

All Aboard the Mars Express

Voice-over 1:

Mars, the red planet: our fascinating and mysterious neighbour. Satellites and probes have been studying Mars since the mid 1960s. And yet two fundamental questions still remain - where is the water that once flowed on the surface, and is there, or was there ever, life on Mars? Europe's Mars Express mission set out in 2003 to help find the answers.

Jorge Vago, Project Scientist:

I think the chances that there may have been life early in the history of Mars are good.

Agustin Chicarro, Project Scientist:

Mars is a planet which is, I would say, very much alive.

Vittorio Formisano, Principal Investigator:

Can life go underground and disappear? Can water go underground and disappear?

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To answer those questions, data from Mars Express is being used to compare Mars with Earth. There are some obvious differences. Mars is half the size of Earth, and the surface environment is harsh. The average Martian temperature is minus 55 degrees Celsius, and the thin atmosphere, made up of 95 per cent carbon dioxide, offers little protection from the sun's rays. The atmospheric pressure is just 1 per cent of that on Earth - far too low for liquid water to remain on the surface. But there are some important similarities.

Agustin Chicarro, Project Scientist:

Mars shows a variety of geological phenomena, like volcanism, like polar caps, like transparent atmosphere, like glaciers, that are only shared with the Earth. These are the two planets in the whole solar system to have these features.

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