

## Moon Rock Now on Permanent Display at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum

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*Lovell holds the Ambassador of Exploration Award. Image Credit: NASA/Paul Aiers*

**LEXINGTON PARK, Md.** - When the doors of the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum open at 10 am Friday morning, visitors will be able to stand within inches of the Moon, or at least a small piece of it. As part of the "Naval Aviation in Space" exhibit currently in final development, the lunar sample, or "Moon Rock" is now on display at the museum.

The lunar sample is on permanent loan from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to the museum as part of the Ambassador of Exploration program. In 2009, NASA gave each of the pioneer astronauts, those from Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo, or their surviving relatives, the Ambassador of Exploration award on the condition it be housed in the institution of their choosing. Captain James "Jim" Lovell, most famous for his role as commander of the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission, chose the Pax Museum to be the home for his award. This was in recognition of his time as a student at the U. S. Naval Test Pilot School and Strike Aircraft Test (now VX-23) at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station.

*Lovell's Gemini XII heat shield, Apollo XIII patch, and lunar sample now on display at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum. Image Credit: PRNAM/Dan Bramos*

Captain Lovell, who traveled into space on four separate missions including Gemini 7, Gemini 12, Apollo 8 and Apollo 13, is a lifetime member of the museum who now resides in Illinois. He has been "an active participant in the development of this new display, having reviewed and approved every text panel and the overall layout", according to museum volunteer Pete Butt, the Exhibits Development Team Lead. Mr. Butt consulted with Captain Lovell many times and was awed to be talking to an American hero and icon, but also noted, "He actually is just a very normal guy who was out puttering in his garage when I first called."

Alongside the moon rock in the secure case is a piece of the ablated heat shield from the Gemini XII capsule and an Apollo 13 patch flown on the mission, both also donated by Lovell.

The lunar sample and other items are part of the new 'Naval Aviation in Space' exhibit developed to tell the story of the contributions of the U.S. Navy and NAS Patuxent River, in particular, towards furthering the United States' goals to explore space. It also serves to celebrate the crowning achievement of a unified national goal of traveling safely to the moon and returning to earth. Other items currently on display in the exhibit are space-flown artifacts from astronauts that have flown on the shuttle and International Space Station, a Mark-4 high pressure suit and a one-tenth scale Space Shuttle Discovery, signed by many astronauts that spent time stationed at Pax River. In the near future, the museum plans to unveil a twelve by twenty-two foot mural saved from the old base Officer's Club, which lends the name to the overall exhibit.

The Patuxent River Naval Air Museum in Lexington Park, Maryland currently has the Test & Evaluation Hall and flightline open on Fridays and Saturdays from 10am to 5pm and Sundays noon to 5pm. During the reduced hours, the museum is offering a special admission rates and asks that all guests comply with posted Center for Disease Control COVID-19 guidelines.

For more information, please visit the website at [www.paxmuseum.org](http://www.paxmuseum.org) or follow the museum on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)

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