

Neptune

Dark, cold and whipped by supersonic winds, Neptune is the last of the hydrogen and helium gas giants in our solar system. More than 30 times as far from the sun as Earth, the planet takes almost 165 Earth years to orbit our sun. In 2011 Neptune completed its first orbit since its discovery in 1846. "We see (Neptune) as Columbus saw America from the coast of Spain.

The ice giant Neptune was the first planet located through mathematical predictions rather than through regular observations of the sky. (Galileo had recorded it as a fixed star during observations with his small telescope in 1612 and 1613.) When Uranus didn't travel exactly as astronomers expected it to, a French mathematician, Urbain Joseph Le Verrier, proposed the position and mass of another as yet unknown planet that could cause the observed changes to Uranus' orbit. After being ignored by French astronomers, Le Verrier sent his predictions to Johann Gottfried Galle at the Berlin Observatory, who found Neptune on his first night of searching in 1846. Seventeen days later, its largest moon, Triton, was also discovered

Nearly 4.5 billion kilometers (2.8 billion miles) from the Sun, Neptune orbits the Sun once every 165 years. It is invisible to the naked eye because of its extreme distance from Earth. Interestingly, the highly eccentric orbit of the dwarf planet Pluto brings Pluto inside Neptune's orbit for a 20-year period out of every 248 Earth years

