

MERCURY

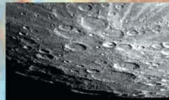


"THE SWIFTEST PLANET"



Mercury, named for the fast-footed Roman messenger of the gods, is the closest planet to the Sun. Doing justice to its name, Mercury circles the Sun in a mere 88 days, compared to 365 days for Earth, and travels through space at nearly 50 kilometers (31 miles) per second, faster than any other planet in the solar system. Mercury's surface temperatures range from a scorching 467 degrees Celsius (872 degrees Fahrenheit) to a bone-chilling -183 degrees Celsius (-300 degrees Fahrenheit).

Although Mercury has very little atmosphere, scientists have found water ice inside deep craters at the north and south poles of this hot little globe.



Mercury's South Pole

Mercury has been visited by only one spacecraft, Mariner 10, which flew by the planet three times in 1974 and 1975.



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