

<|end\_of\_text|>The science of life detection may get a boost from ongoing work in Chile's remote Atacama Desert. Said to be one of the most arid regions on Earth, the Atacama is a prime testing ground for an automated, solar-powered rover named Zoe, which was developed by Carnegie Mellon University's Molecular Biosensor and Imaging Center. The idea: use the Atacama as an analogue to Mars, drafting the needed protocols for life detection in hostile environments. According to a NASA press release, Scientists also plan to map the habitats of the area, including its morphology, geology, mineralogy, texture, physical and elemental properties of rocks and soils; document how life modifies its environment; characterize the geo- and biosignatures of microbial organisms and draft science protocols to support a discovery of life. Technology buffs may want to download CMU's EventScope software, which scientists will use to see the Atacama through the eyes of the rover. Eventscope is available here. The project is part of NASA's Astrobiology Science and Technology Program for Exploring Planets. Its Web site houses images, field reports and background documents.<|end\_of\_text|>When the cataclysm reached The Dalles in the Columbia River Gorge six hours later, people wandering around what