Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory Celebrates 50th Birthday

Written by Nadia Politis on September 4, 2013.

With a photographic exhibition and historical instruments of the past in Santiago, Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO) culminated the celebration of their 50th anniversary.

SANTIAGO — It was close to the formation of AURA (Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy) in 1957 when the director of the National Observatory of Chile, Federico Ruttlant heard that the U.S. was seeking sites for a national observatory in the southern hemisphere".

Christopher Smith, AURA Observatory director. Photo: Nadia Politis.

Almost three years later, astronomers concluded that the best place would be the "Cerro Tololo", located near La Serena, in the Coquimbo Region. An amazing quality of their skies, a government commitment and a prosperous astronomical infrastructure would await for Chilean astronomy in the sixties.

Currently, only five of the seven CTIO domes remain functioning. The largest telescope – "Victor Blanco" – has 4 feet in diameter. "50 years of operation that has contributed to the frontier of science", said Dr. Nicole van der Bliek, CTIO director.

Van der Bliek said that anniversary celebration started with the inauguration of the new instrument: the "Dark Energy Camera" last November. "Its a great achievement for Tololo and astronomy in general. It will make a deep sky survey, analyzing 525 nights from Chilean skies", she said.

As part of celebration, from September 3 to September 28 the Planetarium at the University of Santiago de Chile will host an exhibition of a sample of scientific instruments used at the Observatory. It's a free exhibition and it will be showcase the CTIO's historical artifacts such as ortho-wave radios, weather equipment, photographic accessories and spectrographs.

A paradigm shift

"Looking ahead, Chile will host the next generation of telescopes. The United States is pleased to be your partner in this venture to make it a reality," says Brian Doherty, Counselor for Political and Economic Affairs of the U.S. Embassy in regarding the implementation of the *Dark Energy Camera*.

Doherty emphasized that this new generation of telescopes will change the way we see the universe and highlight Chile's reputation as a destination for world-class astronomers.

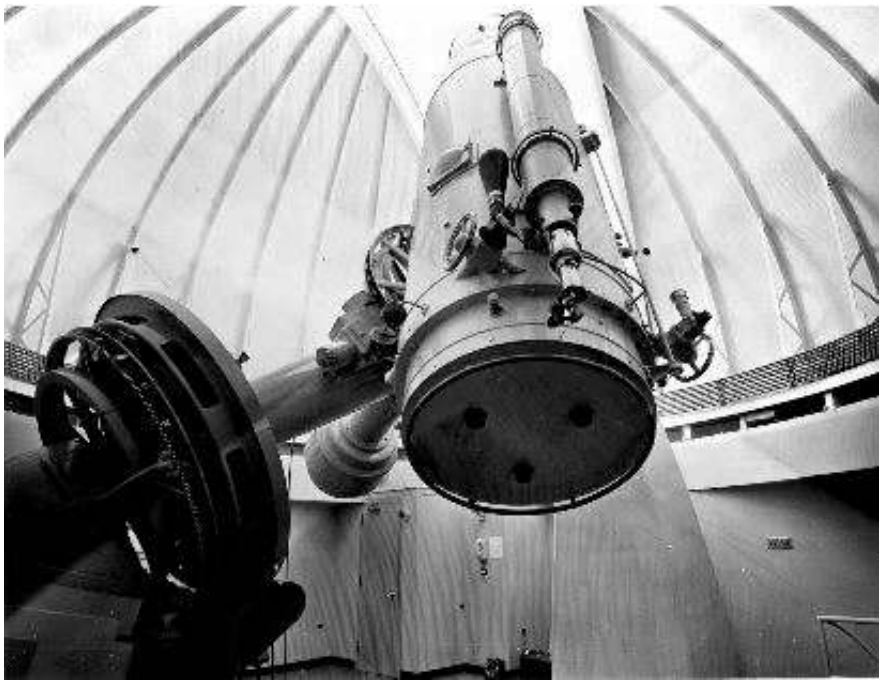
Will there be greater participation of Chilean astronomers?

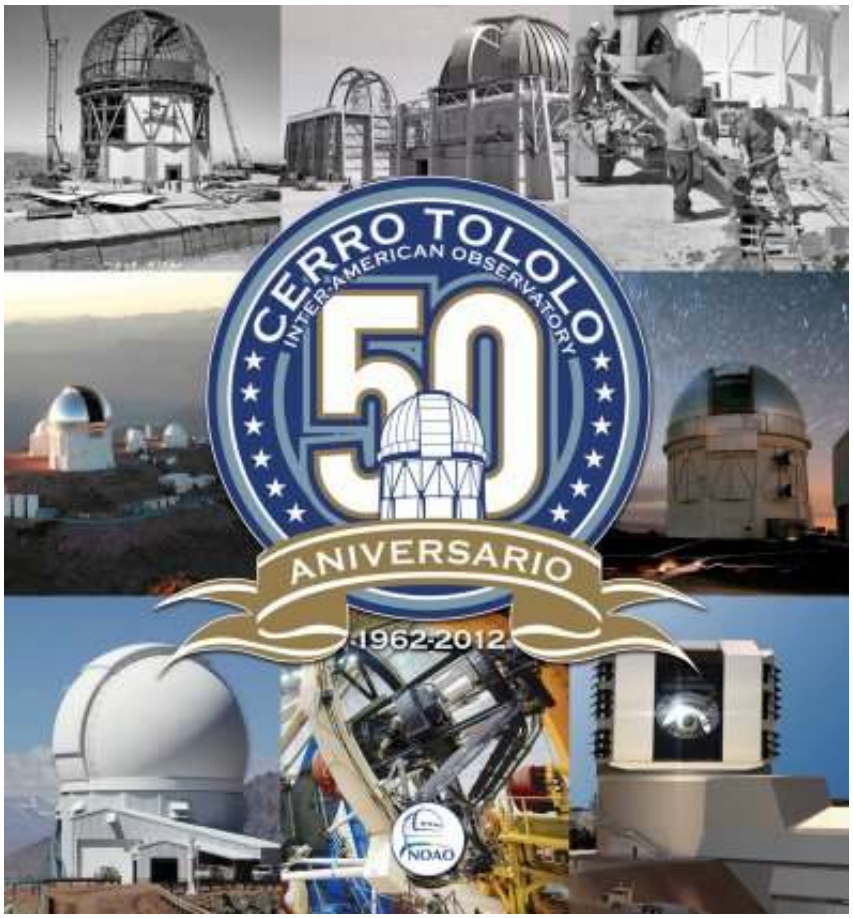
"I see the participation of Chilean astronomers competing globally. Expect their participation when the" Large Synoptic Survey Telescope (LSST) starts to work," says Christopher Smith, AURA Observatory director.

"The LSST will revolutionize the way how to do science. That will be a paradigm shift," says René Mendez, director of the Department of Astronomy at the University of Chile (DAS). Mendez highlights that the volumes of information that will generate the LSST will generate about 30 terabyte of data per night. "Huge volumes of data, which will be necessary to develop highly efficient search algorithms. Their challenges will be huge", he said.

From left to right: Rene Mendez, DAS Director. Nicole van der Bliek, CTIO director Christopher Smith, AURA Observatory director and Brian Doherty, Counselor for Political and Economic Affairs of the U.S. Embassy. Photo: Nadia Politis.

Check the photo gallery for the exhibition of the "50 years of the Cerro Tololo International Observatory" and informatio about the LSST here:

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