MEAN ELECTRON DENSITY VARIATIONS
OF THE QUIET IONOSPHERE
No. 5 - JULY 1959

BY J.W. WRIGHT, L.R. WESCOTT AND D.J. BROWN
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ABSTRACT

The CRPL has initiated a program for large-scale computation of electron density profiles from ionospheric vertical soundings. Scaling is performed at field stations, permitting computation of hourly profiles at the Central Laboratory. These profiles are combined to form hourly mean quiet profiles for each station and month. The results of this program for the month of June are illustrated graphically. This report is the fourth of a series illustrating the electron density variations in the mean quiet ionosphere between latitudes 15°N and 50°N along the 75°W meridian.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Description of Basic Data</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Description of Graphical Representation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Discussion and Applications of the Data</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hourly Vertical Cross sections along 75°W Geographic Meridian</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isoionic Maps (150, 200, 250, 300, 350, 400 km; Nmax, hmax, Scat, Shmax, Shinf)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electron Density vs. Time Curves (N(t)), (Newfoundland, Ft. Monmouth, White Sands, Grand Bahama, Puerto Rico)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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I Introduction

Part of the basic responsibility of the Central Radio Propagation Laboratory is to gather ionospheric, solar, or other geophysical data necessary in the pursuit of research leading to improvements in radio communication and knowledge of the earth's upper atmosphere. The existing network of ionospheric vertical sounding stations is an important source of such data. Typically, the radio sounding data directly provide observations of peak electron densities (corresponding to "critical" frequencies foE, foF1, foF2), data on Sporadic E, and certain derived propagation data such as maximum usable frequencies or MUF factors (Smith, 1939).

In fact, the vertical sounding is potentially capable of providing the complete electron density profile of the underside of the ionosphere (i.e., below hmaxF2) and of providing a basis for extrapolation to much greater altitudes. However, because a lengthy and difficult calculation is required, little of this work had been done until quite recently when techniques and computers have become available and the exigencies of the IGY and satellite programs have made it imperative.
In the course of its development of facilities for electron density profile calculations, the CRPL has succeeded in devising means by which basic data for this purpose may be scaled by the individual field stations, thereby decentralizing and simplifying the most onerous part of the work. Through its own station network and those of the U. S. Army Signal Radio Propagation Agency, and through cooperation with closely associated stations in other countries, the CRPL has initiated an extensive systematic data reduction program, from which hourly electron density profiles are being computed for the following stations:

Puerto Rico (NES, January 1959)
Grand Bahama Island (U. S. Army Signal Corps, February 1959)
Fort Monmouth, New Jersey (U. S. Army Signal Corps, Feb. 1959)
White Sands, New Mexico (U. S. Army Signal Corps, March 1959)
St. Johns, Newfoundland (Def. Res. Tel. Establ. Canada, June 1959)
Adak, Alaska (U. S. Army Signal Corps, June 1959)
Okinawa, Ryukus (U. S. Army Signal Corps, June 1959)
Thule, Greenland (U. S. Army Signal Corps, July 1959)
Bogota, Colombia (January 1960)
Huancayo, Peru (January 1960)
Talara, Peru (January 1960)
Baguio, Philippines (February 1960).

Affiliation and approximate date of initial participation in this program are given in parentheses.

The hourly electron density profiles are extensively used in the research programs of CRPL and are supplied directly to certain other agencies as part of various research and practical activities. However, in this comparatively early stage, broad dissemination of the computed data is a somewhat difficult problem.

In an attempt to make at least a summary of the results of the program widely and rapidly available, the CRPL has initiated the present series of reports. These provide graphical representations of the monthly mean quiet hourly electron densities from certain of the stations in the preceding list, from which a fairly clear picture of the local ionosphere morphology may be obtained.
These reports contain \( N(h) \) data for the stations at Newfoundland, Fort Monmouth, Grand Bahama Island, White Sands, and Puerto Rico. Pertinent facts concerning these stations are given in the following table:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Geomag. Coordinates</th>
<th>Geog. Coordinates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fH</td>
<td>Lat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Johns, Newf.</td>
<td>1.38Mc/s</td>
<td>58.5°N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft. Monmouth, N.J.</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>51.7°N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Sands, N.M.</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>41.2°N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Bahama Island</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>37.9°N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>30°N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II Description of Basic Data

True heights of reflection of radio waves are calculated from the observed or "virtual" heights by the method of Budden (1954); this method need not be described here, but it should be pointed out that full correction for geomagnetic field effects is made and that the usual restrictions to monotonic profiles apply.

Tabulations of the mean electron density data at 10 km intervals and certain related quantities are the bases for the graphs and charts. A sample for the Puerto Rico July data is given on Page 11. The table on the following page identifies the quantities appearing on the tabulation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Electron Density</td>
<td>$10^3$ electron/cm$^3$</td>
<td>Body of table; given at each 10 km of height from the lowest ( h_{min} ) to 950 km.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($10^{-5}$ on maps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMAX</td>
<td>$10^3$ electron/cm$^3$</td>
<td>The mean value of Nmax.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($10^{-5}$ on maps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNT</td>
<td>Kilometers</td>
<td>Count of the number of profiles entering the mean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMIN</td>
<td>Kilometers</td>
<td>The average height of zero or very low electron density, obtained by linear extrapolation of the electron density of the individual profiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMAX</td>
<td>Kilometers</td>
<td>The average height of maximum electron density, determined by fitting a parabola to the upper portion of the individual profiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAT</td>
<td>Kilometers</td>
<td>One half of the half-thickness of the parabola best fitting the upper portion of the F-region profile. Approximates the scale height near the true HMAX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHMAX</td>
<td>$10^{10}$ electrons/cm$^2$ column ($10^{-12}$ on maps)</td>
<td>Obtained by averaging the integration of the individual profiles between the limits ( h_{MIN} ) and HMAX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHINF</td>
<td>$10^{10}$ electrons/cm$^2$ column ($10^{-13}$ on maps)</td>
<td>The average total number of electrons in a column to infinity obtained by extrapolation of observed profiles into the region above HMAX. (See text.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following particular features of the tabulated data should be noted:

A. Averaging process. Each hour of each day is identified with its magnetic character figure, Kp. For each hour, those days for which Kp is less than 4+ are included in the "quiet" average. The other days are similarly combined to form a "disturbed" average; however, this rarely has physical significance because the number of disturbed periods is usually small and the behavior of the ionosphere during disturbed hours is not consistent. Thus graphs for these latter averages are not presented here.

B. Determination of \( h_{\text{max}} \). The nature of the "true height" process is such that no direct measure of \( h_{\text{max}F2} \) is obtained, the virtual height at \( N_{\text{max}} \) being immeasurable. A useful procedure is to fit the portion near \( h_{\text{max}F2} \) with a suitable curve and to determine \( h_{\text{max}} \) from this curve. A parabola is quite satisfactory for this purpose; it is fitted to two of the highest true heights and the measured value of \( N_{\text{max}}(f_{\text{o}F2}) \).

C. Extrapolation of profiles above \( h_{\text{max}} \). Before averaging, the individual profiles are extrapolated above \( h_{\text{max}} \) by a Chapman distribution of 100 km scale height. This assumed model seems to agree well with the few published measurements dealing with the profile of the \( F \) region above \( h_{\text{max}} \) (Wright, 1960). Extrapolation is necessary in order to calculate homogeneous averages near \( h_{\text{max}} \), and the average profiles are, in fact, given to 950 km.

D. Integrated Electron Densities. The total number of electrons in a unit column of the ionosphere between the effective bottom (\( h_{\text{min}} \)) and \( h_{\text{max}} \) is called \( S_{\text{max}} \); it is obtained by numerical integration of the observed profiles between these limits. An estimate of the total electron content to infinity, based upon the Chapman model, is called \( S_{\text{inf}} \). It is obtained by adding to \( S_{\text{max}} \) the quantity \( N_A = 2.82 \, H \, N_{\text{max}} \) where \( H \) is an (assumed constant) scale height for the region above \( h_{\text{max}} \). Current evidence
(Wright, 1960) indicates $H = 100$ km, is an acceptable choice.

