



# To the Moon

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International

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For the 30th anniversary of Apollo 11, NOVA tells the inside story of one of the most difficult engineering feats of all time and the amazing scientific harvest that resulted, on “To the Moon,” a two-hour special.

No other documentary has covered the full range of participants in the Apollo project, from the unsung scientists and engineers who promoted bold ideas about the nature of the Moon and how to get there, to the young geologists who chose the landing sites and helped train the crews, to the astronauts who actually went—not once or twice, but six times, each to a more demanding and interesting location on the Moon’s surface.

What started as a Cold War race to beat the Russians turned into a full-fledged scientific enterprise that is still yielding discoveries nearly three decades after the last mission, Apollo 17. Among the many Apollo veterans who tell their stories on “To the Moon” is Gene Cernan, commander of Apollo 17 and the last man to walk on the Moon.

America first got serious about going to the Moon in 1961, when Russian Yuri Gagarin upstaged Alan Shepard’s Mercury mission by less than a month and became the first man in space. President John Kennedy immediately raised the stakes precipitously by announcing that America would put a man on the Moon by decade’s end. Apollo was born.

But it would not get off the pad before five more flights in the Mercury program plus ten pathbreaking Gemini missions, in which the techniques for getting to the Moon were perfected.

“To the Moon” includes an interview with NASA engineer John Houbolt who showed an unwilling agency the way to its goal by promoting a bold plan called Lunar Orbit Rendezvous. It took Houbolt hard years of campaigning but he eventually convinced his bosses. Experts credit Apollo’s eventual success to the decision to adopt this risky strategy.

Also featured is a rare interview with scientist Ralph Baldwin, who proposed in the 1940s that lunar craters were caused by meteorite impacts rather than volcanoes. The idea was doubted by many geologists, until on-the-spot investigation during Apollo proved Baldwin right.

The commander of NASA’s most daring mission—Apollo 8—also tells his story. Frank Borman’s crew was originally assigned to go into Earth orbit for a test of Apollo hardware, including the lander. But the lander was not ready, and rumors of an impending Russian flight around the Moon prompted NASA to change its plans and send Apollo 8 on the first piloted mission beyond Earth. The memorable flight arrived in lunar orbit on Christmas eve 1968.

Other voices heard in the program include legendary launch controller Gene Kranz; Harrison Schmitt, the only geologist to go to the Moon; and Bill Hartmann, the scientist who put all the Apollo data together and proposed the first ever theory which fully accounts for the strange circumstance that Earth has a moon like the one it does.

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The director of the WGBH Science Unit and executive producer of NOVA is Paula S. Apsell.

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CREDITS

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