

Staff Changes

Our charming Hawaiian secretary, Edie Radl, gave birth to her second child, Isaac, in January. She is on a long term leave, and is replaced by Mercedes Stevens of Spanish origin.

Robbie Spruit, instrumentation software engineer, left in March to join ESO in Munich. He is replaced by Bernt Grundseth who was his assistant.

Bernard Cougrand, special techniques engineer, left in April at the end of his contract and has rejoined CNRS.

Optical technician Alan Cremeen will be leaving in July, to be replaced by Jean-Pierre Lemonnier of l'Observatoire de Meudon. In addition to his functions as an optical technician, M. Lemonnier will be in charge of the vacuum lab and electronographic camera.

Scientific Computing Facilities for CFHT

The avalanche of digital data expected from some CFHT instruments is going to create an urgent need for a moderate sized computer at the CFHT headquarters. The HP 16-bit machines that we presently have are clearly not adequate to treat data from detectors such as the CCD camera and Fourier Transform Spectrometer. Both visiting and resident astronomers are going to require a much more powerful system.

There are a number of compelling reasons why visiting astronomers should treat their data on a CFHT machine, after the actual observing run, but before returning to their home institutions. These include:

- (1) KPNO and CTIO have recently adopted the policy requiring all visitors to do preliminary data reduction on their computers. The idea here is that too many visitors have taken home raw data from complex instruments and then have taken years to reduce it. Alternately, they did not understand what to do, and then claimed the instrument was faulty, the staff incompetent, etc., etc. Many CFHT instruments are sufficiently complex that it is essential to provide facilities for transforming raw data into a readily interpretable form.
- (2) Attending to visitors on a Corporation computer will mean an extra burden on the observatory staff. But they would likely spend nearly as much time answering queries from visitors who have taken raw data home. Communication problems would make "long distance" data reduction hazardous.
- (3) Most visiting astronomers would waste a lot of time duplicating reduction software. This would clearly reduce scientific output. As well, this would give an unfair advantage to astronomers at larger institutions, where staff software technicians might handle the basic reductions.
- (4) Many astronomers would shy away from using the most advanced instrumentation if they had to generate reduction software. This would generally lower the quality of research done at CFHT.

- (5) CFHT staff will best understand each instrument. Hence it makes sense to have the reduction software generated by CFHT personnel. Reduction done by visitors at CFHT headquarters will also provide immediate feedback to the instrumentation technicians and resident astronomers on the performance of each instrument.

Clearly the return in scientific results would be enhanced if a computer were available for preliminary reductions. A system comparable to a DEC VAX machine would likely be adequate. (In fact, UKIRT might be interested in sharing a VAX when they move their offices to Waimea.)

For the moment, we are compiling a "shopping list" for the new computer - peripherals, core size, virtual memory?, floating point processing?, operating system?, etc. Subsequently we will consider the various manufacturers, and then make a formal submission for funding. We would welcome comments at this stage from any prospective visitor on the capabilities they would desire in such a machine, as well as any special requirements for machine hardware or peripherals.

Watch this space for further developments!

Bruce Campbell