

Why The Trip Home Seems To Go By Faster

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NPR:

In 1969, astronaut Alan Bean went to the moon as the lunar module pilot on Apollo 12. Although the trip going to the moon covered the same distance as the trip back, “returning from the moon seemed much shorter,” Bean says.

People will often feel a return trip took less time than the same outbound journey, even though it didn’t. In the case of Apollo 12, the trip back from the moon really did take somewhat less time. But the point remains that this so-called “return trip effect” is a very real psychological phenomenon, and now a new scientific study provides an explanation.

Niels van de Ven, a psychologist at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, says the conventional wisdom is the trip back seems shorter because it’s more familiar, so people recognize landmarks. “And that might help to increase the feeling of speed, of how fast you travel,” he says.

But that didn’t seem right to him. “When I take, for example, an airplane, I also have this feeling, and I don’t recognize anything on my way, of course. When I look out of the window, I don’t see something I recognize,” van de Ven says.

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