

Symposium "The Physics of Compact Objects: Theory versus Observation", Sofia, Bulgaria, July 1987. November 1987.

548. B. Reipurth: Pre-Main Sequence Binaries. Review presented at the NATO ASI meeting "Formation and Evolution of Low Mass Stars", 21 Sept. - 2 Oct. 1987, Viano do Castelo, Portugal. November 1987.
549. E. Oliva and A. F. M. Moorwood: Detection of New, High Excitation, Emission Lines of H₂ in the 2.0-2.4 μ m Spectrum

of the Orion Nebula. *Astronomy and Astrophysics*. November 1987.

NOTE TO OUR READERS

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A Timely Reminder

There has recently been much concern among astronomers about two proposed, commercial space projects. A "Ring of Light" would celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Eiffel Tower, and the Celestis capsule is supposed to carry the cremated remains of humans into space. The International Astronomical Union (IAU) has reacted strongly through its Commission 50 which deals with the safeguard of the best possible observing conditions. Whereas it now appears that the "Ring" will not materialize, less is known about the status of the Celestis project. In any case, there has been a renewed interest in "pollution" of the skies and the astronomers who work with the ESO Schmidt telescope were recently asked by the President of IAU Commission 50 to comment on the number of satellite trails they see on ESO Schmidt plates.

When the counting of satellite trails was nearly finished (Result: there is hardly any long-exposure plate without at least one trail, but since they are thin, they normally do not interfere with the measurements), the triple trail reproduced here was registered on a 2-hour Schmidt plate, exposed for the ESO(R) half of the joint ESO/SERC Atlas of the Southern Sky, now nearing completion. Nothing like it had ever been seen before on any plates obtained at La Silla. In particular, the multiple appearance was puzzling - each trail was double - which three (or six!) satellites were moving in such a perfect procession?

Thanks to the experience of ESO photographer Hans H. Heyer, who also experiments with astrophotography in his spare time and who lives near the Munich airport, the "mystery" was quickly solved. The triple trail was registered sometime between 19:47 and 21:47 (Chilean time) in the evening of Thursday, August 20, 1987, about 40° above the horizon, directly towards south. That evening, at about 19:10, flight PL 696 took off from the Santiago international airport and followed a

northerly course towards Lima, Peru. The DC-8 jet with a wing-span of 43 metres flew through the Schmidt field-of-view less than an hour later.

Supposing that the speed was about 900 km/h and also that the plane passed almost directly over La Silla, the angular distances between the trails of the navigational lights on the wing tips

and below the body indicate that the distance from the ESO telescope was about 13 km; this corresponds to a flight altitude of 11 km. The lights are double for safety reasons and the red lights on the left wing show up more strongly on the red-sensitive plate than the green lights on the right wing. In addition, the strobe lights, which are seen as bright spots at intervals of 0.8 along the wing light trails, flash each 1.1 seconds during 8 milliseconds. The angular distance between the double lights is 7 arc-seconds (projected distance 40 cm), illustrating in an unusual way the resolving power of astronomical instruments.

The loss of a plate for the Sky Survey due to a high flying aircraft is a pity, but not a disaster. However, the fact that this event is the first of its kind recorded at La Silla is a timely reminder. It underlines the nearly perfect "remoteness" of the ESO site, but it also demonstrates the need to preserve these optimal conditions by continued vigilance against all intrusions in space or closer to the ground.

R. M. W.

