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Main content

Article Preview :

During the 1960s "lunar science increasingly became geological science. The later Apollo missions were elaborate geological field trips." So writes Don Wilhelms in the preface to this fascinating history of lunar exploration. His focus on the moon as a rocky world and the accumulation of geological knowledge about it sets this book apart from other accounts of Project Apollo. A magnificent work, it is scientifically rigorous yet clearly written in an anecdotal style and thus should attract a wide audience of general readers as well as scientists.

A geologist with a strong interest in astronomy, Wilhelms joined the new Astrogeologic Studies Group of the U.S. Geological Survey in 1962, three days after completing his doctoral dissertation. He remained in what became the Astrogeology Branch of the Survey until his early retirement in 1986. Wilhelms led efforts to apply principles of terrestrial geology to lunar mapping and to establish a relative time scale for lunar stratigraphic units. Over the years he appears to have gotten to know every person and every policy decision that influenced the scientific side of the Apollo program. In his book he provides trenchant (and not always complimentary) profiles of scientists, astronauts, and administrators, informing us of their ideas, their personalities their disputes, and their accomplishments.

Originally intended as a historical chapter in Wilhelms's *Geologic History of the Moon*, a large (11 by 14 1/2 inch), profusely illustrated Professional Paper of the Geological Survey published in 1987, his account expanded into this 477-page volume. In it Wilhelms traces geological studies of the moon from their beginnings in telescopic studies, recounts the early struggles to include geology and geophysics in the Apollo program, details the advances made by unmanned landers, and describes the geological findings of each of the six manned landings. Based on the author's intimate working knowledge and liberally spiced with his personal observations, *To a Rocky Moon* is the definitive work on this aspect of the Apollo program.

Wilhelms dates the beginning of modern investigation of the moon to August 1892, when Grove Karl Gilbert (1843-1918), chief geologist of the Geological Survey, began an 18-night period of observing the moon through the telescope at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C. Gilbert was the first person to perceive an overall uniformity in lunar craters, from the smallest to the largest. He concluded that virtually all the craters had been formed as a result of the impact of falling bodies. Wilhelms comments that Gilbert's sketches and descriptions (although not...

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To a Rocky Moon book. Read 5 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. When human exploration of the lunar surface began in 1969, it marked... Start by marking "To a Rocky Moon: A Geologist's History of Lunar Exploration" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving... Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. Other editions. Enlarge cover. Book Overview. When human exploration of the lunar surface began in 1969, it marked not only an unprecedented technological achievement but also the culmination of scientific efforts to understand lunar geology. Memoirs of the Apollo astronauts have preserved the exploratory aspects of these missions; now a geologist who was an active participant in the lunar program offers a detailed historical view of those events--including the pre-Apollo era--from a heretofore Read Full Overview. When human exploration of the lunar surface began in 1969, it marked not only an unprecedented technological achievement but also the culmination of scientific efforts to understand lunar geology. Memoirs of the Apollo astronauts have preserved the exploratory aspects of these missions; now a geologist who was an active participant in the lunar program offers a detailed historical view of those events - including the pre-Apollo era - from a heretofore untold scientific perspective. It was the responsibility of the scientific team of which Don Wilhelms was a member to assemble an overall pictur A brief history of moon exploration. In the 1950s, the Cold War sparked a race to visit Earth's moon with flybys, robots, and crewed missions. Here's what we discovered—and what's next. 6 Minute Read. By Nadia Drake and Jenny Howard. For as long as humans have gazed skyward, the moon has been a focus of fascination. The earliest forays into lunar exploration were a product of the ongoing Cold War, when the U.S. and Soviet Union sent uncrewed spacecraft to orbit and land on the moon. The Soviets scored an early victory in January 1959, when Luna 1, a small Soviet sphere bristling with antennas, became the first spacecraft to escape Earth's gravity and ultimately fly within about 4,000 miles of the moon's surface. (Read more about early spaceflight.)