

Spacemen's autographs

Only twelve astronauts actually (0) foot on the moon during the US Apollo space programme between 1969 and 1972. Some have since (13) household names – like Neil Armstrong, (14) made the original 'giant leap for mankind' and Buzz Aldrin, his co-pilot on that mission. The other ten are less well-known, even (15) each made his own contribution to the programme.

But to Paul Prendergast, a postal worker from London, they are all pioneers, worthy to be mentioned in the (16) breath as the great explorers of earlier eras, (17) as Christopher Columbus. Paul's fascination (18) the subject began in 2000 (19) he attended a convention for people (20) hobby is collecting autographs. There he met Alan Bean (fourth man on the moon) and Ed Mitchell (sixth). As he remembers: 'There were television stars there, people from Bond movies, and so (21) , but these men had walked on the moon. I headed straight (22) to meet them and ask for their autographs.' For a collector, the challenge of (23) hold of the remaining ten proved irresistible.

Yet Paul's quest was never going to be entirely straightforward. After (24) , at that time, only nine of the astronauts were still alive and two (25) given up signing autographs years before. Paul eventually (26) to achieve his goals, (27) , by establishing contacts with other collectors, by buying from reputable dealers and by attending specialist auctions.