

Trip to the CSIRO ATNF facility at Narrabri NSW



The CSIRO's Australian answer to the Very Large Array (VLA) New Mexico is called the ATNF compact array and it is located west of the rural township of Narrabri western New South Wales Australia.

The facility forms part of a network of Radio Telescopes that are used for VLB measurements that have been developed to allow higher resolution observations to be conducted by astronomers from all over the world.

The ATNF site was the home of the Solar Heliographic Array that was used to measure many aspects of the radio emissions from our nearest star the Sun. The facility was constructed in 1964 and was completed in 1967, astronomers from all over the world came to use this very impressive scientific tool that helped us understand many aspects of the way the Sun works.



The array consisted of 96 (ninety six) 40 ft dishes arranged in a circle all at the same altitude (each dish is at the same elevation) the facility was opened in 1964 and the this link gives the history of this historic observatory in country western New South Wales. Australia.

<http://www.atnf.csiro.au/overview/history/culgoora.html>

The CSIRO is now dismantling the Solar Radio heliograph as its time as a research tool has long gone. The equatorial mounts and towers are available to research institutions who want them and the SETI Research & Community Development Institute Limited applied for and was allowed to acquire three of these very historic instruments. So two field trips were arranged for our group to go and start the big job of disassembly of the dishes ready for transport to Boonah.

The two trips resulted in us getting three towers and three equatorial mounts down on the ground ready for transport to their new home. We were also able to strip some other, previously damaged mounts for spare parts which will probably come in handy at some time in the future. The first visit was more or less a learning trip, as we had never seen the devices before, let alone pull one to bits.



Engineer Brett Mills provided transport to the site, and we went to the site in his nice new 4x4 drive, very comfortable indeed! Henk Mulder our graphics artist and Noel C. Welstead did an enormous job of pulling down the devices on Saturday & Sunday (7th & 8th August 1999) after a long, 7-hour drive from Brisbane. Sunday was a very hard day for us some of the crew only had about 4 hours sleep on

the Saturday Night mmmmm!!!. All in all the trip was very successful and all were glad to eventually get home again after a hectic weekends work and travel.

The second trip to the site was a few months late and attended by Bob Lamb, Henk Mulder, Noel Welstead and Brechan Skene. This trip was to finish getting the gear ready for transport and to bring back some other items we could transport in Noel's 4x4 drive. This trip we stayed on site at the lodge and had a conducted tour of the ATNF Compact array science center. We met some interesting astronomers and PhD researchers who were using the Compact Array for their studies.



We wish to sincerely thank the CSIRO staff members, especially Counselor Ollie Dowd for his invaluable support in getting the site work ready for us. Thanks Ollie. Also thanks to the other Culgoora site members who assisted us in our stay.