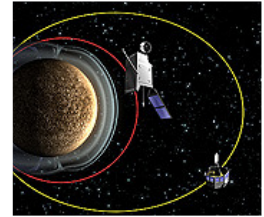


## Last week in space

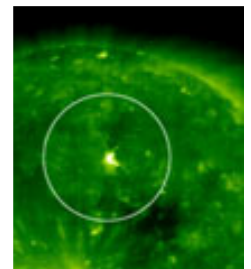
Here's a wonderful example of how amateur astronomers can make important discoveries. Three high school students from Wisconsin discovered an asteroid while doing an astronomical observation project for a class in school. The students will have the opportunity to name the asteroid, temporarily designated as 2008 AZ28. They spotted the asteroid through telescopes located in New Mexico that operate remotely via the internet. If you think you have discovered an asteroid contact the Minor Planet Centre: <http://cfa-www.harvard.edu/iau/mpc.html>

The industrial development of BepiColombo, Europe's first mission to Mercury, has been officially kicked off. The prime contract, awarded by ESA to Astrium, was signed today during a ceremony that took place in Friedrichshafen, Germany. BepiColombo is due for launch in August 2013, and will reach Mercury in 2019 after a six-year journey towards the inner Solar System. It is the first dual mission to Mercury, with one European spacecraft and one provided from Japan. The programme is carried out as a joint mission under ESA leadership with the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). For more information, take a look here: [www.esa.int/esaCP/SEM7UR3MDAF\\_index\\_0.html](http://www.esa.int/esaCP/SEM7UR3MDAF_index_0.html)



On January 14, the MESSENGER spacecraft observed about half of the hemisphere not seen by Mariner 10. These images, formed into a mosaic by the MESSENGER team, were taken by the Narrow Angle Camera (NAC), part of the Mercury Dual Imaging System (MDIS) instrument, about 20 minutes after MESSENGER's closest approach to Mercury, when the spacecraft was at a distance of about 5,000 kilometres. The image shows features as small as 400 meters in size and is about 370 kilometres across. For more information, visit the mission site here: <http://messenger.jhuapl.edu/>

The appearance of a very special solar spot on the sun signalled to scientists around the world that a new solar cycle had begun. This solar spot also produced two solar blasts. Each solar cycle lasts an average of 11.1 years. The new solar cycle, called 'Cycle 24', started on 4 January this year, when SOHO observed an event scientists have been anticipating for about a year. For more information and a short video of the flare, take a look here: [www.esa.int/esaCP/SEMT1J3MDAF\\_index\\_0.html](http://www.esa.int/esaCP/SEMT1J3MDAF_index_0.html)



## Not to be missed next week

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January. Try spotting Mercury in the evening sky just after sunset.

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> January: Take an early morning look towards the West to see at the moon, Saturn and Regulus, all close together.

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January: Take an early morning look at Venus (South-East) very close to the open star cluster M21 in the constellation of Sagittarius.

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January: Cassini will carry out a fly-by a number of Saturn's smaller moons. Take a look at the latest images here: <http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/multimedia/images/index.cfm>