

The 1976 Face on Mars

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THE VIKING ORBITER FACE

On July 25, 1976, the Viking 1 Orbiter, circling the planet Mars at an altitude of 1,000 miles, snapped the first picture of a mesa that had an incredible resemblance to a human face. This face-like mesa, approximately a mile and a half long and a mile wide, was initially spotted on Viking frame 35A72 by Dr. Tobias Owen, a member of National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA's) own imaging team at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California.

While searching for a possible landing site for the upcoming Viking 2 Lander in the Cydonia region, Dr. Owen noticed a gigantic, human-like face glaring up at him from the barren Martian surface. Soon after its discovery, he brought it to the attention of the Viking program director Dr. Gerry Soffen (Figure 1).



Figure 1

Dr Tobias Owen and Dr Gerry Soffen.
"Gee guess what I found, a face on Mars"

The head shaped formation, which the NASA team simply labeled “head” appeared to have an eye, nose and mouth and wore a tight-fitting helmet (Figure 2). Michael Carr, a geologist with the U. S. Geological Survey who was then head of the Viking Orbiter imaging team, immediately released the unusual image to the press.

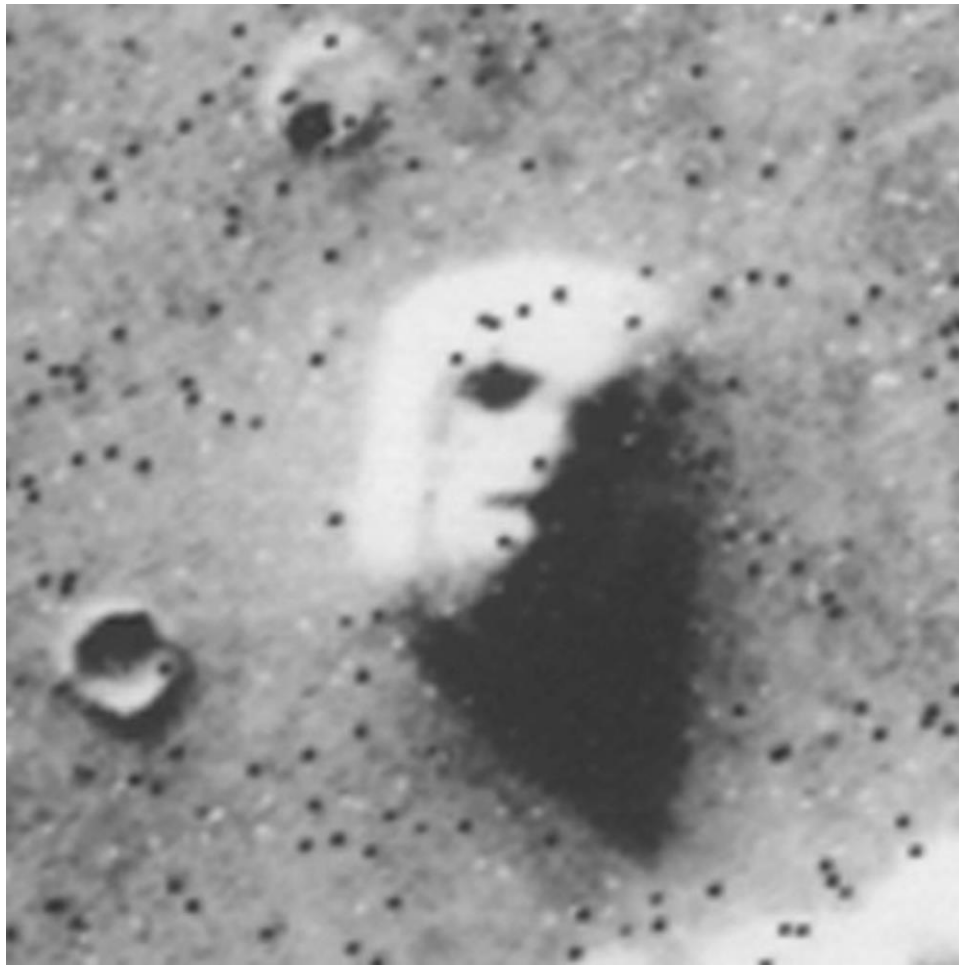


Figure 2

Original 1976 NASA Viking orbiter version of the Face on Mars (Frame 35A72).

At an early press briefing NASA’s Project Scientist for the Viking program Dr. Gerry Soffen announced that an image of an odd landform resembling a face had been found on Mars (Figure 3).



