

**Space exploration has long been about reaching far off destinations but now there's a race to exploit new frontiers by mining their minerals.**

When Neil Armstrong first stepped on the Moon in 1969, it was part of a "flags and footprints" strategy to beat the Soviets, a triumph of imagination and innovation, not an attempt to extract precious metals.

No-one knew there was water on that dusty, celestial body. What a difference a generation makes.

Mysterious and beautiful, the Moon has been a source of awe and inspiration to mankind for millennia. Now it is the centre of a space race to mine rare minerals to fuel our future - smart phones, space-age solar panels and possibly even a future colony of Earthlings.

"We know that there's water on the Moon, which is a game-changer for the solar system. Water is rocket fuel. It also can support life and agriculture. So exploring the Moon commercially is a first step towards making the Moon part of our world, what humanity considers our world," says Bob Richards, CEO of Silicon Valley-based Moon Express, one of 25 companies racing to win the \$30m in Google Lunar X Prizes.

It is considered to be among the top-three teams in the running for the prize. The other two are Pittsburgh-based Astrobiotic and Barcelona Moon Team.