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SciOps

DOCUMENTATION

Those of you who applied for WFI time in P73 will (hopefully!) have noticed the new-look WFI web pages (you do read them don't you?). These pages should be easier to navigate, and you should be able to find the information you are after much quicker than in the past.

A similar thing has just happened for SUSI2 on the NTT. The SUSI2 webpages have just had a complete revamp to make important information much easier to find.

As a result of two successful upgrades, TIMMI2 has a new user's manual available online. A postscript version will soon be released.

In addition, the postscript version of the EFOSC2 user manual has had a major overhaul for the first time since 1999. The new manual can be found under the "Documentation" link on the EFOSC2 webpage.

One way to improve our documentation and make it more useful to the user community is for you to provide us with feedback. If you have any comments you would like to make on any of the La Silla documentation, please email us at *lasilla@eso.org*

SOFI

The InfraRed spectro-imager at the NTT has not been at all well over the past few months, suffering several mishaps one after the other. Several wheels have either lost their initialization switches or become stuck, making the operation of SofI quite challenging. The final days of October will see SofI undergo a thorough maintenance mission, during which time the instrument will be almost completely dismanteled and three of the wheels replaced. We expect that this intervention will restore SofI's reliability.

FEROS (John Pritchard)

FEROS is once again undergoing a major upgrade. After last year's successful move from the ESO-1.52m to the MPG/ESO-2.20m, FEROS, the last non-VLT compliant instrument, is now being given a "VLT makeover". The major result of this, as far as the community is concerned, is that observers will now use the ESO standard P2PP to observe with FEROS. This will also allow FEROS to be operated in Service Mode, opening the door for new types of projects (e.g. long term monitoring). This will result in a significant increase in productivity of the 2.20m telescope since the constraints for WFI and FEROS programmes are largely complimentary.

The first stage of this upgrade, the Fibre Service mission, was carried out in October. This involved a complete replacement of the Science fibres, and has successfully restored FEROS to its intrinsic high efficiency (approximately 18% for Telescope+Instrument+Detector). We now finally realise the factor 2 increase in throughput (compared to the ESO-1.52m) due to the increased light collecting area of the 2.20m.

The November commissioning period should see the complete implementation of the VLT standard Instrument and Detector Control Systems, and the replacement of the current Copenhagen University Astronomical Observatory CCD Controller with an ESO standard FIERA CCD Controller.

The new FEROS (FEROS-II) will be back online in mid-November and will immediately be put to work on several Service Mode programmes. The first visiting astronomer to use FEROS-II will arrive in late December.

SEST

In the June Messenger we brought you highlights from the last dishwalk at the SEST. Since the end of August however, the SEST has been stowed and we have had to bid the staff of SEST farewell from La Silla. Some of them can now be found moving further up in the world (in both latitude and altitude) and we wish them every success with APEX.

MARS

27th August 2003 found Mars at the closest it has been to Earth in a very long time, and the staff of La Silla as well as the kids from the village of Cachiyuyo at the ESO 1m telescope to witness the event. A brief presentation explaining the astronomy behind the close approach preceded the viewing session through a mounted eyepiece (not often you actually get to look through a 1m telescope these days!). The seeing conditions were really quite good and you could clearly see lighter and darker regions on the surface of Mars, as well as the bright, white polar cap. La Silla University really put on a wonderful evening for all who could attend, and it was amazing to see such a lot of detail on the surface of Mars with my own eyes. Thanks to our resident photographer, Peter Sinclaire, photographs of the event can be found at:
http://www.pbase.com/psinclai/marte&page=all

The kids from Cachiyuyo and the line of La Silla staff all waiting to glimpse a peek at Mars