Figure 3

NASA press briefing after announcing they had discovered a facial formation on Mars.
"We found a face on Mars"

Soon after its press release, the news media was quickly informed by NASA that when a second picture was taken only a few hours later and the odd facial formation disappeared (Figure 4).¹ Dr. Soffen assured the media that the facial formation was nothing more than a "trick of light and shadow." Oddly, this second image never surfaced and only the original high-contrast picture of the "Face" was circulated to the press as nothing more than a phantom novelty. From this moment forward NASA's official position was that the Face on Mars was nothing more than an apparition of shadows and rock, and the overall mesa had no resemblance to a face.



Figure 4

NASA press briefing after announcing that a second picture showed the facial formation had disappeared.
“It was just a trick of light and shadow”

THE SECOND FACE

As a result of releasing this odd facial formation to the public, NASA decided not to proceed with the original plan of a Viking 2 landing within the Cydonia region because the entire area was deemed to be “unsafe.”² The Viking 2 Lander eventually set down in a rocky plain called Utopia. This last-minute change in plans went virtually unquestioned by the mainstream media. With NASA’s firm and consistent stance that this facial formation was nothing more than a “trick of light and shadows,” the public soon lost interest. From that point on both NASA and a fawning media considered the case closed.³ Unfortunately the “Face on Mars” was banished to the sensational pages of supermarket tabloids and the illusion-filled minds of fringe-science enthusiasts.

Ironically the viability of the Face on Mars as an artificial construct was resurrected only a few years later by a group of NASA’s own employees working at the Goddard Space Flight Center. Two engineers by the name of Vincent DiPietro and Greg Molenaar received permission to review the entire Viking archives including all the data tapes and printed photographs. Everything was at

their disposal. One of the first things the pair of researchers found was the second “lost image” that NASA supposedly acquired only a few hours after the first shot. According to the official image log this elusive second image was actually acquired almost a month after the first image, exposing the Face under slightly different lighting conditions and illuminating the eastern edge of the formation.

Utilizing a new enhancement method that DiPietro and Molenaar had developed called Starburst Pixel Interleaving Technique (SPIT)⁴ they were able to access more data from the original Viking tapes. This new technique allowed them to reveal more detail and as a result exposed additional facial features suggestive of an eye, nose, mouth and teeth (Figure 5).

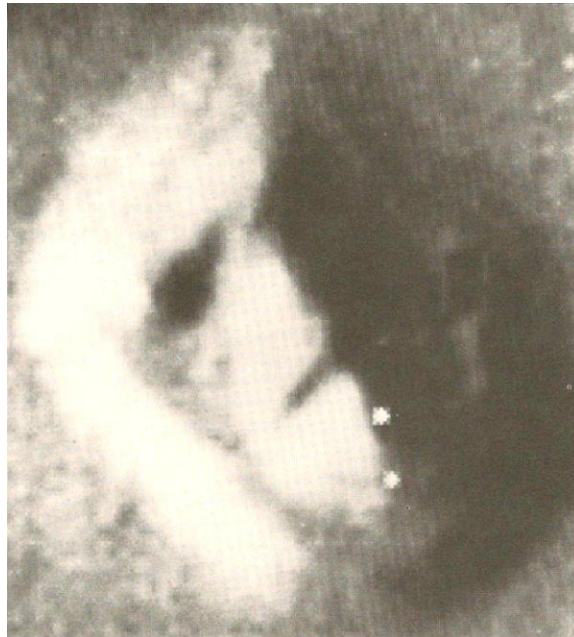


Figure 5

The SPIT version of the second image of the Face on Mars (1980)
(Frame 70A13)

The results of their studies were published in 1980 in a monograph entitled “Unusual Martian Surface Features.” Although their extensive report suggested an artificial explanation for the Face and some of its surrounding structures, both NASA and the mainstream scientific community silently ignored their groundbreaking work.⁵

Sometime during the mid-1980s a young image analyst at The Analytical Sciences Corporation, by the name of Dr. Mark Carlotto produced a computer-adjusted “local-contrast-stretch” of NASA’s Viking frame 70A13 (Figure 6). Despite the seemingly poor quality of these early Viking images, Carlotto’s computer enhancements were able to reveal additional structural dimensions within the formation, included such bisymmetric features as a set of eyes, mouth and hair.⁶



Figure 6

Dr. Carlotto's computer-adjustment of the second image of Face on Mars (1987)
Viking Frame 70A13

While working with the new computer enhancements of the Viking images, provided by Dr. Mark Carlotto, independent researcher Richard C. Hoagland produced a mirror split of both sides of the Face. He was astonished with the results, which revealed an interesting two-faced, humanoid/feline aspect to the overall facial formation (Figure 7). Notice the flanged headdress, eye, nose and mouth on the left side and the feline aspects on the right side including an eye, muzzle and mane.



