RLSO 2

Robotic Lunar Surface Operations 2

2019

B. Sherwood
A. Austin
T. Colaprete
J. Elliott
T. Fong
A.S. Howe
S. Magnus
P. Metzger
A. Parness
R. Polit Casillas
H.H. Schmitt
M. Sims
M. Smith
M. Vaquero
G. Voecks
K. Zacny

Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology

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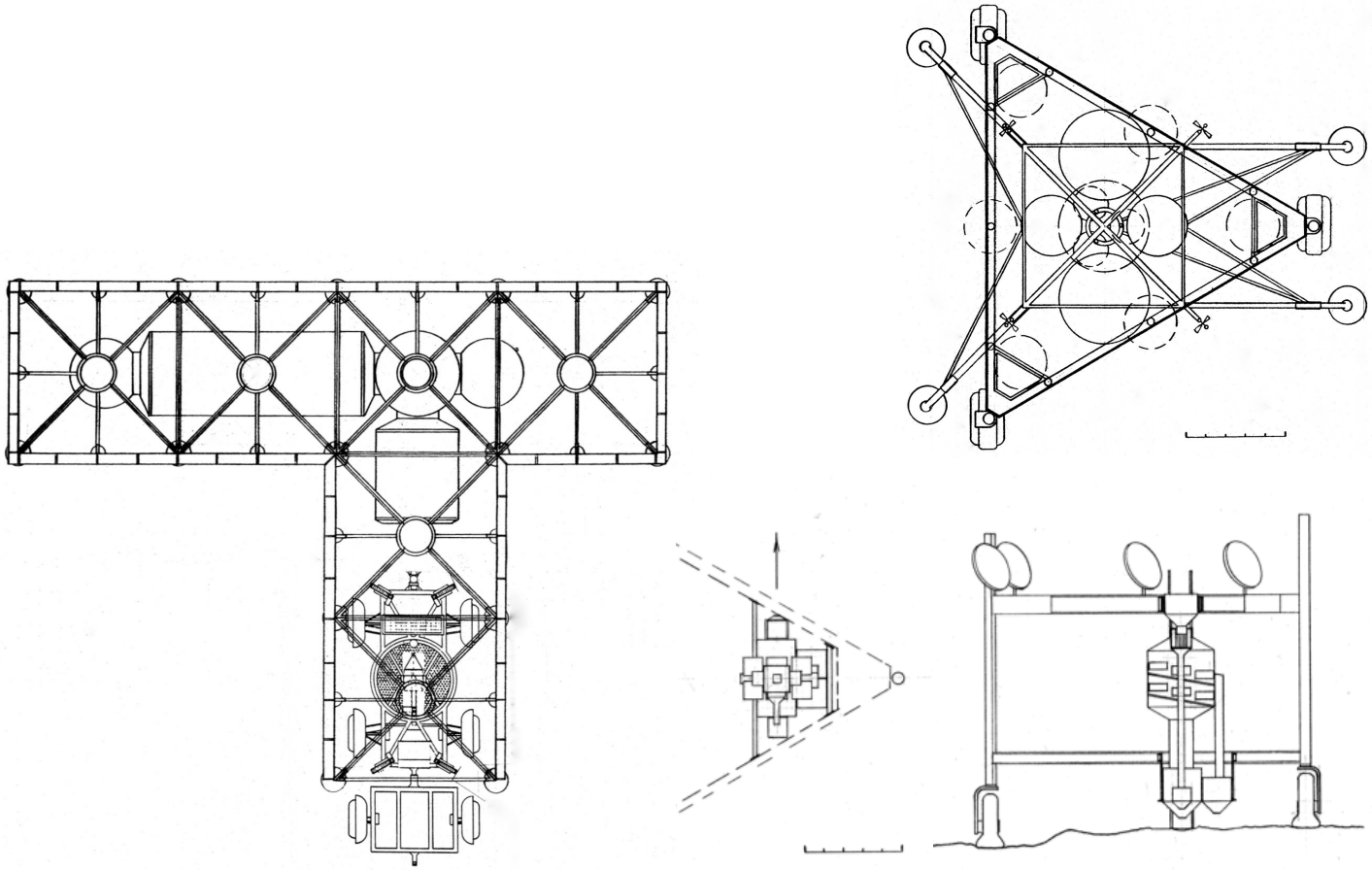
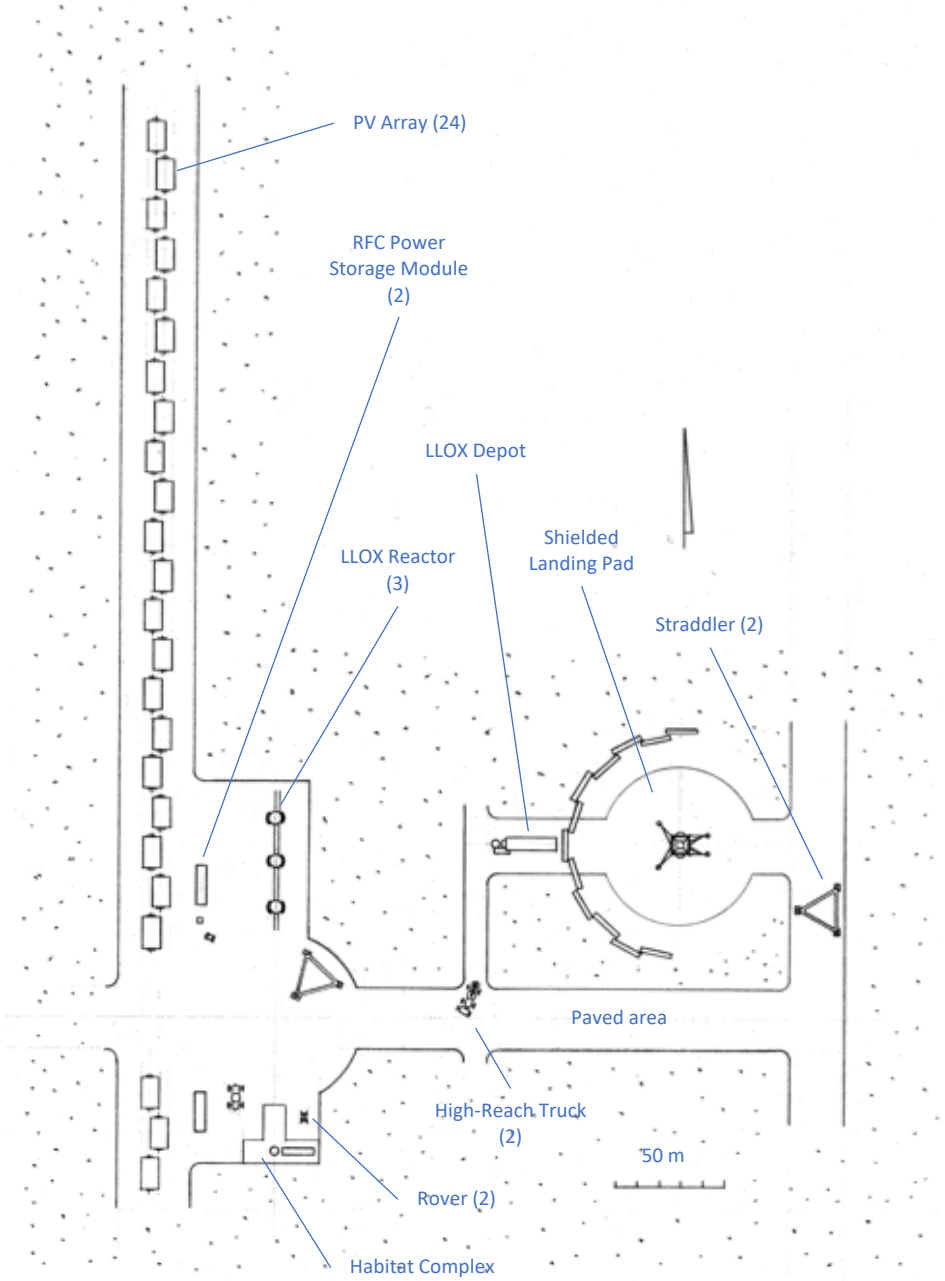
RLSO – 1989 Boeing study for NASA ARC

