



US Ambassador Visits NOAO South

Chris Smith

The new US Ambassador to Chile, Paul E. Simons, paid an overnight visit to the AURA facilities on Cerro Tololo and Cerro Pachón on 19 April 2008. Ambassador Simons recently arrived in Chile, and was excited to come to La Serena to visit our facilities in northern Chile. Chris Smith hosted the ambassador on behalf of both AURA and CTIO, together with Steve Heathcote, director of the Southern Astrophysical Research (SOAR) telescope, and Jean-René Roy, deputy director of the Gemini Observatory.

The visit included tours of SOAR, Gemini, and various telescopes at CTIO, together with a quick stop at the future site of the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope. The ambassador was joined by two Fulbright scholars and former CTIO summer students: Gabe Brahmmer and Guillermo Damke. Gabe participated in the 2001 CTIO Research Experiences for Undergraduates program and is now a PhD student at Yale University, spending this year working at the University of Chile in Santiago. Guillermo participated in the 2006 CTIO Prácticas de Investigación en Astronomía program and is currently working as a data analyst at CTIO. He will start his PhD at the University of Virginia in September 2008.



Figure 1: Ambassador Simons hears about the variety of operational arrangements that CTIO supports on Cerro Tololo, from those operated wholly by CTIO to our support of US university facilities on site.



Figure 2: SOAR Director Steve Heathcote points out unique features of the telescope to the ambassador, accompanied by Fulbright scholars Gabe Brahmmer and Guillermo Damke.



Figure 3: Gemini Deputy Director Jean-René Roy describes the operation of the Gemini South 8-meter telescope.

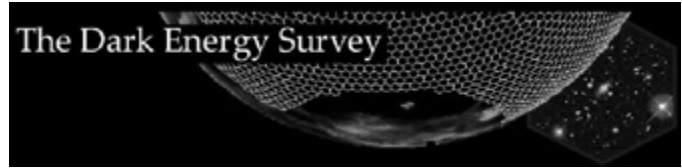
The April 2008 Dark Energy Survey Collaboration Meeting

Christopher Miller

The Dark Energy Survey (DES) collaboration held its semi-annual meeting in La Serena from April 23–26. Over 50 international visitors arrived from 20 different organizations spread over three continents.

The DES collaboration meetings provide an opportunity for this large and very distributed project to have face-to-face contact on a regular basis. Each DES participant organization will host at least one meeting over the course of the project. This was the first chance for many of the collaboration members to see the site where the Dark Energy Camera (DECam) will be placed—on the Blanco 4-meter telescope at Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory.

The Local Organizing Committee included Chris Miller, Tim Abbott, Chris Smith, and Alistair Walker from CTIO. Leonor Opazo and Ximena Herreros did most of the real work in coordinating the meeting.



Two additional technical meetings were held during the days before the larger collaboration meeting: a front-end electronics team meeting and an integration-and-installation team meeting. Ricardo Schmidt and Tim Abbott organized these two groups, who spent much of their time on Cerro Tololo working out the more challenging details of integrating the large DECam instrument onto the Blanco telescope.

CTIO Staff Changes

Alistair Walker

Over the past several months, there have been a number of staff changes at CTIO, both on the mountains and at our La Serena headquarters. As reported in the March 2008 *NOAO/NSO Newsletter* by KPNO Director Buell Jannuzi, these changes have two primary sources. One is normal staff turnover; the other is the outcome of implementing the recommendations of the NSF Senior Review, whereby CTIO and KPNO were directed to modernize their facilities and provide state-of-the-art instrumentation.

On Cerro Tololo, both Blanco 4-meter telescope operators, Mauricio Fernandez and Angel Guerra, have retired after many years of outstanding service. Their skill and dedication at the Blanco telescope is one of the primary reasons that visiting astronomers invariably give top ranking to their technical support team in their after-run evaluations. Our telescope operators have nighttime responsibility for the safety of the facility and personnel, and are also our direct interface with the visiting astronomers. We wish Mauricio and Angel all the best for the future.

Claudio Aguilera, Alberto Pasten, and Mauricio Rojas are our new operators, who will work at either the Blanco or Southern Astrophysical Research (SOAR) telescope. We are broadening the tasks undertaken by the telescope operators, so they will also be trained

in instrument set-up and support, in addition to their regular activities. Claudio and Alberto previously worked on the small telescopes for the Small and Moderate Aperture Research Telescope System (SMARTS) consortium, so we also welcome Jose Velasquez and Manuel Hernandez as the two replacement SMARTS operators.

SOAR is in a phase of instrument commissioning, which is expected to last for at least the next two years, so new electronic technician Guillermo Dubo will assist in these activities along with day-to-day maintenance of the facility. On Tololo, we have employed electrical technician Nelson Ogalde, who will begin by instituting a comprehensive preventive maintenance plan for the many electrical systems at the Blanco telescope.

Daniel Holck has just begun as a junior optical engineer. He will have a diverse set of responsibilities, including the optical well-being of the smaller telescopes and assisting our optical engineer, Roberto Tighe, with the Blanco and SOAR telescopes.

A few months ago, Marco Bonati, a senior computer programmer, returned to CTIO after several years working on astronomical instrumentation at Caltech. Marco is a CCD controller expert, and will support both our present Arcon and Leach controllers, as well as

work on the development of the new NOAO Monsoon controllers. These controllers operate with the NOAO Extremely Wide-Field Infrared Imager, and—soon— the Dark Energy Camera. We plan to retrofit the Tololo Arcon controllers with Monsoon systems as soon as possible.

Finally, a few statistics: CTIO has always been perceived to have a very stable staff, a consequence of an exciting and fulfilling work environment for its employees, coupled with good staff-management relations, and a competitive remuneration package. However, over the last several years, our advantage in these respects over other employment opportunities has been eroded. With the impact of budget constraints and previous uncertainties about the future of CTIO, we have seen greater staff turnover than in previous decades.

It is interesting to note, considering all NOAO staff in Chile, that exactly half (46 of 91) of our staff began employment in 2000 or later. Of the remainder, one person started in the 1960s, 14 in the 70s, 16 in the 80s and 14 in the 90s. I hope that the renewed emphasis on the importance of CTIO as determined by the Senior Review and exciting upcoming projects like LSST will convince outstanding new employees, such as those listed above, that they can have fulfilling long-term careers at CTIO.