

Mars is the god of War. In Greek mythology, he is known as Ares. The planet probably got this name due to its red color; Mars is sometimes referred to as the "Red Planet." The name of the month March derives from Mars. This is the symbol for Mars:



Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun, and the seventh largest of the nine planets.

Mars comes in second place (Earth being in first) for having the most highly varied and interesting terrain of any of the terrestrial planets. Check out some of these spectacular features:



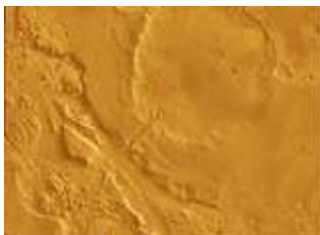
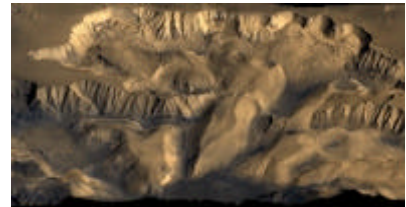
**Olympus Mons** - The largest mountain in the Solar System! Olympus Mons rises a full 24 km (78,000 ft.) above the surrounding plain. Its base is more than 500 km across and is rimmed by a cliff 6 km (20,000 ft) high!

**Valles Marineris** - A network of canyons that run 4000 km long and stand from 2 to 7 km tall!

**Hellas Planitia** - A huge impact crater in the southern hemisphere. It's over 6 km

deep and 2000 km across!

**Tharsis** - A huge bulge on the Martian surface. It's about 4000 km across and 10 km high!



Though there is no water on Mars now, it is thought that large lakes or even oceans may have once existed on this planet. Clear evidence of water erosion can be seen in old river channels and floodplains. It seems that water was only around for a very short while and very long ago.

The southern hemisphere of Mars is mostly ancient cratered highlands (left) - much like our own Moon. In contrast, most of the northern hemisphere consists of plains which have undergone changes since the planet was first formed. The northern hemisphere is also lower in elevation.



On Aug 6, 1996, David McKay announced the first identification of organic compounds in a Martian meteorite. It is suggested this may be evidence of ancient Martian life. This sounds exciting, but always remember that *"extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."* Scientists must do much more studying and research before we can be confident about this claim.

**Look for Mars!** When it is in the nighttime sky, Mars is easily visible with the naked eye. Its brightness varies greatly depending on where it is relative to the Earth.

- ~ Mars is a small, rocky planet which is cold and lifeless.
- ~ The first spacecraft to visit Mars was Mariner 4 in 1965. Several others followed including the two Viking landers in 1976. After a long break, Mars Pathfinder landed successfully on Mars on July 4, 1997.
- ~ Mars has permanent ice caps at both poles made up mostly of solid carbon dioxide. We know this as "dry ice."
- ~ Very strong winds and vast dust storms sometimes blow through the entire planet for months!
- ~ Mars has two tiny moons which orbit very close to the surface. Their names are Phobos and Deimos.