

MEDIA RELEASE

21 August 2017



Image caption: Australia's first satellite WRESAT soars into orbit, 1967. Image courtesy DST Group.

From outback to outer space: Woomera 1955 – 1980 Exhibition at the State Library of South Australia

Woomera Rocket Range launched Australia into the space age in the 1950s. The Woomera story is one of secrecy and controversy, innovation and achievement, set against the background of the Cold War and the Space Race. Discover the stories of the early days of Australia's space activity and what life was like for the men, women and children who lived in the 'top secret' outback town of Woomera in a new free exhibition at the State Library of South Australia.

The State Library has partnered with the National Archives of Australia to present **From outback to outer space: Woomera 1955 – 1980**. A major collaborative effort, the exhibition is drawn from collections around Australia including the State Library of South Australia, National Archives of Australia, Defence Science and Technology Group, South Australian Aviation Museum and the Woomera historical museums.

On display are large scale rocket models together with space artefacts, photographs and archival footage. Oral histories of former Woomera residents will provide visitors with a first-hand account of what it was like to live in Woomera. The exhibition highlights one of Australia's most significant space achievements, the launch of its first satellite WRESAT (Weapons Research Establishment Satellite) in 1967, making Australia one of the earliest nations to put its own satellite into orbit.

Kerrie Dougherty, space historian and curator, was engaged to help curate the exhibition. "Growing up in the 1960s, I was fascinated with Woomera, which was the hub of early space activities in Australia. Curating this exhibition has been a dream project, as it's allowed me to tell the story of a place and time unique in Australia's engineering, technological and scientific history that I still find inspiring today", Kerrie says.

Director State Library of South Australia, **Alan Smith** comments "An exhibition of this scope doesn't happen in isolation. We have been delighted to partner with the National Archives of Australia and the International Astronautical Congress, and others to bring this fascinating and important part of Australia's history to life."

Unlocking the stories of the past to share with current and future generations is an important role for the State Library. "By sharing these stories we not only impart knowledge but hope to inspire people of all ages to learn more about Australia's role in the space and science industries," says Alan Smith.

David Fricker, Director-General of National Archives of Australia, says "The State Library and the National Archives of Australia are strongly linked through our extensive collection material as well as through our colocation in the State Library building. A collaboration of this nature was a natural extension of our shared presence in Adelaide.

This exhibition gives the Archives an opportunity to open our collection up to a new audience, including displaying one of our most valuable items: fragments of rock collected from the Moon's surface in 1969, during the Apollo 11 mission. Many of the images displayed in this exhibition also come from various series held by the Archives, some of which have never been shown publicly until now. We look forward to presenting the exhibition at our National Office in Canberra in late 2019."

The exhibition, together with the education and supporting programs, is part of the 68th International Astronautical Congress Cultural Program. The Congress is the world's largest annual gathering of space professionals and is in Adelaide from 25-29 September 2017. The State Library is pleased to be a part of this significant international event.

On display until the 12 November 2017 at the State Library of South Australia, this exhibition explores a fascinating part of Australia's technological and scientific history, and provides an insight into the social history of Woomera.

MEDIA PREVIEW:

Tuesday, 22 August 2017, 10am

Meet in the Institute Gallery, Institute Building, Corner North Terrace and Kintore Avenue

Media are invited to view the exhibition. The following people will be available for comment:

- **Alan Smith** – Director State Library of South Australia
- **Mark Gilbert** – Marketing Content Librarian and Curator, State Library of South Australia
- **Dr Sara King** – Exhibition Curator, National Archives of Australia
- **Kerrie Dougherty** – Space Historian and Guest Curator

EXHIBITION DETAILS:

From outback to outer space: Woomera 1955 – 1980

23 August to 12 November 2017

Open daily (closed public holidays)

State Library of South Australia

Corner North Terrace and Kintore Avenue

Free entry

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