

# One small step in the search for moonwalk tapes

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This is the Parkes telescope around the time of the Apollo 11 Moon landing in 1969. Credit: CSIRO

The world will get the first glimpse of what the historic Apollo 11 moonwalk really looked like thanks to the exceptional footage taken from Australian telescopes on 21 July (Australian time) 1969.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the mission, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration ([NASA](#)) has released dramatically enhanced, digitally re-mastered, copies of television recordings of the Apollo 11 [moonwalk](#).

Four epic scenes showing Apollo 11 mission commander Neil Armstrong's first step on the Moon's surface, Lunar Module Pilot, Buzz Aldrin's, descent of the lunar module ladder, the plaque reading and the raising of the US flag, were unveiled by NASA today, Friday July 17, 2009.

The remarkable footage was taken from CSIRO's Parkes Radio Observatory and the Honeysuckle Creek tracking station outside Canberra.

It completely transforms the blurry footage that was relayed by live television to an estimated 600 million people in 1969, giving the world a clear picture of the iconic moment in history.

The new footage is the result of a concerted three-year search by a core team of Australian and American [Apollo 11 Mission](#) aficionados for the original high quality, video recordings of the Moonwalk.

Engineers recorded these onto 1-inch magnetic data tapes at the three tracking stations involved - Honeysuckle Creek, Parkes and NASA's Goldstone station in California.

The tapes were later sent to NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre in Greenbelt, Maryland, and then on to the Washington National Records Center (WNRC) in Suitland, Maryland.

Sadly though, NASA reports that these original high quality video recordings of the event may be lost forever, as it is likely that these tapes were erased and reused.

On a positive note however, the search did uncover the best available television recordings of the moonwalk from which the digitally re-

mastered footage was sourced.

In addition, the CSIRO scientist who initiated the search, John Sarkissian, has raised the possibility that backup tapes of the mission recorded at Parkes might still exist.

Mr Sarkissian said his interest in the whereabouts of the original tapes was triggered in 1997 when he started researching the role the Parkes Observatory ('the Dish') had played in the Apollo 11 Mission's success.

"I realised very quickly that the data tapes contained video recordings that were superior to the footage broadcast 'live' to the world and which were the best currently available to the public," Mr Sarkissian said.

He wrote a report on his research which, after it was released and covered widely by the US and Australian media in 2006, led to NASA announcing an official search for the missing tapes.

He said he was then alerted by a letter, written in the early 1990's by the Dish's former Director John Bolton, to the existence of a set of backup video tapes of the mission which had been made at Parkes.

Subsequent talks with the engineer responsible for making those recordings confirmed the backup tapes' existence.

"I and my search team colleagues have spent the last few years looking for those tapes and, although we haven't found them yet, we are still hopeful particularly as there is no record or other evidence that they were destroyed or lost," Mr Sarkissian said.

"They could still be stored somewhere and, with a bit of luck, the publicity about the release of details of NASA's report on the official search for the tapes might jog someone's memory."

Source: CSIRO Australia

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