

NASA adds 13th day to Discovery's final flight

March 3 2011, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



In this frame grab made Thursday, March 3, 2011 from from NASA TV, space shuttle Discovery astronauts and mission specialists Nicole Stott, left, Michael Barratt, center, and pilot Eric Boe let the microphone float between answers as they participate in media interviews while taking a break aboard the International Space Station. With the major objectives of their joint mission behind them, Mission Control gave the station and shuttle crews the afternoon off, a day after the second and final spacewalk of Discovery's final journey. (AP Photo/NASA TV)

(AP) -- The 12 orbiting astronauts took care of a little maintenance work aboard the International Space Station on Thursday before a well deserved break on their twice extended mission.

With the major objectives of their joint mission behind them, the station and shuttle crews couldn't wait to gather around the big bay window to

take in the majestic views of Earth. Mission Control gave them the afternoon off, a day after the second and final spacewalk of Discovery's final journey.

The shuttle [astronauts](#) will get an extra day to savor the experience.

On Thursday, [NASA](#) managers added a 13th day to Discovery's mission, which already had been stretched earlier in the week to 12. When notified about "the extra extra day," shuttle commander Steven Lindsey called it great news. "We're excited," he said.

In a series of TV interviews earlier in the day, astronaut Alvin Drew said when he floated out on his first [spacewalk](#) this week, "I had to keep reminding myself that I had a job to do and not just take in this gorgeous scenery around me."

"You are part of the scene. You've gone through the looking glass," he said in a series of TV interviews.

Astronaut Nicole Stott said she and her crewmates have talked a lot about Discovery's final voyage. NASA's oldest shuttle will be retired once it returns to Earth next week and be sent to a museum.

Endeavour will make its farewell flight in April, and Atlantis will close out NASA's 30-year [shuttle program](#) this summer.

Stott noted that the word "bittersweet" is used quite a bit to describe this last flight of Discovery, which she called "a really, really high-performing spacecraft."

"I tend to think more 'bittersad,' " she told an interviewer.

She added: "It's just a part of history that I hope we hold on to and

appreciate and that we celebrate when we get home and are walking away from her on the runway for the last time."

Lindsey said the mission has gone "just absolutely spectacular."

The six shuttle and six station astronauts teamed up to install a new storage room on the orbiting lab, and hooked up an equipment platform with a spare radiator.

On Thursday morning, they fired Discovery's thrusters to steer the outpost into a slightly higher orbit. And later in the afternoon, they were going to get a special phone call - from President Barack Obama.

Discovery will remain at the space station until Monday, two days longer than originally planned. The extra time will be used to unload supplies and experiments from the storage unit.

Landing is now scheduled for Wednesday.

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