

NASA refurbishes video copies of moon landing

By SETH BORENSTEIN (AP) – 3 days ago

WASHINGTON — With the help of Hollywood, those historic, grainy images of the first men on the moon never looked better. NASA unveiled refurbished video Thursday of the July 20, 1969, moonwalk restored by the same company that sharpened up the movie "Casablanca."

NASA lost its original moon landing videotapes and after a three-year search, officials have concluded they were probably erased. That original live video was ghostlike and grainy.

NASA and a Hollywood film restoration company took television video copies of what Apollo 11 beamed to Earth 40 years ago and made the pictures look sharper.

NASA emphasized the video isn't "new" — just better quality.

"There's nothing being created; there's nothing being manufactured," said NASA senior engineer Dick Nafzger, who's in charge of the project.

But some details seem new because of their sharpness. Originally, Armstrong's face visor was too fuzzy to be seen clearly. The refurbished video shows his visor and a reflection in it.

The \$230,000 refurbishing effort is only three weeks into a months-long project, and only 40 percent of the work has been done. But it does show improvements in four snippets: Armstrong walking down the ladder, which includes the face visor image; Buzz Aldrin walking down the ladder; the two astronauts reading a plaque they left on the moon; the planting of the flag on the moon.

The original videos beamed to earth were stored on giant reels of tapes that each contained 15 minutes of video, along with 13 other channels of live data from the moon. In the 1970s and 1980s, NASA had a shortage of the tapes and erased about 200,000 of those tapes and reused them. That's apparently what happened to the famous moon landing footage.

Nafzger praised the restored work for its crispness. The restoration company, Lowry Digital of Burbank, Calif., also refurbished "Star Wars" and James Bond films, along with "Casablanca."

The company noted that the latter film had a pixel count 10 times higher than the moon video, meaning the moon footage was fuzzier than that vintage movie and more of a challenge in one sense.

But the moon video also was three continuous hours, not chopped up like movies are, which made some of the work easier, said Lowry president Mike Inchalik.

Of all the video the company has dealt with, he said, "This is by far and away the lowest quality."

The restoration used four video sources: CBS News originals; kinescopes from the National Archives; a video from Australia that received the transmission of the original moon video; and camera shots looking at a TV monitor.

Both Nafzger and Inchalik said they went to extremes to enhance the video as conservatively as possible.

On the Net:

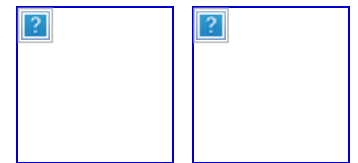
- NASA restored video: <http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/hd/apollo11.html>



Photo 1 of 2



This photo, from NASA TV, shows the Apollo 11 astronauts on the lunar surface after landing from a new digitally refurbished version of the original moon landing video unveiled in Washington Thursday, July 16, 2009. After NASA couldn't find its original videotapes, NASA and a Hollywood film restoration company took television video copies of what Apollo 11 beamed to Earth on July 20, 1969, and made the pictures look sharper. (AP Photo/NASA TV)



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