

Mercury in color

On 14 January 2008, the *MESSENGER* spacecraft passed within 200 km of Mercury during the first of its three flybys before the spacecraft settles into orbit around the innermost planet in March 2011. *MESSENGER*'s visit was the first to Mercury since *Mariner 10*'s three flybys in 1974–75. In addition to adjusting course to put *MESSENGER* in position for its 2011 rendezvous, the January flyby provided an opportunity to study the planet with the craft's seven onboard instruments. In particular, *MESSENGER* captured images of large, previously unseen parts of the planet.

MESSENGER's wide-angle camera is equipped with 11 narrowband color filters. This color image, taken 80 minutes before the spacecraft's closest approach, is a combination of three separate images, at wavelengths of 1000, 700, and 430 nanometers (in the near-IR, red, and violet) and colored red, green, and blue, respectively. The colors displayed here are thus somewhat different from what would be seen directly with the human eye. The false-color image accentuates color differences and provides information about the planet's minerals and rock types, knowledge that will be used to investigate Mercury's formation and structure. (Courtesy of NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Carnegie Institution of Washington.)

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