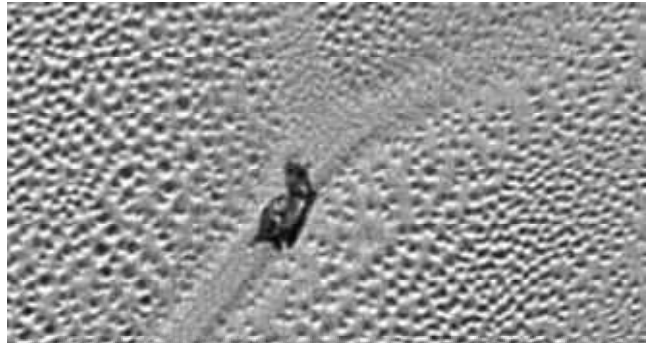


NASA Spots Mysterious 'Snail' Crawling Across Pluto's Surface

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When NASA's New Horizons Space Probe became the first spacecraft ever to reach Pluto on its July 14 flyby, it sent back some curious photos of the dwarf planet's surface.

Transmitted to Earth on Christmas Eve from New Horizon's Long Range Reconnaissance Imager, or LORRI for short, the probe's images show an object resembling a snail crawling across an icy region of broken terrain known as Sputnik Planum, according to Tech Times.

While many may want to credit this celestial creepy crawler as proof of extraterrestrial life, NASA says that theory is not very likely.

Instead, scientists believe Pluto's snail could simply be dirty water "icebergs" floating in denser solid nitrogen, NASA reports.

The area where the mysterious object was toward the center of Sputnik Planum, just to the left of Pluto's heart.

Sputnik Planum's icy landscape isn't an easy, flat surface to travel, however. Its surface is divided into pieces or polygons that can be 10 miles to 24 miles wide, and scientists believe these cells elevate and sink depending on heat received by Pluto's reserved internal heat.

"This part of Pluto is acting like a lava lamp, if you can imagine a lava lamp as wide as, and even deeper than, the Hudson Bay," William McKinnon, deputy lead of the New Horizons Geology, Geophysics and Imaging team, from Washington University in St. Louis told NASA.

Computer models show that these blobs of toppling solid nitrogen can slowly merge over millions of years.

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