

PHILIPPE BUSQUIN VISITS PARANAL

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR RESEARCH AT THE ESO VERY LARGE TELESCOPE

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR Research, Mr. Philippe Busquin, who was visiting the Republic of Chile, arrived at the ESO Paranal Observatory on July 29, 2003.

The Commissioner was accompanied, among others, by the EU Ambassador to Chile, Mr. Wolfgang Plasa, and Ms. Christina Lazo, Executive Director of the Chilean Science and Technology Agency (CONICYT).

The distinguished visitors were able to acquaint themselves with one of the foremost European research facilities, the ESO Very Large Telescope (VLT), during an overnight stay at this remote site. Arriving after the long flight from Europe in Antofagasta, capital of the II Chilean region, the Commissioner continued along the desert road to Paranal, some 130 km south of Antofasta and site of the world's largest and most efficient optical/infrared astronomical telescope facility.

The guests were welcomed by the ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, and the ESO Representative in Chile, Mr. Daniel Hofstadt, as well as ESO staff members.

The visitors were shown the various high-tech installations at the observatory, including many of the large, front-line VLT astronomical instruments that have been built in collaboration between ESO

and European research institutes. Explanations were given by ESO astronomers and engineers and the Commissioner gained a good impression of the wide range of exciting research programmes that are carried out with the VLT.

Having enjoyed the spectacular sunset over the Pacific Ocean from the KUEYEN telescope, one of the four 8.2 m telescopes that form the VLT array, the Commissioner visited the VLT Control Room from where the four 8.2 m Unit Telescopes and the VLT Interferometer (VLTI) are operated. Here, the Commissioner was invited to follow an observing sequence at the console of the KUEYEN telescope.

"This is a tribute to the human genius", commented the Commissioner. "It is an extraordinary contribution to the development of knowledge, and as Commissioner for Research, I am proud that this is a European achievement."

"It is a great pleasure to receive Commissioner Busquin, whose actions towards European research we admire, and to share with him the excitement about the wonders of the Universe and the advanced technology that allows us to probe them", said the Director General of ESO.



ESO astronomers demonstrate an observation sequence to Commissioner Busquin.



The Commissioner visits the VLT Interferometric Laboratory with the VINCI instrument.

ESO Press Release 22/03

Fellows at ESO

MALVINA BILLERES



WHEN I HAD MY interview for an ESO fellowship in Chile, the committee asked me where I would like to work: Paranal or La Silla. I have to confess that I had never been to either of the ESO observatories before, and I thought that my tiny amount of experience wouldn't be enough to work at Paranal, so I answered La Silla.

After two and a half years of the La Silla routine, I know that my argument was completely wrong! The fellows at La Silla do exactly the same job as the staff, with a

lot of responsibilities, freedom and interesting challenges.

I think that the most exciting thing at La Silla is that I can touch everything: be part of the difficult task of opening SOFI, pilot the New Technology Telescope with its active optics, do a turn as a Telescope and Instrument Operator (TiO), make tests with the instruments to do my science etc... With all these possibilities, I feel really lucky to be at La Silla!

Before coming to Chile, I spent almost 6 years in Montreal (Canada) where I did part of my thesis. I had the chance to work in a really good team at the University de Montreal, on pulsating stars: white dwarfs and mainly subdwarf B stars. During my thesis, I did a lot of fast photometry observations with the Montreal 3-channel portable photometer, LAPOUNE. I went

to the CFHT several times, and spent weeks at the Mount Bigelow station in Arizona (amazing to see that observatories are always localized at such beautiful places).

Today, although my science is still centred on the study of variable evolved stars (EC14026 and ZZ Ceti), I have broadened my scientific interests: the search for LPs-dBV (a new class of pulsating sdB discovered last year) in the southern skies, the search for luminosity variations in young brown dwarfs, determining the influence of magnetic cycles on measured radial-velocity with HARPS. ESO is a perfect place to start new projects thanks to the interaction with all the visiting astronomers.

In addition, the mountains in Chile are almost as beautiful as the mountains in the French alps where I came from.