

Endeavour flies over Arizona on way to Calif. home (Update)

September 19 2012, by Paul Davenport



In this image provided by NASA the Space Shuttle Endeavour is ferried by NASA's Shuttle Carrier Aircraft (SCA) over the Kennedy Space Center in the early morning hours of Sept. 19, 2012 as it departs for California. Endeavour and the Shuttle Carrier Aircraft are in Houston after leaving Kennedy Space Center Wednesday. The ferry flight continues at dawn Thursday, heading to NASA Dryden, then on to Los Angeles Friday. This is the last flight for a space shuttle. (AP Photo/Robert Markowitz, NASA)

(AP)—Space shuttle Endeavour has flown over Tucson, Arizona, on its

trek west to retirement in a Los Angeles museum.

Endeavour, atop a modified jumbo jet, did a partial loop over the city to honor former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, before it continued its journey west.

Hundreds of people gathered on the grass mall at the University of Arizona campus to watch it pass.

The retired shuttle departed Houston earlier Thursday after a one-day stop at the home of NASA's Mission Control. It took off Wednesday from its old home in Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

It continues its journey to Los Angeles International Airport, where it's scheduled to land Friday.

This is the last flight for a space shuttle.



In this photo provided by the University of Texas, Space shuttle Endeavour sits atop the shuttle aircraft carrier, flies past the Tower at The University of Texas at Austin Thursday, Sept. 20, 2012. Endeavour is making a final trek across the country to the California Science Center in Los Angeles, where it will be permanently displayed. (AP Photo/Courtesy of Lara Eakins, The University of Texas at Austin)

Endeavour is en route to retirement in California, where it will be put on permanent display in a museum.

Along the way, the shuttle will pass low over several cities and places, including Tucson, the home of the last person to command an Endeavour mission, retired astronaut Mark Kelly, and his wife, Giffords.

The couple recently moved back to Tucson from Houston, where Giffords was recovering from serious injuries she suffered in a 2011 attack in which a gunman killed six people and wounded Giffords and 12 others.

Thursday's flyover, which Kelly requested, gives NASA a chance to honor Giffords' legacy as a longtime advocate for American human spaceflight, NASA spokeswoman Lisa Malone told The Associated Press in an email. She said no additional costs would be incurred by honoring Kelly's request.



Space shuttle Endeavour sits atop the shuttle aircraft carrier, passes by the Texas

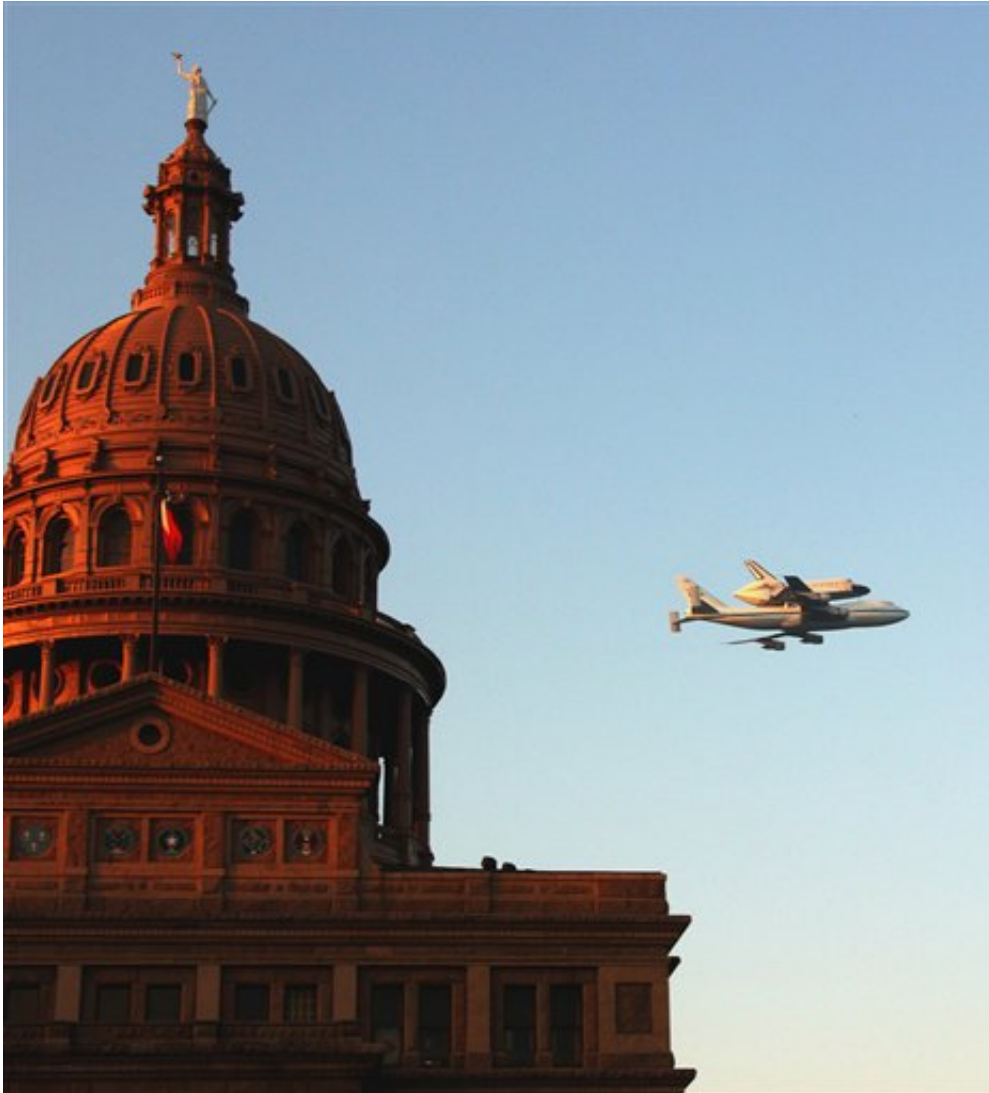
Capitol in Austin, Texas, Thursday, Sept. 20, 2012. Endeavour is making a final trek across the country to the California Science Center in Los Angeles, where it will be permanently displayed. (AP Photo/Statesman.com, Jay Godwin)

