

Astronauts pack trash, surplus gear for ride home

September 7 2009, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



This image provided by NASA shows a portion of the International Space Station photographed by a space walking astronaut during the STS-128 mission's second session of extravehicular activity Thursday Sept. 3, 2009 as construction and maintenance continue on the station. The blackness of space and Earth's horizon provide the backdrop for the scene. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- The astronauts aboard the linked space shuttle and space station are nearly finished packing up a moving van for return to Earth in a few days.

The Italian-built van - essentially a giant cylinder - flew up aboard Discovery with seven tons of space station supplies and equipment. It will come back filled with a ton of trash, surplus gear and completed science experiments.

The astronauts will place the van back aboard Discovery on Monday night, just in time for Tuesday's shuttle undocking.

On Sunday, the 13 space fliers got the night off after a week of virtually nonstop work together. Astronaut Danny Olivas, who went out on all three spacewalks, was looking forward to doing nothing for a change. He said he wanted to gaze out the window and snap some pictures.

"All in all, it's been a very successful mission," Olivas said in a TV interview. "Everybody here is in good spirits, and we are ready to finish up here and come home."

Olivas led the outdoor effort to furnish the [international space station](#) with a fresh tank of ammonia coolant and some new antennas and electronic units.

He and a colleague also routed 60 feet of electrical cable for a new room, Tranquility, that's due to arrive early next year. But one of eight cable connectors would not hook up late Saturday night, no matter how hard the spacewalkers tried, and the power jack was left dangling there with an insulating sleeve for protection.

Astronauts on a future shuttle mission will take a crack at fixing the balky connector or rerouting the power for the Tranquility chamber. Tranquility will house life-support systems as well as a lookout tower or cupola, and serve as living quarters.

Earlier this year, Comedy Central's [Stephen Colbert](#) campaigned for naming rights to the room and even won NASA's online vote. But the space agency went with Tranquility in honor of this summer's 40th anniversary of the first manned moon landing. It gave the TV comedian's name to a new treadmill that was sent up aboard Discovery.

One of the returning spacemen, Timothy Kopra, has been on board the space station since mid-July. He said he'll miss the place, the people, the views, and the 16-daily sunrises and sunsets. But he's looking forward to seeing his wife and two children, "and getting back to life in general on the planet."

Discovery is due back at Kennedy Space Center on Thursday.

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Citation: Astronauts pack trash, surplus gear for ride home (2009, September 7) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-09-astronauts-trash-surplus-gear-home.html>

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