

New ALMA Site Museum Preserves Valuable Local Culture

Gonzalo Argandoña, Felix Mirabel (ESO)

The construction of ALMA close to the village of San Pedro de Atacama is making contributions to other sciences besides astronomy.

More than 10 000 years ago, human beings arrived at the Atacama Desert for the very first time. For generations, they managed to survive in this harsh environment, giving birth to a myriad of unique cultures and traditions, whose origins and evolution are still subject to intense research by anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, geneticists and linguists.

Thanks to the environmental studies that have been an essential part of ALMA construction since the beginning of the works, including archaeological surveys of the area, scientists now have fresh knowledge of the old history of Chajnantor and nearby areas. Part of this significant comprehension is expressed in the new ALMA site museum, which was inaugurated in July 2006 at 3 200 m altitude, close to the Operations Support Facility (OSF). The museum is a realistic reconstruction of one of the twenty old *estancias* that have been discovered in the area, between 2 800 and 4 000 metres altitude, by the Chilean archaeologist and ALMA consultant, Ana María Barón.

The corrals and dormitories made of stone may seem basic at first glance, but they are the material expression of an old, vanishing way of life, in which Andean shepherds used to stay in an *estancia* as long as they had enough water and vegetation for their cattle. When the moment came, complete families moved to a different *estancia*, with more water and food for their animals.

In recent decades, those families have tended to move closer to the lower and more benign lands of the *Salar de Atacama*, leaving behind the ancient high *estancias* due to the growing scarcity of rain. In fact, the *Estancia Barrios* – where the ALMA site museum is now placed – was finally abandoned in the '60s by the family of Pedro Cruz, who spent part of his infancy on the high-land *estancias* that now are silent witnesses of the progress of ALMA construction. Pedro Cruz

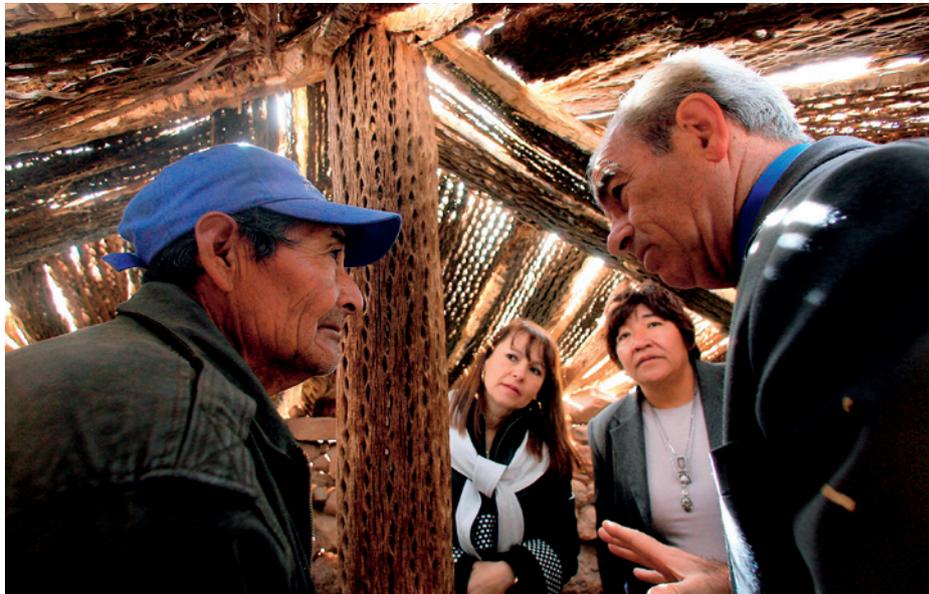


Photo: J. Alvarar, El Mercurio

was one of the main guests at the inauguration event of the site museum, in a very symbolic ceremony that was hosted by Massimo Tarengi, ALMA director, and ALMA executives in Chile.

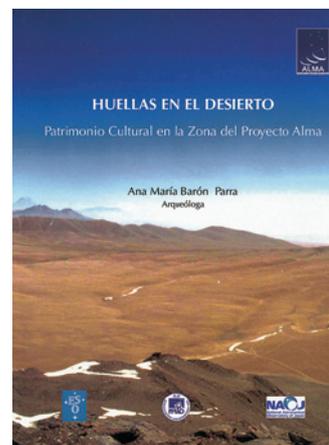
The Intendente Marcela Hernando, representative of the President of Chile in Region II, celebrated the integration of different cultures in the same land, under one of the clearest skies of the world. The mayor of San Pedro de Atacama, Sandra Berna, expressed her gratitude to ALMA for its contribution to the understanding and protection of Atacama cultural heritage.

In the future, when ALMA is completed, the site museum will be open to the public, as part of a special visits programme that will also include an ALMA Information Centre at the OSF and a viewpoint at Chajnantor for those who are fit enough for an altitude of 5 000 metres.

Young students from local schools of San Pedro de Atacama and Toconao also attended the event. They symbolically received the first copies of the book "Footprints in the Desert" (*Huellas en el Desierto*), which presents the main findings of the archaeological surveys in the ALMA area. This publication, written by Ana María Barón and edited by ESO, was donated to all schools in Chile's Region II, to expand the new knowledge of the Atacama Desert and its culture to

younger generations. It is available electronically at the Spanish website <http://www.eso.cl>, and an English edition is now under production.

Cover of the new book "Footprints in the Desert" (*Huellas en el Desierto*), which presents the latest findings on the old history of the Llano de Chajnantor and nearby areas, which was donated to all schools in Chile's Region II.



At the end of the ceremony, Pedro Cruz and other members of the local communities spontaneously performed their own rituals for the inauguration of the site museum. They paid their respects to the high mountains and to the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), in an old tradition that was joined by ALMA executives and Chilean authorities, asking for prosperity and harmony for all the people living now in this arid and ancient ground.

Photo: C. Romero



Massimo Tarengi, ALMA director, performing the local ritual of 'payment' to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), at the inauguration ceremony of the new site museum.

ESO-Chile Fund for Astronomy: 10 Years of Productive Scientific Collaboration

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In a ceremony in Santiago in June 2006, ESO and the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the Supplementary Agreement. This agreement granted to Chilean astronomers up to 10% of the total observing time on ESO telescopes and established an annual fund for the development of astronomy, managed by the 'ESO-Chile Joint Committee'.

The celebration event was hosted by ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, and the Director of Special Policy for the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Luis Winter. "ESO's commitment is, and always will be, to promote astronomy and scientific knowledge in the country hosting our observatories", said Dr. Cesarsky. "We hope Chile and Europe will continue with great achieve-



At the ceremony to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the ESO-Chile Joint Committee: (from left to right) Felix Mirabel (ESO Representative and Head of the Science Office in Chile), Dr. Catherine Cesarsky (ESO Director General), Dr. Leonardo Bronfman (Director of Astronomy Department, Universidad de Chile; representative of the Chilean scientific community within the ESO-Chile Joint Committee), and, speaking, Ambassador Luis Winter (Director of Special Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile).

ments in this fascinating joint adventure, the exploration of the Universe."

On behalf of the government of Chile, Ambassador Luis Winter outlined the historical importance of the Supplementary Agreement, ratified by the Chilean Congress in 1996. "Such is the magnitude of the ESO-Chile Joint Committee that, only

in 2005, this annual fund represented eight per cent of all financing sources for Chilean astronomy, including those from government and from universities", Ambassador Winter said. The appointed Chilean astronomer for the ESO-Chile Joint Committee, Dr. Leonardo Bronfman, also took part in the ceremony, along with ambassadors in Chile of ESO mem-