

Preface



“Tim will continue with his training at the European Space Agency, but if we don’t fund any more then he won’t get a second flight. We don’t lose all the science that we have done, we don’t lose the enthusiasm of the young people for science – but where are we in the UK? Just another backward nation that is not participating on the international stage, in the future of the human race? We are a travelling nation; we have explored for centuries and I think it’s almost in our blood. It is something that Britain wants to do, Britain needs to do and we have got to continue that funding.”

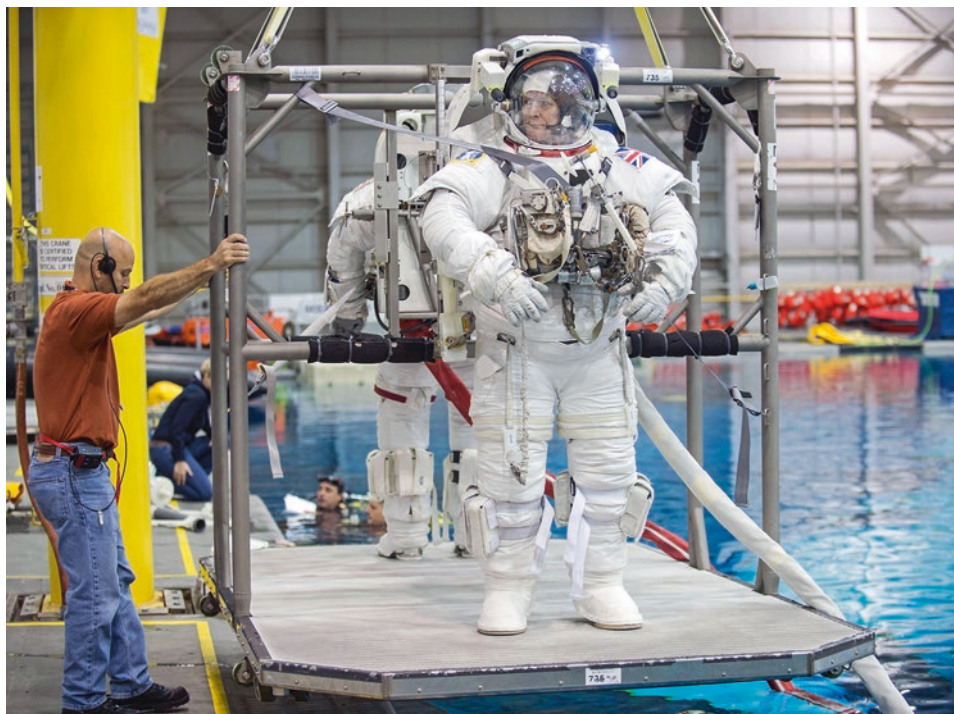
*Helen Sharman, on the eve of her 25th anniversary
as Britain's first astronaut.*

For centuries, the British developed a reputation as a nation of explorers. From Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the globe to the British-sponsored ascent of Mount Everest, British explorers crossed oceans and continents and ventured where few, if any, had gone before. But until very recently, that legacy of exploration had not extended to space. Most other major space-faring nations have shown at least some level of interest in human spaceflight, either by developing their own capability of sending humans into orbit (the U.S., Russia and China), or by piggybacking on those programs (Canada, Japan, and several major European nations). Sadly, the British government (Margaret Thatcher in particular) has had a long-standing opposition to such efforts, declining either to contribute to ESA's human spaceflight efforts or to fund its own. For decades, successive British governments chose to stay out of ESA's human spaceflight program, looking on as more than half a dozen other European countries sent astronauts into Earth orbit. But in 2008, there were signs of optimism for supporters of a UK government-sponsored human space effort when ESA selected a new class of six astronauts. For the first time, the new group included a British representative: Timothy Peake. Then, *finally*, the incumbent coalition government committed £27 million to ESA in 2012 and a further £49 million in 2014. These contributions paved the way for Tim Peake's mission to the International Space Station (ISS). The rest, as they say, is history, and is chronicled in the book you are reading.

