

## Media Advisory

### UNH space scientist comments on tomorrow's Mars probe landing; climate studies similar to those planned on Mars ongoing on Mt. Washington

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Commenting on tomorrow's landing of the Mars Polar Lander, even a seasoned scientist is cautious.

"Predictions here are pretty risky," admits James Ryan, University of New Hampshire professor of physics. "A lot of the scientific objectives are driven by the question, 'Let's go see what's there.' And since we haven't been there before, who knows?"

The Polar Lander has spent the past 11 months journeying to the red planet, and will spend another three months on its surface. Equipped with a microphone and instruments to study the Martian atmosphere, the Lander may answer questions about the conditions on our planetary neighbor.

"I rather doubt we'll hear little Martians scratching the surface with picks and shovels to dig up the alien spacecraft, but what we might hear of seismic origin would be undoubtedly interesting," says Ryan, who works within the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space. "Much of the mission is a fishing expedition, measuring things that have never been measured before, and since we haven't been on enough planets other than Earth to be experienced in such things, whatever we discover will be just that, a discovery."

The Mars Polar Lander has a LIDAR experiment onboard to measure aerosol and dust concentrations in the Martian atmosphere, equipment similar to that being installed near Mt. Washington by UNH climate change scientists. The GroundWinds project -- Ryan is co-principal investigator of the project -- will use laser technology to track wind direction and speed. "Of course, the Mars Lander LIDAR experiment will be bigger, fancier and more powerful and will consequently measure a lot more things related to terrestrial weather and climatology."

As for Ryan's more humorous take on the Mars Polar Lander's arrival on Martian soil, he comments, "The Martians will probably say, 'Who ordered this thing? Send it back now before they charge us for it.'"

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