

Atmospheric Electrostatics

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Editorial Foreword

Atmospheric Electrostatics is a welcome addition to the Electrostatics Series of monographs.

The author has skillfully combined fundamental theories of atmospheric electrostatic phenomena with his own unique explanation of thundercloud charging. The arguments put forward are very convincing and are supported by appealingly simple experiments. Mathematical treatment of the subject is kept to a minimum, which enables the non-expert to follow the reasoning with ease. At the same time, the introduction of the electrochemical model for charge exchange makes this compulsory reading for atmospheric scientists who are more familiar with the traditional theories of thundercloud charging.

The subject is presented in a very logical manner, beginning with early 19th Century experiments and leading finally to extraterrestrial lightning phenomena. Congratulations to the author for presenting this complex subject in such a way that even a novice to the field will have no difficulty in following the text. All levels of readers are guaranteed a fascinating conducted tour through this most fundamental of electrical phenomena.

Dr. J.F.Hughes, PhD, MIEE, CEng, FInstP.

Southampton. April 1986

Preface

Static electricity became a fashionable science in the early 1700 century and several investigators drew a parallel between the sparks produced in the laboratories to that of lightning and thunder produced during foul weather. It is surprising, however, that even today with our highly advanced technology in electronics and space science we still do not know what causes thunderclouds to charge. The purpose of this book is to give a general overview on atmospheric electricity and to discuss several proposed charging mechanisms including recent important discoveries in atmospheric electrochemistry. The aspects of atmospheric electrochemistry becomes important when we realize that the atmosphere, due to the constant bombardment of cosmic rays, is ionized and behaves very much like an electrolyte. Electrochemical potentials are produced on material surfaces that are exposed to our ionized atmosphere and are as common as contact potentials generated when dissimilar conducting materials touch each other.

This book is not a review of the most current publications on atmospheric electricity but serves as overview of the basic problems still at large and the purpose is to try to inspire new fresh blood into the oldest field of electricity. Two excellent textbooks are recommended for those interest in a detailed picture of the electrical structure of our atmosphere: H. Israel, Atmospheric Electricity Vol. 1, (1970), and Vol.2 1973. J.A. Chalmers, Atmospheric Electricity, (1957).

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Lars Wählin

Table of Contents

	Page
CHAPTER 1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
1.1 PRIMITIVE BELIEFS	1
1.2 EARLY ELECTROSTATICS	2
1.3 FRANKLIN VERSA NOLLET	5
1.4 THE LIGHTNING ROD	6
1.5 LATER DEVELOPMENTS	9
CHAPTER 2 THE ELECTRIC STRUCTURE OF THE ATMOSPHERE	15
2.1 IONS	15
2.2 THE FAIRWEATHER ELECTRIC FIELD	21
2.3 THE AIR TO EARTH CURRENT	25
2.4 POINT DISCHARGE CURRENTS	26
2.5 PRECIPITATION CURRENTS	27
2.6 LIGHTNING CURRENTS	29

	Page
2.7.1 THE ELECTRIC BUDGET	29
2.7.2 THE GLOBAL THUNDERSTORM CIRCUIT	30
2.7.3 THE ELECTROCHEMICAL MECHANISM	32
CHAPTER 3 CHARGING MECHANISMS	35
3.1 SUMMARY	35
3.2 CONTACT CHARGING	37
3.3 ELECTROCHEMICAL CHARGING	43
3.4.1 OTHER CHARGING PROCESSES	52
3.4.2 THE ELSTER-GEITEL PROCESS.	53
3.4.3 THE WILSON EFFECT	54
3.4.4 DIFFUSION CHARGING	55
3.4.5 FREEZING POTENTIALS	56
CHAPTER 4 THE THUNDERCLOUD	57
4.1 THERMAL DYNAMICS	57
4.2 THE ENERGY OF THUNDERSTORMS	59
4.3 THE ELECTRICAL ENERGY IN THUNDERSTORMS	59
4.4 THE LIGHTNING DISCHARGE	61
4.5 PROTECTION AGAINST LIGHTNING	67
4.6 THE ELECTRIC CHARGING OF CLOUDS	70

	Page
4.7.1 BALL LIGHTNING	75
4.7.2 THE QUANTUM MODEL	76
4.7.3 THE STANDING WAVE MODEL	76
4.7.4 THE RING CURRENT MODEL	77
4.7.5 THE PINCH EFFECT	78
CHAPTER 5 FAIRWEATHER PHENOMENA	83
5.1 EXPERIMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS	83
5.2.1 EXHAUST CHARGING	88
5.2.2 VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS	89
5.2.3 EARTHQUAKE LIGHT	90
5.3 BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS	92
5.4 THE ELECTRODE EFFECT	96
5.5 INTERPLANETARY STATIC ELECTRICITY	98
CHAPTER 6 INSTRUMENTATION	99
6.1 MEASUREMENTS	99
6.2 ELECTRIC FIELD MEASUREMENTS	99
6.3 THE ELECTROMETER	101
6.4 THE FIELD MILL	103
6.5 ELECTROMAGNETIC DETECTION	104

6.6 THE FUTURE	106
CHAPTER 7 MEASUREMENTS	109
7.1 RESULT OF FAIR-WAEATHER MEASUREMENTS	109
7.2 MEASURING TECHNIQUES	110
7.3 RELIABILITY OF MEASUREMENTS	111
7.4 RESULTS	112
7.5 APPENDIX	120
REFERENCES	109
INDEX	113

List of Illustrations

Fig.		Page
1	Franklin's proposed sentry-box experiment.	3
2	D'Alibard's version of Franklin's sentry-box experiment.	4
3	Professor Richmann is killed when lightning strikes his experimental antenna in St. Petersburg, 1753.	7
4	Hat pin and umbrella lightning rods (Paris, 1778).	8
5	Points according to American standards (1959) not cheap and only of psychological importance.	9
6	Boys camera photograph of cloud to ground discharge.	12
7	Ion production as function of altitude.	17
8	Conductivity as a function of altitude (Rocket data).	17
9	Gerdien conductivity apparatus.	18
10	Typical ion current readings from Gerdien cylinder.	19
11	Electrochemical equilibrium potentials for different material as a function of ion concentration ratio.	20
12	The fairweather electric field in the atmosphere.	21
13	Relative distribution of radon atoms and excess positive ions as a function of altitude.	22

14	Electric energy, charge and potential vs altitude.	23
15	Diurnal variations in fairweather field compare to world-wide convection.	24
16	The mirror-image effect.	27
17	The global electric circuit by C.T.R. Wilson.	30
18	Variation in fairweather field and current compared to thunderstorm activity.	31
19	Lord Kelvin's condenser system.	38
20	Contact potential between zink and copper. (a) Potential well diagram of metal surface. (b) Electric field before contact is made. (c) Electric field after contact is made.	39
21	Contact potentials in an ionized environment. (a) Ion current with switch k closed. (b) Potential build-up with switch k open.	42
22	Experiment demonstrating electrochemical charging. (a) Galvanic cell with ionized air as electrolyte. (b) Galvanic cell with water as electrolyte.	45
23	Charge-size measurements of rain drops compared to values predicted by the electrochemical charging process.	51
24	The Elster-Geitel charging process of cloud drops.	53
25	Phillip's and Gunn's Experiment with metal spheres. (a) Equilibrium potentials for different dia. spheres. (b) Equilibrium potentials for different air velocities.	55
26	Electric diagram of thunderstorm (Kasemir).	60
27	Lightning discharge theory by Kasemir. (a) Start of return stroke. (b) Charge transfer by induction.	63

28	Lightning protection for houses.	69
29	Lightning protection for sail boats.	70
30	Typical charge distribution in a thundercloud.	71
31	Laboratory model of thundercloud.	74
32	The ring current model of ball lightning.	77
33	Two parallel wires which carry currents in the direction attract each other.	78
34	The pinch effect causes the lightning channel to brake up into small segments (bead of pearl lightning).	79
35	Magnetic ring field model of ball lightning.	80
36	Exhaust charging of a motor car.	88
37	Electrostatic charging of volcanic plume.	89
38	A person exposed to the electric fairweather field.	93
39	Apparatus measuring ion intake through the respiratory system.	95
40	Ratio of charged ions inhaled at different bias voltages.	95
41	Dry mountain winds (föhn or chinook) and positive ions.	96
42	The electrode effect.	97
43	Different antennae configurations for electric field measurements in the atmosphere. a) Disc antenna. (b) Whip antenna. (c) Whip antenna with radioactive probe. (d) Long wire antenna.	100
44	Electrometer circuit.	101

45	Circuit for electric field measurements of thunderclouds.	102
46	Cylindrical electric field mill.	103
47	Rotating shutter electric field mill.	104
48	Loop antenna for lightning detection.	105
49	Diurnal variations for 16 fairweather days Dec. 1990	110
50	Reliability of test data	112
51	Diurnal changes in fairweather generator	114
52	Diurnal changes in resistive load	114
53	Average field, current and ions Aug. 1990- Apr 1992	116
57	Diurnal variations compared to the Carnegie and Maud exp.	117
55	Diurnal power variations at different stations June 4, 1992	118
56	Diurnal power variations at different stations June 5, 1992	118
57	Recordings durin nearby earth quake	120
58	Electric field, current density and ion density.	121
59	Current density and temperature	121
60	Generator power and wind	122
61	Wind, temperature and relative humidity	122