Figure 7

Hoagland's mirroring of the second image of the Face on Mars (1987)

Left: Dr. Carlotto's enhanced image

Center: Left side mirrored – Humanoid side.

Right : Right side mirrored – Feline side.

(Viking Frame 70A13)

In response to Hoagland's 'mirroring' technique NASA representatives speculated that if we were to find a sculpted face on another planet it would be a fully symmetrical human face and look something like Elvis Presley or Frank Sinatra (Figure 8).



Figure 8

Symmetrical human face

Left: Elvis Presley

Right: Frank Sinatra

Then sometime during the early 1990s Dr. Carlotto took another crack at enhancing the two Viking images of the Face on Mars. Again, his results were stunning (Figure 9). Not only did his images bring out more detail of the eye and mouth, it exposed the facial features on the eastern side, providing additional support for Hoagland's proposed two-faced, human/feline model.

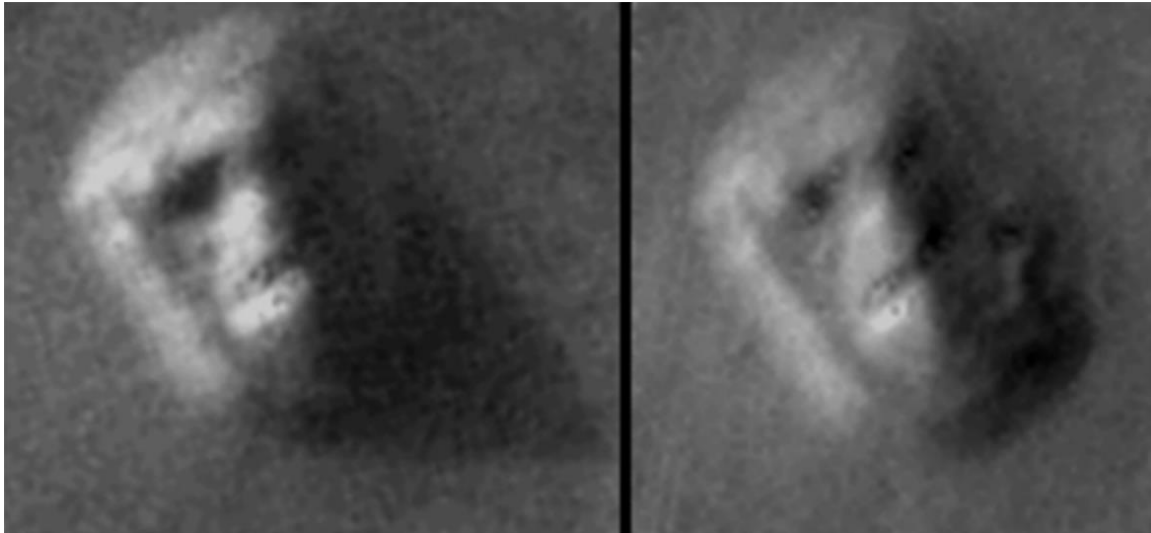


Figure 9
Face on Mars
Left: Viking frame 35A72
Right: Viking frame 70A13
Enhancements by Dr. Mark Carlotto

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Footnotes

1. The Viking Orbiter could not have taken another picture of the Face at Cydonia, only a few hours later because the probe was programmed to systematically image the planet in sequential orbits, and would have been over an area many miles away at the time in question. According to NASA official ancillary data the second image was taken 35 days after the first image.
2. Masursky, H. & Crabill, N. L., *Viking site selection and certification*, NASA SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS SERIES, NASA-SP-429. 1981. P. 7-9.
3. Michael Malin, *The Face on Mars*, (California, Malin Space Science Systems, Inc, 1995), <http://www.msss.com/education/facepage/face.html>.

4. Vincent Dipietro and Greg Molenarr, *Unusual Martian Surface Features*, Third Edition, Mars Research, (Maryland: Glen Dale, 1982), 38.
5. Randolph Rafael Pozos, *The Face on Mars Evidence for a Lost Civilization?*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1980), ix.
6. Richard C. Hoagland, *The Monuments of Mars: A City on the Edge of Forever*, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1996), Fig. 34.