Life in the Solar System

Life in the Solar System

1. Study processes that produce current conditions on planets (n_e)
2. Life elsewhere in Solar System? (f_l)

Planet Temperatures

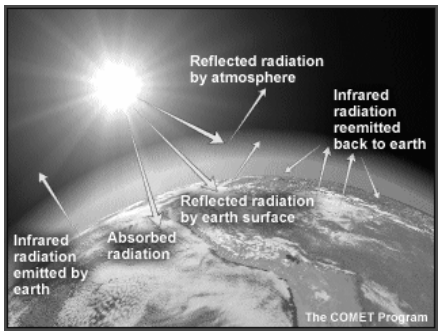
Factors in Planet temperature:
Greenhouse gas?

N_2, O_2	CO_2, H_2O	CH_4, CFC's
no	yes	yes (Life)

Reflecting Light (Albedo)
Clouds, Rock, Ice, Snow

Two extremes:
Runaway Greenhouse
Runaway Glaciation

Greenhouse effect



Terrestrial Planet Atmospheres

	Venus	Abiotic Earth	Mars	Biotic Earth
CO_2 (%)	96	96	95	0.03
N_2 (%)	~ 3	~ 3	2.7	79
O_2 (%)	trace	trace	0.16	21
H_2O (%)	< 0.1	?	--	
Pressure (bar)	90	60	0.0061	1.0
T_{avg} (ºC)	477	290 (> 50)	~ –50	15
T_{avg} (K)	750	563	~ 220	288

Recall from Chap. 3

$$T = 279K \left(\frac{(1 - A)\, L}{d^2} \right)^{1/4}$$ Rapid Rotation, Albedo

Apply to Venus, Mars

	Venus	Mars
d	0.72 AU	1.52 AU
A	0.80 (!)	0.215
T_{avg} (no greenhouse)	220	213
T_{avg} (actual)	750	220

♀ Venus: Basic Facts

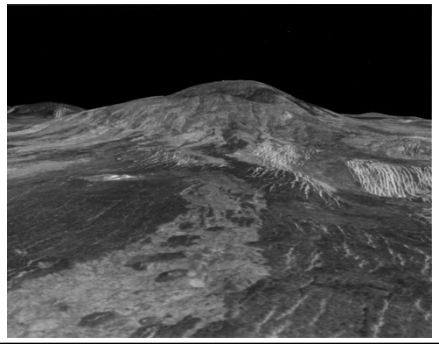
Sister Planet: $R_♀ = 0.95\ R_⊕$
$d_♀ = 0.72\ d_⊕$

BUT HOT!

Clouds: Sulfuric Acid droplets

Radar "Active" surface
Age < Age of Planet
But no large-scale plates

View of Venus from Radar Mapping



Evolution of the Atmosphere

Ultraviolet H_2O → H + O (Escape)

⇒ no oceans

⇓

CO_2 remained in atm

⇓

Thick atm, Greenhouse ⇐ Hot!

$d_♀ < d_⊕$ ⇒ H_2O higher in atm

Runaway Greenhouse

Example of positive feedback

Mars: Basic Facts

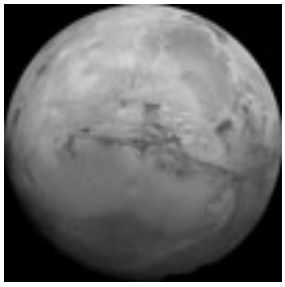
Smaller	$R_♀ = 0.53\ R_⊕$
Less Massive	$M_♀ = 0.11\ M_⊕$
Less Dense	$\rho_♀ = 0.71\ \rho_⊕$

Mars year = 687 Earth days
Mars day = 24.5 Earth hours

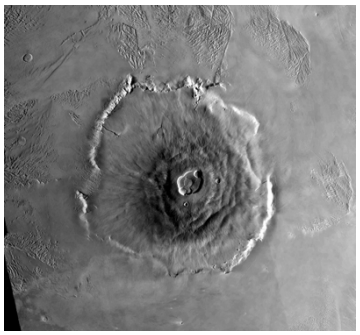
Seasons

2 small moons (captured asteroids)

Mars



Ancient Volcanoes



Olympus Mons
The largest volcano in the solar system
24 km high
Scarp is 550 km in diameter

Polar Ice Caps

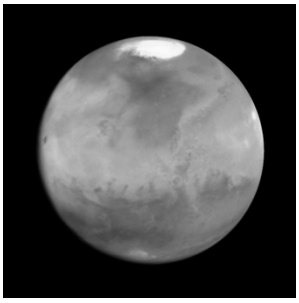


Image from the Hubble Space Telescope during close approach of Earth and Mars.

