

# Critical moment



**JULY 20, 1969**  
"One giant leap for mankind."

**T**HE MOST DISTANT LEG OF NASA'S APOLLO 11 mission saw the lunar module, or LEM, detach from the orbiting space capsule and head to the Moon's surface. Astronaut Neil Armstrong could see the landing target, in a vast area named the Sea of Tranquility, was strewn with boulders. Taking control manually, he glided over the surface in search of smoother terrain, with fuel perilously low. Too far and he and his partner Buzz Aldrin would have to abort the mission. But a rocky landing that damaged the LEM could have left them to die on the surface.

The pair also carried the hopes and fortunes of an entire planet. For a moment, suspended over the surface of that distant world, the two men represented the entire species. Earth held its breath.

A gentle touchdown, with less than 30 seconds of fuel remaining, left the LEM safe in a flat plain. Seven hours later, an estimated 600 million watched on TV as Mr. Armstrong stepped onto the surface with the instantly famous pronouncement, "That was one

**Neil Armstrong, the first person to set foot on the Moon, is reflected in the visor of the second, Buzz Aldrin, as he snapped this photo. The two spent a total of 22 hours on the Moon while the third astronaut on the US NASA mission, Michael Collins, waited for them in the Apollo 11 Command Module in lunar orbit.**

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small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Along with NASA's breathtaking photos of the Earth, the event permanently altered our view of our planet, our species and our place in the universe.

Today, 50 years later, only 12 men, all NASA astronauts, have walked on the Moon. No manned lunar mission has been launched since 1972. But that pause appears to be coming to an end. The US, Japan, India, Russia, Germany and the UK have all sent probes to the Moon. China recently made history by putting a rover on the far side of the Moon—a major milestone. Both the US and China have expressed interest in restarting manned missions.

And this time, humanity isn't waiting. Israeli non-profit SpaceIL this year became the first private business to send its own unmanned probe, which made it to the Moon, though it crashed on the surface. Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin are both eyeing lunar tourism in the next decade. The next person to walk on the Moon could be anyone. ♦