

Two Russians, one American land back on Earth from ISS

April 10 2017



A Soyuz MS-02 capsule brings Russian cosmonauts Sergey Ryzhikov and Andrey Borisenko and US astronaut Shane Kimbrough back home after a 173-day mission to the International Space Station

Two Russian cosmonauts and a US astronaut touched down safely in central Kazakhstan Monday following a 173-day mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS).

"Touchdown confirmed," said a commentator on NASA Television, describing it as a "textbook" landing.

NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough was accompanied by Russian space agency cosmonauts Sergei Ryzhikov and Andrei Borisenko in the earthbound Soyuz MS-02.

Footage from the landing site showed the trio grinning in the spring sunlight, shaking hands with the recovery team and speaking on mobile telephones.

The landing took place in bright conditions at 1120 GMT (5:20pm) southeast of the Kazakh steppe town of Dzhezkazgan.

Of the trio that blasted off towards the ISS together in October only Ryzhikov is completing a first mission.

Former Gulf War helicopter pilot Kimbrough spent close to 16 days on the US space shuttle Endeavour in 2008 while Borisenko was on his second ISS mission following a 164-day stint in 2011.

"Goodnight Earth from @Space_Station, headed back your way tomorrow!" Kimbrough wrote in his last tweet prior to the undocking from the ISS.

Kimbrough's return to Earth saw 57-year-old US astronaut Peggy Whitson take charge of the ISS to become the first woman to command

the orbiting outpost on two separate occasions.

On April 24, Whitson will break the record for cumulative days spent in space by any US astronaut, eclipsing previous holder Jeff Williams' total of 534 days.

The veteran, who now heads a crew that includes Russian Oleg Novitsky and Frenchman Thomas Pesquet, joked Kimbrough had left "big socks to fill" during the handover.

Whitson, Novitsky and Pesquet are set to be joined by NASA's Jack Fischer and Fyodor Yurchikhin of Roscosmos, who are due to blast off on April 20 from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

The ISS will remain below its full capacity of six in the near future after Russia decided to cut its contribution to the crew from three to two cosmonauts in a cost-saving measure.

Roscosmos said last year the measure—which will help Moscow save funds on resupply missions—is likely to be in place until a new module arrives to boost the Russian section of the orbital lab at the end of 2017 or in early 2018.

The ISS space laboratory has been orbiting Earth at about 28,000 kilometres (17,000 miles) per hour since 1998.

Space travel has been one of the few areas of cooperation between Russia and the West that has not been badly affected by the crisis in Ukraine.

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