"Develop a concept for a LLOX-producing lunar base that would be built by robots before human crews arrive"

Integrated element designs.

Quantified operations analysis.

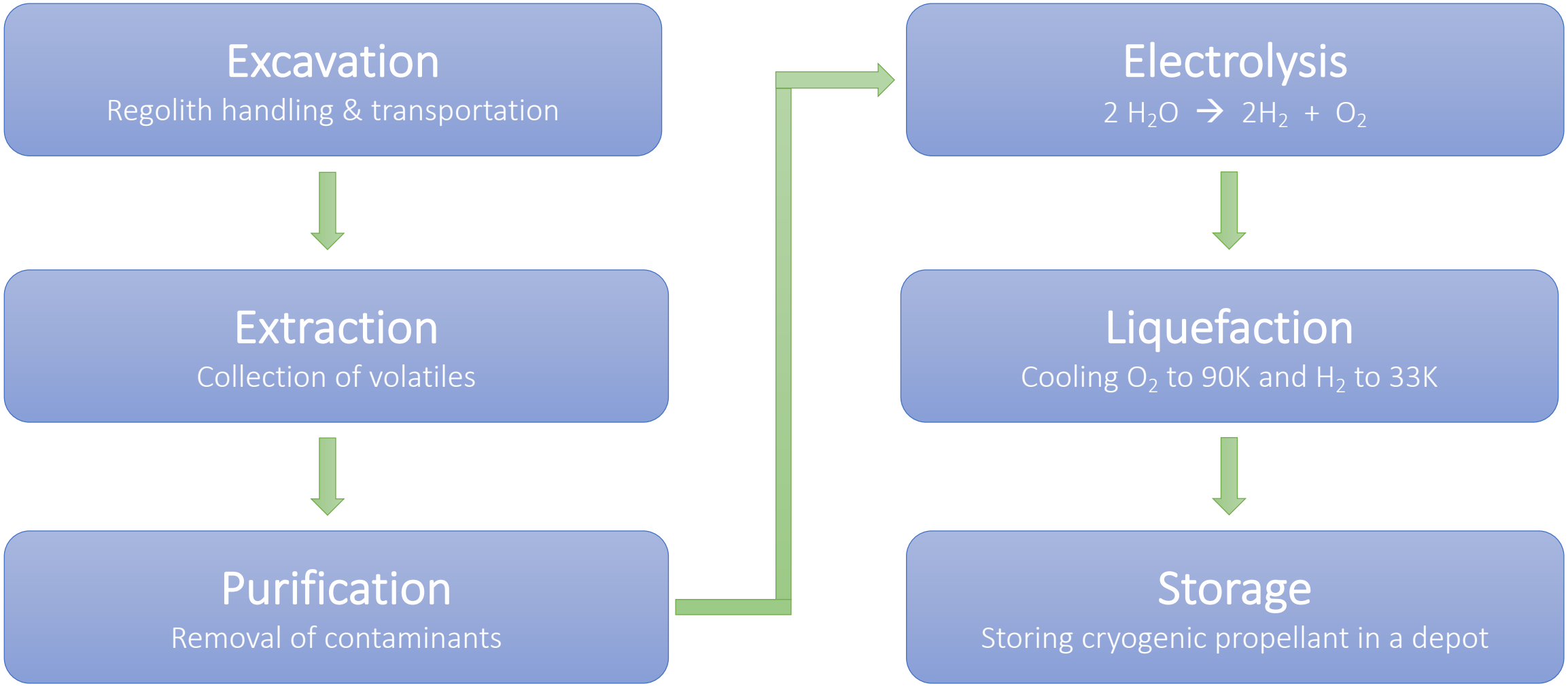




What would RLSO look like today?

- Lunar polar volatiles, including ice
- ISS experience, international collaboration
- SPD-1, Moon Village, commercial actors, private capital
- SLS, Orion, Gateway, CLPS, Blue Moon
- Modern tools: spreadsheets, CAD, performance models

Functional decomposition of ice-based propellant ISRU



Major elements of an ISRU base

Power System – 500 kW capacity, near-100/% duty cycle, modular units landed intact, then connected via cables or laser WPT

Habitat System – Minimal functions, 30-d visits: hab, logistics, workshop, EVA, regolith-shield superstructure

