THE SOLAR SYSTEM · PART 6 OF 9 · AGES 11–16

Exploring the Solar System

Nine firsts, from the first satellite to a telescope a million and a half kilometres from Earth.

4 Oct 1957

Sputnik 1, the first satellite

The Soviet Union launches the first artificial satellite. The beach-ball-sized sphere beeps out radio signals as it circles Earth, starting the space age.

13 Sept 1959

Luna 2 reaches the Moon

A Soviet probe hits the Moon, becoming the first spacecraft to reach another world. Weeks later, Luna 3 sends the first pictures of the Moon's far side.

14 Dec 1962

Mariner 2 flies past Venus

NASA's Mariner 2 makes the first successful visit to another planet. It finds that Venus is scorching hot under a thick carbon dioxide atmosphere.

20 July 1969

Apollo 11: people on the Moon

Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin become the first people to walk on the Moon. Six Apollo crews land by 1972 and bring back rock and soil samples.

1977

Voyager 1 and 2 launch

Two probes set off on a grand tour of the giant planets. Voyager 2 is still the only spacecraft to visit Uranus and Neptune. Both now fly in interstellar space.

24 April 1990

Hubble Space Telescope

Space Shuttle Discovery carries Hubble into orbit about 500 km up, above the blurring air. Among many discoveries, it finds new moons around Pluto.

12 Nov 2014

Philae lands on a comet

ESA's Rosetta mission drops the Philae lander onto Comet 67P: the first landing on a comet. It bounces, then settles and sends back data.

14 July 2015

New Horizons flies past Pluto

NASA's New Horizons gives the first close-up view of Pluto, revealing mountains, glaciers, icy plains and a huge, pale heart-shaped region.

25 Dec 2021

James Webb Space Telescope

The largest space telescope yet launches on an Ariane 5 from French Guiana. From 1.5 million km away it studies the Universe in infrared light.

Still travelling

Voyager 1 crossed into interstellar space in August 2012 and is the most distant human-made object. Its radio signals, moving at the speed of light, now take almost a day to reach Earth.

NEXT IN THE SERIES
7. Solar System Myths and the Real Science

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