A month ago, Florida Tech professor John Deaton would have jumped at the chance to travel to Mars. But that was before the College of Aeronautics professor spent two weeks in a simulated Mars habitat in a remote part of Utah.

"I think I've changed my tune," said Deaton, whose specialty is human factors. "It was a lot harder than I expected. I think going to Mars is going to be an extremely difficult mission."

Deaton emerged last week from the Mars Desert Research Station slightly sleep deprived and about 8 pounds lighter. His home for those two weeks was a two-story, 26-foot-long building he shared with five strangers from around the world.

Run by the nonprofit Mars Society, the station was created to simulate the red planet to allow researchers to better understand what would be required to staff an outpost on Mars.

"The first couple of days I questioned, 'Why am I doing this? I'm not getting enough sleep. I'm either too cold or too hot, I'm not eating well'," said Deaton of Winter Springs. "It produced some anxiety, and you have to adapt to it."

During the first week of the experiment, Deaton developed pink eye.

"The crew that goes to Mars, they're going to have medical issues," said Deaton, 61. "They're not going to be able to get in the car and drive to Walgreens."

At the advice of the "flight surgeon," Deaton and one of his crewmates left the habitat for a few hours so he could get medical attention. That was the only time the participants were able to leave without donning their required spacesuits. The bulky attire, complete with helmet, boots and gloves, sometimes took as long as 30 minutes to put on. Mimicking spacewalk procedures, crew members were required to spend time in an airlock chamber before and after going outside.

Conservation was a running theme during the two weeks, as it would be for a long journey to Mars. Water left over from washing dishes was used to flush the toilet. Showers were few and quick. Food was rationed.

"I appreciate things more today than I did before," Deaton said. "I really missed fresh vegetables."

The crew spent about 18 hours a day working on experiments. Deaton was especially interested in how the confined space and limited resources would affect the group.

Every day, he administered tests to gauge his crewmates' performance and decision-making abilities in the tight quarters, including a sleeping area Deaton likened to a coffin. He's still in the process of reviewing the data.

Deaton's biggest surprise: how well everyone got along. Aside from a few Skype conversations, their first meeting was the night before they entered the habitat.

"I attribute a lot of it to the commander, he was a very good leader," Deaton said. "We still communicate on a daily basis. They plan on coming out for a (shuttle) launch and staying at my house."

Deaton and his crewmates also hope to return to the habitat in a year to conduct further research.

As for the real red planet, Deaton said that trip is better left for someone else.

He realized the crew would likely need a doctor or someone with extensive medical knowledge and an engineer also would be helpful. Having a couple engineers on his crew proved invaluable when high winds ripped a hole in the roof.

Deaton also believes a Mars crew should be made up of young people who are less likely to have health problems and possibly even single men or women who do not have children to minimize the effect on a family.

Leaving behind his two daughters, eating freeze-dried food and being confined to a small space for several years isn't something he's ready for.

"I think I'm too selfish for that," Deaton said.