

The 2010 HiRISE Color Face
(NASA Spin Doctors Dream in False Color)
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False Color/False Image

On July 28, 2010, the University of Arizona HiRISE team released a "false color" image of the eastern, feline side of the Face on Mars in a massive media blitz. Of all the major news agencies only Fox News and a few other networks were willing to take the bait. Fox News announced that NASA acquired new evidence that the famous Face on Mars is just a rocky mesa. They posted the tightly cropped detail of the Face that was provided by the University of Arizona along with an early Viking shot of the Face that included some of its surrounding landforms (Figure 1). The Fox News.com article reported the following; “[The] new image just released by NASA confirms what the space agency has said all along: That's no face on Mars. It's just a rocky mesa”.¹ The caption accompanying the two images read as follows; “At left, the famous 1976 image from Viking that seems to show a face. On the right, a new image of the same rock surface, taken from much closer and in higher resolution, the features completely disappear.”² The space and astronomy news outlet, Universe Today seemed very excited in proclaiming “Alas, it’s just a hill”.³

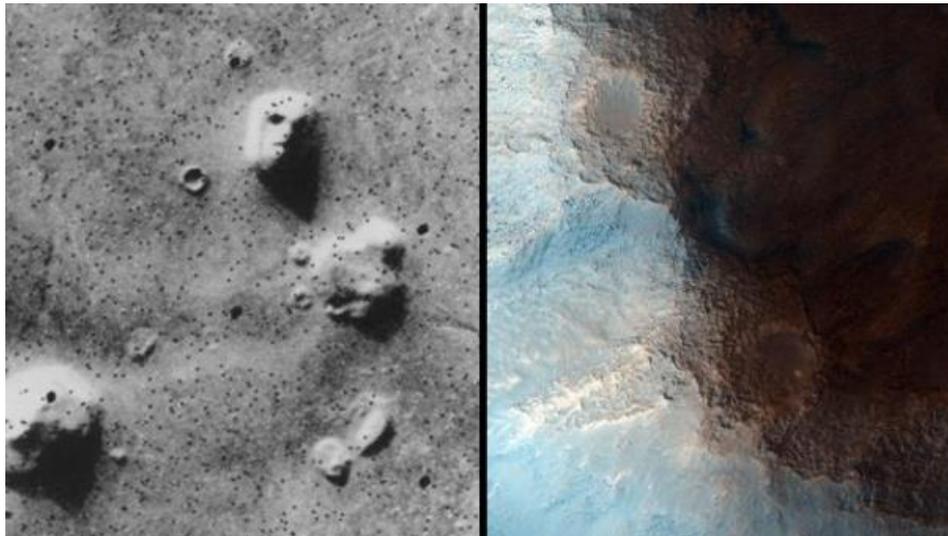


Figure 1

Comparative images of the Face on Mars offered by Fox News

Left: Original Viking image (1976)

Right: “New” false color HiRISE image of The Face on Mars from 2007 – re-released in 2010

Unfortunately, there are many problems that arise in the way these two images were presented to the public by various news reports that used the same comparison. First of all, the paired images mislead the viewer by suggesting that this newly released HiRISE image shows the entire Face formation and includes the mesa seen directly below it, just as we see in the original Viking image. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although actually fully colorized, the new photograph does not include the entire Face image and as we will see it isn't even a new picture. However, at this point NASA hopes the reader will be convinced that the Face on Mars is just an illusion and will move on...nothing to see here.

Now, if the viewer is not completely confused and discouraged at this point hopefully the reader will seek a link to the University of Arizona web site to get more information. Once there, they will find the same, colorized image of the Face that is apply titled "Popular Landform in Cydonia Region" (Figure 2). The short article accompanying the image, which is written by HiRISE project leader Alfred McEwen,⁴ totally ignores the fact that the posted image is actually a small detail of the overall formation and he only passively acknowledges that this image was taken in 2007. Alfred McEwen provides the following text;

"HiRISE captured this image (in 2007) of an eroded mesa made famous by its similarity to a human face in a Viking Orbiter image with much lower spatial resolution and a different lighting geometry."⁵



Figure 2
False Color version of the 2007 HiRISE Face (detail), released in 2010

The Feline Side

So, after seeing the same image, the reader assumes that the only difference between this new color image and the 2007 version is the color. Any reader unfamiliar with the navigating hurdles of the UA web page would be hard pressed to discover additional links to the original 2007 image and much larger colorized version. However, once found - they would quickly realize that the image on the main page is only a very small, cropped detail of the eastern side of the Face (Figure 3). It's really only a small detail of the Feline side of the Cydonia Face.

