

It's a Hoax

In August of 2003, Mars' orbit brought it closer to the earth than it will be for thousands of years. Although it was interesting, it wasn't very spectacular. The image of Mars was smaller even at that distance (34.5 million miles) than the image of Jupiter is tonight.

As the date for the close approach in 2003 neared, there was a story going around that Mars would be so close that it would appear the same size as the moon. Obviously, that didn't happen.

Surprisingly, the story resurfaced last August when Mars made its last close approach. And of course it didn't happen last year either.

(Mars' orbit brings it close to the earth every 780 days. This is called opposition because it is the point in orbit where Mars is opposite the earth from the sun.)

Like a good hoax, the story is back again this August. We have received several inquiries about the "Mars as big as the moon" story and so have the directors of other planetariums. Some of the professional websites have posted notices that the rumor is back.

In fact, at the end of August, Mars will be almost 240 million miles away. If you can still find it in the glare of the setting sun, it won't be as bright as the brighter stars.

So, if you get an urgent E-mail saying that Mars will be as big as the moon, hit the "delete" button.

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