

# Why Mars?

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## [Why Mars? The allure \(and challenge\) of colonizing the red planet](#)

by Roger Wiens

On May 30, Mars and Earth will get close. Really close. With a distance between them of only 46.8 million miles, it's the nearest the two planets will be to each other in their respective orbits. While nearly 50 million miles might still seem far away (because it is), when you consider the average distance between the two planets is 140 million miles, this [close approach of Mars](#) makes the planet feel, well, like the neighbor it is. Not only does this give you a great opportunity to see the Red Planet in the night sky, it also gives us a chance to think about Mars and the possibilities it holds.

I have been fortunate to lead a joint French-American team using a laser-based sensor, [ChemCam](#), which was developed at [Los Alamos National Laboratory](#) and is now aboard NASA's Curiosity rover.

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