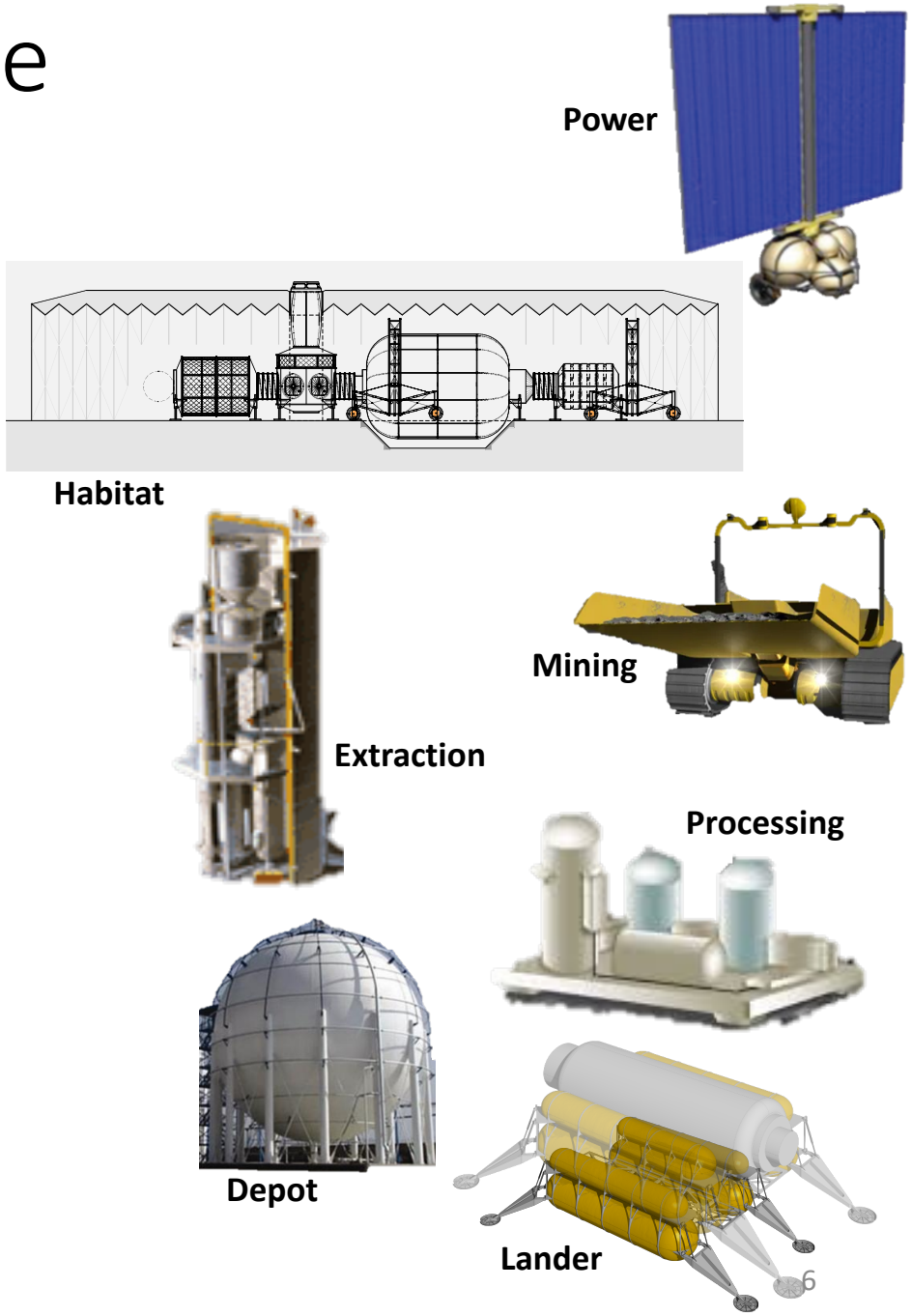
ISRU Mining System – Mobile robots that reach, excavate, beneficiate, and transport lunar regolith (or extract resource onboard and transport it)

ISRU Extraction System – Processor that separates frozen volatiles from lunar regolith

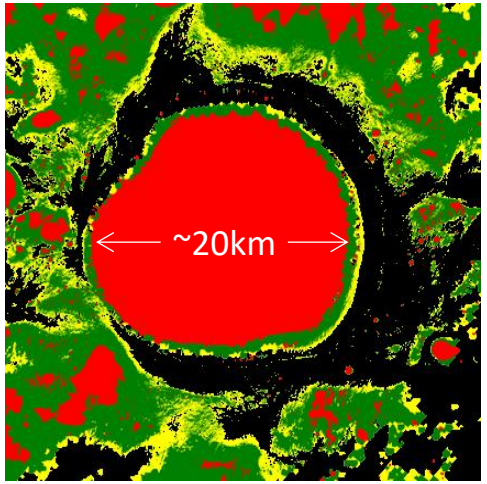
ISRU Volatiles Processing System – Plant that separates water from other volatiles, and cracks it into H_2 and O_2

ISRU Depot System – Plant that liquefies, cryogenically stores, and distributes cryogenic propellant to reusable landers

Lander System – Reusable, refuelable lander, reusable landing pad, and ground support systems



Polar ice resources



Type 1
Type 2
Type 3
Type 4

- Bin by water-stability depth into four terrain types
- Map areas that have 20-m DEM and high-res thermal models
- Illustrated: Hermite-A crater, lunar north pole

	Total Fractional Area (%)	Water concentration (wt%)	Depth beneath the surface (cm)	Water-containing column (cm)	Total water excavated (kg/m^3)	Extraction area for 10 t of water (m^2), @30% patchy
Type 1a PSR regolith	9	2	20-100	80	7.2	1,400
Type 1b PSR surface frost	9	100	0 - 0.002	0.002	0.006	> 1.5M
Type 2 PLR buried regolith	28	1	40-100	60	2.7	3,700
Type 3 PLR deeper regolith	7	0.5	60-100	40	0.9	12,000
Type 4 Lunation-lit regolith	56	0	--	0	0	n/a

Initial ISRU Requirements

Water need

- Lander flights per year: 4
- Propellant required per flight: 40,000 kg
- Water required per flight: **51,500 kg** (6:1 engine ratio vs. 8:1 water mass ratio)
- Water need: 206,000 kg/yr = **1,130 kg/d** @ half-time operations

Resource need

- Type 1: **0.15 m^3 (~210 kg)** per kg of H_2O yield
- Type 2: **0.40 m^3 (~600 kg)** per kg of H_2O yield

Regolith need

- Type 1: 240,000 kg/d @ half-time
- Type 2: 680,000 kg/d @ half-time

Initial Energy Requirements

Volatiles processing minimum: **10.5 kWh per 1 kg of water**

- 2 kWh/kg for extraction from regolith
- 6.5 kWh/kg for electrolysis: H_2O into H_2 and O_2
- 2 kWh/kg for liquefaction: H_2 and O_2 into LH_2 and LOX

