

U1L1A1 | The Earth: Our Home

Excerpts from *The Blue Dot Tour: It's all about us*

By David Suzuki with contributions from the David Suzuki Foundation Senior Editor Ian Hanington.

Slide 1: Apollo 17 'The Blue Marble'



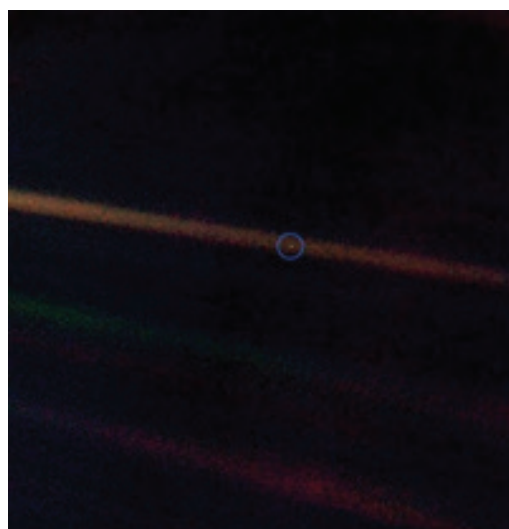
Figure 1. View of the Earth as seen by the Apollo 17 crew traveling toward the moon. This translunar coast photograph extends from the Mediterranean Sea area to the Antarctica south polar ice cap. This is the first time the Apollo trajectory made it possible to photograph the south polar ice cap. Note the heavy cloud cover in the Southern Hemisphere. Almost the entire coastline of Africa is clearly visible. The Arabian Peninsula can be seen at the northeastern edge of Africa. The large island off the coast of Africa is the Malagasy Republic. The Asian mainland is on the horizon toward the northeast.

A now-famous 1972 photo of Earth taken by Apollo 17 astronauts from 45,000 kilometres away became known as “the blue marble.”

Slide 2: The pale blue dot

The late scientist Carl Sagan described a 1990 picture taken from six-billion kilometres away by the unmanned Voyager 1 as a “pale blue dot.”

Read text from photo, or use audio file from The Pale Blue Dot PowerPoint to hear Carl Sagan read a version of this text.



Carl Sagan, Pale Blue Dot

We succeeded in taking that picture [from deep space], and, if you look at it, you see a dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever lived, lived out their lives. The aggregate of all our joys and sufferings, thousands of confident religions, ideologies and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilizations, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every hopeful child, every mother and father, every inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every superstar, every supreme leader, every saint and sinner in the history of our species, lived there on a mote of dust, suspended in a sunbeam.

The earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and in triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of the dot on scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner of the dot. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity – in all this vastness – there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. It is up to us. It's been said that astronomy is a humbling, and I might add, a character-building experience. To my mind, there is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly and compassionately with one another and to preserve and cherish that pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

U1L1A1 | The Earth: Our Home

Slide 3: The Atmosphere (stay on this slide for the remainder of this reading)

The vision of Earth from a distance has profoundly moved pretty much anyone who has ever seen it. “When we look down at the Earth from space, we see this amazing, indescribably beautiful planet,” International Space Station astronaut Ron Garan said. “It looks like a living, breathing organism. But it also, at the same time, looks extremely fragile.” Referring to the atmosphere, Garan added “it’s really sobering...to realize that that little paper-thin layer is all that protects every living thing on Earth.”

Many astronauts report a deep feeling of connection that transcends borders and worldly conflict—referred to by some as the “overview effect.” Apollo 14’s Edgar Mitchell said, “You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty.”

How can anyone who has even seen a photo of the Earth treat our small blue home with disdain and carelessness? How can anyone fail to recognize how precious and finite the resources, especially water, are—and that we must share and care for what we have?

The “blue marble” photo from Apollo 17, the last manned lunar mission, catalyzed the global environmental movement. Now, as people around the world compete for air, water and land—not just with each other, but with corporations bent on profit at any cost—we need a resurgence in action to care for our small blue planet.

That’s why I’m about to embark on what will likely be my last national tour. From September 24 to November 9, I’m crossing the country, from St. John’s, Newfoundland, to Victoria, B.C., with 20 stops along the way. The plan is to work with Canadians from all walks of life to protect the people and places we love. It’s the most important thing I’ve ever done.

The goal of the Blue Dot Tour is to work with community leaders and groups, local governments, First Nations, musicians, writers, legal experts and—we hope—you on local, regional and national initiatives to ensure all Canadians have access to clean water, fresh air and healthy food. Ultimately, we’d like to see the right to a healthy environment enshrined in the Canadian Constitution’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

That may seem like a challenge, but it’s not unusual. More than half the world’s nations—at least 110—have environmental rights in their constitutions. Not having them is a strange oversight in a country like Canada, where our clean air and water, spectacular nature and abundant wildlife and resources instill a sense of pride and make us the envy of people around the world.

Maybe we take our good fortune for granted. But we shouldn’t. Already, environmental hazards contribute to about 36,000 premature deaths in Canada a year, and half of us live in areas where we’re exposed to unsafe air pollution levels. Pollution costs Canada about \$100 billion a year, and many people suffer from illnesses like asthma and heart disease because of environmental contamination.

As the rush to extract, transport and sell fossil fuels while there’s still a market heats up, it will only get worse—unless we all pitch in. It’s not about getting in the way of industry or progress; it’s about building a conversation about the kind of country we want. And it’s about ensuring that our economic activity creates more benefits than harm to people and the natural systems that keep us healthy and alive.