Runaway Glaciation (also positive feedback)

Thin atmosphere led to Weak Greenhouse
Cold temperature led to freeze-out of greenhouse gases
Temperature range now: T = 175 - 300 K
Some places warm enough for liquid H_2O
but pressure is too low

Active in past, but not now: Fossil river beds

Liquid H_2O for $\sim 1 \times 10^9$ yr (and perhaps more recently)

Life?
Survive another 0.7×10^9 yr in frozen lakes?
Analogy to Antarctic lakes

Antarctica as a model for early Mars

Dry valleys: Mean T = –20 ºC
Annual precipitation ~ 2 cm
But T > 0ºC for a few days in summer.
⇒ Lakes are not frozen solid (though always ice-covered)
Algae & bacteria photosynthesize in lakes
Also lichens in rocks
If life arose on Mars, it might have lasted $1 - 2 \times 10^9$ yr
A large (140 mile × 30 mile) lake
exists ~ 2.5 miles deep in ice near Vostok station
May have been under ice for 500,000 yr
Plans to drill into lake - halted in Feb. 2011 due to weather

Viking Mission

2 spacecraft 1976
1. Chryse Planitia 22º N. Lat
2. Utopia Planitia 48º N

Cameras, …

Organic Matter Analysis
3 life detection experiments
Sampler arm

Organic Matter Analysis

- Could detect carbon molecules
  - Few/billion if more than 2 Carbons
  - Few/million if 1 or 2
  - 100 to 1000 times less than desert soils
  - Could be left over, brought by asteroids, …
- No organic molecules found

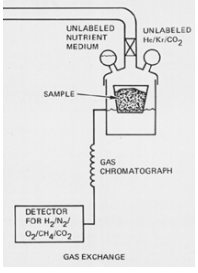
Life Detection Experiments

- All assumed microscopic soil organisms
  - Fairly near surface (shallow trench)
  - Either heterotrophs
    - Feed and look for signs of metabolism
  - Or autotrophs
    - Look for signs of photosynthesis
  - If signs of life, do a control experiment
    - Sterilize first

Gas Exchange Experiment (GEX)

- Most earth-biased
  - Assumed Martians would like chicken soup
  - Pressurized, warmed to 10 C
  - First mode: humidify
    - N_2, Argon, CO_2, O_2 released
    - O_2 required chemical reaction
  - Second mode: wet, nutrients
    - Monitor for 6 months, no further activity
- No sign of metabolizing, earth-like life

Gas Exchange Experiment

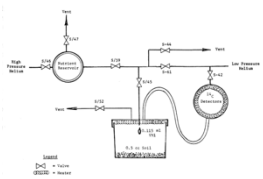


- Looks for metabolism
- Detects gaseous products
- Using gas chromatograph

Labeled Release Experiment

- Assumed metabolizing Martians
  - But less Earth like
  - Simpler mix of nutrients, labeled with ^{14}C
  - Metabolizing organisms produce $^{14}CO_2$
  - Very sensitive to small amounts
- Results: immediate release of $^{14}CO_2$
  - No further release when more added
- Chemical, not biological, reaction suspected

Labeled Release

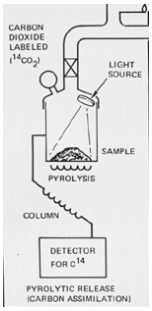


- Looks for metabolism
- Nutrients labeled with ^{14}C

Pyrolytic Release Experiment (PR)

- Assumed photosynthesizing autotrophs
  - Adapted to Mars
  - Supply light, Martian atmosphere
  - But label with $^{14}CO_2$ and ^{14}CO
    - After incubation, remove gases
    - Burn up (pyrolize)
    - Look for $^{14}CO_2$ from burned-up Martians
  - Interesting Results

Pyrolytic Release



- Looks for autotrophs
- Supplies gases
- Labeled with $^{14}CO_2$

Pyrolytic Release Results

- First experiment gave positive result
  - Could be about 100 to 1000 bacteria
    - Could have escaped detection with GCMS
  - Repeat with sterilized sample (175 C, 3 days)
    - Reaction reduced, but not eliminated
  - Further controls, lower T sterilization
    - Little change in results
- Conclusion: most likely a chemical reaction

Summary of Viking Results

No organic molecules found

Some **apparent** activity in pyrolytic release expt.

Could be photosynthesis by 100 - 1000 bacteria
They could have escaped detection by organic matter analysis
But, sterilized controls did same thing
⇒ chemical, not biological, reaction

Surface is strongly oxidizing (UV)

⇒ Organic matter would be destroyed
⇒ Experiments not designed for this
⇒ Oxygen rich compounds on surface can react like life

To find current Martians (or fossil Martians)….
Dig Deeper!

