

André B. Muller (25.9.1918–1.4.2006)

Richard M. West (Munich, Germany)

With great sadness, we have learned about the death of André Muller on 1 April, at the age of 87. Living in retirement in his native Holland since 1983, he was one of ESO's true pioneers, an outstanding representative of the select group of European astronomers who succeeded in steering ESO through the difficult initial phases. André was closely associated with the entire process, from the first site monitoring programmes in South Africa to the subsequent search in Chile, the decision in favour of the La Silla site, as well as the management of ESO's early activities in Chile, including the construction of the headquarters and observatory and the installation of the first generation of ESO telescopes. Few persons, if any, have been so intimately connected to the setting-up of ESO's facilities and it would be impossible to list in detail all of the services André performed for the organisation with such great expertise and zeal during his long career.

André Muller obtained his PhD in Leiden in 1953, with a study of the variable star XZ Cygni. His thesis advisor was Pieter Oosterhoff, one of the twelve leading European astronomers who authored the historical statement in January 1954 that ultimately led to the creation of ESO.

Based at the University of Groningen as an associate of Adriaan Blaauw, ESO Director General (1970–74), André worked for some time at the Leiden Observatory station on the premises of the Union Observatory in Johannesburg, South Africa. Thus he was well prepared to participate in the early site studies in that country. He led the 'Quick Look Expedition' at the Table Mountain in the Klavervlei Farm area in 1959–60, reporting to the ESO Committee (the precursor of the Council) in July 1960. He went on to supervise several stages of the following 'Comprehensive Programme' that included testing at four different observing sites in 1961–63. Site monitoring in those days was very hard work indeed, as illustrated by the following instructions: "... Observers and assistants have to work during 25 consecutive nights and after this period have to take leave during five consecutive nights. ... With the exception of these five nights, there will be no opportunity for outings, whatsoever ..." It was during this period that André concluded that the astronomical quality of a site is critically dependant on the amount of temperature change during the night: the less, the better.

As ESO began to orient itself towards Chile, André Muller was sent to that country in late 1962 and joined Jürgen Stock's travelling team. Following the decision by the ESO Council in Novem-

ber 1963 to place the future ESO observatory in Chile, André became an ESO staff member on 1 January 1964, as superintendent in Chile. Together with his wife Louise and their six children, he moved from South Africa to La Serena in March of that year and soon thereafter, he made the first and decisive visit to the La Silla mountain, together with ESO Director General Otto Heckmann. He was closely involved in the acquirement of this exceptional location and was responsible for the smooth establishment of the extensive infrastructure needed to run an observatory in the middle of the desert. He set up the Pelicano base camp and traced the path along which the road to the summit was later constructed. He had an incredible workload over the next years, as the buildings were constructed and the telescopes began to arrive. In March 1966, Council held its first meeting in Chile and the La Silla road was dedicated. On this occasion, great admiration was expressed for André Muller and his able team of Chileans and Europeans. Work also proceeded on the ESO Headquarters in Chile at the Vitacura site in the capital, Santiago de Chile. At the end of this exceedingly busy period, the official dedication of the La Silla Observatory took place on 25 March 1969, with the associated visits and a major international symposium in Vitacura on the Magellanic Clouds, the proceedings of which were edited by André Muller.



Photo: EHPA, made available by J. Rösch

Searching for a site in March 1964: Jean Rösch (left) and André B. Muller (right) in front of the mountain Cinchado.

Having done far more than any call of duty, André Muller then transferred in October 1969 to the Office of the Director General in Bergedorf near Hamburg, Germany. Here he assumed the crucial task of leading the ESO Visiting Astronomers Programme, being responsible for the scheduling of the rapidly growing number of observing programmes with the expanding telescope park at La Silla. He continued to supervise the important, preparatory seeing studies for the 3.6-m telescope dome. From now on, André would also remain closely connected to the 1-m Schmidt telescope project. This instrument was under construction in Hamburg but had become somewhat delayed and now needed a firm hand to get ready as soon as possible for its main

task, the Southern Sky Surveys. Working in close contact with the ESO Telescope Project Division at CERN, he contributed to the development of the first computer-based telescope control system. Together with Hans-Emil Schuster, who had worked with André in Chile since 1964 and who was responsible for the operation of the Schmidt telescope, he spent much time at La Silla over the next years in order to tune this very delicate instrument to optimal performance. By the end of September 1983, André Muller left ESO for a well-deserved retirement in his native country. Unfortunately, André and Louise would only be together a few years, before she died in March 1987.

All of us who had the privilege to work with André Muller will remember him not only as an extremely competent astronomer/instrumentalist/manager in his many functions, but also as a delightful and friendly person. He was always ready to help and to provide guidance from his rich experience. Few possessed his intimate knowledge of the organisation and its colourful history.

Thank you André, for your kindness and your great services to ESO and all those young European astronomers who gained access to some of the best observational facilities in the world. We will never forget what you have done for astronomy!

Finnish Parliamentary Committee at ESO Headquarters

Claus Madsen (ESO)

On 15 March, members of the Education and Culture Committee of the Finnish Parliament paid a visit to the ESO Headquarters. The guests were welcomed by the Director General in her office. Following this were extensive briefings on the main activities of ESO by various ESO staff members. After the session, the deputies had a chance to visit the Science Archive and the Optics Laboratory, followed by a late lunch. Finland is the most recent member of ESO and there was a strong interest by the delegation members to learn more about the work and the projects carried out by our organisation. Amongst the many topics discussed were also the role of astronomy in science education and the SAMPO project, which is part of the initial Finnish contribution to ESO.

Dr. Ilkka Taipale, MP, asking a question to the ESO team. At the centre, Committee Chairperson Ms. Kaarina Dromberg, MP and Mr. Tuomo Hänninen, MP (right in the picture).



Photos: H. H. Heyer, ESO

Several Committee members showed considerable interest in Adaptive Optics.

