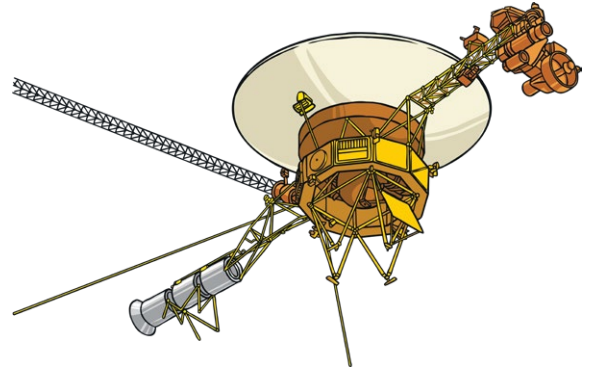


Voyager Information

In 1977, NASA launched two space probes called Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 to explore the outer planets in detail for the first time. Both missions visited the systems of Jupiter and Saturn and Voyager 2 was able to continue onwards to Neptune and Uranus. Both probes have continued their missions beyond the Solar System and are still sending back scientific information.



The missions were launched in 1977 to take advantage of a rare alignment of the planets Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Pluto. The Voyager flight paths were designed to make use of 'gravitational slingshots' a method of flying close enough to a planet to gain a boost in momentum from the speed at which that planet is orbiting the Sun. As a consequence, the probes have reached some amazing speeds. Voyager 1, the fastest, is travelling away from the Solar System at 38 500 mph!

The Voyager missions have been an incredible triumph and have been responsible for many improvements in our understanding of the Solar System. Among the achievements of the Voyager missions are:

- taking photographs which revealed the nature of clouds and storms on Jupiter;
- capturing the images of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune by which we know the planets today;
- discovering of volcanic activity on Jupiter's moon Io;
- discovering 'spokes' in Saturn's rings;
- first and only probes to visit the 'ice giants' Neptune and Uranus;
- discovering 10 new moons orbiting Uranus;
- discovering the point at which the solar wind dies down.

The Voyager Spacecraft's mad hurtle into the emptiness of space continues every moment of every day; there are trackers on the Internet which allow you to follow their progress. Voyager 1 has already become the furthest travelled manmade object in history. It is estimated that the Voyager space probes may be able to send back information for approximately another seven years. After that, it will be another 10 000 years before they get 'close' to any other known objects in space.