ISRU energy: **1,850,000 kWh/yr**

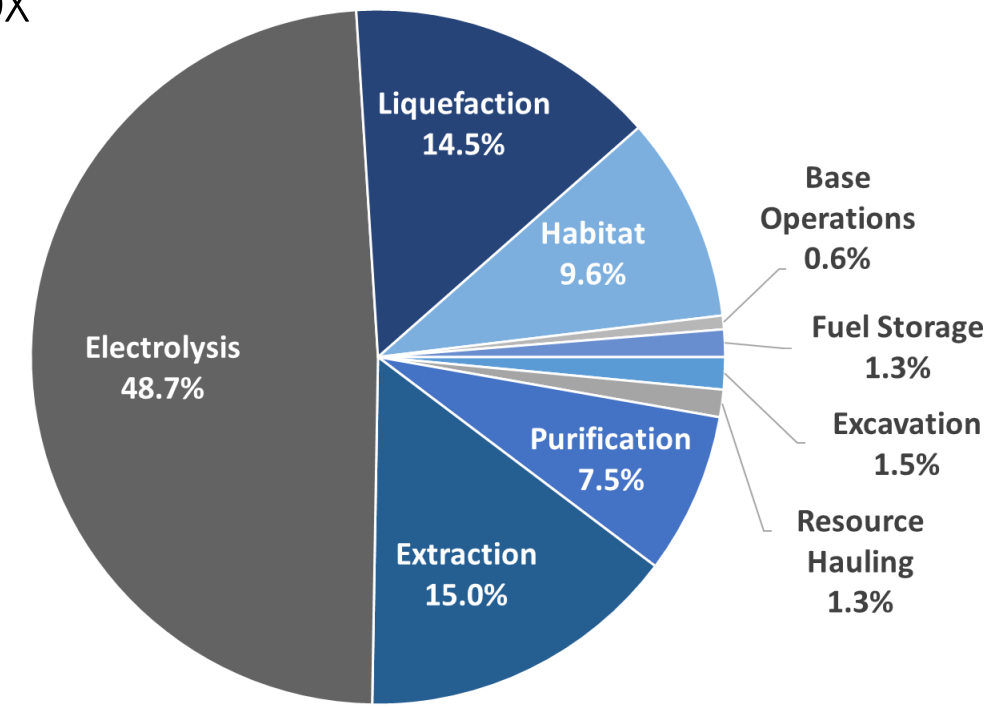
- Quantity of water required: 206,000 kg/yr

ISRU power: **440** kW @ half-time ops (4,380 hr)

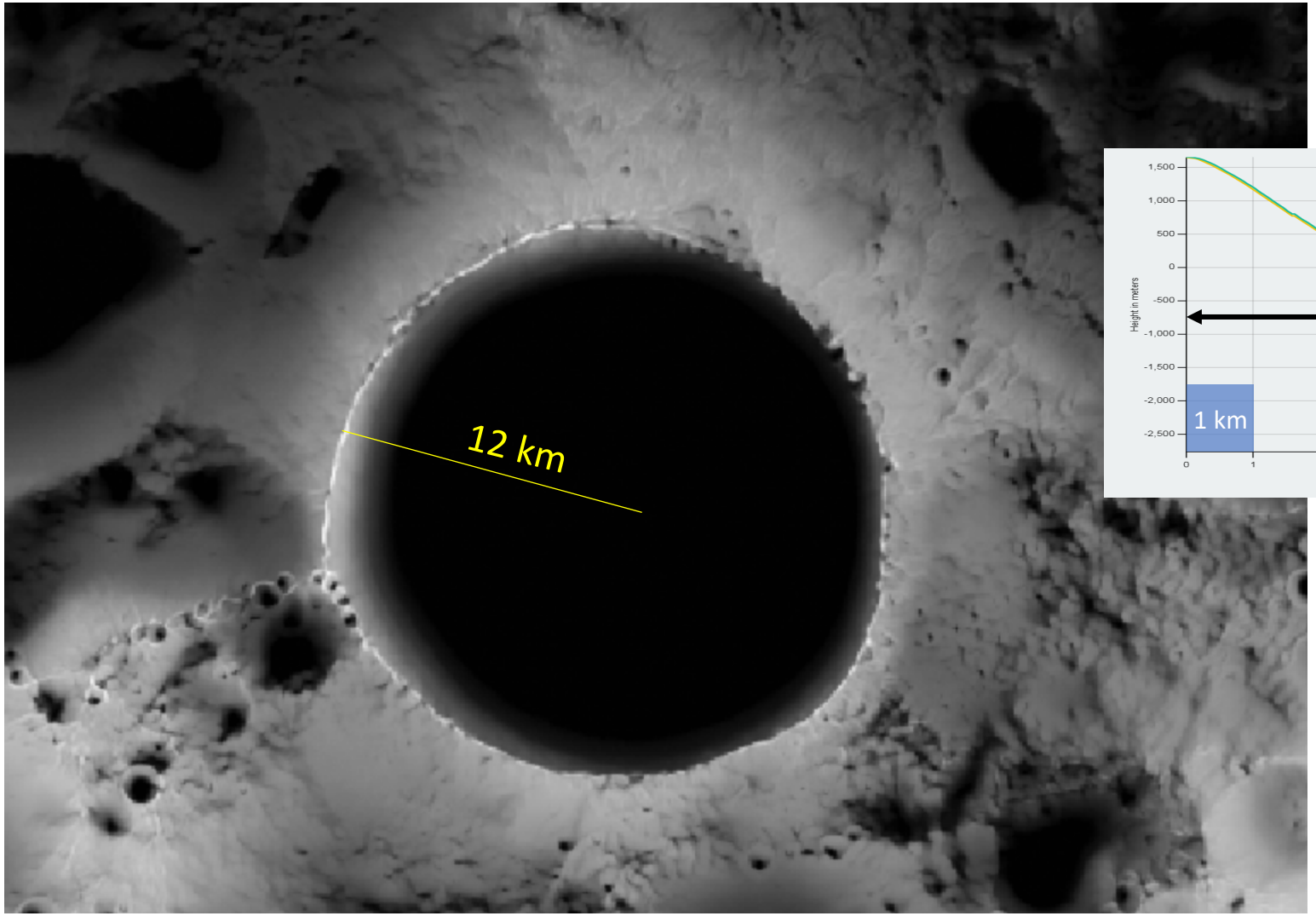
Other energy requirements include:

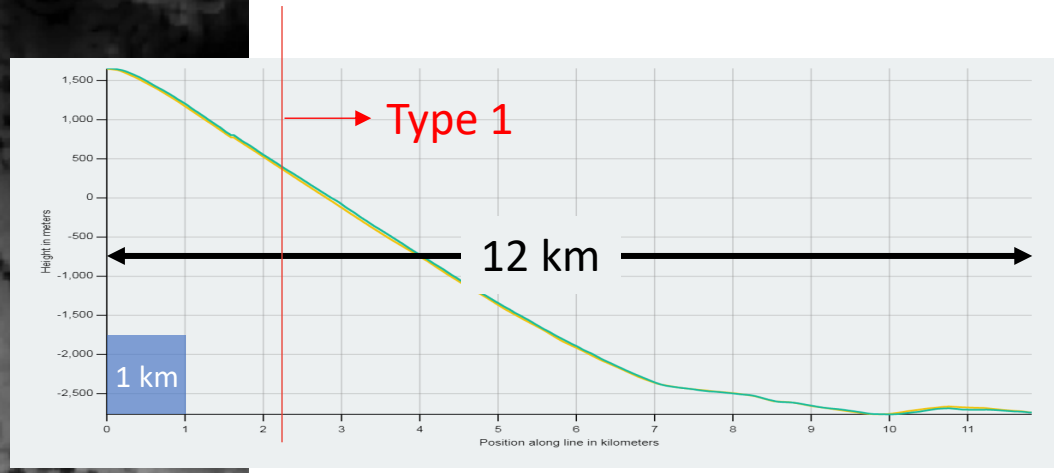
- Excavation, hauling, cryogenic storage
- Hab-complex sustained operation
- General mobility and base operations

