

Huge telescope opens in Spain's Canary Islands

July 24 2009, By CARLOS MORENO , Associated Press Writer



The Gran Telescopio Canarias, one of the the world's largest telescopes is seen at the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory in the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain, Friday July 24, 2009. The euro130 million (US\$179 million) telescope, designed to take advantage of pristine, clear skies at the Roque de los Muchachos observatory atop the Atlantic island of La Palma, was inaugurated Friday. (AP Photo/Carlos Moreno)

(AP) -- One of the world's most powerful telescopes opened its shutters for the first time Friday to begin exploring faint light from distant parts of the universe. The Gran Telescopio Canarias, a euro130 million (\$185 million) telescope featuring a 34-foot (10.4-meter) reflecting mirror, sits atop an extinct volcano. Its location above cloud cover takes advantage of the pristine skies in the Atlantic Ocean.

Planning for the [telescope](#) began in 1987 and has involved more than

1,000 people from 100 companies. It was inaugurated Friday by King Juan Carlos.

The observatory is located at 2,400 meters (7,870 feet) above sea-level where prevailing winds keep the atmosphere stable and transparent, the Canary Islands Astrophysics Institute said.

The institute, which runs the telescope, said it will capture the birth of stars, study characteristics of [black holes](#) and decipher some of the chemical components of the Big Bang.

The telescope is composed of 36 separate mirrors that began slowly focusing in July 2007 to eventually act as a single large reflecting surface that directs light onto a central camera point.

Among those who have done research at La Palma is Brian May, lead guitarist of rock group Queen, who studied there for part of his doctorate in astrophysics at the institute.

May, who published "BANG! The Complete History of the Universe" with astronomers Patrick Moore and Chris Lintott, composed a musical score for the telescope's inauguration.

Large reflecting telescopes began making major contributions to astronomical research when Edwin Hubble perfected the technique of capturing photographic exposures of space with the then-massive 200-inch mirror at Mount Palomar Observatory, in north San Diego County, California in Jan. 1949.

Associated Press Writer Harold Heckle in Madrid contributed to this report.

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Huge telescope opens in Spain's Canary Islands (2009, July 24) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-huge-telescope-spain-canary-islands.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.