

The thirty-ninth anniversary of the last moonwalk

December 14 2011, By Amy Shira Teitel



Scientist-astronaut Harrison H. "Jack" Schmitt stands next to a huge, split lunar boulder during the third Apollo 17 extravehicular activity (EVA) at the Taurus-Littrow landing site. The Lunar Roving Vehicle (LRV), which transported Schmitt and Eugene A. Cernan to this extravehicular station from their Lunar Module (LM), is seen in the background. This image is a mosaic made from two pictures taken by Cernan. Image Credit: NASA/Eugene Cernan

On December 13, 1972, Apollo 17 Commander Eugene A. Cernan and Lunar Module Pilot (LMP) Harrison H. "Jack" Schmitt made the final lunar EVA or moonwalk of the final Apollo mission. Theirs was the longest stay on the Moon at just over three days and included over

twenty-two hours spent exploring the lunar surface during which they collected over 250 pounds of lunar samples.

To commemorate the thirty-ninth anniversary of this last EVA, NASA posted a picture of Schmitt on the lunar surface as its 'Image of the Day.'

Apollo 17 launched on a Saturn V rocket on December 7, 1972. Four days later on December 11, Cernan and Schmitt moved into the Lunar Module Challenger and descended to a touchdown in the Taurus-Littrow valley. Command Module Pilot Ron Evans, meanwhile, stayed in orbit aboard the Command Module America.



Cernan's Apollo 17 lunar suit is currently on display at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, just one of the 137 million Apollo-era artifacts in the museum's collection. Credit: National Air and Space Museum

The Taurus-Littrow valley was chosen as the best landing spot to take advantage of Apollo 17's capabilities. It was a "J mission," one designed for extended EVAs that would take the [astronauts](#) further from the LM than any previous missions using the Lunar Rover. It was also a geologically interesting area. Here, the astronauts would be able to reach and collect samples from the old lunar highlands as well as relatively young volcanic regions. For this latter goal, [Apollo 17](#)'s greatest tool was its LMP, Schmitt.

When NASA began looking for its first group of astronauts in 1959, candidates had to be affiliated with the military, trained engineers, and have logged at least 1,500 hours of flying time in jets. The same basic criteria were applied to the second and third group of astronauts selected in 1962 and 1963 respectively.

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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