Total base power need: ≥600 kW



Shackleton Crater

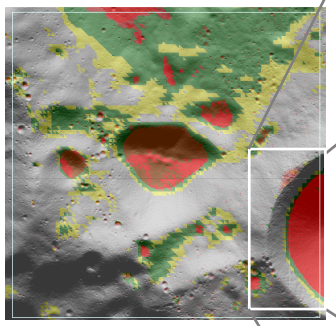




Option 1 – Deep Shackleton, PSR

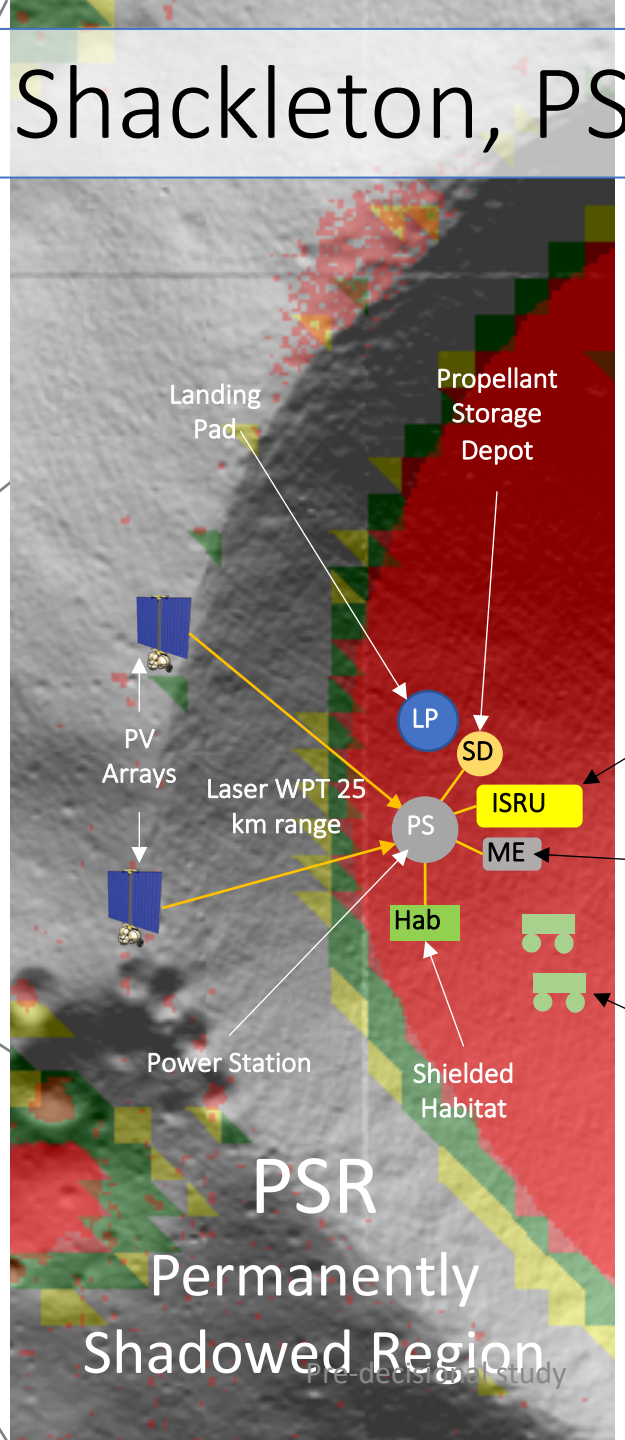
Type 1a Resource

2 wt% water ice, found
20 – 100 cm down



Power Infrastructure

- Multiple PV rim stations yield high lunation duty cycle
- Laser WPT to central power station
- Cable distribution to base elements
- Mobile elements use fuel cells, recharge at central station



