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How the Moon Color Photographs Were Made

The pictures from the moon shown on the cover and on pages 62-67 of this issue were derived from a series of electronic impulses sent across 230,000 miles of space. That in itself is a remarkable feat. But even more remarkable, two of the pictures are in accurate color. This is a tribute to the scientists of NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and to a task force of our own, headed by Bernard Quint, the art director of LIFE.

The cover picture of the moon floor was not actually taken in color; it was photographed three times by Surveyor's TV camera, first through a red, then through a green, then through a blue filter. Each picture's distant signal was picked up on earth, put on video tape and piped into a cathode-ray tube, and photographed in black and white. When the resulting three black-and-white pictures were projected on a screen, one on top of another, each through its own colored filter, a full-color picture could be seen. Two pictures that were taken of this screen image were released by NASA.



ORTH, RENNILSON AND QUINT

Quint was dissatisfied with their color and their fuzzy quality. He asked science reporter Christopher Lofting to obtain from space authorities the original black-and-white separations so that he could sharpen the image by projecting them not onto a screen but directly onto color film. He was particularly interested in getting the separations of the picture showing a device on Surveyor, a "color wheel," not only because it made an interesting picture in itself but because it would be a check on the accuracy of our color. The authorities agreed. Mr. J. J. Rennilson, optical physicist and color expert for JPL, returned with Lofting from Washington to help.

The problem was turned over to Herbert Orth, head of LIFE's color lab. The difficulty was that the color values he had to deal with were unknown—and not primarily designed for standard color reproduction. The scientists are more interested in learning such things as the moon's light frequencies and mineral content than they are in pictures for display, and they had adjusted the moon camera's filter to suit the needs of the computers. Orth put the green-filtered picture in front of a light source and photographed it through a green filter onto color film. Then he put the red-filtered picture in precisely the same position and photographed it through a red filter on the same piece of color film. The same with the blue. He did this 12 times, each time checking finished results against an actual duplicate of the color wheel. After 12 hours he came up with the exposures which satisfied Bernie Quint and which, in Mr. Rennilson's words, are the sharpest and most accurate color views of the moon ever seen.

George P. Hunt
GEORGE P. HUNT,
Managing Editor

LIFE

TEXAS—*What a State!*

The latest lunar report from Surveyor

THE TRUE COLOR OF THE MOON



 MerchMart.com®
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Contrasting
with orange-hued
rising moon
seen from earth,
Surveyor's photo
shows gray-hued
moonscape and a
6-inch-high rock



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