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NASA has recently admitted that most of the moon rocks brought to Earth from 2 Apollo space missions are missing.

Richard Nixon, who was then the US president, ordered the rock to be broken up into small fragments and sent to 135 foreign leaders and 50 local states. The 370 pieces of lunar rock from the 1969 and 1972 missions were collected to be given as gifts to different countries.

Every goodwill moon rock was encased in lucite ball and placed on a wooden plaque with the receiving country's flag.

A hundred of those were distributed to the 50 states of the US while 270 were given to various countries as a goodwill gift. To date, 184 of the goodwill rocks are unaccounted for (lost or stolen) -- 24 in the US and 160 worldwide. Some of the goodwill rocks have gone missing during times of political transition or revolution.

Gaddafi's administration received 2 goodwill moon rocks and they are both missing. The same is true with Romania's Apollo 17 moon rock. According to the US National Archives, a goodwill moon rock was also given to the late dictator of Rome, Nicolae Ceausescu, though it is believed that after his execution the rock was sold.

And then there is the interesting story of how Ireland's goodwill moon rock ended up in a municipal dump. The rock was formerly housed in the Dunsink Observatory in Dublin until the place burned down in 1977. Nobody seemed to have noted that the moon rock was missing til after the event. Apparently, the rock was thrown in along with other debris and dumped in the Finglas landfill which is just across the road. A warning for treasure hunters: some rock worth more than USD 5 million is still lying under tons of trash in the dump.

The Moon rock hunter, as he came to be known, Joseph Gutheinz Jr is a lawyer in Texas and previously an agent of NASA. It all started in 1998 when Gutheinz was still in NASA. He set up the Operation Lunar Eclipse, an undercover sting operation to recover the missing moon rocks. He advertised on USA Today, entitled 'Moon Rocks Wanted' in order to lure con-artists to contact him. What he did not expect was that someone in the possession of the goodwill moon rock of Honduras would contact him. The lunar rock, weighing 1.142 g, was offered to him for USD 5 million.

According to Gutheinz, he once offered a USD 10,000 for Malta's goodwill moon rock but he still has not heard anything about it.

An unnamed private collector reportedly purchased a 0.2 gram of moon dust for USD 442,500. With such high prices, it is not at all surprising that there is a profitable market for both fake and real ones.

The moon rocks containing an important history of the solar system seem to be undervalued by the recipient countries and NASA, doing a poor job of protecting and keeping track of them. Meanwhile, Gutheinz admits that he may never be able to return all of the missing lunar rocks as most of them are now in private collections.

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