

ESO, the European Southern Observatory, was created in 1962 to "... establish and operate an astronomical observatory in the southern hemisphere, equipped with powerful instruments, with the aim of furthering and organising collaboration in astronomy..." It is supported by ten countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. ESO operates at three sites in the Atacama desert region of Chile. The Very Large Telescope (VLT), is located on Paranal, a 2,600 m high mountain approximately 130 km south of Antofagasta. The VLT consists of four 8.2 metre diameter telescopes. These telescopes can be used separately, or in combination as a giant interferometer (VLTI). At La Silla, 600 km north of Santiago de Chile at 2,400 m altitude, ESO operates several optical telescopes with diameters up to 3.6 m. The third site is the 5,000 m high Llano de Chajnantor, near San Pedro de Atacama. Here a new submillimetre telescope (APEX) is being completed, and a large submillimetre-wave array of 64 antennas (ALMA) is under development. Over 1300 proposals are made each year for the use of the ESO telescopes. The ESO headquarters are located in Garching, near Munich, Germany. This is the scientific, technical and administrative centre of ESO where technical development programmes are carried out to provide the Paranal and La Silla observatories with the most advanced instruments. ESO employs about 320 international staff members, Fellows and Associates in Europe and Chile, and about 160 local staff members in Chile.

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EUROPEAN
SOUTHERN OBSERVATORY
Karl-Schwarzschild-Str. 2
D-85748 Garching bei München
Germany
Tel. (089) 320 06-0
Telefax (089) 3202362
Email: ips@eso.org
URL: <http://www.eso.org>

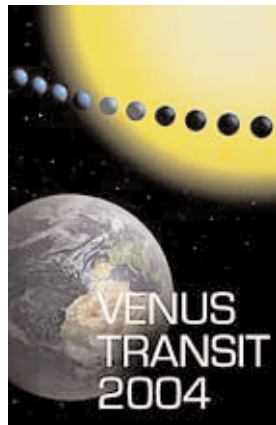
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Venus Rendezvous with the Sun

An invitation to planetariums, public observatories, amateur astronomy associations, etc. to participate in a unique public educational programme



<http://www.eso.org/vt-2004>

On June 8, 2004, Venus passes in front of the Sun. This is a very rare event: the last one occurred in 1882! The founding members of the "VT-2004 consortium", the European Southern Observatory, the European Association for Astronomy Education, the Observatoire de Paris, and the Astronomical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, have decided to take advantage of this unique opportunity to launch an *ambitious educational programme aimed at stimulating and activating the broad public and introducing into Europe's schools the subject of the Venus 2004 transit* with its multiple historical, cultural, scientific and technological aspects. A provisional overview of the main goals and means of this programme is given at the VT-2004 website, now in the process of being set up.

We cordially invite your planetarium, public observatory or association to join this exceptional programme by becoming an institutional member of this international network! You may do so by sending an email to vt-2004@eso.org. Please state in this email which (kind of) activities (if any) you are planning in connection with the Venus Transit 2004.

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