

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MERCURY, NOW THE SMALLEST PLANET IN OUR  
SOLAR SYSTEM, WILL SOON MAKE A VISIBLE PATH  
ACROSS THE SUN!**

**Come and watch the rare Mercury Transit Wednesday, Nov. 8  
at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History**

*Fort Worth, Texas* – The elusive planet Mercury has now taken Pluto’s place as the smallest planet in our solar system. In a rare astronomical event, Mercury will slowly cross the face of the sun during an event known as a *transit* Wednesday, November 8, creating a fascinating viewing opportunity at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.

Transits of Mercury only occur about 13 times in a century. The last occurred May 7, 2003 but was not observable in Texas and most of the U.S. The next Mercury Transit doesn’t happen until May 9, 2016.

***When and Where to See the Transit of Mercury:***

**Wed., Nov. 8 from 1-4 p.m. Fort Worth Museum of Science and History North Lot**

Noble Planetarium staff and volunteers from the Fort Worth Astronomical Society will man solar telescopes on the north side of the Museum Nov. 8 beginning at 1:00 p.m. The first contact, when Mercury’s disc first appears to touch that of the sun, begins at 1:12 p.m. Two minutes later, the entire Mercurian disk appears against the backdrop of the

bright orb. For the next five hours, Mercury will cross the sun. Viewers at the Museum will be able to watch the transit until about 4:15 p.m., when the sun falls below observing levels.

**Background:** Transits of Mercury always take place near May 8 or November 10, when Mercury crosses Earth's orbital plane, the ecliptic. Near May 8, Mercury is heading south; near November 10, Mercury intersects the ecliptic, moving north. If Mercury happens to be between Earth and the Sun on those days, a transit occurs.

Historically, transits were the most valued of astronomical events, giving early astronomers the key to measure the scale of the solar system. Sir Edmund Halley (1656-1742) was the first to recognize that transits could be used to measure the Sun-Earth distance.

**CAUTION:** It is extremely dangerous to view the sun without the right equipment. Blindness or painful, permanent eye damage will result. Never look at the sun directly. Always use an approved solar filter. If you are using a telescope or binoculars, be sure the filter is at the front of the instrument, NOT at the eyepiece. Be sure it is fastened securely so as not to be dislodged. You will need some sort of instrument to see this transit. Remember that Mercury's diameter is only .005 (five one-thousandths) that of the Sun's. Many sunspots are larger than Mercury!

### Transits of Mercury in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

1907 Nov 14
1914 Nov 07
1924 May 08
1927 Nov 10
1937 May 11
1940 Nov 11
1953 Nov 14
1957 May 06
1960 Nov 07
1970 May 09

1973 Nov 10
1986 Nov 13
1993 Nov 06
1999 Nov 15
2003 May 07
2006 Nov 08
2016 May 09
2019 Nov 11
2032 Nov 13

*About the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History*

Dedicated to lifelong learning and anchored by our rich collections, the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History engages our diverse community through creative, vibrant programs and exhibits interpreting science and the stories of Texas and the Southwest.

The Museum features traveling exhibits and four core exhibit galleries, including DinoDig® and KIDSPACE®; the Noble Planetarium, Museum School®; and the Omni Theater, an IMAX dome seven stories high. Since the mid-1980s, the Museum annually welcomes more than 800,000 visitors, making it one of the most popular cultural attractions in North Texas.

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**Photos courtesy The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.**