ASU cosmologist suggests studying moon for alien artifacts

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Moon. Photo courtesy of NASA

(PhysOrg.com) -- If you were part of a team sent to explore an unknown planet; and that planet had a natural orbiting moon, wouldn't it make sense to use that moon as a base camp or remote observation post? Especially if you didn't want those being observed to know you were there? Professor Paul Davis and research technician Robert Wagner think so, and that's why they've published a paper in *Acta Astronautica* that suggests we humans begin taking a little closer look at our own moon to see if any alien life forms might have left behind some evidence of their visit.

Though some might see it as farfetched, or heaven forbid, lunacy, Davis and Wagner are convinced that it's worth the small amount of investment such a search would entail. What if, they suggest, close-up photographs of the moon that are already being made available to the masses (from NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter) via the Internet, were to be presented with a request that anyone that would like to participate, study whichever photos they find interesting, looking for anything that appears of unnatural origin, then report back. Interesting "finds" could then be studied by many others, and those that seem promising could be studied further by professionals. It all seems so easy, after all, other group projects are underway, and by most accounts, appear to meet with relative success.

Another possibility, the team suggests, is using image or shape recognizing software to scan photos of the moon to help narrow down search areas and to alert humans when it finds something interesting.

The idea of putting resources towards searching for the existence of intelligent alien life wouldn't be new of course, the SETI project exists for that sole purpose. Looking for evidence that we've been visited by an extraterrestrial is of course a little different, but in this case, it seems to make sense. After all as Davis and Wagner point out, because the moon is so barren, has no atmosphere and because it is so seldom hit with meteorites, things that go on there are preserved for tens or even millions of years. If any aliens visited the moon during that time span, it should be possible to find traces of their activity, or their equipment, offering proof for the very first time, that there really is someone else out there.

More information: Searching for alien artifacts on the moon, Acta Astronautica, In Press. doi:10.1016/j.actaastro.2011.10.022

Abstract
The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) has a low probability

of success, but it would have a high impact if successful. Therefore it makes sense to widen the search as much as possible within the confines of the modest budget and limited resources currently available. To date, SETI has been dominated by the paradigm of seeking deliberately beamed radio messages. However, indirect evidence for extraterrestrial intelligence could come from any incontrovertible signatures of non-human technology. Existing searchable databases from astronomy, biology, earth and planetary sciences all offer low-cost opportunities to seek a footprint of extraterrestrial technology. In this paper we take as a case study one particular new and rapidly-expanding database: the photographic mapping of the Moon's surface by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) to 0.5 m resolution. Although there is only a tiny probability that alien technology would have left traces on the moon in the form of an artifact or surface modification of lunar features, this location has the virtue of being close, and of preserving traces for an immense duration. Systematic scrutiny of the LRO photographic images is being routinely conducted anyway for planetary science purposes, and this program could readily be expanded and outsourced at little extra cost to accommodate SETI goals, after the fashion of the SETI@home and Galaxy Zoo

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