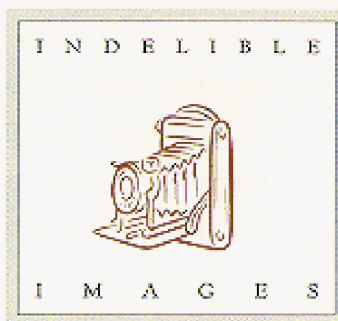




No Place Like Home

FIVE HOURS AFTER blasting off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on December 7, 1972, *Apollo 17* was about 25,000 miles from Earth when an astronaut aimed a Hasselblad camera out a window and made this photograph—*The Blue Marble*, NASA's most requested picture. It has been reproduced countless times, in books and magazines, on posters, Web sites and T-shirts. NASA archivist Mike Gentry plausibly speculates it is the most widely disseminated image in history.

Unlike *Earthrise*, the seminal photograph of a partial Earth with the Moon in the foreground taken by *Apollo 8* in 1968, *Marble* shows the planet in all its spherical glory, thanks to a flight plan that directed *Apollo 17* over the Southern Hemisphere at midday at the peak of the southern summer. No wonder the ecology movement seized upon it to convey the message that Earth is a last-chance habitat in the blackness of space. Arthur C. Clarke, the British-born sci-fi visionary and author of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, says



from Sri Lanka that the image was the “first clear picture of the full Earth that most people ever saw, and at the time they were beginning to be concerned about environmental problems.” Sir Arthur, 84, knows the photograph well: it hangs above his desk.

NASA officially credits the photograph to the entire *Apollo 17* crew: commander Eugene Cernan, 78, who is a consultant in Houston after leaving the agency and running an aeronautics firm; command module pilot Ronald Evans, who died in 1990; and lunar module pilot Harrison “Jack” Schmitt, 67, who in 1976 was elected to one term as a U.S. Senator from New Mexico and is a consultant in Albuquerque. *Apollo 17* was man’s last trip to the Moon, and it seems ironic the most striking memento of that voyage 30 years ago this month is *The Blue Marble*. “It’s because we’re earthlings,” says Schmitt, who recalls that he took the photograph. “Even the first generation to settle on the Moon will think of the Earth as home.” —Terence Monmaney