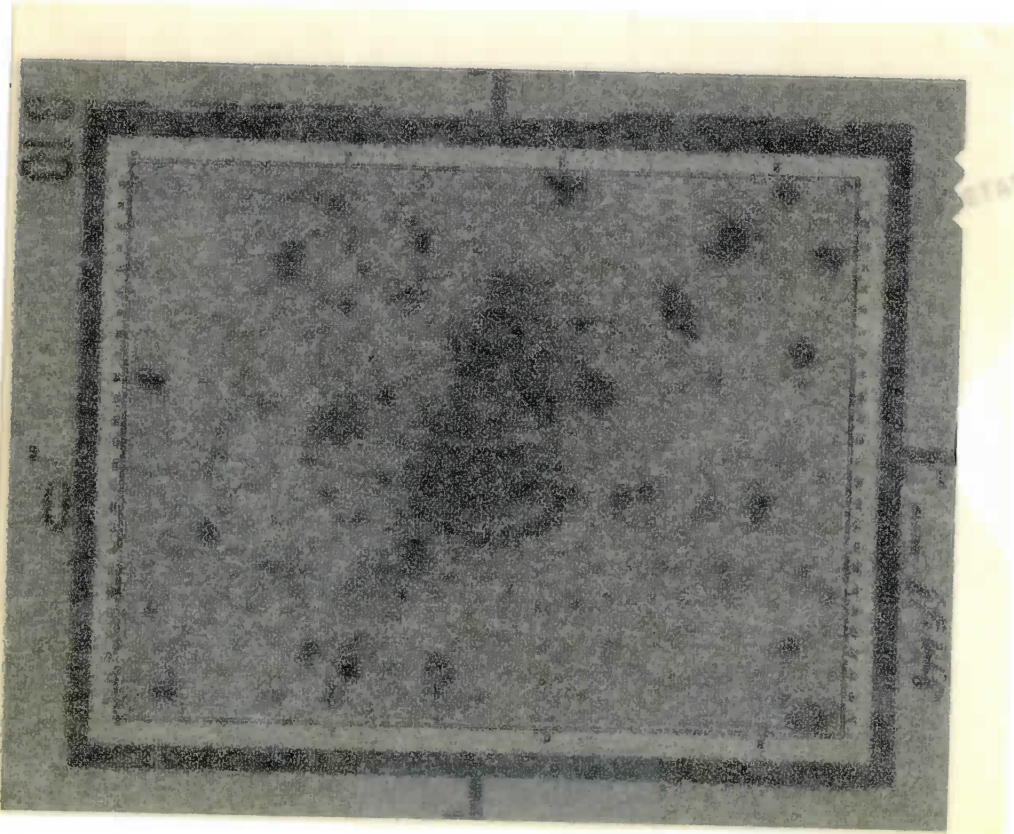


ARC STARS -- The largest optically visible structures yet observed in the universe -- luminous arcs of great length -- have been discovered in distant clusters of galaxies by astronomers from the National Optical Astronomy Observatories in Arizona and Stanford University in California. Using the four-meter telescope at Kitt Peak in Arizona, the scientists estimate the arcs to be from then 300,000 light years long and so uniform and symmetrical they resemble the contrails of a turning aircraft. Because they are bright at blue wavelengths, the are suspected to consist of stars newly formed along an advancing shock front. Another explanation is that they may be the dragging of the stars from one galaxy by the gravitational pull of another passing by. The light from the arcs takes more than 3,000 million years to reach the Earth.

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