

NAME _____

ABOUT MARS ♂



Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun in the Solar System. Named after the Roman god of war, Mars, it is often described as the "Red Planet" as the iron oxide (rust) prevalent on its surface gives it a reddish appearance. Mars is a terrestrial planet with a thin atmosphere, having surface features reminiscent both of the impact craters of the Moon and the volcanoes, valleys, deserts, and polar ice caps of Earth. The rotational period and seasonal cycles of Mars are likewise similar to those of Earth, as is the tilt that produces the seasons.

Mars has two relatively small natural moons, Phobos and Deimos, which orbit close to the planet. Both of these moons are oddly shaped and are not exactly spherical like most moons. The idea behind why this is thought to be because Mars' gravitational pull captured in its orbit what were originally asteroids. Because they now in Mars' orbit, they are now considered moons.

In January 2004, the NASA twin Mars Exploration Rovers named *Spirit* and *Opportunity* landed on the surface of Mars. Among the most significant scientific returns has been conclusive evidence that liquid water existed at some time in the past at both landing sites.

On March 10, 2006, the NASA Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) probe arrived in orbit to conduct a two-year science survey. The orbiter began mapping the Martian terrain and weather to find suitable landing sites for upcoming lander missions. The MRO snapped the first image of a series of active avalanches near the planet's North Pole, scientists said March 3, 2008.

The Mars Science Laboratory, named *Curiosity*, launched on November 26, 2011, and is expected to reach Mars in August 2012. It is larger and more advanced than the Mars Exploration Rovers, with a movement rate of 90 m/h. Experiments include a laser chemical sampler that can deduce the make-up of rocks at a distance of 13 meters.

Questions about Mars

1. What was Mars named after? Why is Mars often called the 'Red Planet'?

2. What are the names of the moons of Mars? Why do the moons of Mars have a strange shape?

3. What were the names of the first two rovers explored Mars? What did they both discover?

4. What is the name of the rover that is currently on the way to Mars and when will it land?
