Similarities between features in a hot spring outflow channel in El Tatio, Chile and those identified in the ‘Home Plate’ feature in the Columbia Hills of Gusev crater suggest that this may be a good place to search for signs of life.

- The Atacama desert is considered a Mars analog, since it is very dry, gets very cold in the winter and at the very high elevation has a stronger UV flux than most surface locations on Earth.

- At El Tatio, microbes in the hot spring environment play a part in the creation of distinctive nodule-like features that are similar in morphology and scale to those seen on Mars (image at left, ‘Home Plate’ on left, El Tatio on right).

- Similar morphology does not necessarily require similar creation processes, however this research suggests that Columbia Hills may be a promising location to investigate further with the Mars 2020 rover, which has an excellent suite of instruments for detecting biosignatures.

Ruff and Farmer (2016). *Nature Communications*