

'Awesomesauce,' proclaims US astronaut on historic spacewalk

May 12 2017

So what is it like to float out into the vacuum of space?

"Ginormous fondue pot, bubbling over with piping hot awesomesauce," said American astronaut Jack Fischer as he embarked on his first-ever spacewalk outside the International Space Station on Friday.

The comments by Fischer, 43, were carried live on NASA television as he and his colleague Peggy Whitson, 57, made the 200th spacewalk to build and maintain the orbiting outpost.

The spacewalk was briefly delayed after NASA discovered a "small leak of water" in equipment that helps power their spacesuits.

The glitch affected equipment known as the servicing and cooling umbilical (SCU), which supplies power and oxygen to the spacesuits, discovered as the astronauts were seated in the airlock inside the space station.

"This is the connection point of the component in the airlock itself that provides power, oxygen, cooling water and communications lines to the two crew members while they are in the process of biding their time, pre-breathing pure oxygen, in the airlock itself," NASA commentator Rob Navias said.

But the spacewalk was allowed to go ahead because according to NASA procedures, the astronauts can share one functioning SCU.

'Abbreviated' spacewalk

Spacewalks usually last about six-and-a-half hours, but Friday's was "abbreviated" due to the late start and lasted four hours and 13 minutes, Navias said.

The pair completed all the major work scheduled for the day, with the exception of a couple of minor tasks, he said.

The main job was to replace what is known as the ExPRESS Carrier Avionics, or ExPCA, box.

It weighs 200 pounds (91 kilograms) on Earth and routes data and commands to experiments inside the space station, Navias said.

"It has been exhibiting some thermal issues of late, so it is being replaced," he said.

Fischer's enthusiasm for the beauty of the Earth beneath him was apparent throughout the spacewalk.

"Ooh, it's the Bahamas!" he fawned at one point.

"Oh, they are my favorite. Wow, they're so blue," added the rookie spacewalker, who goes by the nickname "2Fish."

Whitson, who was making the ninth spacewalk of her career, could often be heard chuckling at Fischer's exclamations.

She holds the record for most spacewalks by a woman, and ranks fifth for the most hours spent in space by an astronaut, with 57 hours and 35 minutes.

As the spacewalk concluded, Whitson said it was "amazing" to have completed the station's 200th spacewalk.

"It is a huge honor to work with all of you."

Spacewalk history

The first piece of the International Space Station—a Russian module—was launched in 1998, and the first spacewalk ever conducted at the station took place in December that year.

Today, the \$100 billion orbiting lab is roughly the size of a football field and a symbol of global cooperation among the 15 nations that have helped build and operate it.

The station orbits the Earth at a height of about 250 miles (400 kilometers), circling the planet every 90 minutes at a speed of about 17,500 miles (28,000 kilometers) per hour.

NASA has experienced a series of problems with water leaking inside the astronauts' helmets, most notably in 2013, when water began filling Italian Luca Parmitano's headpiece, forcing him to cut short his spacewalk and make an emergency re-entry into the space lab.

NASA's bulky white spacesuits are aging, and the same models have been in use for four decades.

Despite the glitch that delayed the start of today's spacewalk, Navias said the suits performed "flawlessly" during the outing.

Citation: 'Awesomesauce,' proclaims US astronaut on historic spacewalk (2017, May 12)
retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-05-awesomesauce-proclaims-astronaut-historic-spacewalk.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.