

Spacesuits



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The goal of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth required the development of three things: spacecraft, launch vehicles, and protective clothing. Spacesuits: Within the Collections of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum takes the reader through the development of the last category, the spacesuits used during this venture. Highlighting the pressure suits created during the years leading up to the lunar missions and beyond, this book features dramatic photographs of the Smithsonian's collection, as well as never-before-published historical images of spacesuit development and testing—range-of-motion studies, for example, in which researchers wore spacesuits while playing baseball and football. The book also includes a group of advanced spacesuits, which, though never used on a mission, are in many respects the most exciting suits ever created. One suit glove has steel fingernails and sharkskin pads, in an attempt to harness the abilities of the human hand.

Spacesuits are surprisingly fragile; they are made for a short lifespan in the most extreme of conditions, and long-term survival is not part of their design process. The final chapter touches briefly on the current conditions of historic suits, how they have held up over time, the reasons for their deterioration, and the rewards and difficulties associated with caring for and preserving these very complex and iconic artifacts. From the first spacesuit designs of the 1930s through those worn on the landmark Apollo-Soyuz program of 1975, Spacesuits provides a behind-the-scenes look at the history of these remarkable creations, including some that have never before been publicly displayed.

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