

Reach for the stars

SPACE EXPLORATION

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Promotions and Publications

Celestial bodies and the infinity of space around the planet Earth have fascinated mankind from the earliest times. In the previous century it became possible for man to travel into the blue yonder and come closer to unravelling the mysteries of the cosmos. This year sees the 25th anniversary of the first space shuttle flight on 12 April 1981 when shuttle Columbia lifted off. This historic event places renewed emphasis on the efforts of man to break through the atmosphere of the earth on journeys of discovery.

Those who cannot blast off into space can share in the accounts of researchers and the brave explorers who venture into the unknown through mediums such as books and film.

The Central Film and Video collection offers a wide range of titles featuring space exploration and information about our universe. A selection of those titles are highlighted here.

The complete cosmos. Episodes 11-15, Blast off! / producer and director, Martyn Ives.

This title forms part of *The complete cosmos*, a series of twenty-five ten-minute shorts packaged together and spread over

five videotapes. Together they attempt to present a complete overview of our current state of knowledge of the universe, or at least provide a pretty thorough introduction.

Starting with the sun, they work outwards and also cover Mercury, Venus, earth and the moon. In each case they discuss aspects of these heavenly bodies' origins and physical characteristics, coming up with many curious facts that I do not think are generally

known, like the fact that Mercury has double sunrises. They make use of sophisticated animation and computer techniques, as well as archival documentary footage. There is no emphasis at all on the human element and it is all purely factual and educational, but at the same time it is detailed and comprehensive, and as it comes in ten-minute segments, schools would find it extremely useful.

More casual viewers would also enjoy it, for though it lacks artistic flair, the contents are fascinating. The production company, York Films, has long specialised in heavenly phenomena and can be trusted to produce worthwhile material.

Destination: Mars / producer and director, Andrew Liebman.

It is estimated that early in the 21st century, it will be possible to send a manned space mission to the planet Mars, some 250 million miles from Earth. Most of the technology required already exists and stunning breakthroughs in recent years have made it economically feasible. This programme from the Discovery Channel takes us on a simulated flight to the Red Planet, a journey that will take six months. While depicting an international crew as they experience life on board, it explores the training programmes and technologies currently being developed, from the production of fuel for the return voyage on Mars itself and the establishment of a space age habitat, to the creation of artificial gravity and the selection of the crew.

Drawing upon the experiences of both National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Russian space missions, it includes interviews with members of what is referred to as the Mars Underground, scientific enthusiasts totally committed to colonising Mars and, eventually, make it into a living planet. It takes us into the realms of science fiction, but it is a very comprehensive survey that considers a great many issues, except the morality of it all. It makes for very interesting viewing.



Destination space / producer, John Rubin.

The first moon landing, on 20 July 1969, captured the imagination of the world and for some time afterwards, subsequent space missions continued to fascinate us. However, eventually interest began to wane and recent shuttle disasters have begun to cast doubt on the entire enterprise. This programme from the National Geographic Society sets out to reignite the early enthusiasm and does so by focusing on a number of specific issues, some of which feature more prominently than others. One of them is the experiences of NASA astronaut Michael Foale on board the ageing Mir Space Station in 1997, who joined two Russian astronauts for a period of four months.

It also travels to French Guiana, where Arianespace operates the world's most successful commercial satellite-launching programme, and to a sea platform situated some 1400 miles south of Hawaii, from where a rival company hopes to launch a satellite. It speculates on the future of space travel, notably an idea to use laser sails to propel space craft to other worlds, and some new designs that could revolutionise space technology. It ends with high school students being challenged to come up with their own ideas for designing a water rocket that will carry an egg into the air and back to the ground without breaking it.

Dark side of the moon / director, William Karel.

At the time of the Apollo 11 moon landing, there was some speculation concerning the veracity of the entire enterprise. With American prestige on the line, failure was just not an option and this film raises an intriguing issue. It argues that President Nixon authorised the making of a fake 'moon walk', which would be transmitted throughout the world if the real thing did not come off. It was made on the set of Stanley Kubrick's **2001: a space odyssey** and we are shown some surviving footage of the resultant film. This documentary investigates the matter further,

interviewing some of the people involved and linking up various strands. It is a fascinating story, which blends facts, fiction and hypothesis in a way that allows one to suspend one's disbelief for a surprisingly long period of time and illustrates how the progress of technology has made it possible to manipulate images without it being too obvious. It is one of the cleverest films I have seen for some time and an excellent example of the manipulative power of the medium.

From the earth to the moon / producers, Brian Gazar, Ron Howard and Michael Bostick.

A dramatisation of the NASA lunar programme, from the first attempts at space flight up to the last voyage to the moon, that of Apollo 17. It was the most widely talked about mini-series of 1998, winning both the Golden Globe and the Broadcast Film Critics Association Award (BFCA) for the Best Mini-Series or Motion Picture made for TV, as well as numerous Emmy awards and nominations. The directors of individual episodes included the likes of Tom Hanks, Sally Fields, Gary Fleder and Jon Turteltaub. Originally transmitted in twelve parts, it has been specially packaged for video release.

Houston, we've got a problem / producer, Don Wiseman.

Unique footage charts the near disaster that befell Apollo 13, stranded 200,000 miles out in space, between the earth and the moon. Ground and flight crews disclose how cooperative ingenuity saved the astronauts' lives.

More titles

Apollo 13

Cold War. Volume 4.

Conquest. Part I, Tranquility Base.

Conquest. Part II, No frontier.

Conquest. Part III, The phoenix will rise.

For all mankind.

From Apollo to the stars.

The other side of the moon.

Space: the frontiers and beyond.

The material available on this interesting topic could send any librarian into orbit. Create an awareness of this material by compiling displays and posters. This topic could also be explored for holiday activities in libraries such as star gazing sessions, picnics under the stars, learning about constellations, finding one's way with the stars...the sky's the limit. Promote these titles by screening a video to conclude the activity. Forget about gravity and inspire the members of your community to reach for the stars!

Note: Reviews by Freddy Ogterop, Film/Video/DVD Selector of the Western Cape Provincial Library Service.

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