

NASA's retired shuttle Endeavour heads west Monday (Update)

September 13 2012, by Marcia Dunn

(AP)—The baby of NASA's space shuttle fleet is about to leave home—for good.

At sunrise Monday, Endeavour will depart Kennedy Space Center for a museum in California, with a two-day stopover in Houston, home to Mission Control and the astronauts who flew aboard the replacement for the lost shuttle Challenger.

Endeavour is the second of NASA's three retired shuttles to head to a museum. The youngest shuttle will make the four-day trip to Los Angeles atop a modified jumbo jet, bound for the California Science Center. Discovery landed at the Smithsonian Institution's display hangar in Virginia last spring. Atlantis will remain at Kennedy.

After taking off from the former shuttle landing strip Monday morning, Endeavour and its carrier jet will fly low over Kennedy and the beaches of Cape Canaveral, then head west toward NASA points along the Gulf of Mexico. The pair will swoop over Stennis Space Center in Mississippi and Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, where the shuttle booster rockets were made.

Next stop: Ellington Field near NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston.

Endeavour will remain at Ellington until Wednesday morning so space center employees can see the shuttle up close. Houston had bid for a

shuttle; the loss still nags many there. NASA chose New York City as the winner for the shuttle prototype Enterprise, which was relinquished by the Smithsonian to make room for Discovery.

NASA's two other shuttles during the 30-year program, Challenger and Columbia, were destroyed during flight, with 14 astronauts altogether killed.

Endeavour was built to replace Challenger and made its flying debut in 1992, six years after the launch accident. It performed the next-to-last shuttle mission in May and June 2011.

During its 25 missions, Endeavour logged 299 days in space and circled Earth 4,671 times. Total off-the-planet mileage: 122.8 million miles (197.62 million kilometers).

After leaving Houston on Wednesday, Endeavour will stop for fuel at Biggs Army Airfield in El Paso, Texas, and then perform a low flyover of the White Sands Test Facility in New Mexico, which served for decades as an emergency shuttle landing site. Then it will head to NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base in California, another old shuttle touchdown venue.

On Thursday, Endeavour will fly to Northern California, home to Ames Research Center in Mountain View. NASA plans low-level flights over San Francisco, Sacramento and other major cities before heading to Los Angeles and a late-morning arrival at Los Angeles International Airport.

NASA was mum Thursday regarding the exact times of all these flyovers for security reasons. Officials warned that the weather needed to cooperate to allow for such a full and busy schedule.

The shuttle will make its final 12-mile (19.3 kilometer) journey from the

airport to the California Science Center, via city streets, on Oct. 12-13. It will go on public display beginning Oct. 30.

Atlantis' road trip—from a Kennedy Space Center hangar to the visitor complex—is scheduled for Nov. 2.

NASA retired the shuttle fleet last year under White House direction in order to focus more time and money on travel beyond Earth's orbit, first an asteroid and then Mars in the coming decades.

Private companies, meanwhile, are trying to pick up where NASA left off regarding the International Space Station. Until those businesses can provide spaceships for flying people, U.S. astronauts will need to rely on Russian rockets to get to the orbiting lab.

More information: NASA: www.nasa.gov
California Science Center: www.californiasciencecenter.org/

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