

Historic explorers globe charts course for ASU

The nearly century-old globe bears the signatures and routes of more than 80 legendary explorers; partnership with American Geographical Society brings it to ASU's Tempe campus

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Story highlights

The American Geographical Society recently announced a 10-year partnership with ASU, during which the university will co-steward its historic Fliers and Explorers Globe.

The nearly century-old globe bears the signatures and routes of more than 80 legendary explorers, including Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, Neil Armstrong and Sir Edmund Hillary.

The university plans to incorporate the globe into courses and public programs, and host future signing events with notable explorers.

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh climbed into a small, single-engine plane after only a few hours of sleep and flew more than 3,600 miles from Long Island, New York, to Paris, becoming the first person to fly nonstop, solo, across the Atlantic Ocean.

That kind of risky journey takes a rare form of courage and fearlessness, the kind also exhibited by Amelia Earhart, Neil Armstrong and dozens of other pioneers of exploration.

These adventurers left their marks on history — and their signature on the [American Geographical Society's historic Fliers and Explorers Globe](#). The 18-inch artifact has been autographed by more than 80 of the world's greatest travelers, turning it into a physical map of human exploration.

Now, the nearly century-old globe is embarking on a journey of its own.

The American Geographical Society, or AGS, recently announced a 10-year partnership with Arizona State University, which will bring the artifact from the society's headquarters in New York City to ASU's Tempe campus this winter, where it will serve to educate students and the general public about the fascinating history of human exploration.

Jerome Dobson, president of AGS, said the society invited a dozen universities and museums to submit proposals to host the globe in a way that would "fit its historical significance and expose it to the public in a creative and accessible manner."

"Several submissions were acceptable," Dobson said, "but one stood out: Arizona State University, whose faculty and administration understood the boundless value of the globe, and both educational and promotional purposes, and also what we meant by a true partnership and co-stewardship."

The announcement of the partnership was made during a Sept. 15 ceremony at the Explorers Club in New York City, as part of the AGS's 175th anniversary celebration, where Kathy Sullivan became the latest explorer to sign the globe.

"We are grateful to the American Geographical Society for entrusting ASU with this national treasure," said [Dan Cox](#), dean of natural sciences in [The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#). "Co-stewarding an artifact that's been signed by over 80 legendary figures — from Lindbergh and Earhart to the Apollo 8 astronauts and, most recently, by Dr. Sullivan — is a profound honor and a responsibility."

Sullivan was recognized for being the only person to both walk in space and reach Challenger Deep, the deepest known point in the ocean. Before Sullivan, the globe had not been signed in 10 years.

"That's largely because it's a very high bar to sign this globe," Cox said. "It's pretty rarefied air, the group of explorers who have been asked to sign the globe."

Cox, who attended the ceremony with several ASU faculty members, said the globe is a fitting addition to ASU and The College.

"We are one college, with many disciplines and a shared spirit of discovery," he said. "We have an explorers-and-discoverers ethos across the whole college. So it's a fitting home."

A history of exploration

The AGS Fliers and Explorers Globe is not the largest globe ever made, nor is it especially remarkable for its color or other details. Its value comes instead from its history and the hands that once touched it.

"It is priceless," Cox said. "You can't really put a value on it because it's totally irreplaceable."

The globe was originally owned by John H. Finley, editor-in-chief of The New York Times and president of the American Geographical Society. Finley invited early heroes of exploration to sign their names and draw the routes of their journeys across the globe.

In 1929, Finley gave the globe to the geographical society, which continued the tradition.

The men and women who have signed it explored places for the first time in recorded history, reaching new extremes of height or depth, pioneering new forms of travel or setting aviation records — often at great personal risk.

In addition to signatures of aviation pioneers Earhart and Lindbergh, astronauts Armstrong and John Glenn, the Apollo 8 crew, mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary, polar explorer Robert Peary and undersea explorer William Beebe have also signed the globe.

[David Sailor](#), director and professor in ASU's [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#), called the globe “an important national — and, really, international — treasure” that allows people to view exploration through a different lens.

The routes drawn on the globe tell of journeys that carried explorers across vast oceans, to the summit of Mount Everest and even far beneath the sea.

“As you spin the globe, you see where these different activities took place, and you get a sense of the scale and scope of the exploration,” Sailor said.

The routes also place the explorers' accomplishments in a geographical context, he said.

“Reading that Lindbergh was the first person to fly nonstop, solo, from New York to Paris tells only part of the story,” Sailor said. “Seeing the route on a globe conveys the scale of the Atlantic Ocean and the magnitude of his accomplishment.”

Welcoming the globe

The globe is expected to arrive at ASU's Tempe campus this winter and will be installed in the [Interdisciplinary Science and Technology Building \(ISTB\) 4](#), home of the [School of Earth and Space Exploration](#).

It will be housed in a museum-quality glass enclosure. Because the nearly century-old artifact is fragile, visitors will not be allowed to touch it.

Two replicas, known as legacy globes, will provide a more hands-on experience. One will be displayed in the [Map and Geospatial Hub](#) in Hayden Library, and the other will be housed on the fifth floor of Coor Hall.

Unlike the original, the legacy globes can be touched and spun. They will have specific themes, and will be signed by innovators in those fields. One, for example, will recognize leaders who helped develop geographic information systems.

ASU also plans to create an interactive digital version of the globe that will be available by phone or computer. Users will be able to rotate it, zoom in on signatures and select individual explorers to learn more about their lives, journeys and accomplishments.

“The virtual 3D globe is going to be accessible to anyone on the planet,” Sailor said.

A digital version will also be projected onto the “Magic Planet,” a 6-foot-diameter globe in ISTB4 that can display images of Earth and other planetary bodies.

“The students and the general public will learn more about the history of these individuals and learn more about them on a personal level — not just their accomplishments,” Sailor said.

[Shiloh Johnson](#), senior project manager for [Geospatial Research and Solutions](#), said ASU is developing a range of educational opportunities around the globe, including incorporating its history into courses. The university also plans to host public programs where explorers will be invited to Tempe to add their names and routes to the globe.

“People can come and meet those individuals, see them sign the globe,” Johnson said. “We’ll have some lectures and events to celebrate those signings when they happen, because they are very special.”

Cox noted that ISTB4 already attracts large numbers of K–12 students and teachers for tours and educational events.

“There’s incredible foot traffic,” he said. “It’s going to have a lot more visitors and be a resource to inspire future generations.”

For Sailor, Sullivan’s recent signature carries another important message: The age of exploration is not over.

“Oftentimes, when we think about great fliers and explorers, we think back nearly 100 years to Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart,” he said. “But we don’t realize that great accomplishments are still happening today.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Jerome Dobson (left), president of the American Geographical Society, observes the society's historic Fliers and Explorers Globe with recent signer Kathy Sullivan (right), who was recognized for being the only person to both walk in space and reach Challenger Deep, the deepest known point in the ocean. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



Kathy Sullivan became the latest explorer to sign the globe at a ceremony celebrating the American Geographical Society's 175th anniversary on Sept. 15 in New York City. Courtesy photo