



One of the two NTT adapter-rotators during integration at Garching in May 1989. Intensive tests on mechanics, electronics and software are going on and the optical integration will be started immediately after reception of the optics. The most optimistic planning foresees the start of the installation on the telescope at the beginning of October.

learned about the exceptional seeing, enabling the NTT optics to be tested to the limit, even at the moment of "First Light"! It was just too good to be true! When would we get the first images? After some discussion, we agreed over the line that the most important thing would be to secure several good images in Chile, before attempting to transmit any of them to Garching. In this way, the images would be there, even if the complicated transmission process should lead to a crash of the NTT control system. And there we were, sitting, hearing the "Ah's" and "Oh's" 12,000 kilometres away, wishing as never before that we would soon be able to see those fantastic images.

The Images Arrive

Finally, shortly before 6 o'clock in the morning of March 23, Anders Wallander, one of the remote observing operators

in Garching, took over the control of the NTT computer via the satellite link and requested it to transmit the first CCD image. At first something did not work, and Massimo later said that I went rather pale. (He never saw himself.) But then it came, and it took us a few minutes to measure the size of the stellar images with the IHAP system. We could not believe our eyes! More frames followed and were immediately written to tape. Preben Grosbøl rushed to the Terminal Room and read them into the MIDAS system on the VAX computer. David Chittim nursed the connected photographic Dicomed facility to incredible performance heights and soon Claus Madsen came with the first negatives from the darkroom. But then Massimo told us that the seeing was improving and even better images were on their way! We threw away an hour's effort and started all over again.

By 8 o'clock that memorable morning,

we knew that we had in our hands the sharpest images ever obtained with a large ground-based telescope. Clearly, we should attempt to share them with the rest of the world as soon as possible. There was no longer any question of waiting until after Easter, and all available resources were switched into high gear. Two hours later, Hermann Heyer was ready with most of the 650 photographic copies of the ω Centauri field; equally many photocopies of the rapidly compiled Press Release and figure captions soon came back from Harry Neumann's Xerox machines; Elisabeth Völk was busy with the address labels and the envelopes that had been stamped in record time by Herbert Zodet and Marianne Fischer. And just before 12 o'clock, Hans-Jürgen Kraus delivered the entire lot to the Garching Post Office, less than six hours after the image was first recorded by the NTT at La Silla. Early the following week, European newspapers began reporting about the event, quite a few of them reproduced that famous picture.

The Future

The moment of "First Light" for the ESO NTT signals a new era in observational astronomy and none of those who participated in that exhilarating experience will ever forget the team spirit which permeated the staff on both sides of the link. For the time being, further adjustments are being made by the engineers. And soon it will be time for the astronomers to think seriously about how they can best exploit the exciting new capabilities of the ESO NTT, so dramatically demonstrated that Thursday morning. No doubt they will know how to take full advantage of this beautiful new tool.

R. M. WEST, ESO

Operating Manuals Now Available

The following updated Operating Manuals have recently become available:

- B & C Spectrograph
- CASPEC
- CAT/CES
- ECHELEC
- EFOSC
- IR Photometers
- PISCO

Copies of these manuals can be obtained from Visiting Astronomers' Service, ESO Headquarters, Karl-Schwarzschild-Str. 2, D-8046 Garching bei München, F.R.Germany.