Reach, remove, and haul regolith resource <1 km to ISRU base

ISRU Plant

Purification
Electrolysis
Liquefaction

Central Microwave Extractor

Fuel Celled Dig/Haul Robots

Excavation
Dig & Haul robots

Extraction
Central microwave unit

Purification
Processing plant

Electrolysis
PEM or SOXE

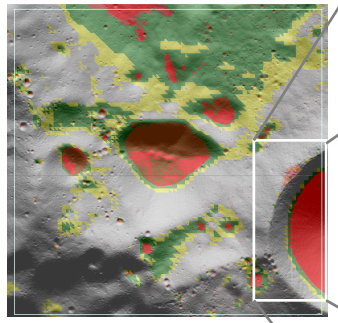
Liquefaction
Turbopumps & Coolers

Storage
Depot at landing pad

Option 2 – Shackleton Slope, into the PSR

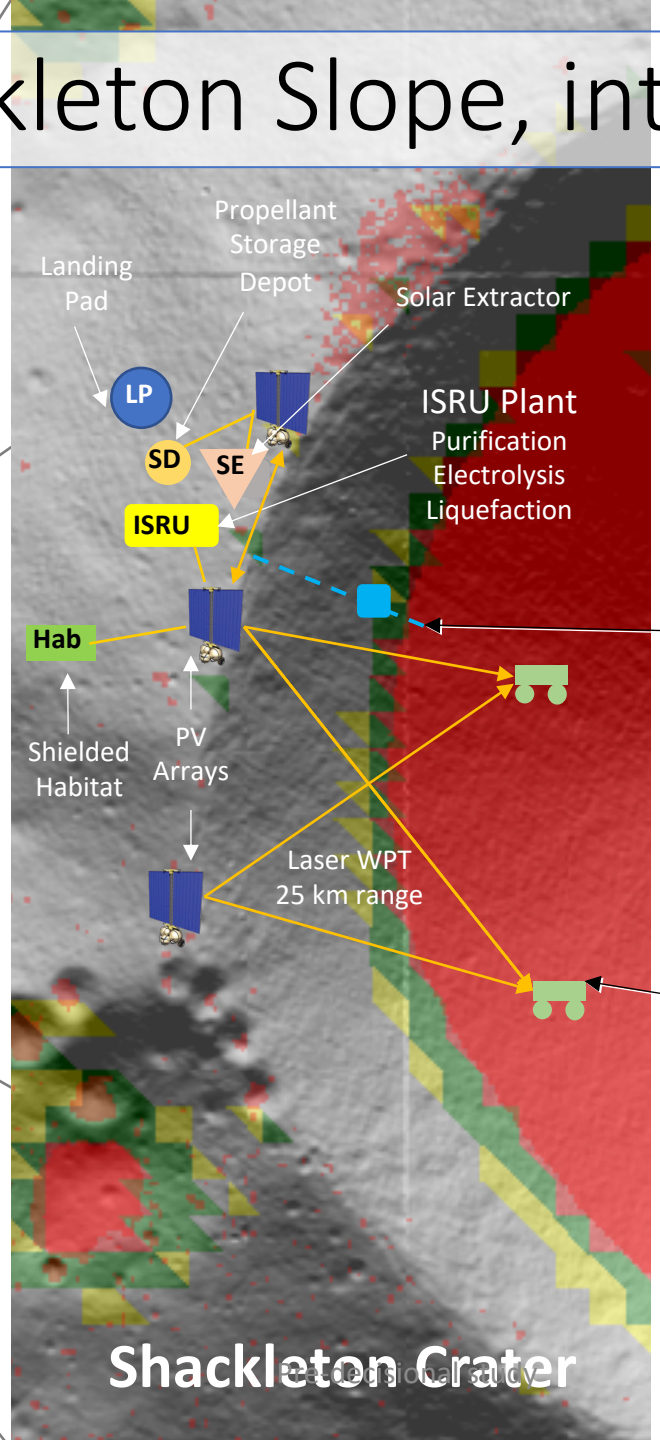
Type 1a resource

2 wt% water ice, found
20 – 100 cm down



Power Infrastructure

- Multiple PV rim stations yield high lunation duty cycle
- Power cables to base elements
- Laser WPT to excavators inside PSR
- Fuel-celled base robots



Haul beneficiated resource <10 km up and out of the crater

Resource "escalator"

Passive solar sublimation

Beam-powered Roving Beneficiators

Excavation
Roving beneficiator
Pneumatic collection

Extraction
Solar baking

Purification
Processing plant

Electrolysis
PEM or SOXE

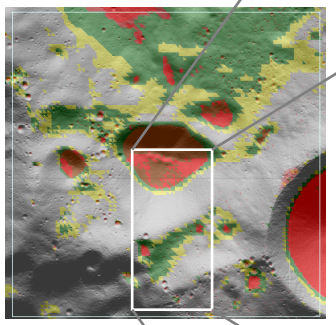
Liquefaction
Turbopumps
& Coolers

Storage
Depot at landing pad

Option 3 – Shackleton West Ridge, PLR Ice Fields

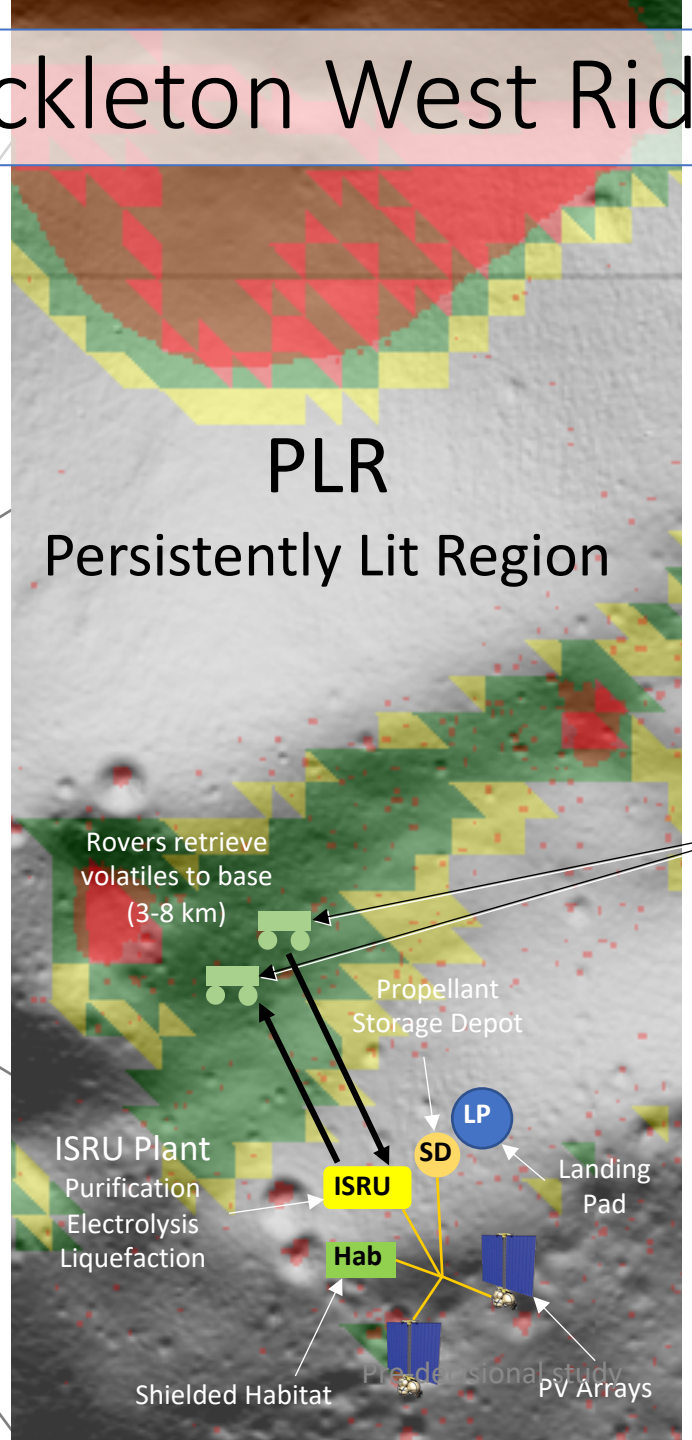
Type 2 resource

1 wt% water ice, found
40 – 100 cm down



Power Infrastructure

- Multiple PV stations yield high lunation duty cycle
- Solar/fuel cell mobility
- Excavator Extractor Retriever and base robots



Fleet of resource rovers

- Core into the buried resource
- Heat the cores in situ
- Freeze the volatiles
- Return to base

Transport frozen volatiles to base (3-8 km)

