

Solar system discoveries timeline

The timeline of discovery of Solar System planets and their natural satellites charts the progress of the discovery of new bodies over history. Each object is listed in chronological order of its discovery (multiple dates occur when the moments of imaging, observation, and publication differ), identified through its various designations ...

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Discovery and exploration of the Solar System is observation, visitation, and increase in knowledge and understanding of Earth "s "cosmic neighborhood". [1] This includes the Sun, Earth and the Moon, the major planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune, their satellites, as well as smaller bodies including comets ...

From the dawn of history until the beginning of the 17th century the known universe consisted of only 8 bodies:

plus the ÜfixedÝ stars. These are the ones that can be seen easily without any optical instruments. In Europe, the prevailing view was the Ptolemaic system with the Earth at the center and the other bodies revolving around it.

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Only 5 new bodies (not counting comets) were discovered in the 18th century (all by William Herschel) bringing the total to 22:

The number of bodies in the solar system increased dramatically in the 19th century with the discovery of the asteroids (464 of which were known at by 1899) but only 9 more ÜmajorÝ bodies were discovered. The number of major bodies rose to 31 (almost double the 17th century total):

27 more small moons were discovered by the two Voyager spacecraft:

Dozens more small moons have been discovered in recent years with large ground based telescopes and CCD cameras. There are well over 100 now known; See JPL's site for more details.

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Humans (Homo sapiens) have inhabited the Earth in the last 300,000 years at least, and they had witnessed directly observable astronomical and geological phenomena. For millennia, these have aroused admiration and curiosity, being admitted as of superhuman nature and scale. Multiple imaginative interpretations were being fixed in oral traditions of difficult dating, and incorporated into a variety of belief systems, as animism, shamanism, mythology, religion and/or philosophy.

Although such phenomena are not "discoveries" per se, as they are part of the common human experience, their observation shapes the knowledge and comprehension of the world around us, and about its position in the observable universe, in which the Sun plays a role of utmost importance for us. What today is known to be the Solar System was regarded for generations as the contents of the "whole universe".

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