

Astronomy Talk 16th September 2017

Debunking the Moon landing hoax protagonists

Graham Bryant came to give us this thorough look at the ins and outs of the Apollo hoax story.

First he looked at why conspiracy was in the air. The situation in the 1960s included the fact that the Russians had started their rocketry far ahead of the Americans; there was the Vietnam War, The Watergate scandal etc., so that people felt there were reasons to doubt government. The film Capricorn 1 had a faked Mars landing, and that was thought to raise people's awareness too.

In the mid '70s Fox network promoted conspiracy theories as documentaries, including 9/11 being a CIA plot, alien abductions, global warming etc. The end result of all this is that about 25% of people in the US and the UK think we may never have landed on the Moon. There are 250,000 websites devoted to the hoax theory.

We then looked at the organisation of the Apollo project. 450,000 people in hundreds of companies were involved, and none of the ever made a hoax suggestion. Similarly it would have been a great PR success for the Soviets if they had disclosed it. Nothing there either.

Graham talked about a number of specific hoax claims, e.g. Van Allen radiation would have killed the astronauts, many photographic claims concerning stage lighting, that no stars show in the pictures and the waving flag. All of these Graham was able to discredit. In addition he showed pictures that showed dust falling immediately, meaning it must have been in an airless environment, which of course the hoaxers overlook. Graham mentioned the reflectors that were put on the Moon: anyone can get a reflection from these, so we know they must be there.

Finally Graham talked a bit about the psychology of hoax believers, e.g. how it correlates with all sorts of other alternative beliefs.