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On the island of La Palma, to study the birth of the solar system

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Astronomers from Tradate are going to **the island of La Palma, to study a new comet and the origin of the solar system**. The scientists from **FOAM13**, the foundation that manages the astronomical observatory in the Pineta Park, have received the go ahead to use the **Galileo National Telescope** (TNG), one of the largest, existing star observation instruments, and the largest that is Italian owned. The authorisation has been given to a **project to observe the comet 260P-McNaught**. This periodic comet was discovered in 2005 by the astronomer Robert McNaught, and observed again in May 2012 by the Czech astronomer, Martin Masek. **The period of its orbit is about 7 years**, and, as the Tradate-based foundation explain, it is a new comet that has recently come into the vicinity of our Sun. “Observations made with the main telescope of FOAM13 and of the Astronomical Station in Sozzago, **have aroused a lot of interest because of the morphological details that the comet has developed in the last few months.**”

“It’s important to study these small bodies,” the Foundation explain. “The typical dimensions of the nucleus of a comet **can vary from a few hundred metres, to 20-40 km in diameter**. They represent the oldest material **in the construction of our Solar System**, and could even be considered as “untouched” since the birth of the Solar System, **about 5 billion years ago**. The first results from the TNG images look very interesting, but it will take a few months to process and publish them in the most important Italian and international magazines.”

The **Galileo National Telescope**, has a diameter of **3.58 metres, and is situated in Roque de Los Muchachos**, at the highest point of the island of La Palma (**Canaries**) at about 2400 metres above sea level. It is the most important optical instrument **of the Italian astronomical community, and is one of the most important in the northern hemisphere**. The applications to make observations at the TNG are made through the Italian Time Allocation Committee, who distribute them solely on the basis of their scientific merit, 75% of the available time. The remaining 25% of the time is at the disposal of the Spanish and international communities. “So it’s a great success and brings great satisfaction to have our application approved, and to be able to collaborate, professionally, with Italy’s most important and prestigious telescope,” explained **Roberto Crippa, the chairman of FOAM13**.

The approval to use the telescope was obtained thanks to the commitment of **Federico**

Manzini, the head of the scientific section of the Astronomical Observatory Foundation in Tradate (FOAM13) and of the project FOAM13-TNG, together with **Roberto Crippa**, and **Gigi Oldani** with other collaborators, and also to the interest of **Patrizia Caraveo**, the director of the Institute of Spatial Astrophysics and Cosmic Physics (IASF) in Milan, and of **Giovanni Bignami**, the chairman of INAF (the Italian national institute of astrophysics).

Redazione VareseNews
redazione@varesenews.it