



- Paranal
- La Silla
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The ESO Council Visits Chile

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Far from the dreary winter clouds of Europe and in a less formal attire than usual, the members of the ESO Council have just paid a working visit to the ESO installations in Chile, the first since 1972. Under a deep blue sky they climbed the site of the future VLT Observatory at Paranal, and another day and night was spent at La Silla, providing Council delegates with an opportunity to experience life in the remote desert and also to visit the astronomers at the telescopes at night.

This visit of Council was arranged at a particularly appropriate time, one year after the historic decision to choose Paranal for the VLT. It began officially on December 2 with the inauguration of the ESO Exhibition "Explorando el Universo" at the Casa Central of the Universidad de Chile in downtown Santiago. A large number of illustrious guests responded to the joint invitation by the Rector of the Universidad de Chile, Prof. Jaime Lavados Montes and myself. The Chilean Minister of Education, Don Ricardo Lagos Escobar, delivered the official opening speech, and many members of the diplomatic corps in Santiago, including the ambassadors and chargés d'affaires of the ESO member countries and numerous representatives of the local authorities honoured the ceremony by their presence.

role of astronomy in Chile and extended a special welcome to the members of the ESO Council whom he wished a happy and fruitful stay in his country. He talked about the virtues of astronomy as a science with an apparently unlimited

potential for new, exciting discoveries and an indivisible part of culture. He valued the international efforts to support Chilean astronomers in various ways and he looked forward to an even closer collaboration in the future.



Council at Paranal on December 3, 1991. From left to right in back row: Mrs. A. Hansen (Germany), Messrs. J.-P. Swings (Belgium), W.N. Brouw (Netherlands), C. de Loore (Belgium), J. Bezemer (Netherlands), H. E. Jorgensen (Denmark), P. Léna (France), C. Chiuderi (Italy), F. Bello (Portugal) and P.-O. Lindblad (Sweden); from left to right in front row: Messrs. M. Grewing (Germany), J. Damagnez (France), P. Creola (Switzerland), F. Pacini (Italy; President), H. van der Laan (Director General of ESO), H. Grage (Denmark; Vice-President), G. Carante (Italy), M.O. Ottoson (Sweden) and M. Golay (Switzerland).

The Minister of Education praised the



The Chilean Minister of Education, Don Ricardo Lagos Escobar (second from right); Prof. F. Pacini, President of the ESO Council (left); Prof. Jaime Lavados Montes, Rector of the Universidad de Chile (second from left); and Prof. H. van der Laan, Director General of ESO, at the inauguration of the ESO Exhibition at the Universidad de Chile in Santiago on December 2. The display will remain open to the public until the end of January 1992, whereafter it will be transferred to La Serena for display during the annual summer fair in that city. From there it later travels to Antofagasta.

In my discourse I emphasized that the vitality of any research enterprise depends first and foremost on its human resources. The most important condition for the successful elaboration of ESO's partnership with Chile's astronomy community is that community's ability to attract more talents from the body of students with interest in science, to astronomy. This point was also discussed with care in two separate audiences with two of Chile's ministers, Don Ricardo Lagos and Don Edgardo Boeninger, in the week before.

The next day, Council travelled by air to Antofagasta and onwards to Paranal by bus. The stark desert landscape was admired by the delegates, some of whom visited Atacama for the first time. On the top of the mountain, they were received by various members of the ESO staff, including those who have been responsible for the long-term site testing that finally led to the acceptance of Paranal as the VLT site. There was ample opportunity to inspect the progress of the levelling of the top (including a big blast that day!) and to get a feeling for the unusual working and living conditions at this remote site. In the evening, Council returned to Antofagasta and spent the night there. A visit was arranged to the site in the outskirts of the town where ESO is acquiring a small property for its future installations in that city.

Council left Antofagasta in the early afternoon of December 4, flew to La Serena (Ladeco, the internal Chilean airline, had been convinced to make an unscheduled stop there) and on to La

Silla by ESO bus. Here the Council members were met by the La Silla staff and spent the rest of the day informing themselves about the state of affairs at ESO's main installation, and also about the preparations for the move to Santiago of part of the staff, in particular the Administration, to begin in the course of 1992.

In the evening, visits were arranged to the various telescopes. The sky was clear and there was a beautiful view of the sunset over the Pacific, at the present time with a particularly strong red hue due to the dust in the high atmosphere from the eruption earlier this year of the Pinatubo volcano on the Philippines (cf. the photo on page 66). Then the marvellous southern sky came into view, adding this grandest of all inspirations in astronomy to the delegates' many impressions.



A reception was held at the ESO Guesthouse in Santiago, in the evening of December 2.

The actual Council meeting took place on December 4 (in Antofagasta), 5 (at La Silla) and 6 (in the UN CEPAL building in Santiago) and dealt with a number of important matters. Council was pleased to learn that the VLT project is proceeding according to the foreseen time schedule and, in particular, within the agreed budget frame. The recent successful production of the first 8-metre blank at Schott for the VLT (which still has to be ceramized into the zero-expansion Zerodur material) was noted with enthusiasm. The planning of the VLT instrumentation is progressing at a good pace (cf. the overview article in *Messenger* 65, p.10; September 1991).

Another important agenda item was a thorough discussion about the relations with the host state of our observatories, summing up more than 25 years of excellent collaboration between ESO and Chile, and considering how in the future these bonds can be made more effective still to both partners' benefit, now that ESO is building the VLT Observatory.

On Monday, December 9, the President of the Republic of Chile, Don Patricio Aylwin Azocar, granted an audience to a small ESO delegation, headed by Prof. Franco Pacini, President of the ESO Council. President Aylwin was informed about the state of development of our Organization, in which he expressed a keen, appreciative interest. The ESO delegation expressed its gratitude for the hospitality and support from the Republic's authorities during the past 28 years and looks forward to continued collaboration in the decades to come.

Most of the Council members returned to Europe at the end of the week. Before departure, many of them expressed satisfaction about the visit, having found it very useful and contributing to the work of Council. They came away with a better understanding of the conditions at the remote sites and were visibly impressed by the ESO operations. This working visit had certainly fulfilled expectations.