Excavation + Extraction
In situ extraction by coring rover

Purification
Processing plant

Electrolysis
PEM or SOXE

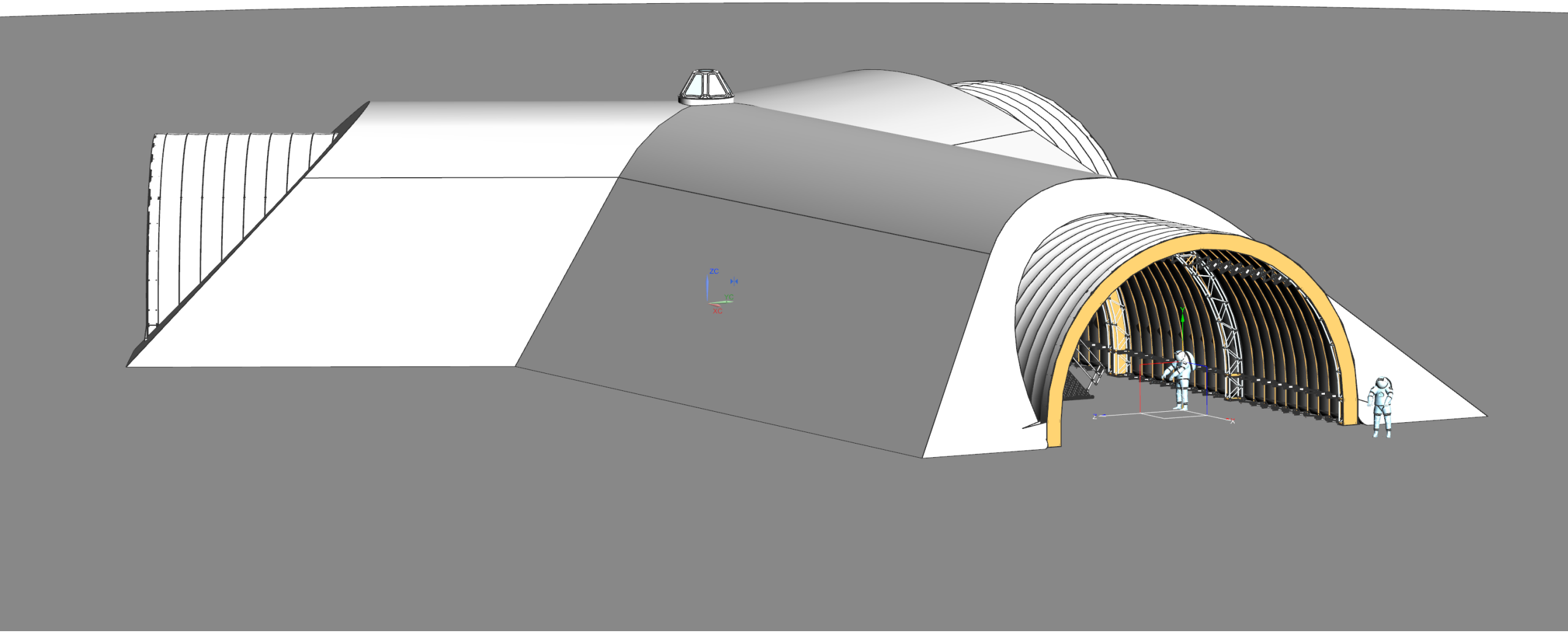
Liquefaction
Turbopumps & Coolers

Storage
Depot at landing pad

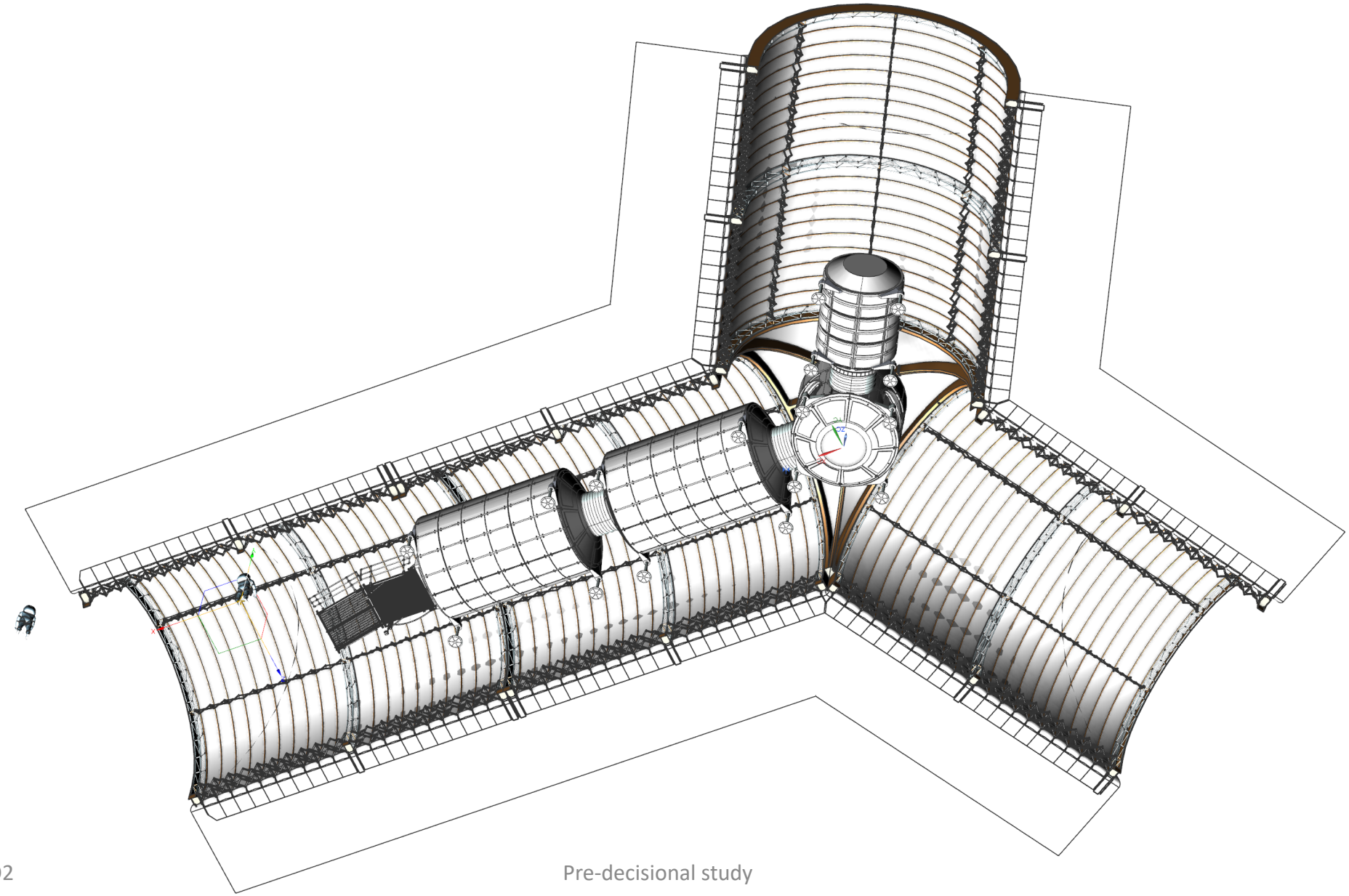
Option comparison

Option	Best attributes	Worst attributes
1. Deep Shackleton	• Best quality resource, with minimal overburden removal • Stable operating environment: dark, 70K • Creates market for power beamers	• Base cannot access regional exploration sites • Base is permanently dark
2. Shackleton Slope	• Best quality resource, with minimal overburden removal • Base can support exploration excursions	Resource must be brought several km up and out of crater
3. Shackleton West Ridge	• Avoids crater slopes • Proximate sunlight and shadow • 0.5m/px LROC imagery • Creates market for mining rovers	“Half-quality” resource, buried deeper

