

NASA dusts off forgotten artifacts in new exhibit

July 16 2009, By JESSICA GRESKO , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The spacesuit was one of three made for the last man to set foot on the moon, but Doug Fisher found it balled up and forgotten at the bottom of a cardboard box.

Fisher has been rummaging around NASA's "attic" for about a year - exploring the recesses of the space agency's warehouses in Cape Canaveral. And Gene Cernan's vintage [spacesuit](#), buried beneath flashlights, wasn't his first find.

Other objects Fisher has rediscovered went on display Thursday at a new exhibit at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. The opening coincides with the 40th anniversary of [Neil Armstrong](#), Michael Collins and Buzz Aldrin blasting off to the moon on the Apollo 11 mission. Cernan's forgotten suit will go on display in the fall near the "Apollo Treasures" gallery, which already features some two dozen artifacts.

The museum-style exhibit is an unusual step for NASA, which was so focused on its mission to put a man on the moon in the 1960s that archiving and preserving the objects that made the 239,000-mile journey wasn't a priority, Fisher said. Some historic items went to the Smithsonian in Washington, while other items were abandoned. The agency previously relied on technology and entertainment like a flight simulator - not history - to educate visitors.

"When something came to the end of its utility ... it tended to drop off the radar," Fisher said. "Like any large institution (objects) found their

way to various display areas and hiding areas throughout the property. I think everybody can relate to that."

Now that's changing. NASA just opened a large warehouse to store artifacts. AND Fisher, who develops and oversees exhibits at Kennedy's visitor's center, has been combing warehouses. HE has recorded some 2,000 pieces of what might previously been considered "space junk" since arriving at NASA in early 2008.

Among the objects Fisher has rediscovered: the flight log used on Apollo 7 with notes handwritten by the astronauts like "landing in Apollo is a CRASH!" and a plaque Apollo 13 astronauts gave NASA in appreciation for their safe return.

On display are objects ranging from hand casts of the Apollo 11 astronauts used to make their gloves to canisters to transport moon rocks. The space itself, meanwhile, is built to look like a vault. Inside, some displays are designed to mimic jewelry boxes, their tops cracked open to reveal items: a videocamera used to broadcast from space, a spacesuit repair kit and a credit card-sized checklist worn on an astronaut's wrist that includes instructions on everything from how to gather lunar rocks to how to plant the American flag.

Not everything in the exhibit is new. The biggest piece is the Apollo 14 capsule that flew to the moon in 1971. It was previously on display nearby at NASA's Astronaut Hall of Fame. Washington's National Air and Space Museum - the repository of many NASA artifacts - also loaned the exhibit four early spacesuits. The prototypes show NASA experimenting with different joints for long missions. They include a spacesuit from the early 1960s that only bends forward and back at the waist and an 83-pound aluminum "RX-2" spacesuit from 1964 that looks like a knight's armor.

There may be even more to come.

The week before the exhibit opened Fisher went into a dark storeroom with a flashlight. Behind broken prop helmets, laying on a desk, was a spacesuit. Fisher had been told it was a replica. But as he waved his flashlight over it he saw the suit's blue fingertips and the glint of a silvery fabric, characteristics of authentic suits. When he pulled it into the light he was positive it was real. A patch identified its wearer: N. Armstrong.

"We think it's Neil Armstrong's backup suit," Fisher said. "It just sort of got left behind."

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