"It's absolutely clear why he got selected against all the odds. They couldn't let him go. He stands out. Most astronauts now are similar, but he is up there in the exceptional class. I think that there was a cowboy element to the original astronauts. Not so with Tim. Tim is ever cool, calm and collected whilst always seeming more charming than macho. When you talk to him, that calmness comes through. It is just about possible to believe that he really enjoyed himself facing the challenge of exercises like escaping from a helicopter cockpit whilst suspended upside down in water. I'd say he is made not so much of the right stuff but rather 'even better stuff'."

*David Southwood, senior researcher at Imperial College,
and member of the UK Space Agency steering board.
(The Guardian, Ian Sample, December 11, 2015)*

The aim of this book was to put you, the reader, in the flight suit of Britain's first male astronaut. To that end, this book takes you on the journey followed by a British Army officer from Chichester, who spent over 185 days living and working on the ISS, including four hours and 43 minutes of space walks. This book is not organized like the typical biography, which usually follows the chronology of the subject from childhood to the present day. Instead of following a linear timeline, this book uses Tim Peake's experiences to illustrate larger points and themes, such as the stresses of an intensely scrutinized, highly visible job, the challenges of extended family separation, and the ever-present possibility of having to make the ultimate sacrifice: All this against the back-drop of a story-hungry press, starved of any news of British astronauts for the best part of 25 years.



Credit: ESA

“I think it is really important to reach out to our younger generation and to try to encourage them to take up science, technology, engineering and mathematics as subjects. We have a skills shortage at the moment, and we desperately need more graduates with those backgrounds.”

*Tim Peake, speaking with The Mail Online,
in an interview with Victoria Woolaston, November 6, 2015.*

Also discussed are the learning curves that have to be met during astronaut and mission training, and the complexity of the technologies required to launch an astronaut into space and keep them alive for months on end. The narrative in the book is written in a way that allows the story and the people to propel the book. The rationale for taking this approach, as opposed to writing subject by subject, is that technology and training, unlike space, does not exist in a vacuum. Complex technical systems, such as the ISS, interact with the variables of human personality, the cultural backgrounds of the astronauts and cosmonauts, and, indeed, the ‘culture’ which permeates organizations like the British government and ESA.



Credit: ESA

“Obviously, this is the first time a UK Astronaut has flown on board the ISS as part of the European Space Agency, so that’s the big thing here. From a government perspective, the UK is becoming involved in human space flight and it is something very important. I hope we go on to continue this involvement. So yes, it is very important the UK is part of this, as there is so much benefit to be had from ISS research in terms of what we are doing on the ISS for people back on Earth. And also on the ISS for future exploration – looking ahead to those lunar and Mars missions, and deeper into the solar system as we go on. I don’t want the UK to miss out on that. ESA has been doing a fantastic job, and will continue to do a fantastic job in human spaceflight. I think it is definitely time for the UK to be part of that, and continue to be part of it. It’s only going to get bigger and better.”

*Tim Peake, in an interview with RocketStem’s Sam Mundell,
February 16, 2015*



Credit: ESA

In addition to delving into the life and career of Tim Peake, this book weaves into the narrative the tortured and intransigent political history of manned spaceflight in the UK. Tim Peake's flight was an opportunity that had existed for decades, but was one that had been perpetually almost micro-managed and mismanaged out of existence by successive generations of myopically-minded politicians and bureaucrats. Along the way, the book aims to correct the myriad misunderstandings and warped impressions the British public have about the program: basically, correcting decades of sound-bites made by the sometimes spectacularly misinformed tabloid press. But ultimately, this book is the story of Tim Peake and the Principia mission – and the down-to-the-last-bolt descriptions of life aboard the ISS – by way of the hurdles placed in the path by the British government and the rigors of training at Russia's Star City.

“The younger generation that I’m talking to as I tour around the UK really will see humans land on Mars for the first time, which is incredibly exciting. We’re now looking to set up a habitational module on the Moon as a stepping stone for Mars. I’ve just been amazed at how well we can live and work in space and still come back to Earth in great shape.



Credit: ESA

“When I’ve been speaking to my friends on board the ISS now, I do miss it. I miss the view of the Earth and I miss weightlessness – so yes, if the chance came up to start a habitation module on the Moon, I’d be first in the queue.”

*Tim Peake, talking on Spirit FM, October 18, 2016,
on the subject of a second mission and becoming
the first Brit to set foot on the Moon.*

TIM PEAKE and BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SPACE

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