

Astronaut and moonwalker Alan Bean dies at 86

26 May 2018, by Jocelyn Gecker



In this July 15, 2009 file photo, Apollo 12 astronaut Alan Bean walks through the largest exhibition of his artwork to date, inspired by his experience walking on the moon, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first Apollo moon landing, in Washington. Bean, the Apollo and Skylab astronaut, fourth human to walk on the moon and an accomplished artist, has died. Bean, 86, died on Saturday, May 26, 2018 at Houston Methodist Hospital in Houston. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin, File)

Former Apollo 12 astronaut Alan Bean, who was the fourth man to walk on the moon and later turned to painting to chronicle the moon landings on canvas, has died. He was 86.

Bean was the lunar module pilot for the second moon landing mission in November 1969. He spent 31 hours on the moon during two moonwalks, deploying surface experiments with commander Charles Conrad and collecting 75 pounds (34 kilograms) of rocks and lunar soil for study back on Earth, according to a statement from NASA and Bean's family that announced his death.

Bean died Saturday in Houston, Texas, following a short illness, the statement said.

"As all great explorers are, Alan was a boundary pusher," NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said in a statement that credited Bean with being part of 11 world records in the areas of space and aeronautics. "We will remember him fondly as the great explorer who reached out to embrace the universe."

With Bean's passing, only four of 12 Apollo moonwalkers are still alive—Buzz Aldrin, Dave Scott, Charlie Duke and Harrison Schmitt.

Schmitt, the lunar module pilot for Apollo 17, was one of many astronauts who mourned Bean's death and paid tribute Saturday to his accomplishments that blazed trails for future space exploration.

"His enthusiasm about space and art never waned. Alan Bean is one of the great renaissance men of his generation—engineer, fighter pilot, astronaut and artist," Schmitt said in a statement, adding that the wide array of lunar samples Bean helped collect from the moon was "a scientific gift that keeps on giving today and in the future."

In 1998 NASA oral history, Bean recalled his excitement at preparing to fly to the moon.



After Apollo, Bean commanded the second crewed flight to the United States' first space station, Skylab, in 1973. On that mission, he orbited the Earth for 59 days and traveled 24.4 million miles, setting a world record at the time.

Born March 15, 1932, in Wheeler, Texas, Bean received a Bachelor of Science degree in aeronautical engineering from the University of Texas in 1955. He attended the Navy Test Pilot School and was one of 14 trainees selected by NASA for its third group of astronauts in October 1963.

"I'd always wanted to be a pilot, ever since I could remember," Bean said in the 1998 NASA oral history. "I think a lot of it just had to do with it looked exciting. It looked like brave people did that. I wanted to be brave, even though I wasn't brave at the time. I thought maybe I could learn to be, so that appealed to me."

Bean retired from NASA in 1981 and devoted much of his time to creating an artistic record of space exploration.

His Apollo-themed paintings feature canvases textured with lunar boot prints and embedded with small pieces of his moon dust-stained mission patches.

In this Sept. 8, 1969 file photo, Apollo 12 moon mission crewmen pose in front of their Saturn 5 space vehicle as the rocket was rolled out of the VAB at Cape Kennedy Sept. 8, 1969 toward launch pad at complex 39. From left are Lunar Module Pilot Alan Bean; Command Module Pilot Richard Gordon and Commander Charles Conrad. Bean, the Apollo and Skylab astronaut, fourth human to walk on the moon and an accomplished artist, has died. Bean, 86, died on Saturday, May 26, 2018 at Houston Methodist Hospital in Houston. (AP Photo/Jim Bourdier, File)

"Alan Bean was the most extraordinary person I ever met," astronaut Mike Massimino, who flew on two space shuttle missions to service the Hubble Space Telescope, said in a statement. "He was a one-of-a-kind combination of technical achievement as an astronaut and artistic achievement as a painter."

Many fellow space explorers posted tributes to Bean on Twitter.

"When you're getting ready to go to the moon, every day's like Christmas and your birthday rolled into one. I mean, can you think of anything better?" Bean said.



"Alan was the strongest and kindest man I ever knew," she said. "He was the love of my life and I miss him dearly."

He is survived by his wife, a sister and two children from a prior marriage, a daughter Amy Sue and son, Clay.

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In this Oct. 1, 2008, file photo, Alan Bean, the fourth man to walk on the moon, is shown during a preview of his work at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum in Austin, Texas. Bean, the Apollo and Skylab astronaut, fourth human to walk on the moon and an accomplished artist, has died. Bean, 86, died on Saturday, May 26, 2018 at Houston Methodist Hospital in Houston. His death followed his suddenly falling ill while on travel in Fort Wayne, Indiana two weeks before. (AP Photo/Harry Cabluck, File)

Retired U.S. astronaut Scott Kelly said the world had not only lost "a spaceflight pioneer ... but also an exceptional artist that brought his experience back to Earth to share with the world." Kelly added: "Fair winds and following seas, Captain."

U.S. astronaut Karen Nyberg called Bean a kind, gracious and humble man and a true role model.

"As a girl who grew up with passions for spaceflight and art, Alan Bean was my hero," she wrote. "I feel fortunate to have met him."

Retired astronaut Clayton Anderson tweeted "#RIP Alan Bean. Thank you for letting me stand upon your shoulders."

Bean's wife of 40 years, Leslie Bean, said in a statement that Bean died peacefully at Houston Methodist Memorial Hospital surrounded by those who loved him.

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