COSMIC RAYS

To reduce the size of this section's PostScript file, we have divided it into two PostScript files. We present the following index:

PART 1

Page #	Section name	
1	20.1	Primary spectra
2	20.2	Cosmic rays in the atmosphere
5	20.3	Cosmic rays at the surface

PART 2

Page #	Section name	
8	20.4	Cosmic rays underground
11	20.5	Air showers
14		References

20. COSMIC RAYS

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20.1. Primary spectra

The cosmic radiation incident at the top of the terrestrial atmosphere includes all stable charged particles and nuclei with lifetimes of order 10^6 years or longer. Technically, "primary" cosmic rays are those particles accelerated at astrophysical sources and "secondaries" are those particles produced in interaction of the primaries with interstellar gas. Thus electrons, protons and helium, as well as carbon, oxygen, iron, and other nuclei synthesized in stars, are primaries. Nuclei such as lithium, beryllium, and boron (which are not abundant end-products of stellar nucleosynthesis) are secondaries. Antiprotons and positrons are partly, if not entirely, secondaries, but the fraction of these particles that may be primary is a question of current interest.

Apart from particles associated with solar flares, the cosmic radiation comes from outside the solar system. The incoming charged particles are "modulated" by the solar wind, the expanding magnetized plasma generated by the Sun, which decelerates and partially excludes the lower energy galactic cosmic rays from the inner solar system. There is a significant anticorrelation between solar activity (which has an eleven-year cycle) and the intensity of the cosmic rays with energies below about 10 GeV. In addition, the lower-energy cosmic rays are affected by the geomagnetic field, which they must penetrate to reach the top of the atmosphere. Thus the intensity of any component of the cosmic radiation in the GeV range depends both on the location and time.

There are four different ways to describe the spectra of the components of the cosmic radiation: (1) By particles per unit rigidity. Propagation (and probably also acceleration) through cosmic magnetic fields depends on gyroradius or *magnetic rigidity,* R, which is gyroradius multiplied by the magnetic field strength:

$$R = \frac{p\,c}{Z\,e} = r_L B \ . \tag{20.1}$$

(2) By particles per energy-per-nucleon. Fragmentation of nuclei propagating through the interstellar gas depends on energy per nucleon, since that quantity is approximately conserved when a nucleus breaks up on interaction with the gas. (3) By nucleons per energy-per-nucleon. Production of secondary cosmic rays in the atmosphere depends on the intensity of nucleons per energy-per-nucleon, approximately independently of whether the incident nucleons are free protons or bound in nuclei. (4) By particles per energy-per-nucleus. Air shower experiments that use the atmosphere as a calorimeter generally measure a quantity that is related to total energy per particle.

The units of differential intensity I are $[\mathrm{cm}^{-2}\mathrm{s}^{-1}\mathrm{sr}^{-1}\mathcal{E}^{-1}]$, where $\mathcal{E}$ represents the units of one of the four variables listed above.

The intensity of primary nucleons in the energy range from several GeV to somewhat beyond 100 TeV is given approximately by

$$I_N(E) \approx 1.8\,E^{-\alpha}\,\frac{\text{nucleons}}{\mathrm{cm}^2\ \mathrm{s}\ \mathrm{sr}\ \mathrm{GeV}}\ , \tag{20.2}$$

where E is the energy-per-nucleon (including rest mass energy) and α $(\equiv \gamma + 1) = 2.7$ is the differential spectral index of the cosmic ray flux and γ is the integral spectral index. About 79% of the primary nucleons are free protons and about 70% of the rest are nucleons bound in helium nuclei. The fractions of the primary nuclei are nearly constant over this energy range (possibly with small but interesting variations). Fractions of both primary and secondary incident nuclei are listed in Table 20.1. Figure 20.1 [1] shows the major components as a function of energy at a particular epoch of the solar cycle.

Table 20.1: Relative abundances F of cosmic-ray nuclei at 10.6 GeV/nucleon normalized to oxygen ($\equiv 1$) [3]. The oxygen flux at kinetic energy of 10.6 GeV/nucleon is 3.26×10^{-6} cm^{-2} s^{-1} sr^{-1} (GeV/nucleon)$^{-1}$. Abundances of hydrogen and helium are from Ref. 4.

