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Seismic investigations of the Martian near-surface at the InSight landing site

Cedric Schmelzbach¹, Nienke Brinkman¹, David Sollberger¹, Sharon Kedar², Matthias Grott³, Fredrik Andersson¹, Johan Robertsson¹, Martin van Driel¹, Simon Stähler¹, Jan ten Pierick¹, Troy Hudson², Kenneth Hurst², Mellanie Drilleau⁴, Balthasar Kenda⁴, Raphael Garcia⁵, Naomi Murdoch⁵, Domenico Giardini¹, Philippe Lognonne⁴, W. Tom Pike⁶, Tilman Spohn³, and the InSight SEIS and Near Surface Team*

¹ETH Zurich, Institute of Geophysics, D-ERDW, Zurich, Switzerland (cedric.schmelzbach@erdw.ethz.ch)

²Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, USA

³Deutsches Zentrum für Luft und Raumfahrt, Germany

⁴Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris, France

⁵Institut Supérieur de l'Aéronautique et de l'Espace (ISAE), France

⁶Imperial College, London, UK

*A full list of authors appears at the end of the abstract

The InSight ultra-sensitive broadband seismometer package (SEIS) was installed on the Martian surface with the goal to study the seismicity on Mars and the deep interior of the Planet. A second surface-based instrument, the heat flow and physical properties package HP³, was placed on the Martian ground about 1.1 m away from SEIS. HP³ includes a self-hammering probe called the 'mole' to measure the heat coming from Mars' interior at shallow depth to reveal the planet's thermal history. While SEIS was designed to study the deep structure of Mars, seismic signals such as the hammering 'noise' as well as ambient and other instrument-generated vibrations allow us to investigate the shallow subsurface. The resultant near-surface elastic property models provide additional information to interpret the SEIS data and allow extracting unique geotechnical information on the Martian regolith.

The seismic signals recorded during HP³ mole operations provide information about the mole attitude and health as well as shed light on the near-surface, despite the fact that the HP³ mole continues to have difficulty penetrating below 40 cm (one mole length). The seismic investigation of the HP³ hammering signals, however, was not originally planned during mission design and hence faced several technical challenges. For example, the anti-aliasing filters of the seismic-data acquisition chain were adapted when recording the mole hammering to allow recovering information above the nominal Nyquist frequency. In addition, the independently operating SEIS, HP³ and lander clocks had to be correlated more frequently than in normal operation to enable high-precision timing.

To date, the analysis of the hammering signals allowed us to constrain the bulk P-wave velocity of the volume between the mole tip and SEIS (top 30 cm) to around 120 m/s. This low velocity value is

compatible with laboratory tests performed on Martian regolith analogs with a density of around 1500 kg/m³. Furthermore, the SEIS leveling system resonances, seismic recordings of atmospheric pressure signals, HP³ housekeeping data, and imagery provide additional constraints to establish a first seismic model of the shallow (topmost meters) subsurface at the landing site.

InSight SEIS and Near Surface Team: Cedric Schmelzbach, Nienke Brinkman, David Sollberger, Sharon Kedar, Matthias Grott, Fredrik Andersson, Johan Robertsson, Martin van Driel, Simon Stähler, Jan ten Pierick, Troy L. Hudson, Kenneth Hurst, Melanie Drilleau, Balthasar Kenda, Raphael Garcia, Naomi Murdoch, Domenico Giardini, Philippe Lognonné, W. Tom Pike, Tilman Spohn, W. Bruce Banerdt, Lucile Fayon, Anna Horleston, Aaron Kiely, Brigitte Knapmeyer-Endrun, Christian Krause, Nicholas C. Schmerr, Pierre Delage, Nick Teanby, Christos Vrettos