Preparations for STS-119, the first space shuttle mission of 2009, reached a major milestone January 14 as Discovery headed to the launch pad at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Riding atop the crawler-transporter, Discovery began its 3.4-mile trip from the Vehicle Assembly Building to Launch Pad 39A in the chilly predawn darkness.

The beginning of its trip to the pad was delayed slightly so technicians could work minor technical issues. One issue involved the mobile launcher platform heaters needed when temperatures are below 45 degrees. The slow trek to the seaside launch pad was completed by midday.

Waiting at the pad was the payload, which will be transferred into the shuttle's cargo bay from the service structure's payload changeout room.
Discovery's crew of seven, led by Commander Lee Archambault, will deliver and install the International Space Station's final truss segment and its set of solar arrays during the 14-day mission.

Space shuttle Discovery is targeted for a February liftoff.