

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, June 12, 2019

Contact: Heidi Hagemeyer, director of communications, 541-382-4754 ext. 166,

hhagemeyer@highdesertmuseum.org

High Desert Museum Presents *Moon Country*

New exhibit highlights Central Oregon's place in space race

BEND, OR — More than 50 years ago, as the space race between the United States and Soviet Union reached a fever pitch, Central Oregon played an important yet little-known role in preparing U.S. astronauts for lunar landscapes. *Moon Country: Oregon and the Space Race*, an original exhibit celebrating this region's involvement in the first lunar landing, opens at the High Desert Museum on Saturday, July 6.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was established in 1958 and, in a race for supremacy with the Soviet Union, set its sights on being the first to put astronauts on the moon. NASA theorized that Central Oregon's volcanic terrain resembled that of the moon, creating an ideal place for geologists to train astronauts and test equipment. The Apollo program trained in Central Oregon in 1964 and in 1966. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the first lunar landing — on July 20, 1969, commander Neil Armstrong and lunar module pilot Buzz Aldrin landed the Apollo Lunar Module Eagle on the moon.

Moon Country: Oregon and the Space Race features stories and rarely seen photographs from this time period in locations well known to Oregonians, from McKenzie Pass to Paulina Lake. As a backdrop, the exhibit also discusses the turmoil dividing the country during that decade, including the civil rights movement and the country's involvement in the Vietnam War. Somewhat isolated during those years, Central Oregon was experiencing its own evolution: The timber industry was shrinking, and some were envisioning future tourism with the establishment of Mt. Bachelor as a ski resort.

From the exhibition, visitors will learn that there is a small piece of lava rock on the moon that came from Devils Lake, beside the Cascade Lakes Highway roughly 30 miles west of Bend. In 1971, astronaut James Irwin placed the rock on the moon during his Apollo 15 mission to commemorate his geological training in Central Oregon years before.

Like many astronauts during those years, Irwin completed some of his training at sites throughout Central Oregon such as Newberry Crater, Lava Butte, Fort Rock and Hole-in-the-Ground. The training offered astronauts a chance to learn about terrain they might encounter on the moon and improve their skills navigating challenging landscapes. It also earned Central Oregon the nickname "moon country."

"Oregon played a unique role in the journey to the moon, and *Moon Country* offers the opportunity to explore a remarkable piece of that history," said Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D.

Moon Country: Oregon and the Space Race (highdesertmuseum.org/moon-country) opens Saturday, July 6 and will be on display through Nov. 10, 2019.

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

Moon Country is made possible by KSJJ 102.9 FM, KTVZ/KXFO and Oregon Public Broadcasting with support from The Bulletin and the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM opened in Bend, Oregon in 1982. It brings together wildlife, cultures, art, history and the natural world to convey the wonder of North America's High Desert. The Museum uses indoor and outdoor exhibits, wildlife in natural habitats and living history demonstrations to help people discover and appreciate this diverse region. The Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is a Smithsonian Affiliate and was a 2018 finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services. highdesertmuseum.org

###