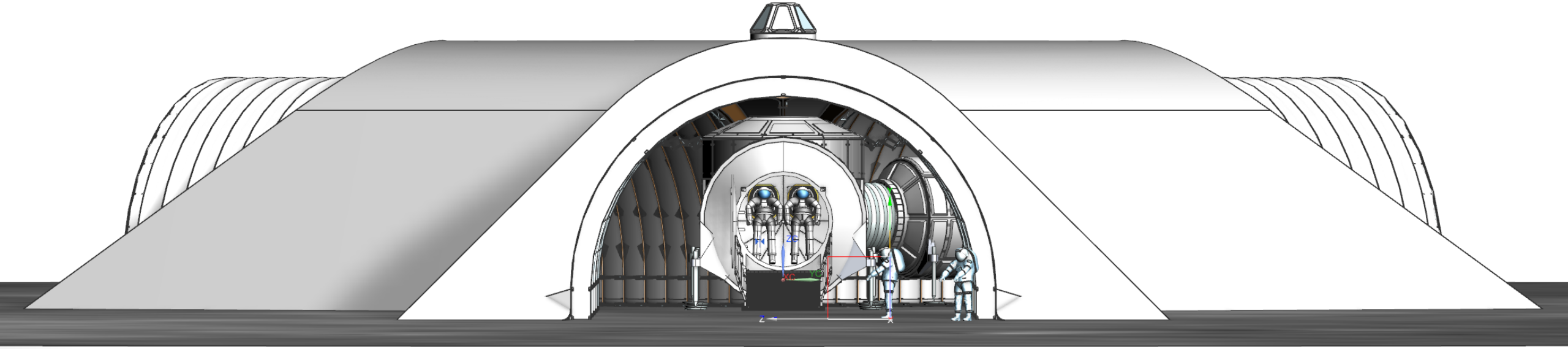
Modern approach: habitats need shielding…



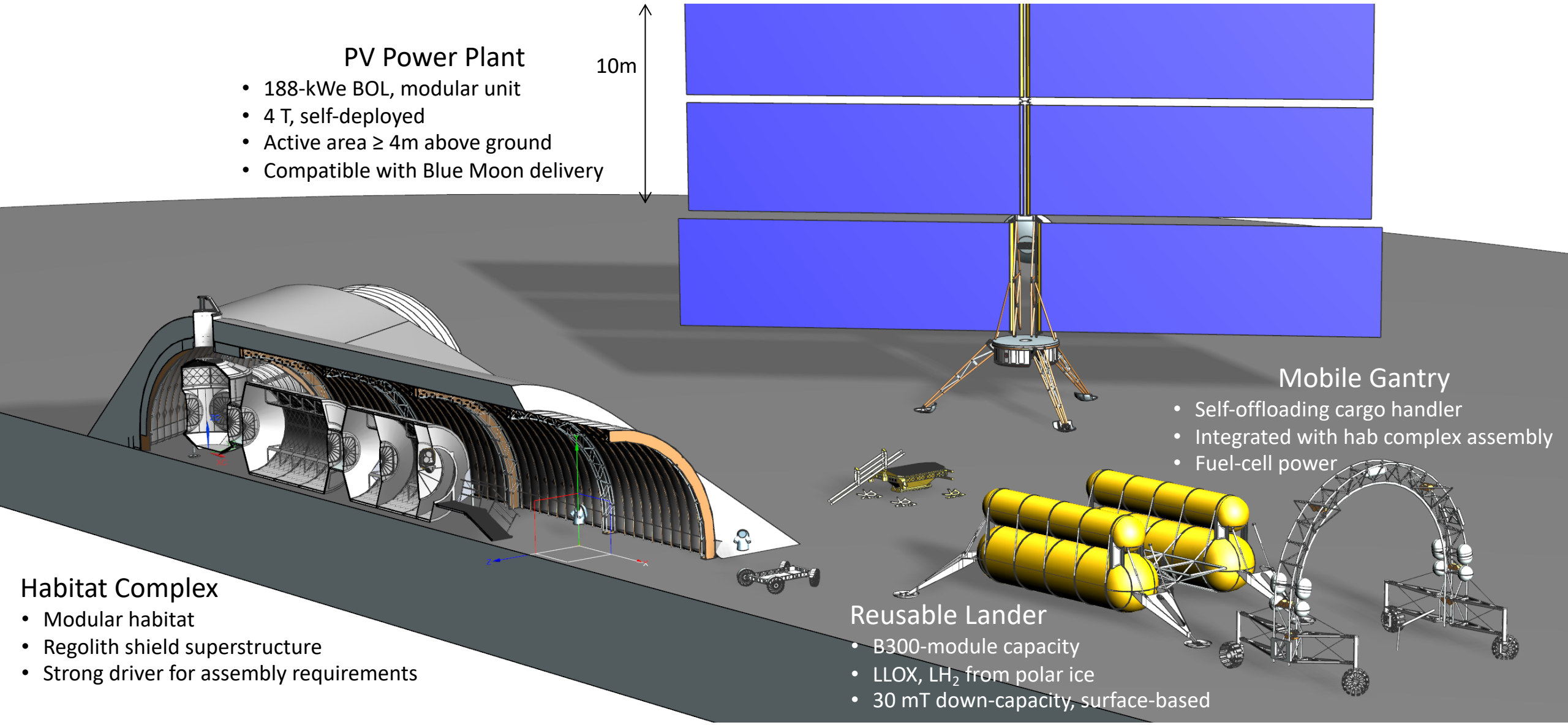
...without direct burial of complex equipment



Robot-accessible workshop is essential



Major base elements drive parametric model



PV Power Plant

- 188-kWe BOL, modular unit
- 4 T, self-deployed
- Active area ≥ 4m above ground
- Compatible with Blue Moon delivery

Habitat Complex

- Modular habitat
- Regolith shield superstructure
- Strong driver for assembly requirements

Mobile Gantry

- Self-offloading cargo handler
- Integrated with hab complex assembly
- Fuel-cell power

Reusable Lander

- B300-module capacity
- LLOX, LH_2 from polar ice
- 30 mT down-capacity, surface-based

Emergent findings

Nuclear power useful for production-scale ISRU would have to be MWe class

“Best” ice resource and location may not be in a PSR

Potential competitive roles for commercial actors

- Power providers, extraction rovers

Empirical knowledge gaps with high leverage

- Vertical distribution at m scale – wt% of ice as a function of depth
- Horizontal distribution at km scale – patchiness of resource “field”
- Geotechnical properties – “coffee grounds and sugar” or cryo-permafrost
- Diffusion rate – trapping vs losing the resource from heating in situ
- Agitation loss coefficient – losing the resource from handling it

Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology