

Mauna Kea telescope back up after lightning strike

August 20 2011, By AUDREY McAVOY , Associated Press

(AP) -- A Mauna Kea telescope that was knocked out by lightning more than two months ago is fully operational again after undergoing repairs, the telescope's director said Friday.

The final problem was a faulty electronics card that helped synchronize the movement of the 2.2-meter telescope dome and the telescope itself. The telescope, which belongs to the University of Hawaii, became fully usable on Wednesday evening once that was fixed.

Operators "are confident that we have repaired the telescope and its sub-systems and we can continue with full night-time observing with remote operation from Hilo, Manoa, the U.S. mainland, and Europe," Colin Aspin, the director, said in an email.

The telescope went offline during the weekend of June 4-5, when tens of thousands of lightning flashes were recorded around the state.

It wasn't clear if a direct [lightning strike](#) knocked out the telescope or if the problem was caused by a lightning strike on Saddle Road that affected power going to the mountain.

The 41-year-old telescope is the first large telescope ever built on Hawaii's Mauna Kea volcano.

It's smaller than its more famous neighbors - including the twin Keck telescopes that have mirrors measuring 10 meters, or about 32 feet, in

diameter. But the machine was the first to show Mauna Kea has some of the world's best conditions for observing the skies.

In the early 1990s, astronomers used it to discover the existence of the Kuiper Belt, a region beyond Neptune home to large numbers of asteroid-sized bodies. Today, [Pluto](#) is commonly regarded as the largest known Kuiper Belt Object, not as the ninth planet.

Other telescopes at the volcano summit have also had problems this year.

The [Subaru telescope](#) was shut down last month after [coolant](#) leaked around the [telescope](#), including on the mirrors and camera.

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