Z	Element	F	Z	Element	F
1	H	730	13–14	Al-Si	0.19
2	He	34	15–16	P-S	0.03
3–5	Li-B	0.40	17–18	Cl-Ar	0.01
6–8	C-O	2.20	19–20	K-Ca	0.02
9–10	F-Ne	0.30	21–25	Sc-Mn	0.05
11–12	Na-Mg	0.22	26–28	Fe-Ni	0.12

The spectrum of electrons and positrons incident at the top of the atmosphere is steeper than the spectra of protons and nuclei, as shown in Fig. 20.2 [2]. The positron fraction is about 10% in the region in which it is measured (< 20 GeV), but it is not yet fully understood [5].

Above 10 GeV the fraction of antiprotons to protons is about 10^{-4}, and there is evidence for the kinematic suppression at lower energy expected for secondary antiprotons [5]. There is at this time no evidence for a significant primary component of antiprotons.

20.2. Cosmic rays in the atmosphere

Figure 20.3 shows the vertical fluxes of the major cosmic ray components in the atmosphere in the energy region where the particles are most numerous (except for electrons, which are most numerous near their critical energy, which is about 81 MeV in air). Except for protons and electrons near the top of the atmosphere, all particles are produced in interactions of the primary cosmic rays in the air. Muons and neutrinos are products of the decay of charged mesons, while electrons and photons originate in decays of neutral mesons.

Most measurements are made at ground level or near the top of the atmosphere, but there are also measurements of muons and electrons from airplanes and balloons. Fig. 20.3 includes a recent measurement of negative muons [7]. Since $\mu^+(\mu^-)$ are produced in

