INTRODUCTION

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Discussions in ground-based optical astronomy now focus on telescopes that are even an order of magnitude larger than the current generation of 8-m class telescopes. In the midst of these exciting long-term prospects telescopes such as those of the Isaac Newton Group keep producing top quality data serving many astronomers. The large telescopes will, however, not leave ING unaffected, and therefore during this year ING started to focus on the medium and longer term future prospects for the observatory. Ideas and plans were extensively discussed during a special workshop held in Sheffield, where also the Instrumentation Working Group was re-established. In this report you can read about the first results of those discussions.

A historic highlight this year for the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory was the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the international agreements that led to the foundation of the observatory on La Palma. The event was celebrated on La Palma with an impressive exhibit and a number of public lectures organized by the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias. These initiatives brought the observatory once again to the attention of the general public of La Palma.

In looking back over the twenty years there have been plenty of scientific and technical accomplishments that have contributed to the success of the observatory. But even more important is looking ahead to what the future might bring. At ING there are many events to look forward to: just to mention a few, the new infra-red camera for the William Herschel Telescope; the adaptive optics system; and the further development of the ESTEC-built super-conducting tunnel junction detector. For the observatory on La Palma as a whole, the 10-m GranTeCan project which broke ground in 1999, has represented an important milestone.

And the dreaded millennium rollover? Well, it just happened. The fact that it passed unnoticed from the operational point of view was no accident, but the result of over 18 months of careful preparation and testing.

The year 1999 has been highly productive in terms of the scientific output of the telescopes. At the same time many improvements have been introduced at the telescopes. All this has not happened automatically, but has been the fruit of concerted effort of all those working at ING and of the continued scientific exploitation of the facilities by many astronomers.