

Discovery's Return Home Delayed

August 20 2005



Ferry flight managers this morning decided not to make an attempt to bring Discovery back to Kennedy Space Center today and will remain at Barksdale AFB, La., through Saturday night. It was determined that weather en route across Alabama, Georgia and Florida, and potential weather issues early this afternoon at Kennedy would violate the vehicle's stringent flight weather criteria.

Early Sunday morning, ferry flight managers will meet again and reassess the weather en route to the Space Center and establish the flight path. The current plan calls for the Shuttle Carrier Aircraft to depart Barksdale Sunday at about 7:25 a.m. EDT and touchdown at Kennedy's

Shuttle Landing Facility in central Florida at about 10 a.m. EDT.

A "pathfinder" KC-135 aircraft flies about 100 miles ahead of the Shuttle Carrier Aircraft and monitors the weather in the flight path for the 747's crew.

NASA announced yesterday that the next Space Shuttle mission, STS-121, is now targeted for March 2006. This will be the second test flight to the International Space Station in the Shuttle Return to Flight series. NASA Administrator Mike Griffin and Associate Administrator for Space Operations William Gerstenmaier made the announcement at a briefing on August 18th.

"We are giving ourselves what we hope is plenty of time to evaluate where we are," said Administrator Griffin. "We don't see the tasks remaining before us being as difficult as the path behind us."

A pair of "Tiger Teams" continues to investigate the External Tank foam loss during Discovery's launch on July 26. Gerstenmaier says the teams have identified the major areas of concern and are making good progress on dealing with the problems.

Discovery will be used for STS-121 instead of Atlantis, putting NASA in a better position for future missions to the Space Station. Atlantis will fly the following mission, STS-115, carrying Space Station truss segments which are too heavy to be carried by Discovery. By changing the lineup, the program won't have to fly back to back missions with Atlantis, as was previously scheduled.

Source: NASA

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