

Mars500 Crew Takes Second Mars Walk

Astronauts participating in a simulated space mission to Mars made a second walk on the imitation surface of the Red Planet in Russia on Friday.

The AFP news agency reports that Russian cosmonaut Alexander Smolevsky, who made the first maneuver with Italian astronaut Diego Urbina on Monday, was joined by China's Wang Yue for the second of the three planned sorties.

The simulated mission carried six volunteers who spent eight months in a space capsule cut off from the rest of the world. The capsule reached Mars on Monday in the mock event.

Smolevsky, Wang and Urbina were charged with landing on the Martian planet while three others -- Romain Charles from France and Russians Sukhrob Kamolov and Alexei Sitev kept in orbit in the main space module.

Friday's walk consisted of collecting soil samples for analysis, and testing for magnetic anomalies. The walk lasted 40 minutes on the sandy surface created at the Moscow research center.

The final walk is scheduled for Tuesday and will be completed by Smolevsky and Urbina. Afterwards, all six astronauts -- three engineers, a doctor, a surgeon and a physicist -- will be locked back in the capsule for the long return flight home.

For the volunteers of the Mars-500 mission, the 520-days spent in isolation are also a test of how humans respond to the pressures of an 18-month voyage to and from Mars.

Although the astronauts, ranging in age from 26 to 38, are not weightless, they are spending their time in tight quarters that prevent their bodies from getting normal exercise.

The living quarters of the space capsule measure just 65 feet by 13 feet (the size of a small mobile home), and special armchairs were set up on the Red Planet's surface to help the men deal with sudden stress.

The experiment is expected to end in November when the capsule makes its mock landing. Russia and the European Space Agency are hoping to make a real space flight to Mars by 2040.

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Story from REDORBIT NEWS:
<http://www.redorbit.com/news/display/?id=1999542>

Published: 2011/02/20 06:25:00 CST

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