

Luna 1 Satellite

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On January 2, 1959, Luna 1 was launched by the Soviet Union from the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Its mission: to be the first spacecraft to escape Earth's gravity and to strike the moon's surface. Shortly after launch, Luna 1 reached escape velocity.

This achievement was commemorated as a major milestone in spaceflight and space exploration. In the ensuing years, countries whose controlling governments had ties to the Soviet Union would often use the imagery of Luna 1 and subsequent Luna missions in their postage stamps.



Specifications:

- Mercury-oxide batteries (lasted 62 hours)
- 797 lb (361.3 kg)
- 4 ft (1.22 m) in diameter
- 5 antennas for communication, four whip-style and one rigid



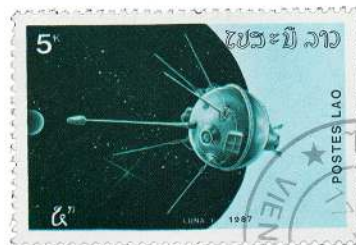
Issued in 1984 by the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, widely considered to be a Soviet satellite state due to its reliance on the Soviet Union for assistance.

Issued in 1969 by the Hungarian People's Republic, during a period known as Goulash Communism.



Once Luna 1 escaped Earth's gravity, it headed towards the moon as its main mission. However, the radio signal to Luna 1 to stop firing the engine for the upper stage rocket was sent too late, giving it slightly too much speed. Because it did not have its own propulsion system, it couldn't correct this error.

After 34 hours, the spacecraft missed the Moon by 3,725 miles (5,995 km) and instead flew deeper into the solar system.



Issued in 1987 by the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which at the time depended heavily on Soviet aid channeled through Vietnam.

Issued in 1984 by the People's Republic of Kampuchea, a partially recognized satellite state of Vietnam founded by Cambodian communists dissatisfied with the Khmer Rouge and with the Soviet Union as one of its main allies.



This mistake would give it another first, to be the first "artificial planet" as it eventually entered heliocentric orbit around the sun, where it remains to this day. It was renamed Mechtla, or "dream" in Russian.

Additional Achievements:

- Obtained new data on the outer Van Allen radiation belt
- Discovered the moon had no magnetic field
- First-ever direct observations and measurements of solar wind
- First instance of radio communication at the half-million-kilometer distance



It reminds us that even if our dream may not work out how we intended, perhaps it opens the door to something even greater.

Issued in 2017 by the United States as its first use of thermochromic ink on postage stamps. When heat is applied, the image reveals a moon (where Luna 1 was meant to go) eclipsing the sun (where Luna 1 actually ended up).