



ASTRONAUTS ABOARD APOLLO 17, en route to the Moon, looked back on December 7, 1972 at the full Earth reflecting sunlight – and took a photo. Sometimes called “the Blue Marble,” this image from the last manned Moon mission is one of the most famous of a handful of shots of the globe taken during NASA missions. Together, they created an important inflection point in human history, shifting our sense of identity and sparking an awareness of our responsibility to this fragile planet.

Public demand for Earth images preceded these photos. In the early 1960s, with the Space Age still in its infancy, visionary US engineer Buckminster Fuller was already lecturing students about the need to visualize the Earth not as flat and infinite, but as a globe with finite resources. In 1965, the young US writer Stewart Brand launched a campaign to pressure NASA for photos of the planet.

Brand saw that Fuller’s idea of “spaceship Earth” could help steer humanity away from self-destruction. “But how to broadcast it?” he later wrote. “It had to be broadcast, this fundamental

Apollo 17 astronauts were 28,000 miles from Earth when they snapped this famous photo. While NASA has since sent unmanned probes deeper into the space – some of them sending back photographs of our planet – this final lunar expedition was the last time a person was far enough away to see the circumference of the Earth

point of leverage on the world’s ills. ... A photograph would do it.” Brand made buttons that said, “Why haven’t we seen a photograph of the whole Earth yet?” and distributed them at universities. In 1967, NASA released the first satellite photo of the full Earth.

Brand immediately put that image on the cover of his 1968 *Whole Earth Catalog*, a freewheeling, pre-internet database of tools and information that Apple founder Steve Jobs called “one of the bibles of my generation.” A year later, peace activist John McConnell proposed a holiday to raise awareness of the environment; in 1970, the first Earth Day was celebrated. A global holiday today, the Earth Day flag still features the Blue Marble image above, with its characteristic view of the southern hemisphere.

In 1977, anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote that “it was not until we saw the picture of the Earth, from the Moon, that we realized how small and how helpless this planet is – something that we must hold in our arms and care for.”

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