PRESENTATION OF THE GILL MEDAL TO MR. J. C. BENNETT.

At a ceremony held on 1970 July 27 at the Radcliffe Observatory, Pretoria, the Gill Medal was presented to Mr. Jack Bennett by Dr. A.D. Thackeray.

The ceremony was opened by Mr. K. Sterling, Chairman of the Pretoria Centre, who welcomed the visitors present, among whom was the designer of the medal, Dr. P. Kirchoff. Mr. Sterling went on to give the historical background of the Gill medal, finally calling on Dr. Thackeray to make the presentation to Mr. Bennett.

Dr. Thackeray began by reading the Council's citation, and then gave a resume of Mr. Bennett's astronomical activities, with special reference to his cometary work and his remarkable discovery of a supernova in the galaxy M83. He then presented the medal to Mr. Bennett.

In his reply Mr. Bennett thanked the Council of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa for the award of the medal, and went on to describe some of his successes (and failures!) in comet hunting. He indicated that he was always at the disposal of any member of the Society interested in doing this kind of observational work, and stressed the need for more observers of the Southern skies.

The meeting adjourned for tea, and interested visitors were then invited to the dome of the $12\frac{1}{2}$-inch reflector of the Pretoria Centre for a short observing session.

R. F. Smith.

A NEW SOUTH AFRICAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY

On 1970 September 23 the following announcement was made jointly by the Science Research Council in Britain and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in South Africa:

"Agreement in principle has been reached between the Science Research Council and the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, on a joint astronomical venture covering a minimum period of 15 years.

The project involves the creation of a new observing station pooling the resources, as far as both manpower and equipment are concerned, of the long established Royal Observatory at the Cape and the Republic Observatory in Johannesburg, both of which are unsuitable for further development as observing sites because of their situation in large cities. A site has been selected in the Karroo near Sutherland. This new observing station together with an astronomical base at the present Cape Observatory will be known as the South African Astronomical Observatory which will be operated as an institute of the CSIR. It is planned to come into operation from the 1st January 1972. There will be an Advisory Committee comprising representatives of the S.R.C. and C.S.I.R.

Sir Richard Woolley, O.B.E., F.R.S., who will retire from the position of Astronomer Royal at the end of 1971, has accepted an invitation from the C.S.I.R. to be the first Director of the new Observatory. Sir Richard first came to South Africa as a boy and took his first degree at the University of Cape Town.

With the superior observing conditions to be found in the Karroo and with the pooling of resources, it is the intention to build up an astronomical facility which can make a major contribution to astronomy in the Southern Hemisphere."

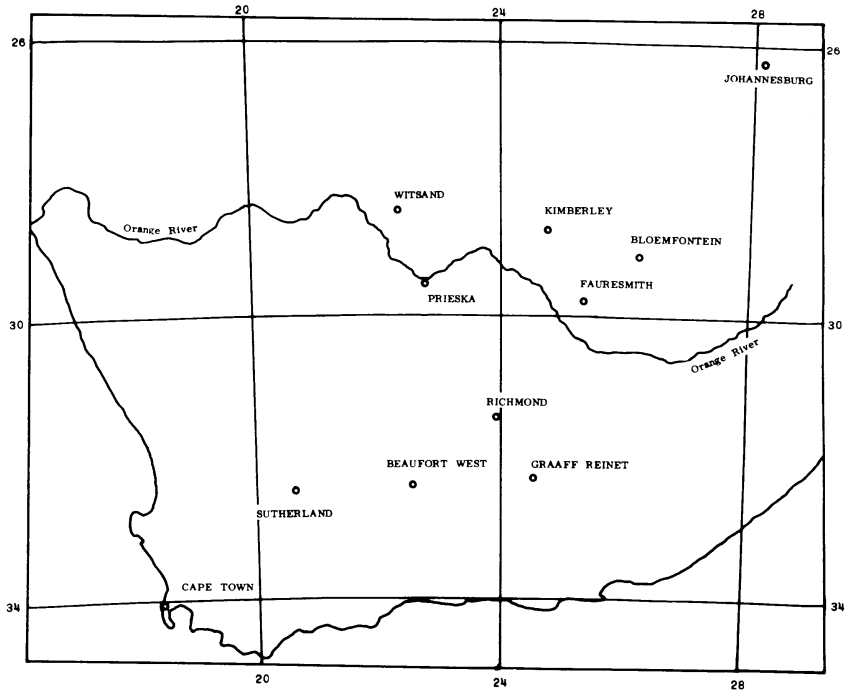
This announcement is the culmination of a long series of negotiations and site surveys undertaken by the two agencies.

For many years now it has been obvious that the Republic Observatory in Johannesburg and the Royal Observatory in Cape Town, caught up as they are in major urbanisation, are becoming very inefficient for modern astronomical observation.

