MESSENGER’S FIRST MERCURY FLYBY: A SUMMARY OF SCIENTIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Dr. Sean C. Solomon, scs@dtm.ciw.edu
Carnegie Institution of Washington, Washington, DC, District of Columbia, United States
Ralph L. McNutt, Jr.
Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland, United States
William V. Boynton
University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, United States
Larry G. Evans
Computer Sciences Corporation, Lanham-Seabrook, Maryland, United States
James W. Head
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States
Stamatios M. Krimigis
Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (and Academy of Athens), Laurel, Maryland, United States
Scott Murchie, scott.murchie@jhuapl.edu
Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland, United States
Roger J. Phillips
Southwest Research Institute, Boulder, Colorado, United States
James A. Slavin
NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland, United States
Maria T. Zuber
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

The MErcury Surface, Space ENvironment, GEochemistry, and Ranging (MESSENGER) spacecraft, developed under NASA’s Discovery Program, will be the first probe to orbit the planet Mercury in March 2011. Launched in August 2004, MESSENGER successfully completed the first of three flybys of Mercury in January 2008. The Mercury Dual Imaging System acquired an 11-color mosaic of part of the hemisphere not seen by Mariner 10, including the entire Caloris basin; several large monochrome mosaics at a range of resolutions; a series of color frames designed for photometric analysis; and inbound and outbound movies. The Mercury Atmospheric and Surface Composition Spectrometer obtained the first high-resolution spectral reflectance measurements (at ultraviolet to near-infrared wavelengths) of surface composition, conducted limb scans of exospheric species, and mapped the composition and structure of the tail region. The Magnetometer measured Mercury’s internal field at low latitudes and documented the major plasma boundaries of Mercury’s magnetosphere. The Energetic Particle and Plasma Spectrometer made the first measurements of low-energy ions in Mercury’s magneto-
sphere. The Mercury Laser Altimeter carried out the first space altimetric profile of the planet. Other instruments in the payload provided baseline measurements that will aid in the interpretation of data from the mission orbital phase. Together, the MESSENGER flyby observations have begun to advance our understanding of the innermost planet.