



# What was the moon landing?

KS2

KS3

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On 20 July 1969, Neil Armstrong climbed down a ladder from a spacecraft and placed his left boot on the surface of the moon. "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," he said, slightly fluffing the line (he meant to say "one small step for \*a\* man"). About 600 million people watched on television around the world — roughly a fifth of humanity at the time. It remains one of the most extraordinary things humans have ever done.

## Why did it happen?

The moon landing was the culmination of the **Space Race** — the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to dominate space. The Soviets had beaten the Americans to almost every milestone: first satellite in orbit (Sputnik, 1957), first human in space (Yuri Gagarin, 1961). Embarrassed and alarmed, President Kennedy responded in 1961 by declaring that the US would land a man on the moon by the end of the decade.

At the time, NASA had about 15 minutes of total human spaceflight experience. The goal Kennedy set was breathtakingly ambitious — many engineers thought it was impossible.

Imagine a school that has just learned to ride bikes being told it must win the Tour de France within eight years. That's roughly the challenge NASA faced. They achieved it through extraordinary engineering, enormous government funding (about 4% of the US national budget at its peak), and a workforce of over 400,000 people — scientists, engineers, and machinists working on the same colossal goal.

## Apollo 11

The mission that achieved it was **Apollo 11**, launched on 16 July 1969 with three astronauts: Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins. Collins stayed in orbit around the moon while Armstrong and Aldrin descended to the surface in the lunar module, named *Eagle*. The landing site was the Sea of Tranquility — a vast, flat plain chosen because it was safe to land on.

Armstrong and Aldrin spent about two and a half hours on the surface, collecting rock samples, taking photographs, and planting an American flag. They left a plaque reading: "We came in peace for all mankind."

## **Did it really happen?**

Yes, absolutely. The conspiracy theory that the landing was faked in a film studio doesn't hold up to any scrutiny. There are 382 kilograms of moon rocks that geologists have studied for decades, confirmed as unlike anything on Earth. The Soviet Union — who had every reason to expose a hoax — tracked the mission independently and never disputed it. Retroreflectors left on the moon by the astronauts can still be hit by lasers fired from Earth today. The evidence is overwhelming.

## **What happened next**

Five more Apollo missions landed on the moon after Apollo 11, the last in 1972. No human has returned since. In recent years, NASA's Artemis programme has been working toward a return, with plans to eventually establish a long-term presence — and to land the first woman on the moon's surface.