Sputnik 1 Encyclopedia Article

Sputnik 1

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Sputnik 1

Sputnik 1 was the world's first space satellite. It was successfully launched into space by a team of Russian scientists on October 4, 1957, from the town of Baikonur, Kazakhstan. The name of the satellite, *Sputnik*, is the Russian word for "traveler." *Sputnik 1*'s successful launch shocked American scientists and engineers, who believed that America would be the first to send a satellite into space. *Sputnik 1*'s reported weight of 184 lbs. (83.6 kg) further astonished and intimidated American scientists, who were at work on America's first satellite that weighed only twenty pounds.

Sputnik 1, created by the design team led by Sergei Korolov, was a moon-shaped, spherical apparatus with a diameter of 22.83 in. (58 cm). It had four flexible whip antennae that ranged in length from approximately 2.2 to 2.6 yards (2.4 to 2.9 m). Two of the antennae were radio transmitters that sent signals back to Earth on two different frequencies as the satellite traveled through space at approximately 17,360 miles (28,000 km) per hour. As the satellite circled the Earth once every ninety-five minutes, it gathered valuable information about the ionosphere and space temperatures. *Sputnik 1* used battery power to relay this data back to Earth via its radio antennae.

Sputnik 1 fell back to Earth on January 4, 1958. The success of *Sputnik 1* signalled the beginning of the increasingly tense competition that would characterize the relationship between the scientific communities and governments of Russia and the United States for the next thirty years.