

One Small Step

Talking Point

by Kathy Helidoniotis



Buzz Aldrin on the moon's surface.

Photos courtesy NASA

The Space Race

The momentous event was the culmination of the decades long 'space race' which saw the US and the Soviet Union compete to be the first to land a human on the Moon. President John F Kennedy had promised his people that he would land an American on the Moon before the 1960s were out. But the Soviets were the first to send a human being into space. It was crunch time for the Americans. Dozens of missions were attempted, but it was not until the last year of the decade that American lunar dreams became a reality.

The spacecraft *Apollo 11*, carrying Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins and Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin blasted off on 16 July 1969. Armstrong and Aldrin landed on the lunar surface, frolicked, took samples and photos, did experiments, climbed back inside the *Eagle* and went home and the world said, 'Wow!'. The event was televised worldwide, partly thanks to the Parkes Observatory telescope in New South Wales, which sent *Apollo 11*'s signals to Mission Control in Houston. But was it all for real?

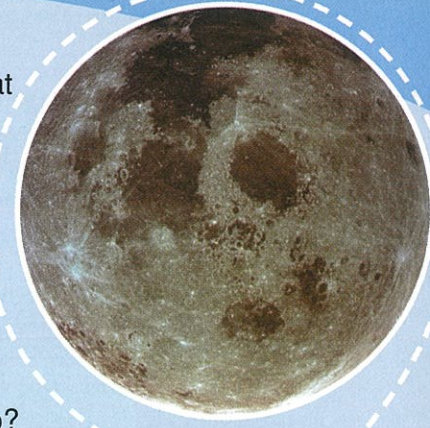
Hollywood Hoax?

NASA and the United States government say it was for real. Others say no, and believe they have the evidence to prove that the whole lunar landing was faked!

The photographs taken by the astronauts have been analysed by **sceptics** all over the world. They have questioned the lengths and positions of shadows. They claim to have noticed a Moon rock with the letter C carved on it, strange objects reflected in the astronauts' helmets and the absence of stars in the sky. They have wondered how film could survive the intense heat on the Moon's surface. But the biggest question of all is how the live television images were beamed back to Earth from the Moon

(384 400 kilometres) at a time when they claim the technology available could only cope with a distance of around 150 kilometres. In other words, was the Moon landing staged in a Hollywood-style studio? Could the 1969 Moon landing be the most elaborate **hoax** of the 20th century?

Hoax or not, humans on the Moon made it seem that anything was possible. It was the crowning achievement of a dazzling decade of discovery. The world, and the way people saw it, would never be the same again.



Did you know?

- ★ The spacesuits worn by the astronauts weighed 136 kilos each.
- ★ The average daily surface temperature of the Moon varies from 105°C in sunlight to minus 115°C in the shade.
- ★ The Moon's gravitational pull is only about one-sixth that of the Earth's.
- ★ The Moon takes 28 days (a lunar month) to orbit the Earth.
- ★ The astronauts' footprints will probably remain on the Moon's surface for thousands of years.

Glossary

- EST** – Eastern Standard Time
- hoax** – a practical joke
- orbit** – to go round
- sceptics** – people who don't trust non-scientifically proven data

What do you think?

If you have an opinion about this issue's 'Talking Point' we'd love to hear it. Write to Freddy and Fifi's Funmail, 95 Coventry Street, South Melbourne VIC 3205, Australia, or email us at magazines@pearsoned.com.au. We'll publish a selection of the best letters.

That's one small step for man ... one giant leap for mankind.

Neil Armstrong's famous remark has become one of the most well known of the 20th century. It's not surprising, really – after all, it's not every day humans walk on the Moon's surface for the first time.

Lunar Landing

It happened at 20 seconds past 12.56 pm **EST** on Monday, 21 July 1969. Some 723 million people around the world were watching as the *Eagle*, the lunar module carrying two United States astronauts, landed on the Moon's surface, live on TV. Many kids were given the afternoon off school, cramming into the living rooms of friends who had the luxury of owning a TV set. The whole occasion became a huge party.

Actually, it was a more than just a party. People felt united in the spirit of what was surely one of humanity's greatest achievements. The then President of the United States, Richard Nixon, summed it up when he said, 'For one priceless moment in the history of man, all the people of the earth are one.' It was a great day to be sitting in front of the TV!

A crowd watches the moon landing on TV through a shop window.

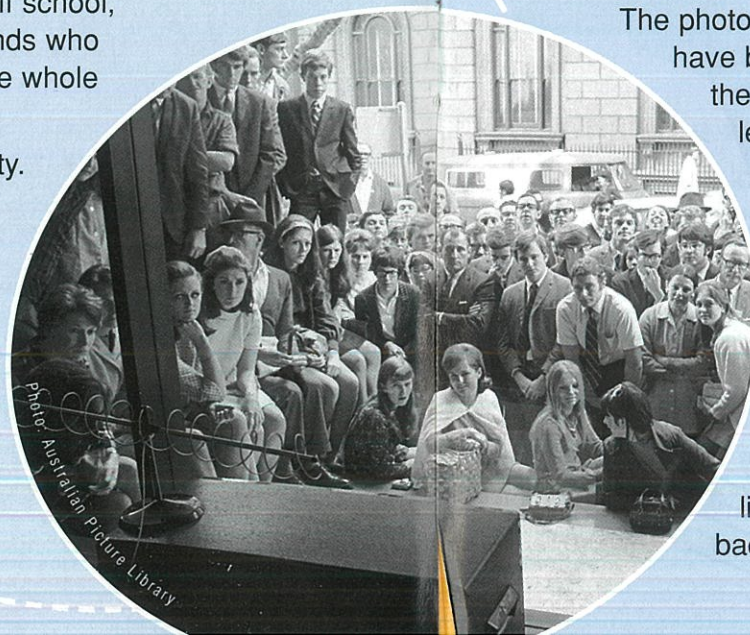


Photo: Australian Picture Library



Lunar footprint.

Check this out!

- nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov
- www.parkes.atnf.csiro.au/apollo11
- *The Dish on video*