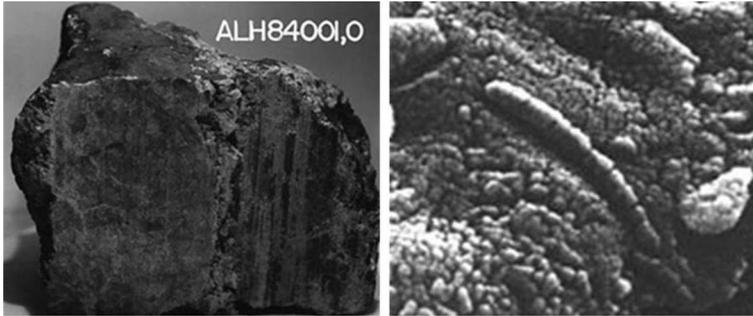
### **Avoiding the Search for Life on Mars**

So, if the reason for holding back the discovery of life on Mars is because there are some people who fear the big changes the release of this knowledge will bring to the world, is there any evidence that the search for life on Mars is being delayed, curtailed or restricted in any way?

I long believed that if they were to find life on other planets, the Americans would fall over themselves with joy to want to excitedly announce the discovery to the waiting world. Well, they kind of did that with the discovery of possible microbial evidence for life on Mars in that little 9-inch meteorite they found in Antarctica and which prompted the then U.S. President Clinton to

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make a televised announcement to the world in August of 1996.



- 1. (L) Probable Martian meteorite: ALH84001**
- 2. (R) Possible fossilized Martian nanobacteria from ALH84001**

Image credits: NASA/JPL

NASA scientists had claimed it had been blasted off from the surface of Mars around 15 million years ago following a meteorite impact on that world and that some 13,000 years later, after a long journey orbiting the solar system, it had landed in Antarctica where it was found in 1984. An electron microscope later revealed what is possibly fossilized remains of Martian bacteria, but this evidence has since been challenged although not discredited.

That was the last real announcement concerning life on Mars that has been officially proclaimed to the world. What we currently have now as the most active scientific programme supposedly capable of searching for life on other planets is a flotilla of spacecraft that has been visiting, orbiting and landing on Mars ever since 1998, when the *Mars Global Surveyor* first began science missions and global mapping of the planet.

This is a programme of scientific study that has been in continuous operation since then. That's over fourteen years of state-of-the-art, scientific investigation at the

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cost of several billion dollars. Well, what do we as the human race have to show for that investment? You can certainly say that we've learned a lot about the planet's past and present geology; the amount of water ice on it; its atmosphere and climate. And we've certainly seen some strikingly beautiful and wondrous pictures of the Martian surface and its sometimes strange, alien geological formations.



### 3. "Dust Devils" forming elaborate tracks across sand dunes

Image credit: NASA/JPL/University of Arizona

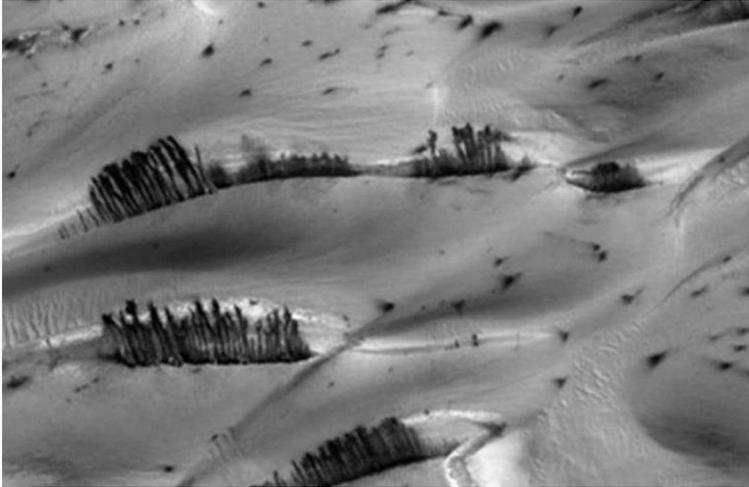
But what about the most important question of all? The question as to whether there is *life* on Mars or not? Well, a visit to NASA's website will give you exactly the same official answer as they gave back in 1976 when the Viking landers first attempted to find out if life existed on the Red Planet:

"We don't know yet if there is life on Mars. . ."

And this is where the scientific community should really be scratching their heads and asking some aggressive questions here, because surely, after 14 years of study,

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NASA must be able to offer something more concrete than “We don’t know...”



#### **4. Streaks of dust sliding down dune slopes creating the illusion of upright trees**

Image credit: NASA/JPL/University of Arizona

Consider that scientific data from both NASA and the ESA (European Space Agency) show there are clear requisites for signs of life as we understand it and the conditions to sustain it, present on Mars today:

- Significant amounts of methane in the atmosphere
- Huge amounts of water ice across the planet
- Liquid water consistently appearing on the surface
- Temperature as high as 30C/86F at the Mars equator

But NASA will state that Mars is a geologically dead planet. It has no volcanic activity, no magnetic field, only a very thin atmosphere, and the unprotected surface of the planet is bathed in ultraviolet cosmic radi-

tion that makes it very difficult for life to exist there. Yet studies here on Earth, clearly show that 'life' is a very stubborn, tenuous and resourceful commodity and can and does exist in the most severe and inhospitable conditions of extreme heat or cold.

