



## **The 9 May 2016 Mercury transit &ndash; a timely opportunity for outreach**

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People across most of the globe will have a chance to witness Mercury's next solar transit, 11:12-18:42 UT, Monday 9 May 2016. Occurring a year after the end of the MESSENGER mission and a few months before the launch of BepiColombo, this transit (the first since 2006) will be an ideal occasion to draw the public's attention to the science goals of those missions, to showcase what we have recently learned about Mercury, and to draw attention to the conundrums that make Mercury such a fascinating object to study.

The 2004 and 2012 transits of Venus were accompanied by major outreach events, and stimulated day-long media interest. The 2016 Mercury transit offers a similar opportunity, which the Mercury science community should seize upon. It is especially timely as an occasion to showcase the science achieved by MESSENGER and planned for BepiColombo. As a bonus, outreach infrastructure and momentum should still be fresh enough to re-use for the next transit, on 11 Nov 2019 (after that there will be a 13-year gap until 2032). Inexpensive solar projectors adequate to show the transit are readily available, and a recent upsurge of amateurs posting H-alpha and Ca-K solar images via social media shows that the amateur astronomy community is well-equipped to observe the Sun. Provisional plans for Mercury transit day 2016 are to webstream images for the benefit of those in darkness or afflicted by cloud, taking images from satellites such as PROBA-2 and SOHO as well as ground-based observatories. We will also webstream interviews and features about Mercury itself, to show what a fascinating world BepiColombo will be visiting. We would like to encourage observatories and astronomical societies to invite the public to view the transit using their facilities, and hope to be able to provide an on-line searchable list of transit events so members of the public can find one nearby.