

## News Note: ROTSE visit to Namibia

*Dr D Buckley and W Koorts (SAAO, ASSA)*

David Buckley, Willie Koorts, and Pat van Heerden (UFS & Boyden Observatory) recently paid a short visit to the HESS site near the Gamsberg in Namibia (see figure).



The purpose was to make a detailed inspection of the decommissioned ROTSE (Robotic Optical Transient Search Experiment) telescope. This wide-field (2.6 degree diameter) 0.45m aperture telescope operated until 2013, conducting fast optical follow-up observations of GRBs (gamma ray bursts). The science committee of AfAS (African Astronomical Society) decided in

late 2022 to explore the prospects of resurrecting the telescope, with the idea that it could eventually become part of the SAAO's Intelligent Observatory network and the first telescope available to the African community under the AIOS (African Integrated Observation System) project.

This first reconnaissance visit allowed us to inspect every detail of the telescope, its mount, and control system. Although the camera and focusing unit were removed upon decommissioning, there are plans to replace them with an Andor sCMOS camera from SAAO in the future. Even though much of the 2000's technology at the heart of ROTSE is now obsolete (e.g., the mount runs on a Window NT computer), it was clear that bringing it back into operation should not prove too difficult. Eventually, we plan to modernize it to a Linux-based system. We took the opportunity to clean the very dusty optics, whose over-coated silver mirrors were surprisingly in not too bad a condition.

We were magnificently supported in our visit by on-site HESS staff and particularly Clyde Foster, a South African planetary astronomer who now resides on the farm adjacent to HESS and ROTSE

A return visit, with the camera, is planned for Mar-Apr next year, when we plan to conduct on-sky tests.