

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the biennial report of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes for the years 2004 and 2005. The dynamics and excitement of astronomy have certainly been felt at the observatory during the last two years. As you can read in this report many scientific highlights passed the scene and important technical advances were made. This report provides an overview of the main events and summarizes the financial status and scientific output of the telescopes. The successes and achievements over the period covered by this report have only been possible thanks to the continued quality efforts of ING staff, who have shown a high level of commitment and professionalism through uncertain and sometimes difficult times.

It is now some thirty years ago that La Palma was being explored as a potential location for a new observatory in the Northern hemisphere. That choice has most certainly paid off in scientific terms. The site testing equipment in those days was not so sophisticated to today's standards and the circumstances under which the work was conducted were rather primitive. The pictures below (courtesy of site tester Thomas Gough) give an impression of the situation. Although the observatory is now well established, characterization of the observing site continues and is even stepping up pace with the advent of adaptive optics, the construction of very large telescopes such as the 10m GTC, and the possibility of construction of a future Extremely Large Telescope. In the early days analysis of star trails and of sparse meteorological measurements were the basis for initiating the observatory; now we possess an arsenal of additional tool such as DIMM, MASS, SLODAR, and remote sensing to help us decide on the quality of the atmosphere. But what remains the same is the finding that La Palma is one of the very best observing sites in the World.

The reporting years saw also intense activity on growing European collaboration between observatories in which ING was strongly involved. Under the umbrella of OPTICON a large programme to promote trans-national access to telescopes was initiated. The demand for observing programmes for the ING telescopes was so large that limits had to be imposed to prevent the scheme from running out of resources. European collaboration, not only for the construction of future large facilities, but also for existing observatories will be beneficial to European astronomy at large. ING hopes to play a key role in this as well.



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