

13 THE FIRST MAN ON THE MOON



On 20 July 1969, Neil Armstrong secured his place in the history books: he became the first human ever to step foot on the Moon. As hundreds of millions watched across the world, he famously declared that it was 'one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind'. The USA had won the competition with the Soviet Union (now Russia) to put a man on the moon first – and Armstrong's name was soon known around the world.

The mission

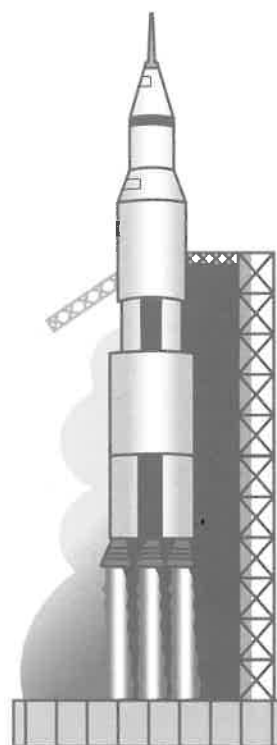
President John F. Kennedy had challenged the USA to put a man on the Moon before the end of the decade, worried that his nation was falling behind in technology. In 1962, the determined president famously stated, 'We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; [...] because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win.'

Seven years later, Mission Apollo 11 launched from the Kennedy Space Center, in Florida. Its crew consisted of Neil Armstrong (commander), Michael Collins (command module pilot) and Edwin E. Aldrin Jr (lunar module pilot), better known as 'Buzz' Aldrin.

Apollo 11 launched successfully and entered an orbit of the Moon. On 20 July, Armstrong and Aldrin took the lunar module Eagle and began their journey to the Moon, leaving Collins aboard the main spacecraft.

Eagle landed on the Moon at 4.17 pm Eastern Standard Time, with less than 30 seconds of fuel remaining. Six hours after landing, Armstrong took the historic step onto the surface of the Moon. As he did so, an estimated 530 million viewers across the world watched the event on television. Aldrin soon joined him, and the two astronauts spent two and a half hours on the lunar surface.

Despite the advanced technology in their space suits – which contained portable life-support systems that controlled oxygen, temperature and pressure – the astronauts found it difficult to adapt to the reduced gravity on the Moon. They found they were capable of jumping far higher than on Earth, and struggled to move forwards rather than upwards!



While on the Moon, Armstrong and Aldrin performed a variety of experiments, and collected soil and rock samples to analyse on their return to Earth. An American flag was left on the Moon as a lasting legacy to the achievement.

After their historic Moon walks, the astronauts successfully returned in Eagle to the main spacecraft, where Michael Collins was awaiting them. President Nixon, who by then had succeeded President Kennedy, communicated with the astronauts by telephone. He said:

'Hello Neil and Buzz – I am talking to you by telephone from the Oval Room at the White House, and this certainly has to be the most historic telephone call ever made from the White House. I just can't tell you how proud we all are of what you have done. For every American, this has to be the proudest day of our lives, and for people all over the world I am sure that they too join with Americans in recognising what an immense feat this is.'

He later added, 'For one priceless moment in the whole history of man, all the people on this Earth are truly one – one in their pride in what you have done, and one in our prayers that you will return safely to Earth.'

The Apollo 11 crew's descent back to Earth lasted several days, during which time they broadcast their thanks to 'all those Americans who built the spacecraft; who did the construction, design, the tests, and put their hearts and all their abilities into those craft.'

Apollo 11 splashed down into the Pacific Ocean on 24 July.

The man

Neil Armstrong was born in Ohio in the USA, in 1930. After serving as a pilot in the US Navy 1949–1952, he joined the organisation we now know as NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Agency), where he worked as an engineer, test pilot, astronaut and administrator.

Working for NASA, Armstrong piloted many different aircraft, including jets, rockets, helicopters and gliders. He was command pilot for the Gemini 8 mission in 1966, and successfully performed the first docking of two vehicles in space. It is his work on Apollo 11, however, for which he is best known.

Following his exploits in space, Armstrong took on many prestigious and high-profile roles, and received awards from countries across the world.