III Description of Graphical Representation

The relative smoothness of mean quiet ionosphere data lends itself to various kinds of graphical presentation which offer convenient aids to the visualization of the height, geographic, and temporal variability of the ionosphere. Included here are three such graphical forms prepared from the tabulations described in Section II.

A. Vertical cross sections of the ionosphere along the 75°W meridian. Pages 12 through 35 give for each hour, a vertical cross section of the mean quiet ionosphere along a meridian section, nominally the 75°W geographic meridian, for the month of July 1959. Contours are parametric in "plasma" frequency ($f_N$) related to electron density $N$ by

$$12,400 f_N^2 (\text{Mc/s}) = N(\text{electrons/cm}^3).$$

The height of maximum electron density is represented by a dashed line. Note that the vertical scale is expanded about 5.5 times.

With the exception of White Sands, each of these stations is reasonably close to the 75°W meridian (see Table 1). There is the possibility that some of the anomalies imposed by White Sands on these contours are the result of the well-known longitudinal asymmetry of the ionosphere.

B. Local time vs Latitude Maps. Another form of presentation, useful for indicating the two-dimensional geographic variations of the ionosphere, is that illustrated by the maps of pages 36 through 45. Here, for fixed levels in the ionosphere (150, 200, 250, 300, 350, 400 km), contours of electron density are drawn in the latitude vs. local time plane. To the extent to which longitude anomalies are negligible, these maps give also the longitude vs. latitude
distribution of electron densities at the indicated heights when it is noon over the 75°W meridian. Similar maps for the peak density, Nmax; its height, hmax; its characteristic thickness, Scat; the total electron content to Nmax, Shmax; and the estimated total electron content, Shinf, are also shown.

C. Electron density vs. time curves (N(t) curves). The mean quiet diurnal variation of electron density between 150 and 400 km heights above the sounding stations is illustrated by these curves. Dashed lines are used wherever the electron density at any height falls below the peak density (i.e. when the height hmaxF2 falls below the height for the curve in question.) Such electron densities are the result of the extrapolations by the Chapman model discussed in Section II C.

IV Discussion and Applications of the Data

Mean quiet electron density data over wide geographic areas are essential for application to numerous problems of both practical and scientific interest. For example, the assessment of the radio refraction errors and Faraday rotation effects in satellite tracking requires a knowledge of the electron density profile in the direction of the satellite or an estimate of the electron density at the satellite itself. Alternatively these properties of the ionosphere, or estimates of the total electron content in a column, may be measured by observations from rockets and satellites, or from radar moon-echoes, and compared with ground-based observations of the kind shown here.

Frequently it will be necessary to use instantaneous density data because of the considerable variability of the ionosphere about the quiet mean. In such cases, the mean data are of value as a "reference level" in the design of the experiment; for example, in the choice of radio frequencies, satellite heights, antennas, etc.
Since electron density data represent virtually our only source of continuous, widespread data on the earth's upper atmosphere, such data also are essential to geophysical problems involving the electrical, neutral, and magnetic properties of the atmosphere.

For example, data on the vertical cross sections may be compared with theoretical expectations for the meridional height dependence of the quiet ionosphere. Several workers (Hirono, 1955; Martyn 1956) have investigated the equilibrium height (of h\text{max}) for an ionosphere controlled by diffusion, height-varying electron loss rate, and uniform (or zero) vertical electron drift. The results are qualitatively in agreement with these observations in predicting a rise of h\text{max} towards the equator in daytime and a reversal of this tendency at night.

