

International Space Station's 'one year crew' returns to Earth

March 2 2016, by Kirill Kudryavtsev



US astronaut Scott Kelly broke the record for the longest single stay in space by a US astronaut after 340 days on the International Space Station

US astronaut Scott Kelly and Russian cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko returned to Earth Wednesday after spending almost a year in space in a ground-breaking experiment foreshadowing a potential manned mission to Mars.

The 340-day mission saw Kelly break the record for the longest single stay in [space](#) by a US astronaut, while Kornienko is now fifth on the list for lengthiest mission by a Russian cosmonaut.

"We have landing," Russian Mission Control confirmed after the trio touched down southeast of the settlement of Dzhezkazgan in central Kazakhstan at around 0430 GMT.

After returning from his lengthy stint in space Kelly was clearly in high spirits as he was lowered to the ground by burly Russian rescue workers at the landing site.

"The air out here feels great. I've no idea why you guys are so bundled up," NASA TV reported him as saying as he sat upright in a chair on the steppe in temperatures just below zero.

Kelly and Kornienko returned with Russia's Sergei Volkov, who was stationed at the ISS for over five months and was met upon landing by his father, retired cosmonaut Aleksandr Volkov.

The "one-year crew" mission—which began on March 27 last year—was the longest by any astronauts aboard the ISS and seen as a vital chance to measure the effects of a prolonged period in space on the human body.

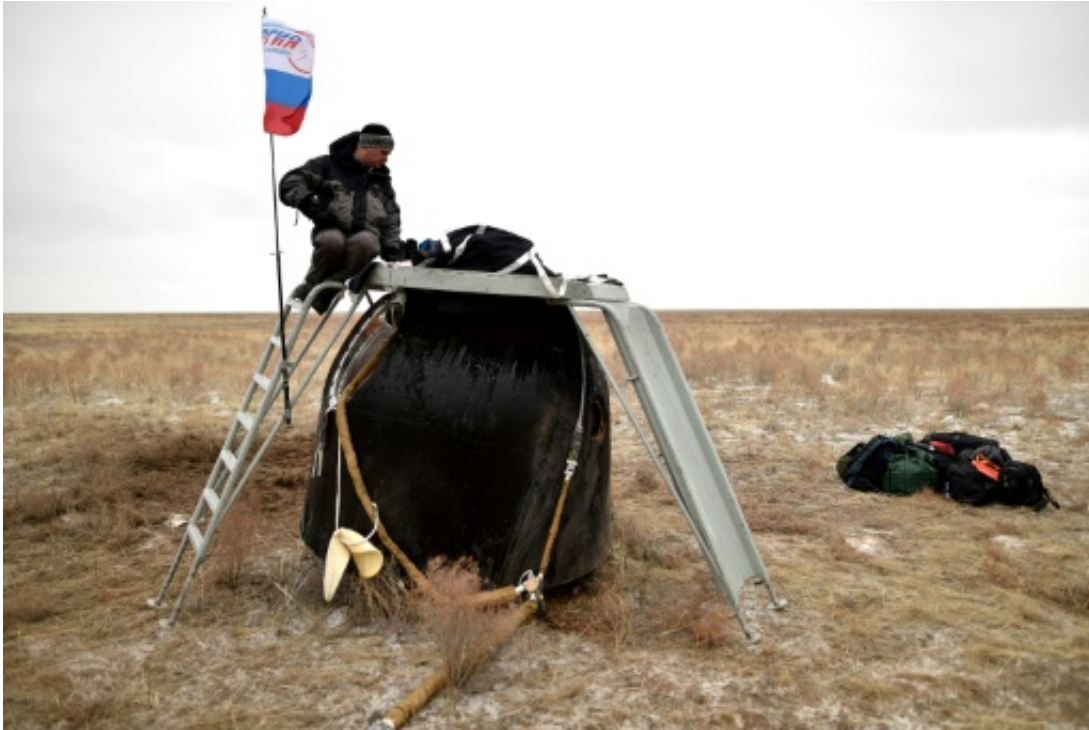


Russian cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko is now fifth on the list for lengthiest mission by a Russian cosmonaut after spending 340 days on the International Space Station

They have been subjected to a battery of tests and other experiments in preparation for a future manned mission to Mars and beyond.

Weightlessness reduces muscle mass and bone density and is believed to diminish eyesight by increasing cerebrospinal fluid around the optic nerve.

Kelly, 52, was also part of an experiment comparing his development and changes in space with his identical twin brother—Mark—back on Earth.



A search and rescue team secures the Soyuz TMA-18M space capsule carrying International Space Station crew US astronaut Scott Kelly and Russian cosmonauts Mikhail Kornienko and Sergei Volkov

Gorilla in space

In his year aboard the space station Kelly has been an avid Internet poster, capturing stunning views on his Instagram page and tweeting regularly to nearly a million followers while travelling some 143 million miles (230 million kilometres).

In one particularly eye-catching stunt the bald-headed astronaut posted a short video of himself dressed up in a gorilla suit and floating through the ISS in pursuit of a colleague.

"Needed a little humour to lighten up a year in space," he wrote on

Twitter on February 23, when he posted the video.

One image Kelly tweeted captured the economic divide between North and South Korea as visible from space, with the South aglow with electric lights and the North cast in a blanket of darkness.

Another impressive shot was one of the Milky Way which Kelly described as "old, dusty, gassy and warped. But beautiful."

"Spaceflight is the biggest team sport there is, and it's incredibly important that we all work together to make what is seemingly impossible possible," Kelly said when handing over command of the ISS to fellow NASA astronaut Tim Kopra on Monday.

Kelly, Kornienko and Volkov leave behind Kopra, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko and the European Space Agency's British astronaut Tim Peake.

NASA's Jeff Williams and Roscosmos' Oleg Skriprochka and Alexey Ovchinin, will join them following a launch from Baikonur later this month.

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