The 3.6 m Telescope on La Silla

The 3.6 m telescope project is progressing well reports Dr. S. Laustsen from La Silla. The transfer of the mechanical parts from the ship to the mountain was supervised by D. Plathner from the ESO TP Division. This is his story about four exciting days:

In the morning of April 7, 1976—after a long trip of about eight weeks—the Spanish motorship "Riviera" finally arrived in Coquimbo with the mechanical parts of the 3.6 m telescope in its hold.

An armada of 23 heavy trucks was lined up opposite the ship: more than 450,000 kg were waiting for unloading . . . 36 truck drivers and helpers, 56 dockers and about a dozen Creusot and ESO poeple had to coordinate their work. Walkie-talkies snarled their commands. The first boxes showed up and were placed onto the trucks, accompanied by excited shouts from the dockers.

An exciting and for the uninitiated visitor somewhat complicated show began. Truck after truck was ordered to the shipside and one or more boxes were lowered by the crane. The loading of the trucks was planned in great detail, and the trucks were called upon according to the appearance of the crates.

Already at 5 p.m., 80 per cent of the cargo had been safely loaded according to the planning, and it became clear that the operation would be finished a day earlier than expected.

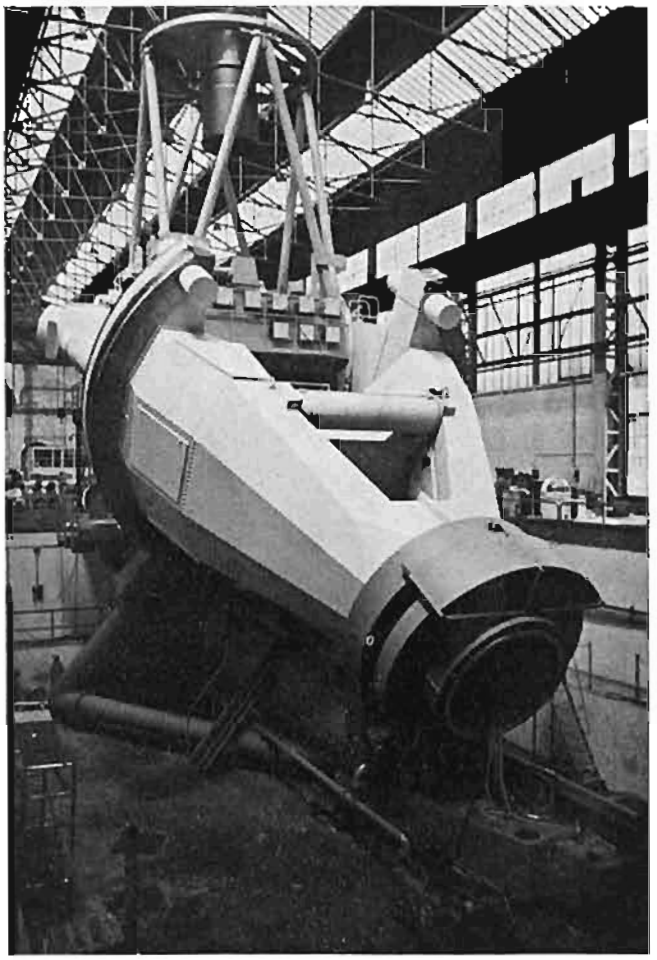
Early the next morning, a 500 m long row of heavily-loaded trucks were waiting for the signal to leave for Pelícano. At 7.30 a.m., the police escort switched on its flash lights, the whole area was trembling by the motor noise and the precious caravan got under way. The speed was low and the sun came out early so that the check-point of Incahuasi—about 100 km north of Coquimbo—was reached only after lunch time.

ESO had provided for a rolling restaurant, and an excellent meal was served to more than fifty people aside the Panamericana under the burning sun.

At 3 p.m. everybody continued and started the attack on "La cuesta de pajonales", the last high pass before the turn-off of the ESO road to Pelícano. There the big trucks arrived at sunset and were halted on the "ring-road" of the camp, giving a nearly perfect imitation of an old prairie-schooner camp.

The third day was full of problems. Nearly all trucks had difficulties in climbing certain passages on the La Silla road. Two heavy front-loaders and two big scrapers had to give permanent assistance to the trucks (which were only 60 per cent charged) and pull them through the sharp bends at kilometre 5 and up the last steep slope from pumping station No. 2.

But also this day could be finished successfully. At about nine o'clock in the evening, all trucks had reached the parking area on the top of the mountain. As unloading had already started the previous day, it was only a matter of hours on the fourth day, before the boxes were all stored in the area around the Danish and GPO telescope buildings.



To end this story about excellent cooperation and goodwill of all participating people, it should be added that the last box had not yet touched the ground when the crew of Creusot were already working with their motor-saw to open the crates and to prepare the king-size Meccano of the ESO 3.6 m telescope for assembly.

Another Fine Comet from ESO

The European Southern Observatory was certainly not built for the noble art of comet-hunting, nor does this kind of astronomy constitute one of ESO's main lines of research. Nevertheless, the name of ESO was recently connected with two important discoveries of "haired stars".

Comet Schuster (1976c)

The third comet of 1976 was found on March 1, 1976 by Dr. Hans-Emil Schuster, in charge of the ESO Schmidt telescope. He noticed the faint, diffuse trail on a plate taken for the ESO (B) Survey a few nights before. Observations on March 2 to 6 confirmed the comet and a first orbit by Dr. B. Marsden, Cambridge, Mass., USA, showed that Comet Schuster was very far from the Sun. Further observations at ESO and other observatories around new moon on March 30, made it possible to confirm that the comet has the largest perihelion distance on