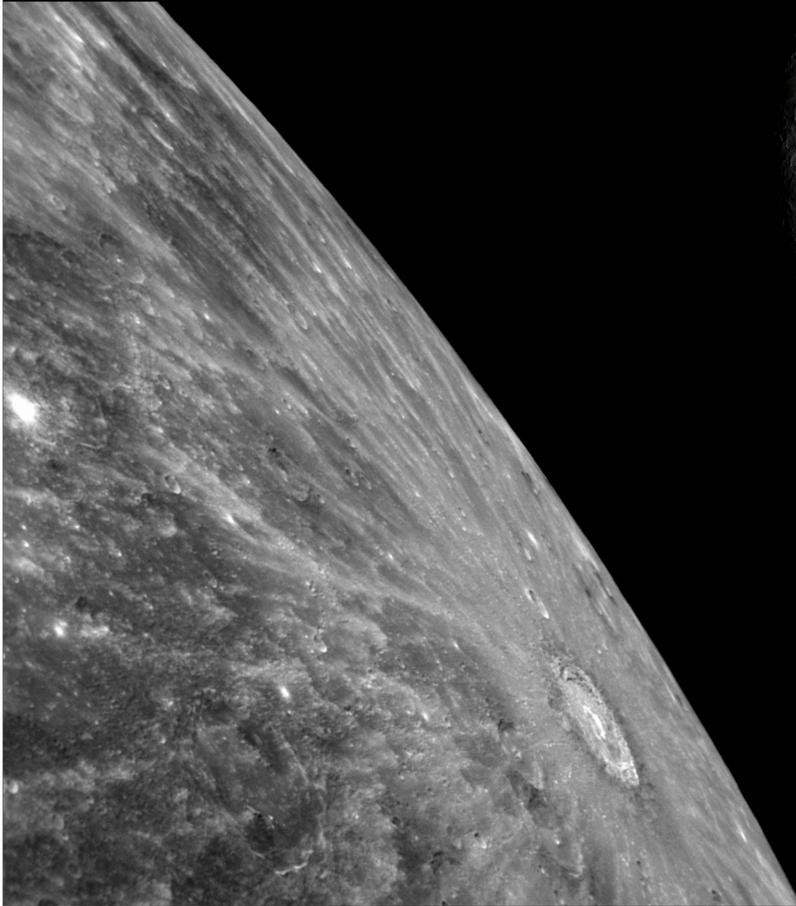
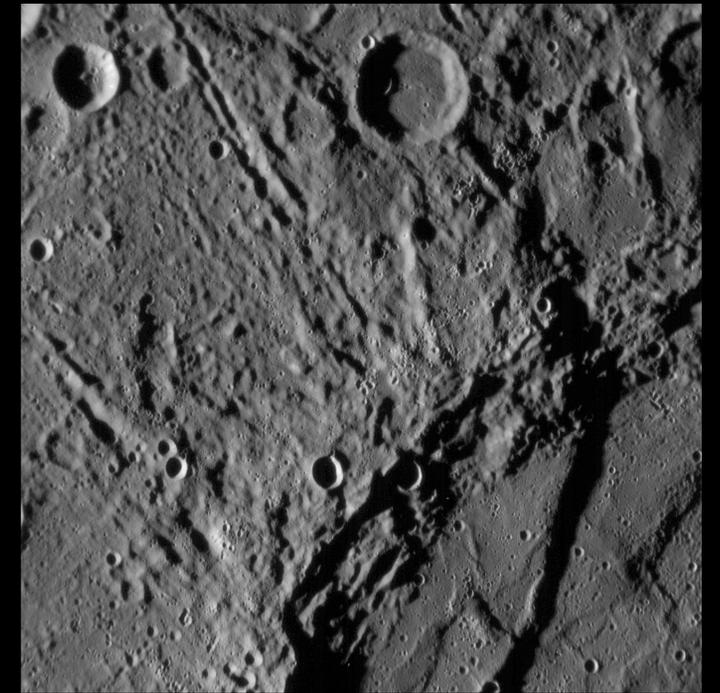


Mercury



Mercury, the closest planet to the Sun, is a **small**, cratered world with **no atmosphere**. Mercury was very hot when it formed. As it cooled off it shrank by a few kilometres, creating **giant cliffs** still visible on its surface today (right). Mercury's temperature reaches a high of **425 C** on its day side and a low of **-175 C** on its night side.



Impact craters (see photos to the left) are common on Mercury. The impact of a large body flings out pulverized material that falls back to the surface. These bright **rays** (top left) gradually darken with time.

Mercury images from the MESSENGER spacecraft courtesy of NASA / Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory / Carnegie Institution of Washington



When **Mercury** is positioned to be **seen from Earth**, it can be seen **just after sunset** low in the western sky or **just before sunrise** low in the eastern sky. The **time-lapse composite to the left** combines photos taken **every evening for two weeks** whenever the Sun was **10 degrees below** the western horizon. **Mercury** is visible as a **sequence of white dots**; its orbit around the Sun places it in a **different position every evening**.

| Mercurian year = 88 Earth days
| Mercurian day = 176 Earth days

*Imagine you are on Mercury and you watch the sun rise. By the time it sets, Mercury will have made a full orbit of the Sun. In other words, **Mercury's day is twice as long as its year!***

The **yellow circle** at right shows the relative size of the **Sun** in the scale model of the solar system made up of these panels. The **tiny dot** at the centre of the circle shows the size of **Mercury** relative to the Sun. The distances between the panels show the relative distances of Mercury and the other planets from the Sun.

