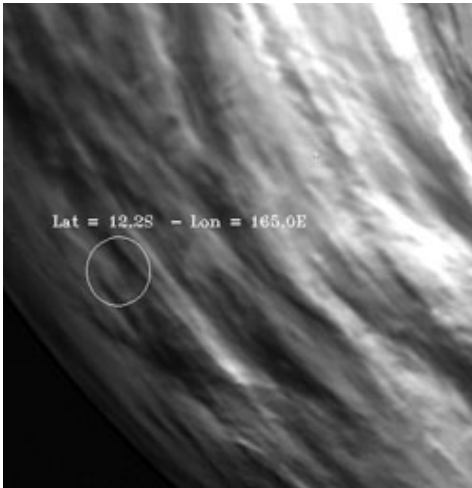


Spacecraft Tandem Provide New Views of Venus



This grey-scale image, obtained by the VIRTIS instrument on board ESA's Venus Express, shows the atmospheric region of Venus over which NASA's MESSENGER passed on 5 June 2007. The region of MESSENGER's closest approach is in the night side (marked by a circle). Credits: ESA/VIRTIS/INAF-IASF/Obs. de Paris-LESIA

NASA's Mercury Surface, Space Environment, Geochemistry, and Ranging spacecraft, known as Messenger, and the European Space Agency's Venus Express recently provided the most detailed multi-point images of the Venusian atmosphere ever seen.

The images result from a June 5 flyby of Venus by Messenger during its long journey to Mercury. Venus Express already was in orbit at the planet. The two spacecraft carry sets of instruments employing different observation techniques that complement each other.

Messenger made its closest approach to Venus at a distance of approximately 210 miles on the night side of the planet. At the same time, Venus Express was behind the horizon, almost above the planet's South Pole, at approximately 21,750 miles.

Scientists from both missions are continuing analysis of the images and accompanying data. Data included several instruments studying Venus' cloud deck and surface, plasma environment, magnetic fields, and atmosphere. More results from this joint observation campaign are expected by the end of the year.

Messenger launched on Aug. 3, 2004, and swung by Venus first on Oct 24, 2006, and for the second time in June. Messenger will enter Mercury's orbit in March 2011. Venus Express, the European Space Agency's first mission to Venus, launched on Nov. 9, 2005, and reached the planet on April 11, 2006.

Source: NASA

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