

View of the Special Astrophysical Observatory. To the right the 6-m dome (about 45 m diameter, 50 m high) and the service crane; the guesthouse is in the background to the left.

ESO VLT Delegation Visits 6-m Telescope

At the invitation of the Special Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) of the USSR Academy of Sciences, a small ESO delegation (Enard, Schneermann, West and Wilson) recently visited the 6-metre telescope which is installed near Zelenchukskaja, in northern Caucasus. It is at present the world's largest optical telescope and constitutes an interesting reference for those who are planning the construction of the VLT, the world's largest telescope of the future. The ESO delegation was warmly received by the Director of SAO, Dr. V. L. Afanasiev and the vice-Director, Dr. L. I. Snezhko, and was lodged in the guesthouse, near the 6-m building, about 2100 metres above sea level.

Detailed discussions were held about the construction and use of large telescopes. The ESO people gave comprehensive talks about the European Southern Observatory and its Very Large Telescope project and were in turn informed about various technical aspects and scientific programmes at the 6-m telescope. A detailed inspection of the alt-az telescope, including the

enormous bearings and the Nasmyth foci platforms, gave useful hints to the ESO engineers. Their SAO counterparts

were pleased to share their extensive experience, gained during more than 15 years, and to point out those particular



In front of the SAO main building at Nizhnyj Arkhiz, below the mountain and about 17 kilometres from the 6-m telescope by road. From left to right: V. F. Afanasiev, M. Schneermann, R. Wilson, L. I. Snezhko, R. M. West, D. Enard.

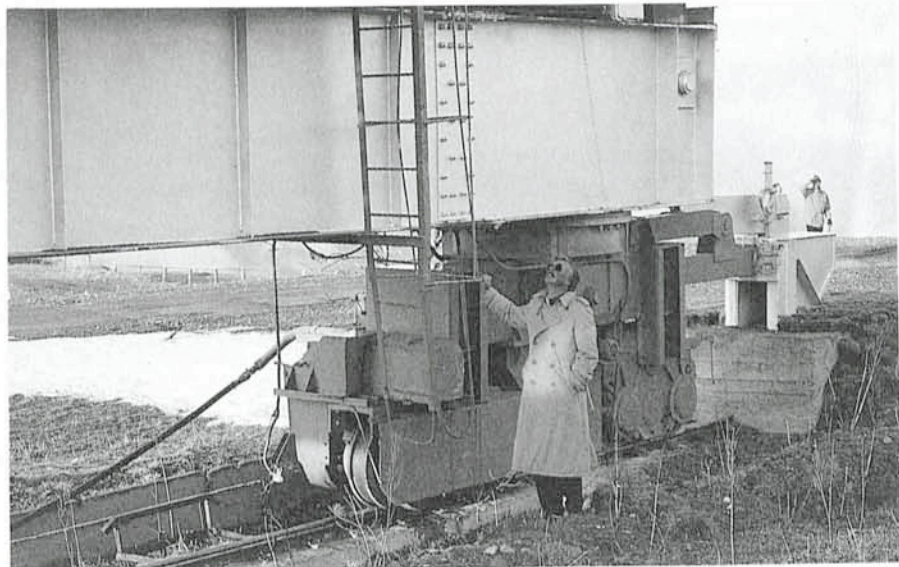
problem areas which must be considered, when ESO embarks on the construction of its VLT.

The weather was cooperative and there was ample opportunity to watch the astronomical observations which concentrated on IDS spectroscopy of the nuclei of active galaxies. SAO has recently adopted a flexible scheduling system, in which several programmes with different seeing requirements are on simultaneous standby. This system appears to have contributed to a more efficient exploitation of the available observing time.

The ESO delegation was interested to learn about the Soviet plans in connection with future large telescopes and the desire to continue the exchange of experience in such matters. There is little doubt that with the development of new astronomical sites in the USSR, in par-



The azimuth drive wheel.



At the foot of the 6-m service crane.

ticular in the high mountains of central Asia, astronomy in this country can look forward to a large observational potential.

After the stay at the 6-m telescope, the ESO people travelled to the other side of Caucasus and during a brief visit to Tbilisi, they had talks with colleagues from the Abastumani Astrophysical Observatory of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. Under the directorship of Academician E.K. Kharadze, plans are now under way for the installation of a large optical telescope at this observatory. Although the time was short, the ESO people were also given the opportunity to experience the legendary Georgian hospitality.

We owe sincere thanks to our hosts for making this visit so useful and pleasant.

R. M. W.

Major Film About Astronomy to be Produced

A major film about astronomy, telling the story of this science from Antiquity to our days and including a detailed overview of modern astrophysical research, is now being prepared by a French producer, with the support of the French Ministry of Education, La Villette, French television and other organizations. In view of the importance of this ambitious international project, which is carried out with the active collaboration of several well-known European astronomers, the European Southern Observatory has offered to provide advice and services during extensive shooting

sessions at the La Silla observatory and also at the Headquarters in Garching.

The project aims at a 6-hour series which will be shown on television in several countries. An associated, large (travel) exhibition and a comprehensive written documentation (book) will also be prepared. The work of astronomers, their celestial discoveries and the life at astronomical institutions, with buildings and instruments will be described.

In order to bring this project to a successful conclusion, the film people are now in the process of establishing contacts with observatories all over the

world and they would greatly appreciate any material (brochures, photos, etc.) at the following address: Mr. R. Pansard-Besson (Les Productions Berthemont), 47, rue de Rennes, F-75006 Paris, France.

The editors regret that the wrong institute was indicated after the name of D. Heynderickx (*The Messenger* No. 47, March 1987, p. 28). The correct affiliation is: Astronomisch Instituut, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium.