

The 4 telescopes and their outlook

The National Science Foundation is defunding the telescopes on Kitt Peak run by the National Solar Observatory and the National Optical Astronomy Observatory. Four telescopes will need to find new users or uses in the next few years.

The WIYN Telescope

This newer telescope, dedicated in 1994, draws its name from its owners and operators — The University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Indiana, Yale University and the National Optical Astronomy Observatory. Its 3.5-meter mirror is nearly as large as the giant Mayall's but it is considerably lighter — only 4,000 pounds. It is seeking other institutions to take up NOAO's 40 percent share of its operating costs.



The 2.1-meter Telescope

When the 2.1-meter telescope opened in September 1964, it was the largest optical telescope on Kitt Peak. It is still in use but will be defunded by the National Science Foundation in the coming year. Kitt Peak National Observatory will soon request proposals from universities and institutions to fund its continued use. Otherwise, it will be mothballed.

NOTE: A meter is 39.37 inches



The McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope

This iconic structure, dedicated in November 1962, still lays claim to the title of largest solar telescope in the world. Its 1.6-meter mirror will be eclipsed by the 4.2-meter Advanced Technology Solar Telescope (ATST) being built in Hawaii. A study of the cost of its decommissioning is planned and a consortium of users is seeking grants to continue its operation.



The Nicholas U. Mayall Telescope

The 4-meter Mayall Telescope, completed in 1970, is the largest optical telescope on Kitt Peak. Its old-fashioned design requires a building 18 stories high. Its rotating dome weighs 500 tons and its mirror alone weighs 15 tons. It could find new life as the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI).

