

use of gamma-ray burst (GRB) afterglows as a tool to study high-redshift star-forming regions. GRBs are distant explosions, caused by the deaths of massive stars, and the resulting afterglows in the optical can be a million times brighter than their host galaxies. But only for a few minutes, as the afterglows fade away extremely rapidly. So one has to be very quick to profit from their brightness. This requires different observing strategies than commonly used in astronomy; most objects in the sky do not change their brightness in zillions of years.

To allow rapid VLT observations of GRB afterglows, an ESO working group recommended to implement the so-called Rapid-Response Mode (RRM), the automatic mode of the VLT. As a fellow and because of my scientific interests, I'm involved in the implementation of this RRM on Paranal. I find this quite exciting: as a GRB goes off and is localized on the sky by a satellite, due to the implementation of the RRM, the VLT is now able to automatically start pointing to the GRB, and observe the afterglow within minutes of the GRB explosion. And thanks to high-precision instruments such as UVES, one can obtain detailed properties of high-redshift star-forming regions. So among other superlative statements one can make about the VLT project, one can add that it is the biggest robotic telescope in the world.

FORMER ESO DG ADRIAAN BLAAUW TURNED 90

On April 12, former ESO DG professor Adriaan Blaauw reached his 90th birthday. Adriaan, together with many friends, family members, colleagues from The Netherlands and abroad, celebrated this occasion on April 17, during an informal get-together at the 19th-century country-mansion Nienoord in Leek, near Groningen.

Well over 200 people including ESO Director General Catherine Cesarsky, shown here with her predecessor, enjoyed a most pleasant event on a warm, sunny afternoon. The event was offered to Adriaan by his present and former colleagues from the Groningen Kapteyn Institute and Leiden Observatory, who join in with colleagues worldwide in congratulating Adriaan and his wife, and wishing them well for the years to come.



ESO AT THE EXPLORING THE FRONTIER SYMPOSIUM

ED JANSSEN (ESO)

The symposium, which was co-chaired by ESO's Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, took place on 18–21 May 2004 at the Max-Planck Society's Harnack-Haus in Berlin. It was dedicated to presenting and discussing the fundamental scientific questions that will be addressed by major future astrophysical facilities during the next few decades. The meeting programme featured 11 invited reviews, 27 contributed talks and 49 posters. The meeting was attended by 160 participants from 17 countries.

ESO's presence included an exhibition/information stand with emphasis on the ALMA and OWL projects. The symposium (and thereby ESO) was presented widely in the local and international media; ESO's Director General gave several interviews, including one for a major television series on groundbreaking science. This was also a topic on the prime-time TV news on the second German channel.

