

ESO 3.6 m Telescope on its Way to La Silla!

November 14, 1975 was an important date for the large ESO telescope. On that day, a meeting with about ten participants took place in Geneva. Around the table were the President of the Council, the Chairman of the Instrumentation Committee, the Director-General of ESO and members of the TP Division who had the privilege to report on the final results of the mechanical and controls tests carried out in the assembly hall of Creusot-Loire at St.-Chamond.

As could be expected with an instrument of the size and the enormous complexity of the ESO telescope, a number of problems were encountered during these tests. Most of them were not too difficult to solve, but others called for imagination and hard work. The trickiest was the high friction of the polar axis. It took us a long time to fully understand the reason for the trouble, which turned out to be a deflection of the structure of the horseshoe, resulting in a small deformation of the flat surface which takes up the axial load of the telescope. The cure was not a simple one, but by grinding under load we succeeded in reaching an entirely satisfactory result.

The astronomers invited to the meeting could, therefore, support the proposal of the TP Division to consider the test period as completed and consequently to disassemble the instrument and have it shipped to Chile.

One week later, the disassembly started and a team from the packing firm Tailleur started to pack. What a

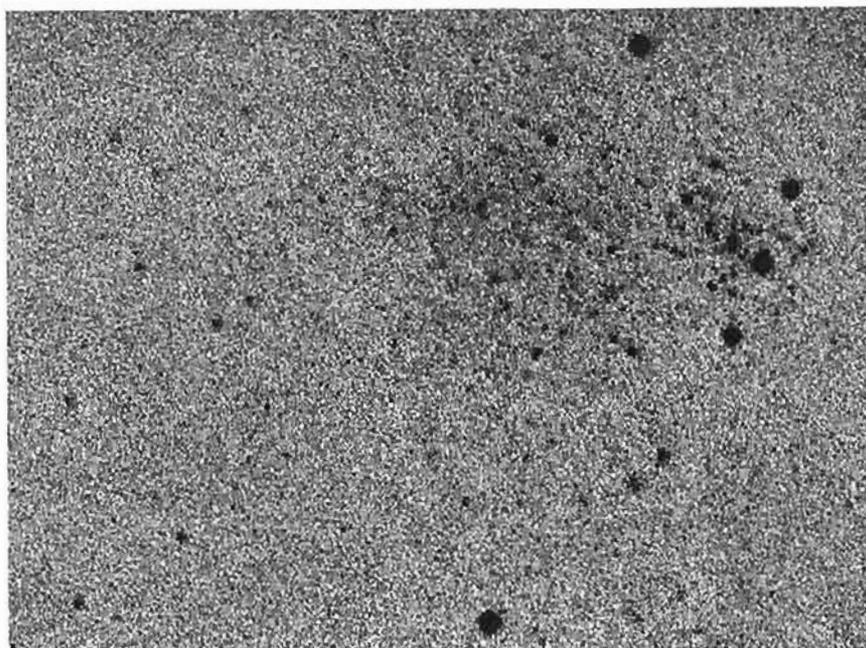
packing job! More than 150 wooden boxes had to be made. The total shipping weight of the telescope in its boxes came to 441,650 kg!

At the day of writing (February 9, 1976) these boxes were standing in the harbour Port-St-Louis-du-Rhône, close to Marseille. Creusot-Loire has chosen a Spanish ship for the transport, and it is supposed that loading will take place on February 13. Once the telescope on board, the ship is scheduled to go non-stop to Coquimbo. The passage can be done in three weeks, which is two to three weeks shorter than foreseen in our planning.

On La Silla, the contractors (Interbeton and Krupp) are busy terminating the building, the dome and the road to the 3.6 m telescope site. The somewhat earlier arrival of the telescope has put extra pressure on them to terminate their work. At present, it seems unavoidable to delay the begin of the telescope assembly by about a week in order to terminate road construction and certain works on the dome. However, telescope erection should in any case start in March. We expect to be able to turn the instrument axes in July. The big optical elements are now on La Silla, ready to be installed.

Our present plan is to make the first astronomical observation in October-November this year.

Further progress of the large ESO telescope will be reported in the next issue of the "Messenger".



A Very Distant Stellar Cluster

Looking through a night's plates from the ESO Schmidt telescope on La Silla, ESO astronomer H.-E. Schuster recently noticed a weak and fuzzy spot in the centre of a plate for the ESO (B) Atlas of the Southern Sky. By closer inspection, it became evident that the object was of extraordinary interest, showing resolution into individual stars. A yellow-sensitive plate confirmed that the brightest stars of the object are rather red; in fact, they

could very well be the most luminous giant stars in a globular cluster. From a preliminary analysis, H.-E. Schuster and R. M. West believe that this is indeed the case and they estimate the distance to the cluster at 100 kpc (about 300,000 light-years). Further observations are needed for verification and there is no doubt that the cluster will be high on the observing list when the 3.6 m telescope goes into action.