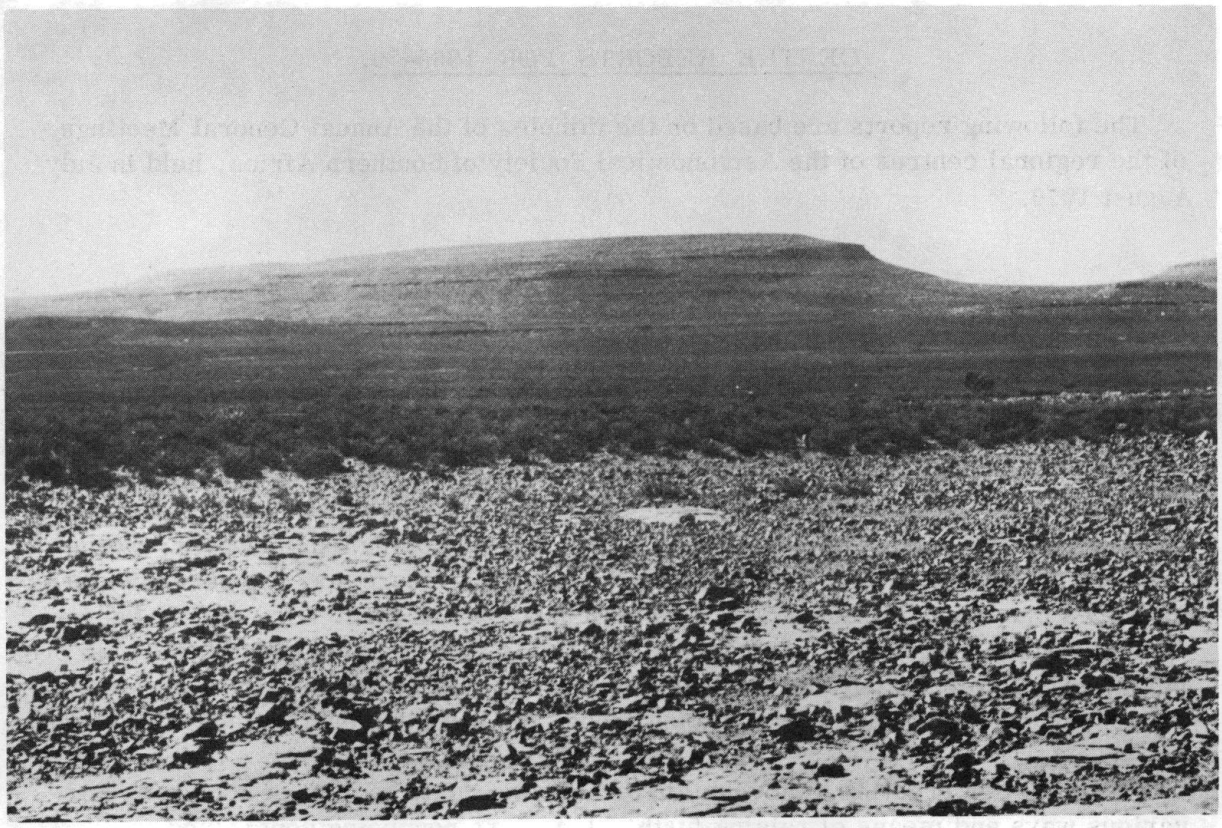
In 1967, therefore, the Royal Observatory started a search for a new site for the 40-inch reflector. After a preliminary investigation of weather data and topography it was decided to concentrate on a series of sites near Sutherland, about 230 miles from Cape Town.

Meanwhile the Republic Observatory was starting independent surveys over a wide area of the country somewhat further north.

Also at about this time an agreement was reached to proceed with the 150-inch Anglo-Australian telescope and, with this heavy commitment in the southern hemisphere it became necessary for the S.R.C. to review its policy on astronomy in the south. A committee, which was appointed for this purpose, visited South Africa in 1968 and it was at this time that it became apparent that the C.S.I.R. were interested in expanding their astronomical activities whilst the S.R.C. wished to somewhat reduce their commitment in South Africa. A joint venture to provide a new observatory at a good site therefore seemed to be the answer to both these problems and the negotiations which followed have resulted in the new agreement.



Map showing the position of Sutherland with respect to other centres in South Africa.



View of the new Sutherland site from the west.

Site-testing continued until March 1970, the Republic Observatory, with limited manpower, pouring an enormous effort into sites at Witsand near Postmasburg, Fauresmith and the farm Kookfontein between Graaff Reinet and Richmond. Representatives of both sides then considered the collected data and decided to site the new outstation at Sutherland, using the existing Royal Observatory in Cape Town as a base.

The final choice of a particular hill-top was delayed until test bores for water and road surveys had been completed but a decision has now been made to build the outstation at a height of 5770 feet on a large flat hill-top about 10 miles east of Sutherland. The photograph shows a view of this hill from the west.

In the initial stage it is planned to move the 40-inch reflector and the wide-angle astrometric camera from Cape Town and the 20-inch reflector from Johannesburg.

Dormitory accomodation, together with a small workshop and office building, will also be erected at the outstation.

Personnel for the South African Astronomical Observatory will be provided by merging the staffs of the existing observatories.

The establishment of the 40-inch reflector combined with modern recording equipment on a site which will provide a very high proportion of really dark sky should provide British and South African astronomy with the opportunity to continue to make significant contributions to the science in the southern hemisphere.

G. A. H.