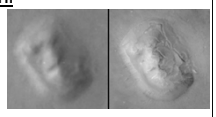
And remember that your experiments determine what you can find…

More Recent Mars Missions

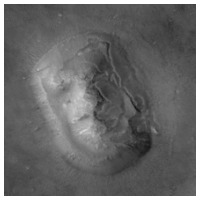
- Pathfinder/Sojourner 1997
- Global Surveyor 1998
- Mars Odyssey 2002
- Mars Express (ESA) 2003
  - Beagle crashed (life detection)
- Mars Rovers 2004
  - Spirit and Opportunity
- Phoenix (NASA) landed in 2008

Global Surveyor

Mars Global Surveyor
http://mars.sdsc.edu/mgs/index.html
1998 - in orbit around Mars
The "Face" on Mars gets erased



Viking Surveyor



And with Mars Odyssey

Global Surveyor Results

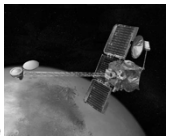
Located areas of floods within last few million years (few impact craters)

Apparently from underground
Out through volcanic fissures

Like a geyser - suspect large aquifer a couple of miles below surface

Or maybe snow (Feb. 2003)
Mars Odyssey Website

Mars Odyssey Results

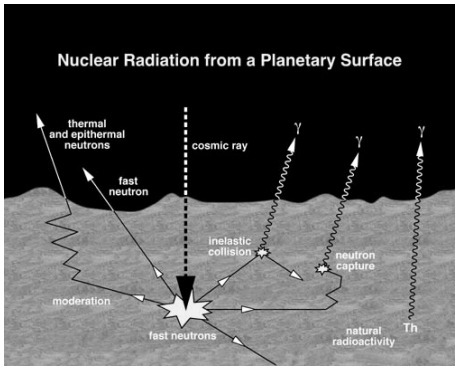


Mapping from Orbit
Gamma ray spectrometer
Cosmic rays excite nuclei on surface to emit Gamma rays

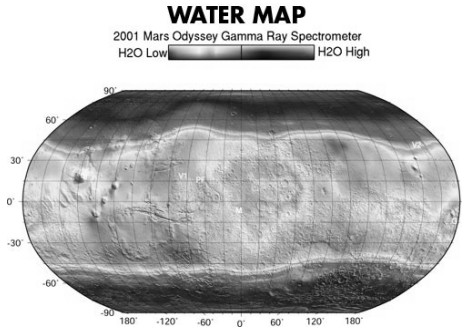
Wavelength of gamma rays characteristic of element

Also neutron detector
Can detect hydrogen (stand in for H_2O) in top meter
Evidence indicates substantial H_2O near poles

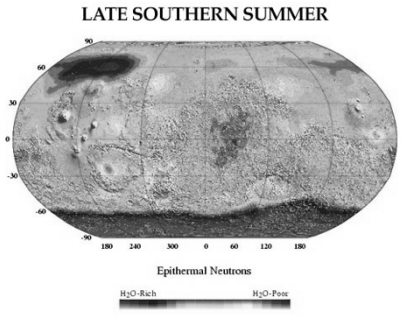
Mars Odyssey



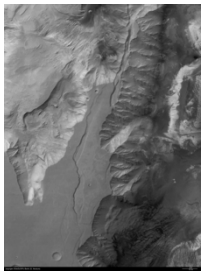
2001 Mars Odyssey Water Map



Mars Odyssey

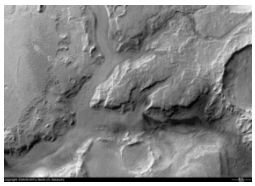


Mars Express



- Walls of Candor Chasma
- Part of Valles Marineris
- Appears to be erosion
- Liquid water?

Mars Express

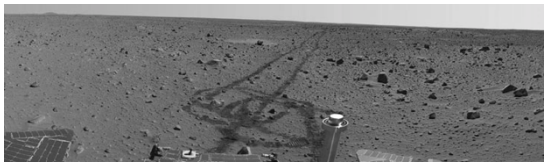


- Branching channels
- More evidence of water?

Mars Rovers

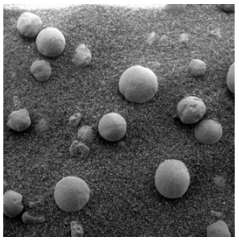
- Two Landers (Spirit and Opportunity)
- Both rovers that have explored 5 to 10 km
- Can dust rock, drill into it, analyze dust, rock
- Spirit did not revive after Mars winter in 2010
- Opportunity still going in February 2011
  - (**much** longer than expected)
- http://marsrovers.jpl.nasa.gov/home/index.html

Panorama from Spirit



Looking back at tracks. Taken May 2004

More evidence of water



Picture from Opportunity
Beads of hematite
Called "blueberries"
Eroding out of rock
Usually form in liquid water
This implies standing water at this site.

Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter

- Orbiter with variety of instruments
  - Launched Aug. 2005, arrived Mar. 2006
  - http://mars.jpl.nasa.gov/mro/
  - Detailed minerals, subsurface water
  - Resolution down to 1 m
  - Evidence of fluid (gas or liquid) along cracks originally underground

Phoenix Lander

- Phoenix (NASA)
  - Launch Aug. 2007, landed near North pole May 2008, Last contact in Nov. 2008
    - Winter, less sunlight, loss of solar power
    - Dug trenches, did chemical analysis
    - Some problems, soil was sticky
    - Clearly there was ice in the soil

Phoenix sees frost on Mars

Meteorites from Mars

- Easy way to get pieces of Mars to study
- Asteroid impact on Mars knocks off pieces
- Some land on Earth
- Antarctic ice is good place to find meteorites
- http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/snc/

Los Angeles 2002

Martian meteorite found in LA county in 1999

245 gm

AlH 84001

1.9 kg (softball-sized) found in 1984 in Allan Hills Region (AlH)
A few meteorites (~12) are so similar to Mars
Minerals & isotope ratios, that they are assumed to come from Mars
1994 AH84001 joined the Mars club

History: formed from magma ~ 4.5×10^9 yr ago
Fractured by meteorite impact
Carbonate globules, … in cracks ~ 3.6×10^9 yr ago
Blasted off Mars by impact 17×10^6 yr ago
Fell to Earth 13×10^3 yr ago

So, known to be from Mars before issue of life arose

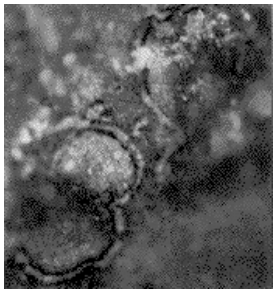
Signs of Life?

McKay et al., *Science*, **273**, 924 (Aug. 16, 1996)

Found in fractures - ~ 3.6×10^9 yrs old
When water existed

1. PAHs - can be produced by breakdown of biological tissues
   Contamination from Antarctic Ice?
   Different mixture of PAHs
   Not necessarily biological - also found in space, interplanetary dust, other meteorites, …
   Associated with carbonate globules

Carbonate globules



Evidence of liquid water formation temperature is disputed

2. Carbonate Globules (50 μm across)
   cores of manganese & rings of iron carbonate and iron sulfide
   similar to globules associated with bacterial action in liquid on Earth

Can form without bacteria on Earth
Associated with tiny magnetite grains (magnetic iron oxides)

Dispute about temperature at which globules formed

3. Magnetite Grains 100 nanometers (nm)
(100×10^{-9} m = 0.1 μm)

Shapes similar to crystals produced by bacteria on Earth

Other shapes seen by other workers

Whisker shapes suggest formation in hot fumaroles

4. Fossilized Bacteria?

With scanning electron microscope, see

bacteria-like shapes (20 - 100 nm long) similar to those seen in Earth rocks near hot springs

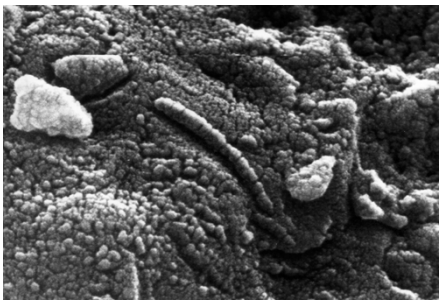
(R. Folk - UT Austin) described as nanobacteria

~ 10 - 100 × smaller than normal bacteria

Are these artifacts of process used by microscope (gold coating)?

Need to section and look for membrane - very difficult

Martians??



Later Developments

1. Several studies support lower temperature for carbonate globule formation - consistent with life
2. Folk finds similar shapes in Allende meteroite (not from Mars)
3. Conference at Johnson Space Center in Houston
   4/24 - 4/27 1997 & March 1998

4. Bada et al., 1998, Science **279**, 362 Found amino acids, suggestive of terrestrial contamination
5. Many more meteorites from Mars being found.

Venus Express Orbiter

- Venus Express Orbiter, an ESA mission
  - Launched Nov. 2005, arrived Apr. 2006
  - Studying atmosphere, surface with radar
  - Learning about methods of water loss
  - http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Venus_Express/SEMOD3808BE_0.html

Future Missions

- Planet-C (Japan) Venus Orbiter
  - Reached Venus, Dec. 2010
  - Problems with orbit injection
- Mars Scientific Laboratory
  - Rover called Curiosity
  - Launch Late 2011 (VERY delayed)
  - Mineral and possible organic matter analysis