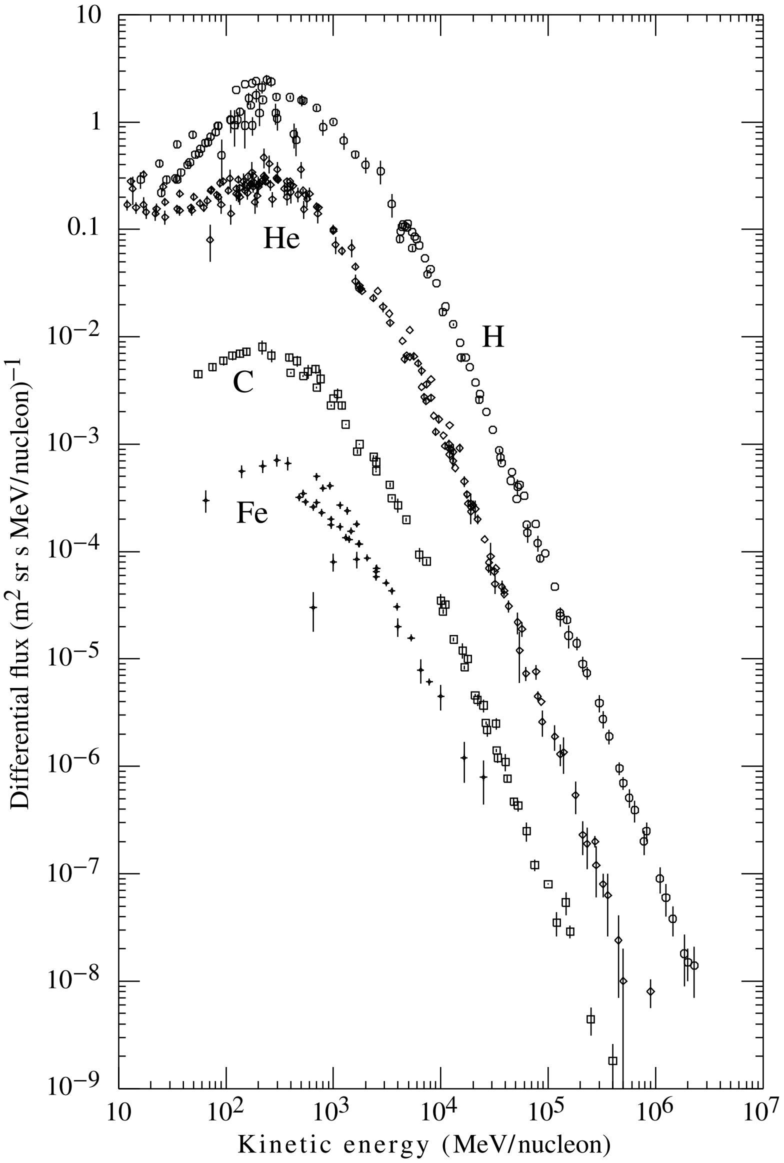

Figure 20.1: Major components of the primary cosmic radiation (from Ref. 1).

association with $\nu_\mu(\overline{\nu}_\mu)$, the measurement of muons near the maximum of the intensity curve for the parent pions serves to calibrate the atmospheric ν_μ beam [6]. Because muons typically lose almost two GeV in passing through the atmosphere, the comparison near the production altitude is important for the sub-GeV range of $\nu_\mu(\overline{\nu}_\mu)$ energies.

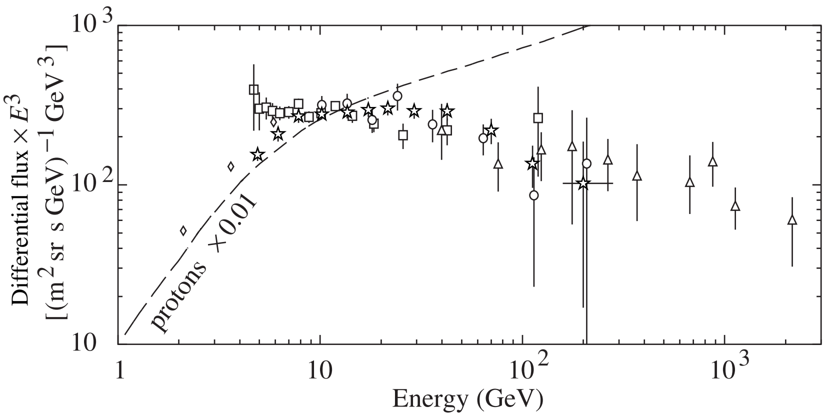

Figure 20.2: Differential spectrum of electrons plus positrons multiplied by E^3 (from Ref. 2).

The flux of cosmic rays through the atmosphere is described by a set of coupled cascade equations with boundary conditions at the top of the atmosphere to match the primary spectrum. Numerical or Monte Carlo calculations are needed to account accurately for decay and energy-loss processes, and for the energy-dependences of the cross sections and of the primary spectral index γ. Approximate analytic solutions are, however, useful in limited regions of energy [8]. For example, the vertical intensity of nucleons at depth X (g cm^{-2}) in the atmosphere is given by

$$I_N(E,X) \;\approx\; I_N(E,0)\, e^{-X/\Lambda} \;, \tag{20.3}$$

where Λ is the attenuation length of nucleons in air.

The corresponding expression for the vertical intensity of charged pions with energy $E_\pi \ll \epsilon_\pi = 115$ GeV is

$$I_\pi(E_\pi,X) \;\approx\; \frac{Z_{N\pi}}{\lambda_N}\, I_N(E_\pi,0)\, e^{-X/\Lambda}\, \frac{X\, E_\pi}{\epsilon_\pi} \;. \tag{20.4}$$

This expression has a maximum at $t = \Lambda \approx 120$ g cm^{-2}, which corresponds to an altitude of 15 kilometers. The quantity $Z_{N\pi}$ is the spectrum-weighted moment of the inclusive distribution of charged pions in interactions of nucleons with nuclei of the atmosphere. The intensity of low-energy pions is much less than that of nucleons because $Z_{N\pi} \approx 0.079$ is small and because most pions with energy much less than the critical energy ϵ_π decay rather than interact.

