

World's largest telescope being built

In June 2012 the European Southern Observatory council approved a \$1.3 billion dollar deal to build the European Extremely Large Telescope (<http://www.eelt.org.uk/>) on top of Cerro Armazones in the Atacama Desert of northern Chile.

The mega project, which broke ground last year, is expected to take a whopping 10 years to complete. With an impressive 39-metre mirror and almost 800 hexagonal segments, each 1.4 metres wide, and only 50 millimetres thick, it has other specifications that leave competing observatories envious. It is the largest optical and infra-red telescope ever built.

Scientists and engineers from all over Europe are involved full time with the construction, with the new telescope slated to open in 2024.

As the new telescope is located at an altitude of more than 3,000 metres above sea level with a track record of clear skies, astronomers will now be able to study in planets, as well as distant galaxies millions of



Neel Roberts
The Sky's the Limit

light-years away and objects like comets that come close to the Earth, in great detail. Remote viewing via the internet will bring a desktop or smartphone experience that people have never had in history!

Sky watch

As you set your clock ahead at 2 a.m. on Sunday, March 8, look south-southwest before dawn as Saturn is easy to catch. Good binoculars can scope the rings on a clear day.

On Sunday, March 22, look southwest-west after sunset as Venus will be that bright object next to the moon while Mars is half way down.

Spring officially starts Friday, March 20 at 4:45 p.m.,

and Newfoundland will catch the total solar eclipse as the sun rises at about 5:30 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

Did you catch the Zodiacal Lights last month? It's a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. The best time to see it is from Sunday, March 8 for two weeks in the west after evening twilight.

Public events

Check out our monthly stargazing event courtesy of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (Calgary) starting at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, March 13. A brief indoor presentation on "Spring in the Sky" is followed by observing through our resident 11-inch Celestron telescope. All are welcome to this free event. Refreshments are provided. Experts are on hand the second Friday of each month to explain the heavens, teach telescoping skills and help you develop your knowledge of our sky. For further information, contact the

Trek Station at 403-485-2994 or visit www.vulcantourism.com.

The Saturday Observer's Night at the Telescope Farm in Didsbury takes place at All Star Telescope just outside of Didsbury on March 21, from 7 p.m. until midnight. This full-facility telescope dealer has a heated showroom with washrooms, and there is no charge to attend. I am planning to attend and you are welcome to caravan with a group I am assembling. We leave Vulcan at about 3:30 p.m., weather permitting. We stop for a Chinese buffet before heading to the celestial farm for the evening, and we stop at Tim Hortons on the way back. For more information, contact Ken From at 866-310-8844 or visit www.all-startelescope.com/pages/observernights.

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at 403-560-6574 and Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.