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# The NetStation GPR: Lander- and Network-based 3-D Investigations of Subsurface Structure, Stratigraphy, and Volatile Distribution in Near- and Deep-Subsurface Planetary Environments

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**THE NETSTATION GPR: LANDER- AND NETWORK-BASED 3-D INVESTIGATIONS OF SUBSURFACE STRUCTURE, STRATIGRAPHY, AND VOLATILE DISTRIBUTION IN NEAR- AND DEEP-SUBSURFACE PLANETARY ENVIRONMENTS.** V. Ciarletti<sup>1</sup>, S. M. Clifford<sup>2</sup>, D. Plettmeier<sup>3</sup>, C. Corbell<sup>1</sup> and M. Biancheri-Astier<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>LATMOS/IPSL, 10 avenue de l'Europe 78140 Velizy, France (valerie.ciarletti@latmos.ipsl.fr), <sup>2</sup>Lunar and Planetary Institute, 3600 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058, USA, <sup>3</sup>Technische Universität Dresden, Lehrstuhl für Hochfrequenztechnik, Helmholtzstraße 10, D-01069 Dresden, Germany.

**Introduction:** The NetStation GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) is a stationary, impulse, multiband HF GPR, designed to conduct geologic and volatile-related investigations of planetary environments in both the near- and deep subsurface (~10 - 10<sup>3</sup> m), whether employed as a single-station investigation or part of a geophysical network on the Moon, Mars, Europa, or other planetary body.

An evolutionary refinement of the low-frequency GPRs developed for the original Mars NetLander and ExoMars missions, the NetStation GPR's enhancements include: (1) operation over a broader range of frequencies (~1.8 - 25 MHz, overlapping both MARSIS and SHARAD); (2) improved polarimetric and volume/3-D imaging capabilities; (3) measurement of surface permittivity and conductivity; (4) the potential for both monostatic and bistatic operation; and (5) the ability to stack up to 2<sup>31</sup> coherent measurements (in monostatic operation), making it the most sensitive GPR ever built.

The NetStation GPR's low mass and energy consumption make it well-suited for deployment on a single lander or as part of a multi-station geophysical network. In monostatic operation, the instrument offers the ability to investigate the electromagnetic properties of the subsurface, at moderate (~100 m) to high (~10 m) resolution, in a broad cone-shaped region extending from ~10 m beneath the Lander to a potential maximum depth in excess of ~1-2 km. When operated bistatically, this region of potential investigation can be expanded up to a radial distance of ~1 km from the Lander.

With an extensive heritage from two prior low-frequency GPRs (NetLander and ExoMars), the NetStation GPR has the ability to address a wide range of scientific objectives, many of which have already demonstrated in the field.

**Subsurface sounding mode:** In its Mars network and stand-alone configuration, the NetStation GPR is designed to operate over the combined frequency range of MARSIS (1.8-, 3-, 4- and 5-MHz, with a 1 MHz bandwidth) and SHARAD (20-MHz central frequency, with a 10-MHz bandwidth) – offering the opportunity for direct comparisons with data acquired by these orbital sounders as well as providing a good compromise between maximum depth of sounding, vertical resolution, and realistically deployable antenna size.

The NetStation's antenna design, which consists of four orthogonal electric monopoles (to both transmit and receive) and a 3-axis magnetic sensor (to receive only), is a major contributor to the instrument's enhanced capabilities – enabling relatively high-resolution investigations of the structure and stratigraphy of the shallow subsurface, as well as the potential to sound to kilometer depths.

Monostatic 3-D investigations can be achieved in a cone-shaped region beneath the Lander by 'steering' the radiation pattern of the radar's transmitted pulse with phase adjustments of the four monopole antennas. The magnitude and direction of the propagation vector of the reflected signal can then be determined by the simultaneous measurement of the signal's magnetic and electrical components – a capability demonstrated in Antarctic field tests of the NetLander GPR prototype [1,2]. In this way, the number, depth, orientation, and electromagnetic characteristics of reflectors beneath the Lander can be assessed.

