



HISTORY

50 years ago, Martin Cooper made the first cellphone call

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HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

By Kai McNamee, Mallory Yu

2-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT

On April 3, 1973, Martin Cooper made the first ever cellphone call on the streets of New York. His invention, a brick-sized device, became the first cellphone available to the general public.

MARY LOUISE KELLY, HOST:

Martin Cooper remembers exactly where he was standing when he made the first ever call from a cellphone on this day 50 years ago.

MARTIN COOPER: I was on the streets of New York, 6th Avenue, right next to the Hilton Hotel.

KELLY: At the time, Cooper was head of the communications division at Motorola, and he was there to demonstrate his company's latest invention.

COOPER: New Yorkers were passing by. You know how blase they normally are, but they were startled because there were no cordless phones at that time.

ADRIAN FLORIDO, HOST:

Up until that point, the only portable phones that existed – for the general public, at least – were in people's cars. And Cooper says Motorola's competitor, Bell Labs, saw car phones as the future. And he worried that car phones would become the standard for mobile communication. You see; he saw things differently.

COOPER: The cellphone ought to be the extension of a person, and it ought to be with the person all the time.

KELLY: So in 1972, he set out to create a mobile phone that could fit in your pocket. By the next year, his team had the first working cellphone system.

FLORIDO: It was a feat of engineering, even if it couldn't quite fit into a standard pocket.

COOPER: It ended up weighing 2 1/2 pounds. It was about 10 inches high, inch and a half wide, 3 inches deep. It was like a brick.

KELLY: On April 3, 1973, standing on those streets in Manhattan, Cooper made a phone call that would change the world. He pulled out his phone book and dialed his counterpart at Motorola's competitor, Bell Labs.

COOPER: I said, I'm calling you from a cellphone but a real cellphone – the personal, handheld, portable cellphone. You notice I was not averse to rubbing his nose in our achievement.

FLORIDO: Cooper and his team knew how monumental this was, even then. They predicted that in the future, everyone in the world would have a cellphone.

KELLY: They were basically right. Today, most of us own and use some kind of mobile phone.

FLORIDO: Still, Cooper thinks the modern cellphone isn't even close to peak form. He sees advances in AI technology as the next frontier in how we communicate.

(SOUNDBITE OF LADY GAGA SONG, "TELEPHONE (FEATURING BEYONCE)")

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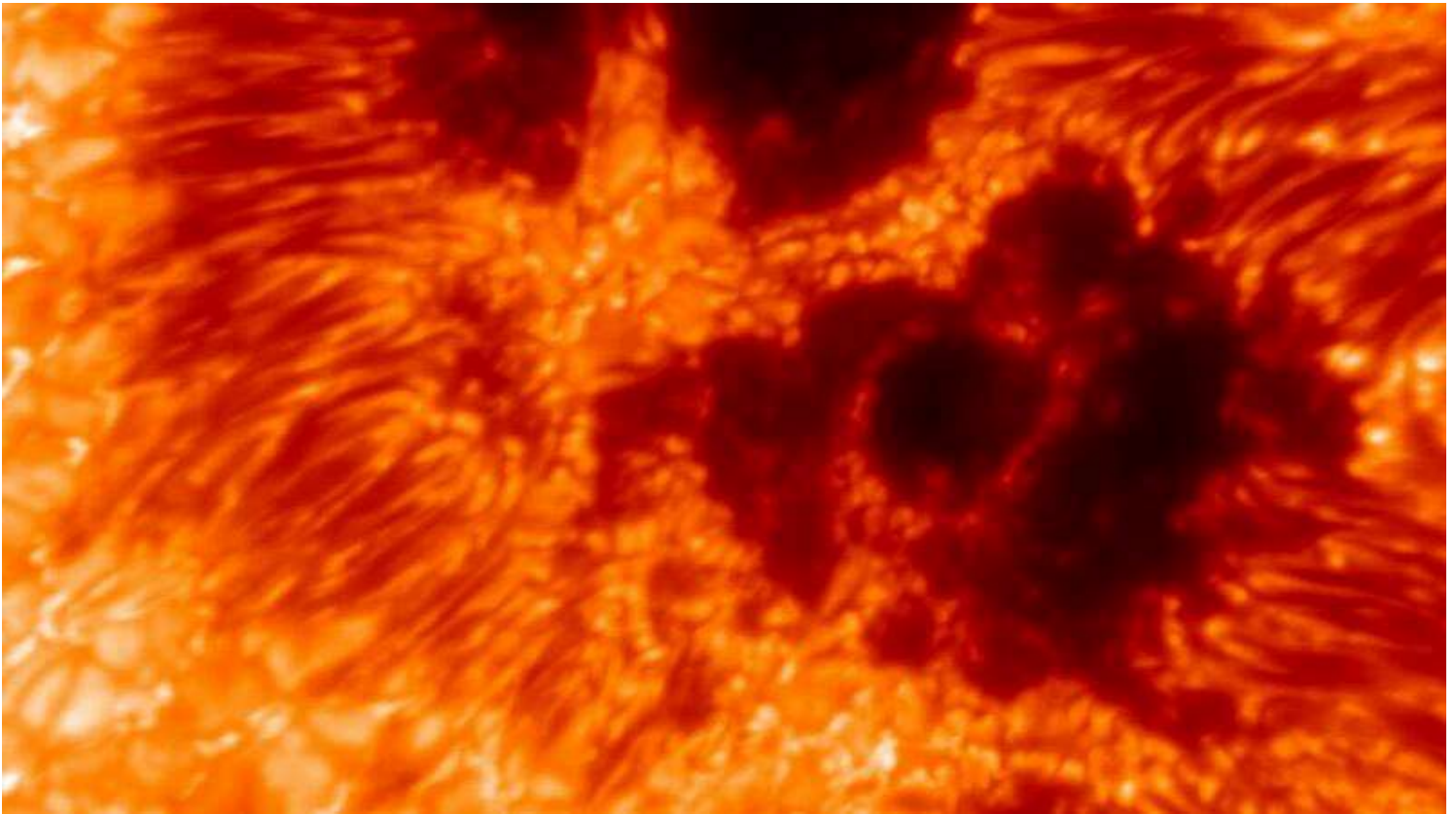
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