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VITALNews

Virginia Initiative for Technology and Administrative Leadership



Happy New Year!

Mars: The Ultimate Reality Show

I never wanted to be an astronaut or build rocket ships to the moon, but over the past few weeks, I've eagerly followed the progress of the Spirit Rover that is now exploring the surface of Mars. I make almost daily visits to the NASA website to look at pictures and view animations of the landing. The entire experience leaves me a little awestruck: we have sent a big go cart to Mars, successfully landed it, and are now moving it around to investigate a planet that is a mere pinprick in our night sky. Wow!

There is another part of this story, though, that is particularly interesting to me as an education technologist: without the Internet, my ability to experience the Mars Mission would be severely diminished. I only hope that parents and teachers

everywhere are sitting down with their children and students and experiencing this momentous event together. This is real-life science at its best, and the Internet allows us to be a part of it in a way that we couldn't before.

A colleague of mine who teaches in an elementary school computer lab said he showed the video about the Mars landing to a third grade group, and the student were spell bound by the drama laid out by the scientists as they described the excruciating six minutes of the landing when they lost touch with the Rover. Were new scientists born that day in his computer lab that may be part of the generation that sends people to Mars?

This issue of the VITALNews features great science resources including, of course, links to the Mars Mission.

*Happy New Year!
Karen*

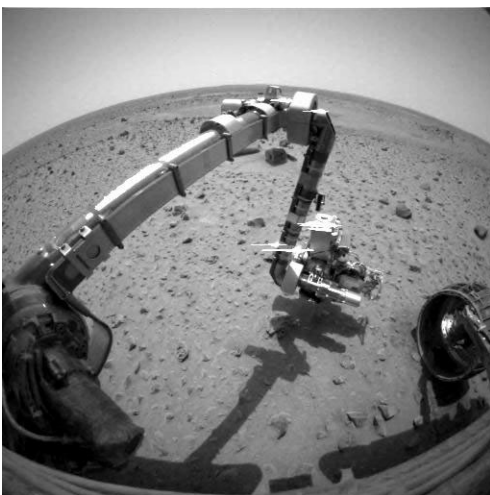


Photo Credit: NASA/JPL/US Geological Survey

Mars Spirit Rover Websites:

[Mars Exploration Rover Mission](#): From NASA, the place to go for the latest images and news.

[Mars for Kids](#): Lots of interactive games and activities including driving your own Mars Rover at a remote location.

[Mars for Teachers](#): Don't miss the free poster that compares Mars and Earth.

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Math and Science Teachers Should Start Here

[ENC Online](#) is the web home for The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education, which is located at The Ohio State University. Billed as a “K12 Math and Science Teacher Center,” ENC online offers a vast array of resources. [The Digital Dozen](#) is a monthly annotated list of 12 websites relating to a science or math theme. [The Classroom Calendar](#) suggests science and math topics to teach throughout the month with links to activities and resources. Finally, the [Professional Development](#) section provides tools for creating and implementing a professional learning plan. There are links to articles accompanied by study guides that encourage discussion and reflection.

Quick Picks

Some Great Science Sites

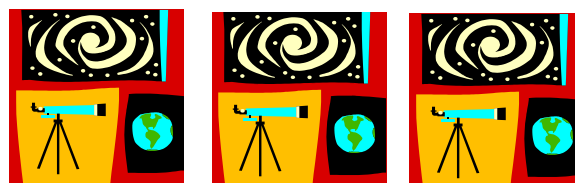
[Adventures of the Agronauts](#): Students investigate the possibility of growing plants on the moon. An excellent problem-based webquest style activity.

[El Nino or El Nono](#): A well-constructed webquest that uses real-time data from a buoy in the Pacific Ocean to help students make predictions about weather patterns.

[Internet Campus](#): A hands-on website that has interactive learning activities in a variety of science areas

There's A New Blog in Town

My enthusiasm for blogging led to the creation of several education related blogs in 2003. In an effort to streamline a bit in 2004, I am combining several blogs into one. Thus, the VITALNews blog has been incorporated into Virginia's Community of Learning blog which is located at <http://vcol.blogspot.com>. I update the blog every week day and highlight websites of interest to the Virginia educational technology community. Hope you'll visit soon!



Virtual Museums Offer Science Online

When looking for science resources on the web, don't forget to visit the websites for science museums. While they may not replace an actual visit, the websites often have online exhibits and areas geared to students.

It's no surprise that the [National Zoo](#) has a wonderful website for learning about animals. There are numerous webcams that let viewers spy on the animals, extensive articles about a wide variety of animals, lots of images, and educational resources that help teachers make the most of the website.

[The Exploratorium](#) is located in San Francisco. This science museum emphasizes hands-on learning, and its website is full of information, resources, and activities on many different topics. There are free live webcasts each week. And don't worry if you can't participate live, the webcasts are archived for future viewing.

Philadelphia's [Franklin Institute](#) celebrates science online. The museum is the subject of an [Earthcam](#) that provides views of Philadelphia. (I checked out some of the other “metrocams” and discovered one pointed towards the [USS Monitor tank at the Mariner's Museum](#) in Newport News, Virginia.) And for those of you that plan ahead, the museum is sponsoring a [Coin Flip experiment](#) on January 17, 2006, in celebration of Ben Franklin's 300th birthday.

[The National Air and Space Museum](#) is definitely worth a visit in person, but their website gives you a taste of what's in store when you go. The museum hosts [several online learning activities](#) that focus on topics ranging from African American aviators to exploring the universe.