

NASA prepares for moon tourism

November 15 2011, By Dan Vergano

Pack your rockets. The newest national park may be on the moon.

While NASA isn't headed back there anytime soon, space tourists may flock to the [Apollo mission](#) lunar landing sites in the near future.

That's helped fuel a nascent effort to declare [moon landing](#) sites as historic preserves or national parks to make sure the sites are protected from disruption.

In part, it's a recognition of the one thing tourists love to bring home: souvenirs.

"Looting, that would be pretty bad," says archaeologist Beth O'Leary of New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. Looting is the bane of archaeological sites, and O'Leary has spearheaded efforts to protect the [moon](#) landing sites before tourists leave Earth. "I put landing people on the moon up there with creating fire as a technological achievement."

From 1969 to 1972, NASA placed six manned space missions on the moon. Each one landed in a different spot, but in each case American astronauts left behind artifacts. The first, Apollo 11, left things ranging from a "Camera, Lunar TV" to a "Urine Collection Assembly (Small)."

The space agency released guidelines this summer on protecting [lunar landing](#) sites and artifacts. They call for a 1,200-acre "no-fly" zone around the first landing site by Apollo 11 and the final one by [Apollo 17](#). Under those guidelines, tourists could only walk within 82 yards of the

Apollo 11 landing site where [Neil Armstrong](#) first took "one small step for man," on July 20, 1969.

What's the rush? NASA had started to get questions from the two dozen or more teams competing for the \$30 million [Google](#) Lunar X Prize for the "first privately funded teams to safely land a robot on the surface of the Moon."

That raised the prospect of private spaceships landing near the spot where [Buzz Aldrin](#) and Neil Armstrong first walked. Part of the prize involves driving a robot rover about a third of a mile on the moon. And who would want to see Armstrong's footprints obliterated by a robot track.

"This really is unprecedented," says NASA's Robert Kelso of the Johnson Space Center in Houston, who headed the guideline effort. "We went looking at NASA for guidelines on this (preservation effort), and we really didn't have anything."

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Citation: NASA prepares for moon tourism (2011, November 15) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-nasa-moon-tourism.html>

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