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Curiosity Rover on Mars Detects Spikes of Methane

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By ASSOCIATED PRESS



A self-portrait of NASA's Mars rover, Curiosity, from February 2013. — NASA

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida—NASA's Mars rover, Curiosity, has detected spikes of methane in the planet's atmosphere. That suggests something is producing or venting the scientifically tantalizing gas, but no one knows what.

Most of Earth's atmospheric methane comes from animal and plant life, and the environment itself. So the Martian methane raises the question of past or present microbial life. Or the gas elevations could come from geological sources, comet impacts or something else entirely.

The latest study, released Tuesday by the journal Science, indicates there's less than half the expected amount of methane in the atmosphere around Curiosity's location in Gale Crater. But over a full Martian year, the rover measured fairly frequent occurrences of elevated methane levels—tenfold increases.

"This temporary increase in methane—sharply up and then back down—tells us there must be some relatively localized source," the University of Michigan's Sushil Atreya, part of the Curiosity team, said in a statement. "There are many possible sources, biological or nonbiological, such as interaction of water and rock."

In addition, Curiosity detected other organic molecules when it drilled into a rock. Scientists said it's believed to be the first confirmation of organic carbon in a Martian rock.

The identity of the organic material is unknown.

The Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Christopher Webster led the international study of methane.

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11:53 am December 27, 2014

1 wrote:

1

11:19 am December 18, 2014

jh wrote:

Its obviously man made global warming on Mars.....

5:55 pm December 17, 2014

Real Science is Good wrote:

Isn't this just a sign of pollution from American industrialism? Theories of Martian Climate Change next?

5:35 pm December 17, 2014

Not really meaningful wrote:

Jay Stern wrote:This suggests that there was plant life on Mars that coalified and is breaking down over time

While what you suggest is a POSSIBILITY, there are many chemical pathways to produce methane that don't involve life. This article is typical hype (or is that that tripe) journalism fed by NASA's publicity machine.

4:32 pm December 17, 2014

Uncle Remus wrote:

Cows
Red Martian cows
Kobe beef ain't got nuthin' on Red Martian cows.
\$2500 for 12 ounces- and a bargain at that!

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