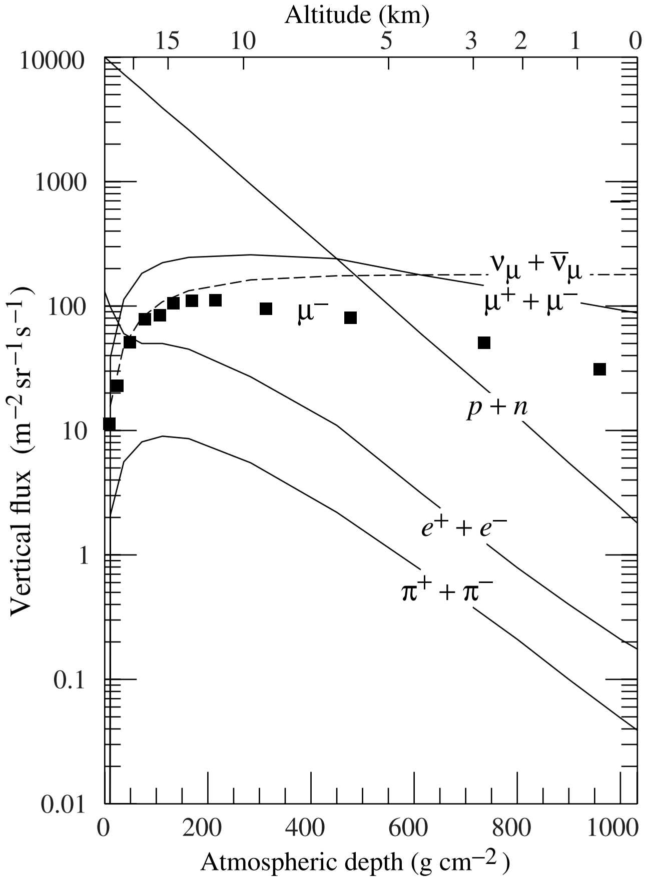

Figure 20.3: Vertical fluxes of cosmic rays in the atmosphere with $E > 1$ GeV estimated from the nucleon flux of Eq. (20.2). The points show measurements of negative muons with $E_\mu > 1$ GeV [7].

20.3. Cosmic rays at the surface

20.3.1. ***Muons***: Muons are the most numerous charged particles at sea level (see Fig. 20.3). Most muons are produced high in the atmosphere (typically 15 km) and lose about 2 GeV to ionization before reaching the ground. Their energy and angular distribution reflect a convolution of production spectrum, energy loss in the atmosphere, and decay. For example, $E_\mu = 2.4$ GeV muons have a decay length of 15 km, which is reduced to 8.7 km by energy loss. The mean energy of muons at the ground is ≈ 4 GeV. The energy spectrum is almost flat below 1 GeV, steepens gradually to reflect the primary spectrum in the 10–100 GeV range, and steepens further at higher energies because pions with $E_\pi > \epsilon_\pi \approx 115$ GeV tend to interact in the atmosphere before they decay. Asymptotically ($E_\mu \gg 1$ TeV), the energy spectrum of atmospheric muons is one power steeper than the primary spectrum. The integral intensity of vertical muons above 1 GeV/c at sea level is $\approx 70\ \mathrm{m}^{-2}\mathrm{s}^{-1}\mathrm{sr}^{-1}$ [9,10]. Experimentalists are familiar with this number in the form $I \approx 1\ \mathrm{cm}^{-2}\ \mathrm{min}^{-1}$ for horizontal detectors.

The overall angular distribution of muons at the ground is $\propto \cos^2\theta$, which is characteristic of muons with $E_\mu \sim 3$ GeV. At lower energy the angular distribution becomes increasingly steeper, while at higher energy it flattens and approaches a $\sec\theta$ distribution for $E_\mu \gg \epsilon_\pi$ and $\theta < 70°$.

