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Abstract

The Phoenix Mission

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The Phoenix mission to Mars was successfully launched on Aug. 4, 2007 and is currently en route to its landing site in the northern plains of Mars, at a latitude nearly the same as Barrow, Alaska. The landing date will be May 25, 2008 and Phoenix will endeavor to understand the history of water in this environment and the potential for the landing location to be a good habitat for microbes should any be there or have been there. Phoenix carries 7 instruments to Mars to conduct atmospheric, mineralogical, chemical, and microscopy experiments. One key instrument, the robotic arm has a scoop, scraping blades, and a rasp to acquire the surface and subsurface soils and ices and deliver them to analytical instruments on the deck of the spacecraft. The primary mission will be 3 months long, starting near the summer solstice and continuing through mid-summer, a unique season on Mars with respect to the enhanced water vapor abundance coming off the north polar cap. The talk will be an overview of the mission, its history, goals, and plans.

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