The N(t) curves are perhaps the most physically significant representation of electron density data. The strong solar control at all levels and the important perturbations of this solar control in the upper F region may be easily seen.
Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Mr. A. H. Shapley for guidance in the initiation of this work, and to Dr. H. H. Howe for the development of the computer programs upon which the whole system heavily depends. This series of reports results from the combined efforts of the NBS Electron Density Profile Group, including at various times L. R. Wescott, L. Hayden, D. J. Brown, F. J. Burmont, I. Ford, N. Moore, M. Durham, G. Lira, under the direct supervision of G. H. Stonehocker. The cooperation of the U. S. Army Signal Radio Propagation Agency, in particular the assistance of Mr. F. H. Dickson (Chief), is gratefully acknowledged.
References


JULY 1959
0900 75° W TIME

HEIGHT IN KILOMETERS

VERTICAL SCALE 5.5 X HORIZONTAL SCALE

N — CONTOURS OF fN
n[MAXIMUM]

NEWFOUNDLAND  FORT MONMOUTH  WHITE SANDS  GRAND BAHAMA  PUERTO RICO

LATITUDE IN DEGREES N

50°  45°  40°  35°  30°  25°  20°  15°
JULY 1959
1400 75° W TIME

HEIGHT IN KILOMETERS

VERIFICATION OF MAXIMUM CONTOURS

NEWFOUNDLAND  FORT MONMOUTH  WHITE SANDS  GRAND BAHAMA  PUERTO RICO

LATITUDE IN DEGREES N

VERTICAL SCALE 5.5 X HORIZONTAL SCALE
JULY 1959
1700 75° W TIME

HEIGHT IN KILOMETERS

VERTICAL SCALE 5.5 x HORIZONTAL SCALE

LATITUDE IN DEGREES N

CONTOURS OF fN

NEWFOUNDLAND  FORT MONMOUTH  WHITE SANDS  GRAND BAHAMA  PUERTO RICO
ELECTRON DENSITY AT 150 KILOMETERS

July 1959

CONTOURS: \( \frac{d}{cm^3} \times 10^{-6} \)
ELECTRON DENSITY AT 200 KILOMETERS
JULY 1959

CONTOURS: \( \text{cm}^{-3} \times 10^{-6} \)
ELECTRON DENSITY AT 250 KILOMETERS

JULY 1959

75° W TIME

CONTOURS: \( \frac{el}{cm^3} \times 10^{-5} \)
ELECTRON DENSITY AT 300 KILOMETERS

JULY 1959

CONTOURS: \( \frac{\text{el}}{\text{cm}^3} \times 10^{-9} \)
ELECTRON DENSITY AT 350 KILOMETERS

JULY 1959

CONTOURS: \( \frac{\text{el}}{\text{cm}^3} \times 10^{-5} \)
ELECTRON DENSITY AT 400 KILOMETERS

JULY 1959

CONTOURS: \( \frac{nl}{cm^3} \times 10^{-5} \)
HEIGHT OF MAXIMUM ELECTRON DENSITY
HMAX
JULY 1959

CONTOURS = Km
QUARTER THICKNESS OF F-REGION PEAK SCAT
JULY 1959

CONTOURS = Km

75° W TIME
ELECTRON DENSITY INTEGRATED TO HEIGHT OF MAXIMUM ELECTRON DENSITY
SHMAX
JULY 1959

CONTOURS = \frac{e}{cm^2}col \times 10^{-12}
N(t) NEWFOUNDLAND JULY 1959
FIXED HEIGHTS IN Km

ELECTRON DENSITY (x10^5 e/cm^3)

00  06  12  18  00
LMT
N(t) FORT MONMOUTH JULY 1959
FIXED HEIGHTS IN Km

Electron Density ($n_e \times 10^5$ cm$^{-3}$)

LMT
$N(t)$ WHITE SANDS JULY 1959
FIXED HEIGHTS IN Km

ELECTRON DENSITY ($n \times 10^5$, $e$/cm$^3$)

LMT

00 06 12 18 00
N(t) GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND JULY 1959
FIXED HEIGHTS IN Km

Electron Density ($10^5 \varphi_{\text{cm}^3}$)

LMT
N(t) PUERTO RICO JULY 1959
FIXED HEIGHTS IN Km

ELECTRON DENSITY (x10^5 e/cm^3)

LMT
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