

Shuttle Atlantis arrives at space station

May 16 2010, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



In this image provided by NASA space shuttle Atlantis' cargo bay and its vertical stabilizer intersecting Earth's horizon was provided on Saturday May 15, 2010 by one of the six STS-132 crew members. A snagged cable forced Atlantis' astronauts to resort to a more inconvenient and less comprehensive method of inspecting their space shuttle Saturday. Docking with the International Space Station is scheduled for Sunday at 10:27 a.m. EDT. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- The shuttle Atlantis arrived at the International Space Station on Sunday amid a flurry of picture-taking intended to make up for a curtailed safety survey the day before.

Four of the six space station residents snapped hundreds of pictures as Atlantis made its final approach. The shuttle performed a slow backflip so all its surfaces could be photographed. An hour later, it docked flawlessly with the station, 220 miles above the South Pacific.

On Saturday, a snagged cable prevented the six shuttle [astronauts](#) from

properly inspecting their ship. NASA ordered up extra pictures and, in fact, doubled the usual number of space station photographers.

The astronauts may try to free the cable during a [spacewalk](#) this week.

"Thanks for the pictures. It's all about the pictures," shuttle pilot Dominic "Tony" Antonelli told the station crew.

"The perfect lighting, and you guys look marvelous," replied Japanese astronaut Soichi Noguchi, one of the photographers.

The photo shoot lasted just a few minutes against a breathtaking backdrop of the Portuguese coast, Spain, France and northern Italy.

Commander Kenneth Ham was struck by the space station's beauty as he guided Atlantis in. "You are brilliantly glowing. It's an absolutely stunning view," he said.

Noguchi's greeting to Atlantis was more to the point. "Yee-haw!" he shouted.

The six shuttle astronauts will spend a week at the orbiting science complex, installing a new Russian compartment and fresh batteries. Three spacewalks are planned, beginning Monday. If the cable repair is approved, it likely would be added to the second spacewalk on Wednesday.

A cable on Atlantis' inspection boom is caught in a camera. The problem prevented the astronauts from thoroughly checking the left wing and some other areas of the shuttle Saturday.

NASA managers said the astronauts can finish the inspection after they arrive at the space station.

Shuttle inspections became mandatory in orbit following the 2003 Columbia tragedy.

Flight controllers, meanwhile, said there was no threat from a piece of space junk that they've been monitoring for the past few days.

The unidentified debris is in an extreme egg-shaped orbit that takes it thousands of miles above the space station to just below it. The closest approach was to occur about an hour after docking, bringing the junk within an estimated six miles of the two spacecraft. Experts determined Saturday night there was no need for the station to move out of the way.

This is NASA's last planned flight for Atlantis. Only two more shuttle missions remain before the fleet is retired.

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