

Shuttle ready for piggy-backed plane ride

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NASA scientists readied space shuttle Atlantis for a "piggy-backed" ride atop a Boeing 747 airplane this week to the Kennedy Space Center.

That journey will cap shuttle's STS-117 mission that officially ended Friday when it landed at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Known as a ferry-flight, the orbiter will make the cross-country trip in one or two days, depending on weather conditions. The first leg is set for Friday.

The STS-117 mission started with a June 8 launch, arriving at the International Space Station June 10. The crew conducted four spacewalks to continue the station's construction, as well as repairing part of the shuttle's thermal blanket, which was damaged during launch.

The return to Earth ended astronaut Suni Williams' record for the longest spaceflight by a woman: 194 days, 18 hours and 58 minutes.

The next shuttle mission is slated to launch in August.

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