

By: Gabriel Cache, Science News Editor

STS-123 Mission Over, Endeavor to Return to Earth

Endeavor cleared for re-entry

Yesterday the crew of mission STS-123 rested in the first half of the day, then began packing Endeavor for the re-entry and return to Earth, which is scheduled for Wednesday. The space shuttle is to undock from the International Space Station today at 7:56 p.m. ET, thus completing the longest mission in which a space shuttle was docked to the ISS. During the 12-day mission, the crew of Endeavor constructed the Canadian maintenance robot Dextre, installed the first section of the massive Japanese space laboratory Kibo and conducted a heat shield repair experiment. Additionally, the space shuttle delivered a set of new experiments to the ISS and a replacement for the French astronaut Leopold Eyharts, namely Garrett Reisman. Eyharts was flown to the ISS with the space shuttle Atlantis during the mission STS-122, which delivered the European space laboratory Columbus. "It's amazing how big the station is. It's so big, you actually have to plan how you carry your stuff around because if you have to go back and get something it takes time," said Reisman. STS-123 was scheduled to execute five spacewalks, thus breaking yet another record for a single space shuttle mission to the space station. The mission also included attaching a new inspection boom on the ISS to investigate the heat shield of the Discovery space shuttle upon its arrival on 25 of May. Discovery will deliver the second section of Kibo and was supposed to carry the inspection boom itself, however the primary experiment module of the laboratory is so big that it didn't leave any room for it. Instead, it had to be carried by Endeavor. According to NASA, the heat shield of Endeavor is in perfect condition and ready for the re-entry on Wednesday. During the packing stage, the crew of Endeavor also transferred one of the experiments carried out by Eyharts, consisting of a seedling grown to understand the effect of weightlessness on the growth of plants. Endeavor is expected to land at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Wednesday at 7:04 p.m. ET.