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# Mock Mars mission lands in sand pit

## Cosmonauts spent 8 months in capsule during simulation

BY ANDREW OSBORN, THE TELEGRAPH FEBRUARY 15, 2011



A cosmonaut "explores" a simulated Mars after spending 233 days in a locked steel capsule. The crew is on a 520-day mission to study the physical and psychological effects of long-distance space travel.

**Photograph by:** Alexander Natruskin, Reuters, The Telegraph

A mock mission to Mars touched down Monday after two cosmonauts walked across a giant sandpit in Moscow meant to simulate the surface of the red planet

After being locked up in a pretend spaceship for eight months, two cosmonauts taking part in the first of three simulated spacewalks planted the flags of Russia, the European Space Agency and China in the sand.

"We have made great progress today. The crew feel fine," said Vitaly Davydov, of the Russian Federal Space Agency.

Wearing spacesuits and oxygen backpacks, a three-man team will spend a month collecting rock samples and drilling beneath the surface while co-ordinating their work with a remote-controlled space robot.

They will be confined to a mock landing vehicle for most of the time, while the other half of the six-man crew will remain "in orbit" in the spaceship.

The experiment, called Mars 500, held at a research centre, is scheduled to continue until November, by which time the crew will have spent 520 days in what is thought to be one of the most gruelling isolation experiments ever undertaken.

The aim is to learn more about the physical and psychological demands of long-distance space travel.