

# Mercury

## Six views of a planet's surface

Mercury, the planet nearest the Sun, has been visited by two probes. The most recent, Messenger, orbited the planet 4000 times in four years before crashing into its surface on 30 April 2015. Like the maps in an atlas of the Earth, the images below are coloured to highlight different aspects of Mercury's surface.

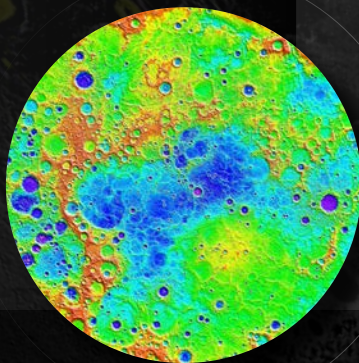


*The Mariner spacecraft flew past Mercury in March 1974. This mosaic image shows the planet's southern hemisphere.*

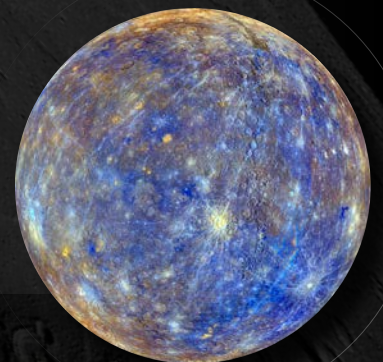


*The Messenger spacecraft took this view of the whole planet shortly after its second flyby. The colours are as they would be seen by the human eye. It's night-time on the left.*

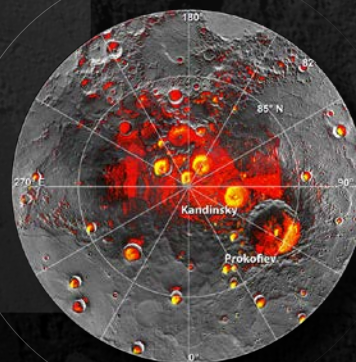
*A relief map of the surface of Mercury's northern hemisphere; the lowest areas are purple, shading through to red for the highest areas.*



*This false-colour image is designed to show up the chemical and mineral compositions of different areas of the planet.*



*Messenger detected higher than average gravitational field strength in the areas coloured red; this suggests the planet's substructure is denser in some parts than others.*



*Mercury's north pole; because the planet is tilted at just 1°, the regions shown in red never see direct sunlight. Radar observations suggest that the areas shown in yellow contain frozen water and other volatile substances.*