

Staff at ESO

Alistair McPherson

As one of four boys brought up in Scotland, I was always the one with a screwdriver in my hand looking to “fix” something. It seemed inevitable that my love of things mechanical would lead me into engineering and I did this by joining the army, attending Sandhurst and completing a degree in aeromechanical engineering. I then commanded a number of units in the UK, Hong Kong and Germany — both helicopter support units and mechanical workshops — leading my soldiers on operations in Northern Ireland, the Gulf War and Bosnia.

As my career progressed I became more involved in procurement programmes, initially as a member of a French, German and UK project based in Paris and my last job in the army was as the programme manager for the Lynx helicopter fleet. In this job, I was responsible for all engineering, maintenance and airworthiness issues, as well as the procurement of a replacement fleet of some 100 helicopters.

After my job with Lynx, which I really enjoyed for the variety of engineering, leadership and politics, I made the decision to leave the army and seek a

complete change of direction. Whilst looking for another career opportunity, I saw an advertisement for the job of VLT Infrared Survey Telescope (VISTA) project manager at the observatory in Edinburgh. As I read the advert I realised that I had the qualities and experience that they were looking for and applied. The rest is history.

I thoroughly enjoyed this appointment and I learned a great deal about telescopes and how the astronomy community worked. This also gave me an introduction into ESO and, of course, Paranal. So, when I was no longer required on VISTA and there was an opportunity on the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT), I was pleased to come to Garching and join the team at the latter part of phase B.

I have had a varied, interesting and challenging career both in the army and in the world of observatories. Although I still barely scratch the surface of the astronomy side of the work, I am fascinated and motivated by being at the frontline of some pioneering engineering within the E-ELT project. I continue to enjoy the challenges that we face and, according to my wife, I apparently enjoy working



with younger intelligent people. Maybe that keeps me young?

Many challenges lie ahead of us as we move towards E-ELT construction, but as an organisation we can work together to achieve the completion of this vision. I look forward to leading the team which will deliver the reality of the E-ELT.

Fellows at ESO

Maja Vučković

I have been living in Santiago de Chile and working as an ESO Fellow for two years. Of that time I have spent about six months in the Atacama Desert at the Paranal Observatory as a VLT support astronomer. While on Paranal, I am also a Fellow responsible for X-shooter on Unit Telescope 2 (UT2), the unique echelle spectrograph that can obtain a simultaneous spectrum from ultraviolet to near-infrared wavelengths (0.3–2.5 μm). This simultaneous wavelength coverage is a

major advantage for photometrically and spectroscopically variable objects as it allows the various contributors to a spectrum to be disentangled, which is one of the hottest topics of my research at present. While in Santiago, apart from enjoying a “normal life”, I am trying to understand what the hot subdwarf stars do.

I was one of those children who dreamed of becoming an astronomer when they were growing up. My grandma frequently took me from the roof of our vacation house in the mountains as I would often

fall asleep there while watching the stars. I was mesmerised by the night sky, while all her other grandchildren would safely be sleeping in their beds surrounded by their favourite toys. Even though it seems that I have known what I wanted to do since my childhood, the road to where I am now was anything but straightforward, and it took many years.

Thirsty for knowledge during my undergraduate studies of astronomy at the University of Belgrade, my home town, I was totally taken by the observational