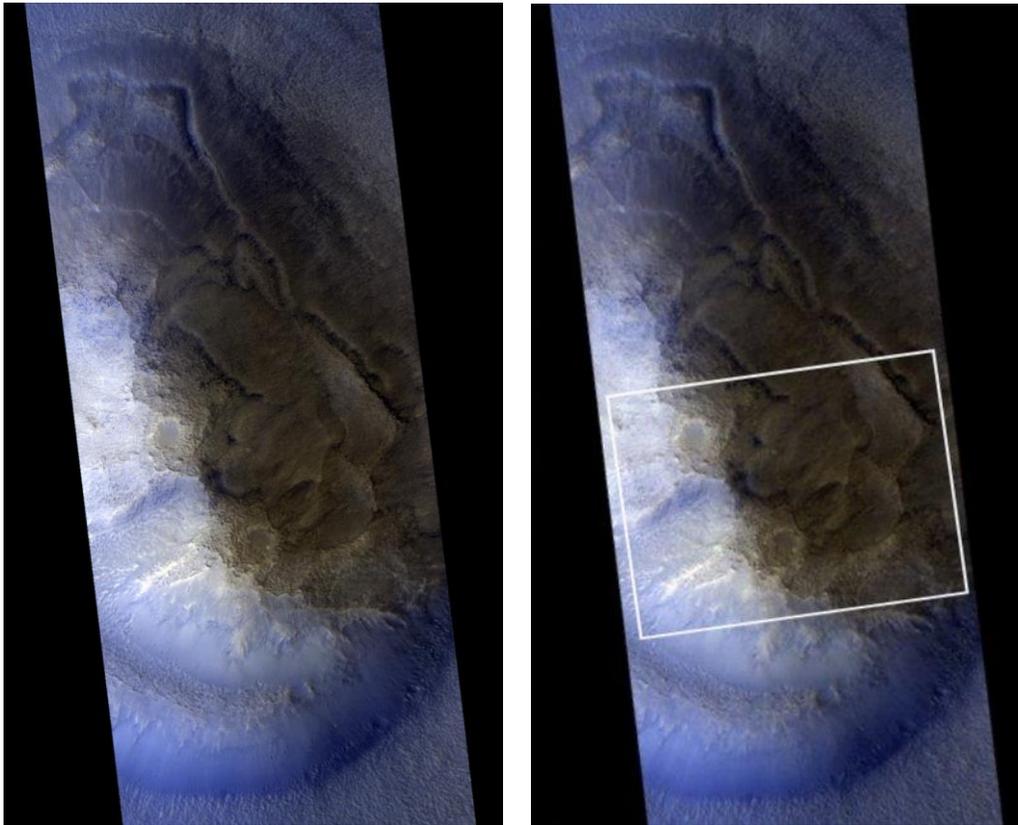


Figure 3

Partial view of the Face on Mars – HiRISE false color (2010)

Left: Detail of the eastern, feline side.

Right: Detail of the eastern, feline side with the boxed area of the images that was released

If the reader is still interested and decides to continue digging even deeper into the provided links, they would finally realize that this so-called new colorized HiRISE image is not new and see that it is only a small detail of the much larger 2007 image of the Face (Figure 4).



Figure 2
The Face on Mars HiRISE (2007)

When the new false color MRO HiRISE image of the eastern side of the Face⁶ (Figure 4.A) is compared to the highest resolution picture obtained earlier by NASA's MOC camera in 2001⁷ (Figure 4.B) and with the European Space Agency's 2006 false color image⁸ (Figure 4.C) - it becomes quite clear that the eastern facial features are consistent and appear to be permanent structural formations (Figure 4). Looking at all three images, note the broad forehead and a crown feature is observable in each image. Notice the rectangular, squinting eye, the muzzle and zig-zag shaped mane is present in all three images. Also notice that each image shows evidence of a parted mouth and flailing tongue (Figure 4.D).