Planetary scientists Janice Bishop and Chris McKay, while investigating carbonate rocks coated with iron oxides collected from the Mojave Desert, found that organisms were protected from deadly ultraviolet light by an iron oxide coating. This suggests a survival mechanism that may have protected life on Mars as conditions deteriorated on the planet's surface.<sup>1</sup>

The Atacama Desert in Chile provides scientists with a useful analogue of Mars due to its hyper-arid, near waterless conditions, one of the driest places on Earth, and here also Dr McKay found microbial life thriving on the underside of translucent quartz rocks. In this peculiar micro-environment where fog provides the only source of moisture, microorganisms were not only protected against damaging ultraviolet radiation but had enough light, too.

In the same region, Professor Nilton Renno, who is a key investigator for Curiosity, said there is a salt crust on the surface below which exist liquid droplets of salty water that teem with bacterial life.<sup>2</sup>

Life is therefore likely to be found in a wide variety of niches and conditions. It could even exist on an interstellar planet unheated by a sun. Planetary scientists Dorian Abbot and Eric Switzer postulated that a planet ejected from its planetary system could conceivably maintain a liquid ocean under layers of thermally-insulating water ice, deriving its heat and possibly sustaining any life, purely from geothermal flux.<sup>3</sup>

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Quite clearly 'life finds a way', and if, as NASA's own studies seem to show, Mars used to be an Earth-like planet with oceans, seas, rivers, an atmosphere, a magnetic field and, very likely under these conditions, 'life', then the chances of that life still existing somewhere despite the cataclysm that struck the planet, must surely be very high indeed.

'Life' will cling on, mutate, evolve, and may even thrive once it has adapted to new conditions, and that is not to mention the 'extremophiles' that - as they do here on Earth - always seem to find some specialized niche and habitat in which to survive and live.

Even if it is found to be true that no life can survive on the *surface* of the planet due to lethal levels of UV radiation, the possibility of finding life *beneath* the surface just a few metres below ground or in sheltered caves far from radiation's harm, will have most biologists declare a virtual 99% certainty that life exists on Mars.

And yet NASA will not come out and reflect that view. Instead, they fluff around seemingly waiting forever for that absolute proof. And worse, crucially and infuriatingly, they still won't go *searching* for that proof.

### **The Mars Science Laboratory: Not-so-Curious?**

At the time of writing, the Curiosity Mission in the form of "The Mars Science Laboratory" and at a cost of \$2.5 billion dollars, landed successfully on Mars in a hair-raising but brilliantly executed manoeuvre in August 2012. Hailed as the most sophisticated spacecraft to have so far landed on Mars and armed with the most advanced set of scientific experiments yet to explore the planet's surface, what will Curiosity actually do?

Will it be able to search for *life*?

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Well, the Viking Mission of 1976 was an astrobiology mission designed to hopefully detect life on the surface of Mars, which, according to some scientists, it did find, and to others, it didn't. Then followed *Pathfinder*, *Spirit*, *Opportunity*, and *Phoenix*, which were all geology missions sent to discover what they already knew - that locations, where the spacecraft landed, were ancient sites where water used to exist millions of years ago.



### **5. Curiosity: The Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) (Artist's impression)**

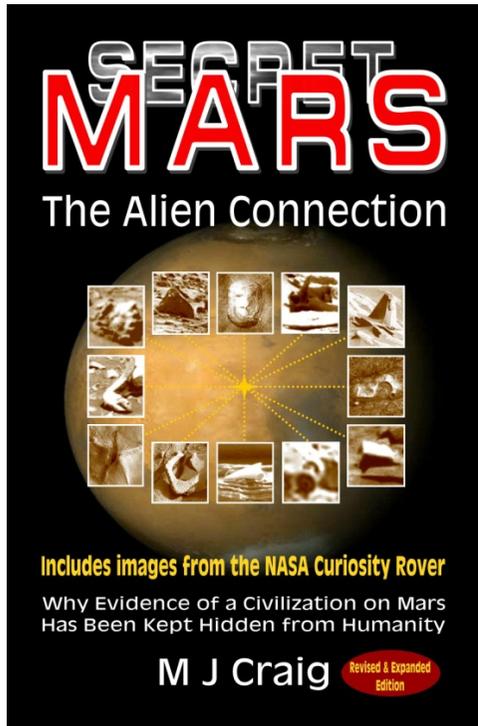
Image credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

The Curiosity mission is...well, yet another 'geology' mission!

In actual fact, quite a bit more than that; a roving, robotic geochemist that can laser zap and powder down rocks and also sample soil to get a real close up look at their secrets, but that's about it. As Project Scientist John Grotzinger said in the NASA video, *The Science of Curiosity: Seeking Signs of Past Habitats on Mars*:<sup>4</sup>

Curiosity is not a life-detection mission. We're not actually looking for life. We don't have the ability to detect life if it was there.

- End of Sample -



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