Although designed primarily as a monostatic instrument, for operation from a fixed lander, the NetStation GPR can also be operated bistatically, in conjunction with radar instruments on other spacecraft. This capability was part of the original ExoMars mission design, where pulses, emitted by the GPR on the ExoMars Lander, were to be received on the ExoMars Rover, with the aid of a small magnetic sensor. Bistatic investigations of the region surrounding a NetStation-equipped lander can also be conducted by the reception of reflected signals from an orbital sounder (although this technique does limit the number of potential coherent additions). NetStation's ability to use bistatic measurements to investigate a multi-layered stratigraphy, was successfully demonstrated by a field test of an earlier instrument prototype in the West Egyptian Desert [3,4].

When implemented as part of the standard payload of a multi-station geophysical network, the data acquired by the NetStation GPR will enable direct comparisons with the orbital sounding data obtained by MARSIS and SHARAD, at multiple locations, and with orders-of-magnitude improvements in sensitivity and horizontal resolution. The resulting knowledge of the electromagnetic properties and structure of the subsurface can be compared with the local- and regional-scale geology exposed in nearby outcrops, impact craters, and visible in the various orbital imaging

and remote sensing data sets. Terrestrial experience has demonstrated that the acquisition of such 3-D GPR data, in conjunction with the contextual information provided by other remote sensing data sets, can significantly improve upon the ambiguity associated with the interpretation of 2-D radar profiles and can greatly assist in understanding the geology, geologic history, and hydrology of the crust (e.g., [5,6]).

**Other operational modes:** In addition to its *sub-surface sounding mode*, the NetStation GPR has an *impedance measurement mode* and a *passive (receiver) mode*, each of which addresses a different set of scientific objectives.

The permittivity of geologic materials reflects their composition, density, temperature, volatile content and volatile phase. The NetStation GPR can determine the permittivity of the shallow subsurface (averaged over the top few meters) from the impedance of the instrument's electrical antennas deployed on the surface, [2]. Large diurnal and seasonal variations in regolith permittivity may provide critical evidence of temperature- and time-dependent properties, such as the freezing and thawing of near-surface brines.

In its *passive mode* the NetStation GPR acts as a simple broadband receiver which can be used to: (1) detect electrical discharges in the atmosphere due to triboelectric charging (produced by dust grain collisions in dust storms and dust devils), (2) remote sensing of the lower ionosphere by monitoring diurnal variations in the intensity of the galactic EM background radiation -- which provides a measure of ionospheric absorption and its electron density profile, and (3) measure the natural RF background noise and EMI generated by the spacecraft.

**Summary of Principal Science Objectives:** Of the various approaches and techniques that might be used to investigate the subsurface geology and hydrology of Mars, terrestrial experience has demonstrated that geophysical techniques are best suited for this task [7,8]. Because ground penetrating radar is especially sensitive to the high dielectric contrast between liquid water and other geologic materials, such as rock and ice, the NetStation GPR is ideally suited for the detection of diurnally- and seasonally-occurring near-surface brines (utilizing its *permittivity mode*) and deep subpermafrost groundwater (using its *deep-sounding mode*), as well as the investigation of other large-scale crustal characteristics.

The data acquired by the NetStation GPR provides invaluable information about the geologic and hydrologic nature of the crust at a scale ( $\sim 10 - 10^3$  m) and resolution ( $\sim 10 - 10^2$  m) provided by no other readily-deployable geophysical investigation – outside of an active seismic array.

These capabilities make the NetStation GPR a powerful tool to address the following high-priority (and inherently overlapping) science objectives:

- *Identify evidence of transient or persistent liquid water environments, and the occurrence of massive ground ice, that may support, or preserve evidence of, past or present life.*
- *Understand the geology and geologic evolution of the landing site, including its local lithology, stratigraphy and structure.*
- *Understand the distribution and state of subsurface volatiles, especially H<sub>2</sub>O and, potentially, methane hydrate.*
- *Characterize the 3-D compositional, physical, and electromagnetic properties of the landing site – including the scale and magnitude of spatial heterogeneity – for comparison with those measured at larger scales by orbital remote sensing instruments, such as OMEGA, CRISM, MARSIS and SHARAD.*
- *Characterize the electromagnetic activity of the atmosphere and surface environment, including the frequency and intensity of atmospheric discharges, variations in the electron density profile and other properties of the ionosphere, and the ambient RF background noise.*
- *Identify potential hazards and in-situ resources of importance to future robotic and human exploration activity.*

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