

The Third NEON Observing School

The Network of European Observatories in the North (NEON) is pleased to announce its third observing school, sponsored by the European Community, which will take place at Asiago Observatory (Italy) from

September 9 to 22, 2002

The school is organised jointly and alternately by Asiago Observatory (Italy); Calar Alto Observatory (Germany-Spain) and Haute-Provence Observatory (France), with additional tutorial assistance from ESO.

The purpose of the school is to provide opportunity to gain practical observational experience at the telescope, in observatories with state-of-the-art instrumentation. To this effect, the school proposes tutorial observations in small groups of 3 students, under the guidance of an experienced observer, centred around a small research project and going through all steps of a standard observing programme. Introductory lectures are given by experts in the field. The list of topics includes telescope optics, photometry, spectroscopy, data analysis, etc.... Special emphasis will be given this year on polarimetry. Additional topics cover VLT instrumentation, virtual observatories, wide-field imaging, etc....

The school is open to students working on a PhD thesis in Astronomy, or young post-docs without previous observational experience, and which are nationals of a member State or an associated State of the European Union. The working language is English. Up to fifteen participants will be selected by the organising committee and will have their travel and living expenses paid if they satisfy the EC rules (age limit of 35 years at the time of the Euro Summer School).

Applicants are expected to fill in an application form (available on the Web site), with a CV and description of previous observational experience, and to provide a letter of recommendation from a senior scientist familiar with the work of the applicant.

The application deadline is April 20th, 2002.

Secretary of the school: Mrs. Françoise WARIN at IAP 98bis, Bd Arago F-75014 PARIS warin@iap.fr

Further instructions and full practical details can be found on the school Web site, which is hosted by the European Astronomical Society at:

<http://www.iap.fr/eas/schools.html>

You will also find there a description of activities in the previous schools, hosted in 2000 by the Calar Alto Observatory, and in 2001 by the Haute-Provence Observatory.

We expect the next school to be as great a success as were the previous ones!

Spread the word around your community.

Michel Dennefeld, Co-ordinator of the NEON school

“Life in the Universe” Winners on La Silla and Paranal

A. BACHER, ESO and Institut für Astrophysik, Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck

“Please fasten your seat-belts, we are descending to Santiago de Chile!” On board of the airplane are the winners of the “Life in the Universe” contest, Mihaly Kristof, Katalin Lovei, Adam Orban, Andras Sik and Tamas Simon. All are excited and for one it is the first flight in his life. What a chance!

“Life in the Universe”, a common educational project of ESA, ESO and CERN, had its final event during the European Week of Science and Technology 2001 in Geneva. The two first prizes are a trip to Korou, sponsored by ESA, and a visit to the ESO Observatories in Chile. In November 2001, the

team from Hungary, who created an ingenious game called Entropoly, was chosen among 77 competing groups to be one of the two best projects and it won the trip to Chile.

After a day of recovering from the 17-hour flight to Chile, we went to La Silla. Olivier Hainaut gave an inspired guided tour to the telescopes. From inside we could see the 3.6-m and the NTT. The concept of active optics was explained as well as all the different instruments including their purposes. For the winners, who have never before seen a telescope with a mirror larger than 1 m in diameter, it was a thrilling moment to experience such big telescopes moving.

In the night we could see astronomers working in the New Swiss Telescope and the NTT.

At the final event in Geneva, Michel Mayor gave a talk about extrasolar planets. It was very interesting for the winners to see the New Swiss Telescope where the images shown during that talk were obtained.

In the NTT we could follow a changing of the instrument from EMMI to SOFI. We did not only see how the images of the objects were taken, but we were also told why they are so interesting and what science the astronomer will do after data reduction.



La Silla: Olivier Hainaut is explaining the 3.6-m telescope.



VLT: The winners and Gerd Hudepohl in front of UT1.

The next destination was the Paranal Observatory. Humberto Varas was our guide and showed us the site. First we

got a visit to UT1, ANTU, by day. The active optics system and the mounted instruments were explained. We also

had a look into the control room, where the different purposes of the computers and monitors were illustrated.

After dinner we went again up on the mountain and we saw the opening of the telescopes. The winners were really excited seeing the “big brother” of the NTT moving. After sunset we stayed for a long time in the control room. We got explanations of the instruments mounted on each telescope as well as of the objects imaged that night. The Telescope Operators, the Staff Astronomers and the Visiting Astronomers kindly explained us their work.

Of course, on both observatories we had the possibility to ask questions, which was very important for the winners, not just hearing astronomers talking, but speaking directly to them.

Although the long trip was very exhausting, we forgot it completely seeing the observatories. All are thankful to ESO for providing this nice prize and the opportunity to see the sites, where real frontline astronomy is done.

In the Footsteps of Scientists – ESA/ESO Astronomy Exercise Series

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The first instalments of the “ESA/ESO Astronomy Exercise Series” has been published, on the web and in print (see also ESO PR 29/01). These exercises allow 16–19-year-old students to gain exciting hands-on experience in astronomy, making realistic calculations with data obtained by the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope and ESO’s Very Large Telescope (VLT). Carefully prepared by astronomers and media experts, these exercises enable the students to measure and calculate fundamental properties like the distances to and the ages of different kinds of astronomical objects.

Cover of General Introduction.
(European Space Agency
and European Southern Observatory).

