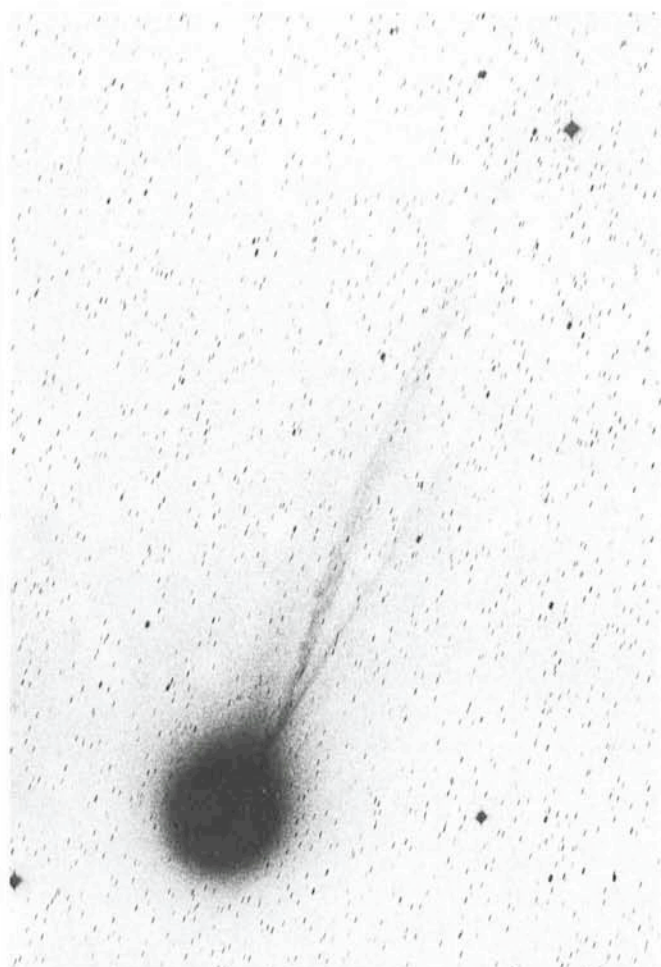


Fig. 2: γ^2 Velorum/standard star. Wavelength scale is in microns.

Comet Halley Observed at ESO

Comet Halley was photographed with the ESO 1 metre Schmidt telescope at La Silla on December 9, 1985. The



Comet Halley photographed with the ESO 1 m Schmidt telescope on December 9, 1985. Scale of the photograph: 1 degree = ~ 5 cm.

exposure was 10 minutes on a blue-sensitive emulsion. The telescope was guided on the moving comet. The stars in the field are therefore seen as short trails.

Although Comet Halley is somewhat brighter (magnitude 4 on December 12) than originally predicted, it has been slow in developing a tail. This negative picture, which has been somewhat enhanced for clarity, shows two tails pointed towards East (away from the Sun). The thin, very straight tail (the northernmost) is a typical ion-tail, consisting of charged particles, which are pushed away from the comet by the solar wind (charged particles travelling away from the Sun at high speeds). The other ion tail, which is slightly bent and broader, can be followed to a distance of about 2.5 degrees (more than 5 million kilometres) from the comet's head. The bend ("kink") is due to a change in the solar wind direction. Both tails are enveloped in a very faint cloud of dust particles, also released from the comet.

When the picture was taken, Comet Halley was about 200 million kilometres from the Sun and 110 million kilometres from the Earth. It is moving south in the sky and is becoming more and more difficult to view from Europe. In early February, it disappears from view, when it passes behind the Sun. It is expected that it can be seen again around February 15.

Many of the ESO telescopes will be used for observations of Comet Halley during early 1986.

El cometa Halley observado en la ESO

El día 9 de diciembre de 1985 se tomó una fotografía del cometa Halley con el telescopio Schmidt de 1 m. La exposición fue de 10 minutos. El telescopio fue dirigido en dirección del cometa en movimiento, y por lo tanto las estrellas aparecen como rayas cortas.

Cuando se tomó la fotografía el cometa Halley se encontraba a una distancia de aproximadamente 200 millones de kilómetros del sol y a 110 millones de kilómetros de la tierra. A principios de febrero pasará por detrás del sol y desaparecerá de la vista. Se espera que volverá a verse alrededor del 15 de febrero.

Se usarán varios telescopios de la ESO para hacer observaciones del cometa Halley a principios del año 1986.