

Library - Book Review

Tracking Apollo to the Moon

By Hamish Lindsay

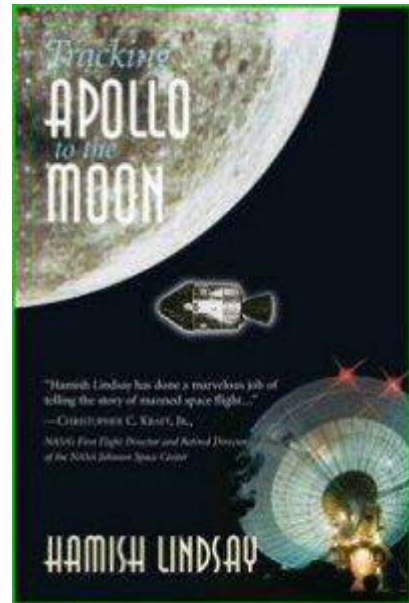
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Reviewed by: Graeme Jenkinson

(Extracted From AAQ November 2004 Newsletter)

The Australian author, Hamish Lindsay, joined the technical staff of NASA in 1963 and continued to work for them until 1981. With his inside experience of all the NASA programs of this period, including Apollo, Lindsay has given us a detailed Australian perspective of this unique period of history. All manned US flights from Alan Shepard aboard Freedom 7 through to the return to earth of a lifeless Skylab are covered individually, and in great detail.

Prior to reading this book I was not fully aware of how serious the "space race" between the USA and the USSR had become by the early 1960's. By outlining the progress of the Soviet program against the early American failures, Lindsay has put into perspective just how precarious the US position was by 1963, the time of John F. Kennedy's commitment to a manned lunar landing by 1969.



Generously illustrated with both black and white and colour plates, the addition of contemporary newspaper cartoons gives a humorous insight to the "man in the streets" view of the program. I found the inclusion of route maps with the descriptions of the later Apollo astronauts travels across the lunar surface a great help in fully appreciating the hazardous nature of these EVAs (extra-vehicular activities).

Lindsay does a good job of describing the social and political background to these times, the immense pressures placed on huge numbers of both NASA and outside support staff to meet shortened deadlines driving divorce rates in areas surrounding these facilities to the highest in the entire USA. Unlike the more well known flow on of scientific and industrial benefits of Apollo, insights such as these make me wonder as to the unintended consequences of the manned space program, some of which may still be rippling through US society today.

Like the rest of the book, the extensive account of Apollo 13's near tragedy held me spellbound, unable to put it down. Perhaps we would not be lucky to learn so much of the detail of this exciting period in history, were it not for the insiders perspective of the author. As a schoolboy watching Armstrong's first steps on the lunar surface via the black and white TV of our school library, Lindsay has given new depth and understanding to an unforgettable moment of my life. I highly recommend this work to those, who like me, enjoy learning about the history of space sciences.