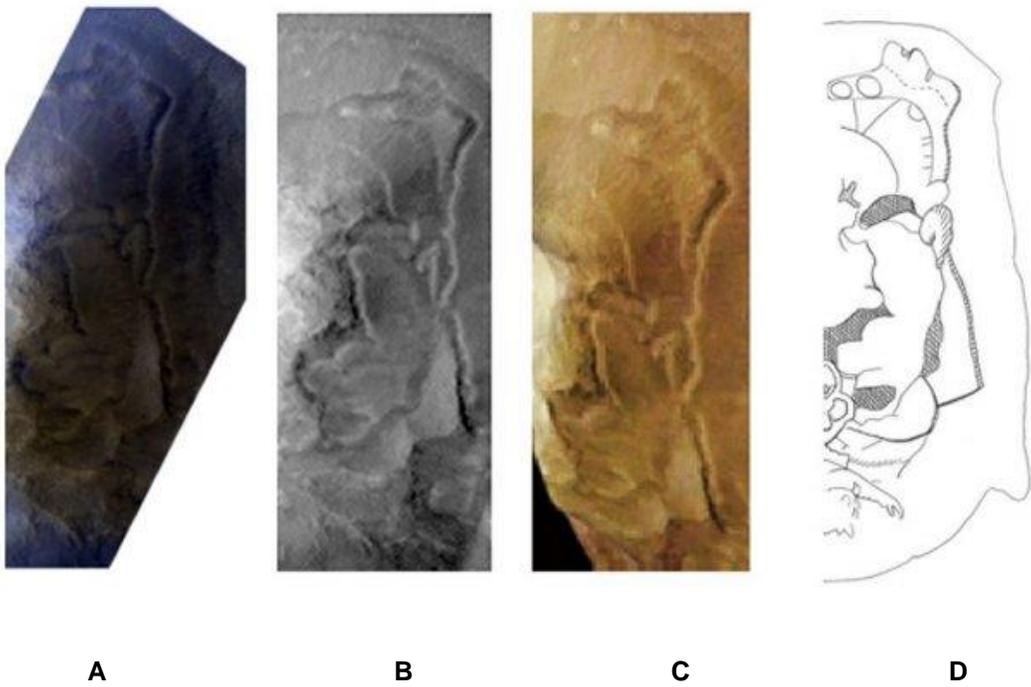


Figure 4
Comparison of the eastern feline side of the Face on Mars
A: Detail of HiRISE false color image (2010)
B: Detail of MOC image E03-00824 (2001)
C: Detail of the ESA false color perspective view (2006)
D: Analytical drawing (2009)

The fact is - NASA decided - not to take a new MRO HiRISE image of the Cydonia Face, but to once again muddy the political waters that have surround the planet Mars by one again misrepresenting the famous Face on Mars, this time with a small “false color” detail of its eastern side. More “Fake News”.

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Footnotes

1. Face on Mars or Rocky Hill? New Photo Reveals Truth, Fox News.com, Air & Space, July 30, 2010.
<http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2010/07/30/highest-quality-pics-famous-face-mars/>
 2. Ibid.
 3. Nancy Atkinson, *Extreme Close-Up of the Face on Mars*, Universe Today, July 28, 2010.
<https://www.universetoday.com/69766/extreme-close-up-of-the-face-on-mars/>
 4. Dr. Alfred McEwen is a planetary geologist and director of the Planetary Image Research Laboratory (PIRL). He is the principal investigator of the High Resolution Imaging Science Experiment (HiRISE) for the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO).
<http://www.lpl.arizona.edu/Support/faculty/faculty.php?nom=McEwen>.
 5. Alfred McEwen, *Popular Landform in Cydonia Region*, University of Arizona HiRISE, PSP_003234_2210, April 11, 2007, http://www.uahirise.org/PSP_003234_2210.
- The new HiRISE picture is actually a colorized version of a MRO HiRISE image that was originally released on April 11, 2007.
6. MRO HiRISE, *Popular Landform in Cydonia Region* (PSP_003234_2210), The University of Arizona HiRISE, April 5, 2007, http://www.uahirise.org/PSP_003234_2210.
 7. Michael Malin, *Highest-resolution View of "Face on Mars,"* Malin Space Science Systems, Inc, May, 2001, www.msss.com/mars_images/moc/extended_may2001/face/.
 8. European Space Agency, Mars Express, *Cydonia - the face on Mars*, Science & Exploration, September 21, 2006.
http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Mars_Express/SEM09F8LURE_0.html.

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