SOAR Science Operations Ramping Up

Steve Heathcote

The first semester of regular science operations at SOAR (semester 2006B) has just drawn to a successful close with favorable feedback from the principal investigators of the six supported NOAO programs, which totaled 21 nights of observing. Semester 2007A is about to get underway, during which 11 programs totaling 27 nights are scheduled.

Looking ahead to 2007B, we anticipate scheduling 50 percent of the time for science—with a goal of 60 percent—so that at least 27 nights will be available through the NOAO time allocation process. Again, the instruments available will be the SOAR Optical Imager and the OSIRIS near-infrared (IR) imager/spectrometer (See *www.soartelescope.org* for further information on these instruments).

The remainder of the year will see intensive work on instrument commissioning, with three additional instruments slated to come on line during 2007.

The new detector package for the Goodman Spectrograph, a custom version of a camera manufactured by Spectral Instruments containing a 4k × 4k Fairchild CCD 486, has been received at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and software integration work is underway. Once this has been completed, the camera will be shipped to Chile for integration with the spectrograph, allowing us to complete commissioning of this instrument.

Pre-shipment testing of the Spartan IR camera at Michigan State University is nearing completion, with delivery to Chile and the subsequent start of commissioning now expected to take place in the second quarter of 2007.

The Phoenix high-resolution IR spectrometer will move to SOAR in April, upon completion of its very successful stint as a visiting instrument on Gemini-South.

While we do not expect commissioning of these instruments to be advanced far enough to allow us to offer them as general-user instruments in 2007B, we expect to issue an announcement of opportunity to participate in science verification testing of one or more of the instruments later in the year.

Comet McNaught as seen from Cerro Pachón on 20 January 2007, with the Moon at lower right, and the SOAR and Gemini South telescopes in the foreground. *Credit: Joao Santos.*

Knut Olsen & Dara Norman Move to NOAO North

Knut Olsen and Dara Norman, with daughter Tyra, moved from Chile to Tucson in late February, after almost eight and five years at CTIO respectively.

Knut came to La Serena as a post-doc—yet another member of the University of Washington "mafia." After 18 months, a tenure-track position became open and we were only too happy to have Knut become a more permanent fixture! Over the years, he did just about everything at CTIO, including supporting a variety of instruments—particularly Mosaic and Hydra on the Blanco telescope—and helping to organize meetings and colloquia, including the first IAU Symposium in Chile.

More recently, Knut did valuable work on science simulations for the next generation of extremely large telescopes exploring the limits of faint and crowded stellar photometry in barely-resolved populations in nearby galaxies. He now works for the NOAO Gemini Science Center (NGSC) supporting US users of Gemini, but has also found time to play a leading part in several collaborations studying stellar populations in the Magellanic Clouds and Local Group galaxies.

Dara, who also now works for NGSC, came to CTIO holding an NSF postdoctoral fellowship to continue working on quasars, Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN), and large-scale structure. Recently, she has used the Deep Lens Survey in combination with Chandra X-ray telescope data to identify AGN candidates in galaxy cluster environments. Further observations to determine their physical characteristics are underway. Dara has also found time to play a very significant role in local educational outreach. We'll really miss Dara and Knut, and we wish them all the best for the next stage of their careers in Tucson.

-Alistair Walker