

Neil Armstrong

Neil Alden Armstrong (an American astronaut working for NASA) is best known for becoming the first man to walk on the Moon in July 1969.

His Early Life

Born on 5th August 1930 in the state of Ohio, USA, Neil was the eldest of three children to Stephen Koenig Armstrong and Viola Louise. He developed an interest in flying at a young age when his father took him to the National Air Races as a toddler. At the age of six, Neil flew for the first time with his father. As a teenager, Neil had a part-time job and used the money he earned to pay for flying lessons. He earned his student pilot certificate on his 16th birthday and flew solo soon after – all before he had a licence to drive a car!

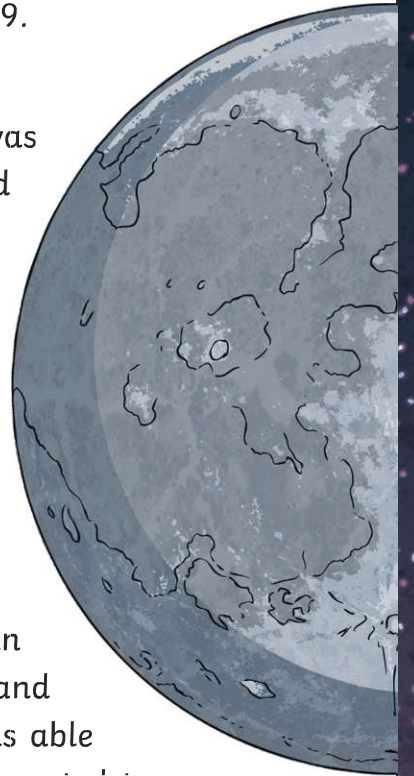
At the age of 17, Neil attended university to study **aeronautical engineering** and then went on to join the US Navy as an aviator. During his career, Neil flew more than 200 aircraft and was renowned for being calm and resilient, meaning he was able to fly in difficult situations. In September 1962, Neil was accepted to the **NASA** Astronaut Corps, which would eventually lead to the exciting task of landing on the Moon.

The Moon Landing

After carrying out much training and many trial missions, the day had arrived. On 16th July 1969 at 1:32 p.m., the powerful Saturn V rocket left the launch pad and carried Neil Armstrong and his crew mates, Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin and Michael Collins, into space for the Apollo 11 mission. The journey to the Moon took over three days to complete. During the journey, the astronauts were able to contact Earth.

Did You Know...?

None of the Apollo 11 crew suffered from space sickness as some members of previous crews had. Neil was especially glad about this as he had been prone to travel sickness as a child.



Once they reached the Moon's orbit, Michael remained in the rocket completing science experiments and taking photographs while Neil and Buzz entered the **lunar module** (nicknamed The Eagle) to descend to the Moon's surface. The descent did not go smoothly; when Neil noticed they were heading to an unsafe landing area, he took manual control of The Eagle and this took longer than expected. This meant that the module was running low on fuel by the time they landed on the surface of the Moon. At this point, Neil uttered the words, "**Tranquillity Base** here. The Eagle has landed."

Did You Know...?

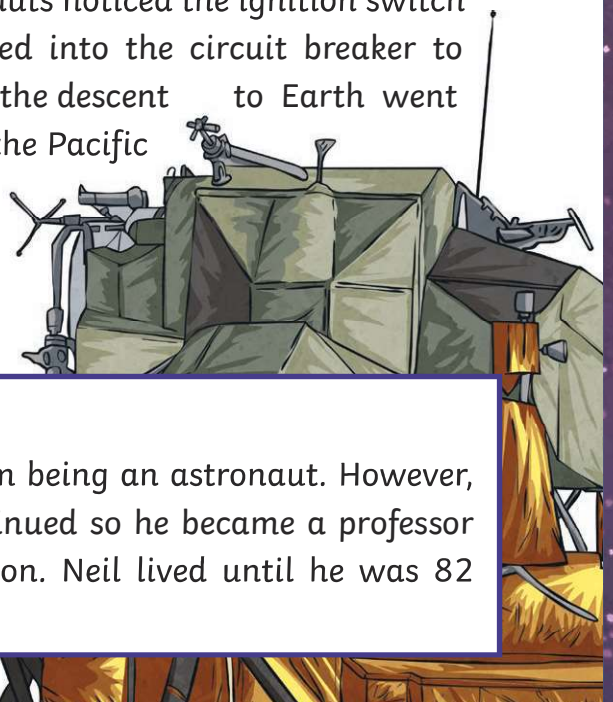
The Moon landing was shown on television around the world and viewed by an estimated 600 million people.

Finally, following rest, checks and preparation, the astronauts opened the hatch on 20th July 1969 and Neil made his way down the ladder first. As Neil set his left foot on the surface of the Moon, he was heard saying the now famous words, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Buzz joined Neil after around 19 minutes and they completed various missions, including planting the flag of the United States. The pair spent two and a half hours on the Moon; this time was limited because NASA were unsure how long the spacesuits would cope with the high temperatures (up to 100 degrees Celsius) on the Moon.

When it was time to leave the Moon, the astronauts noticed the ignition switch was broken so they used part of a pen pushed into the circuit breaker to activate the launch sequence. The remainder of the descent to Earth went smoothly and the astronauts arrived home, in the Pacific Ocean, on 24th July 1969. Following 18 days in quarantine in case of infection, they were released to tour the country.

Later Life

Soon after returning home, Neil retired from being an astronaut. However, his enthusiasm for space and aircraft continued so he became a professor in order to share his knowledge and passion. Neil lived until he was 82 years old.



Glossary

aeronautical engineering: The primary field of engineering concerned with the development of aircraft and spacecraft.

lunar module: A small craft used for travelling between the Moon's surface and an orbiting spacecraft.

NASA: Abbreviation of National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

quarantine: Isolation in case of infection.

Tranquillity Base: The site on the Moon where humans landed and walked for the first time.