Hundreds of people gathered Wednesday to watch the shuttle land in Houston for an overnight stay, an exciting but bittersweet moment for many residents who felt spurned that Space City wasn't chosen as the final home for one of the five retired shuttles.

"I think that it's the worst thing that they can do, rotten all the way," said 84-year-old Mary Weiss, clinging to her walker just before Endeavour landed after flying low over Gulf Coast towns, New Orleans and then downtown Houston and its airports.

Space City, partly made famous by Tom Hanks when he uttered the line "Houston, we have a problem" in the movie "Apollo 13," has long tied its fortune to a mix of oil and NASA. Astronauts train in the humid, mosquito-ridden city, and many call it home years after they retire. The Johnson Space Center and an adjacent museum hug Galveston Bay.

Still, people came out in droves Wednesday, waving American flags and toting space shuttle toys, cameras and cellphones.



Space shuttle Endeavour sits atop the shuttle aircraft carrier flies over downtown Austin, Texas early Thursday, Sept. 20, 2012. Endeavour is making a final trek across the country to the California Science Center in Los Angeles, where it will be permanently displayed. (AP Photo/Marco Hanson)

Back-to-back delays in the ferry flight resulted in one day being cut from the Houston visit. After landing, the Endeavour rolled slowly in front of the cheering crowd. It circled and preened like a runway model, giving awed spectators an opportunity to take pictures from a variety of angles.

"I want to go on it," said 3-year-old Joshua Lee as he headed to the landing area with his mother and grandmother.

The shuttle took off after sunrise Thursday, riding piggyback on a jumbo jet. It stopped at Biggs Army Airfield in El Paso, Texas, before heading toward Tucson and then on to NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, California. After spending a night there, the shuttle will head to Los Angeles International Airport on Friday.

In mid-October, Endeavour will be transported down city streets to the California Science Center, its permanent home.



Space Shuttle Endeavour sits atop the shuttle aircraft carrier, flies over downtown Austin, Texas early Thursday, Sept. 20, 2012. Endeavour is making a final trek across the country to the California Science Center in Los Angeles, where it will be permanently displayed. (AP Photo/Marco Hanson)

NASA still plays a large role in Houston, and astronaut Clayton Anderson, who lived on the International Space Station from June to November 2007, encouraged people to focus on a new era of space exploration.

"The shuttles are a wonderful legacy, a huge part of Houston, but now it's time to look to the future," said Anderson, who lives in the Houston suburb of League City.

This is the last flight for a space shuttle. Atlantis will remain at Kennedy for display, and Discovery already is at the Smithsonian Institution, parked at a hangar in Virginia since April.

Endeavour—the replacement for the destroyed Challenger shuttle—made its debut in 1992 and flew 25 times before it was retired. It logged 123 million miles (198 million kilometers) in space and circled Earth nearly 4,700 times.

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Citation: Endeavour flies over Arizona on way to Calif. home (Update) (2012, September 19) retrieved 23 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-shuttle-endeavour-houston.html>

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