

2015 OHP Spectroscopy Workshop

David Boyd

This year's spectroscopy workshop was held once again at the Observatoire de Haute Provence from 13th to 18th August and was organised by Francois Cochard of Shelyak, the spectrograph manufacturer. There were 48 participants, mostly from mainland Europe, plus myself from the UK, two from the US and one from Australia. Many of those attending had brought telescopes and spectrographs which were set up on the observing field for the duration of the workshop. Several of the participants were beginners in spectroscopy with relatively little practical experience and were using the workshop to get up to speed. The temperature was hot during the day with a pleasant breeze but cool at night and the sky was remarkably transparent compared with typical skies we experience in the UK. Only two nights were seriously affected by clouds.

The focus of this annual workshop is on gaining practical experience of spectroscopy and on understanding its scientific potential. The programme this year consisted of a series of talks in the morning by Francois Cochard explaining the process of recording and processing spectra, short talks by participants describing their own projects, four afternoon lectures by Steve Shore, a professor at Pisa University, on the astrophysics of novae, symbiotic stars and other objects relevant to the workshop and, on the final day, a review of spectra recorded by participants during the workshop with helpful hints on how these could be improved. Talks were given in either English or French with in-line translation by Olivier Thizy into the other language. This in itself was an impressive achievement given the wide range of topics covered.

The Observatoire de Haute Provence houses several large telescopes, the largest being a 1.93m reflector which was until recently equipped with the Elodie spectrograph used to confirm the existence of the first exoplanet 51 Peg b by Mayor and Queloz in 1995. Due to funding problems, several of the scopes are no longer in active use which seems a shame as they could provide a useful teaching resource for students. The observatory hosts public visits and is worth visiting if you are in the area. The atmosphere of the place is quite rustic. Accommodation and all meals were taken in the Maison Jean Perrin within the observatory grounds. The food was good and plentiful and the rooms sparse but comfortable with en-suite facilities.

As a first-time participant I found the atmosphere welcoming and the immersion in all things spectrographic a very enjoyable experience. My French is a dim memory from my school-days but I found most people could speak reasonable English. I would recommend the workshop to anyone interested in practical spectroscopy and, although it is in the south of France, remember to take warm clothing as the nights get quite chilly.

All the presentations were recorded and are available on the Shelyak website at http://www.shelyak.com/contenu.php?id_contenu=117&id_dossier=7_lang=2

I am grateful to the Royal Astronomical Society for a grant which supported in part my attendance at the workshop.



Figure 1: The group photograph.



Figure 2: Telescope field with scopes shielded from the fierce sun.

Published in BAA VSS Circular No 165, September 2015.