Figure 20.4 shows the muon energy spectrum at sea level for two angles. At large angles low energy muons decay before reaching the surface and high energy pions decay before they interact, thus the average muon energy increases. An approximate extrapolation formula valid when muon decay is negligible ($E_\mu > 100/\cos\theta$ GeV) and the curvature of the Earth can be neglected ($\theta < 70°$) is

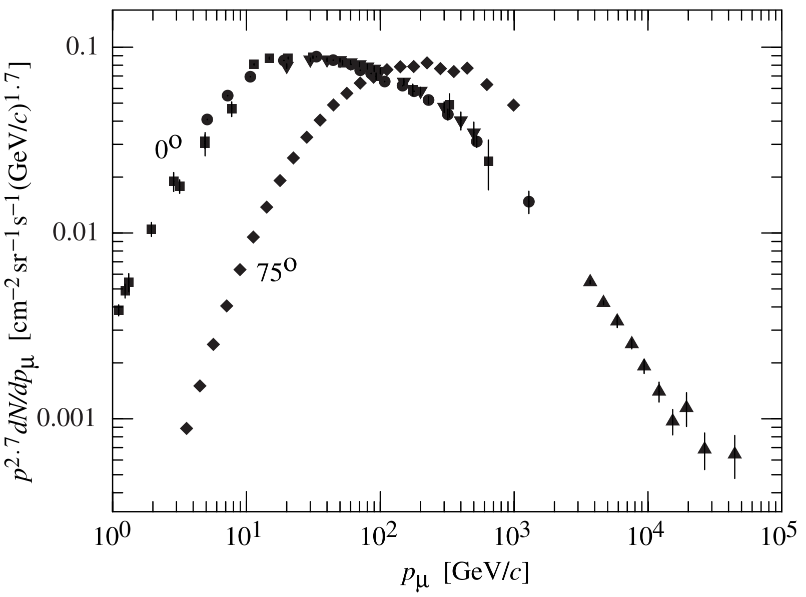

Figure 20.4: Spectrum of muons at $\theta = 0°$ (■ [12],● [13], ▼ [14], ▲ [15]), and $\theta = 75°$ ♦ [16]).

$$\frac{dN_\mu}{dE_\mu} \approx \frac{0.14\,E^{-2.7}}{\mathrm{cm}^2\ \mathrm{s\ sr\ GeV}} \times \left\{ \frac{1}{1+\dfrac{1.1E_\mu\cos\theta}{115\,\mathrm{GeV}}} + \frac{0.054}{1+\dfrac{1.1E_\mu\cos\theta}{850\,\mathrm{GeV}}} \right\}, \tag{20.5}$$

where the two terms give the contribution of pions and charged kaons. Eq. (20.5) neglects a small contribution from charm and heavier flavors which is negligible except at very high energy [17].

The muon charge ratio reflects the excess of π^+ over π^- in the forward fragmentation region of proton initiated interactions together with the fact that there are more protons than neutrons in the primary spectrum. The charge ratio is between 1.2 and 1.3 from 250 MeV up to 100 GeV [9].

20.3.2. ***Electromagnetic component***: At the ground, this component consists of electrons, positrons, and photons primarily from electromagnetic cascades initiated by decay of neutral and charged mesons. Muon decay is the dominant source of low-energy electrons at sea level. Decay of neutral pions is more important at high altitude or when the energy threshold is high. Knock-on electrons also make a small contribution at low energy [11]. The integral vertical intensity of electrons plus positrons is very approximately 30, 6, and 0.2 $\mathrm{m}^{-2}\mathrm{s}^{-1}\mathrm{sr}^{-1}$ above 10, 100, and 1000 MeV respectively [10,18], but the exact numbers depend sensitively on altitude, and the angular dependence is complex because of the different altitude dependence of the different sources of electrons [11,18,19]. The ratio of photons to electrons plus positrons is approximately 1.3 above a GeV and 1.7 below the critical energy [19].

20.3.3. ***Protons***: Nucleons above 1 GeV/c at ground level are degraded remnants of the primary cosmic radiation. The intensity is approximately represented by Eq. (20.3) with the replacement $t \to t/\cos\theta$ for $\theta < 70°$ and an attenuation length $\Lambda = 123$ g cm^{-2}. At sea level, about 1/3 of the nucleons in the vertical direction are neutrons (up from $\approx 10\%$ at the top of the atmosphere as the n/p ratio approaches equilibrium). The integral intensity of vertical protons above 1 GeV/c at sea level is ≈ 0.9 $\mathrm{m}^{-2}\mathrm{s}^{-1}\mathrm{sr}^{-1}$ [10,20].