First Temperature Observations with the USU Very Large Rayleigh Lidar: An Examination of Mesopause Temperatures

Leda Sox
*Utah State University*

Vincent B. Wickwar
*Utah State University*

Joshua P. Herron
*Utah State University*

Marcus J. Bingham
*Utah State University*

Lance W. Petersen
*University of Utah*

Matthew T. Emerick
*Utah State University*

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Leda Sox1, Vincent B. Wickwar1, Joshua P. Herron2, Marcus J. Bingham3, Lance W. Petersen3, Matthew T. Emerick1
(1Physics and CASS, 2Space Dynamics Lab, Utah State University, Logan, UT; 3University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah)

Introduction
As the impetus for extended observational measurements throughout the middle atmosphere has increased, the limits of previous instrumentation need to be pushed. The Rayleigh lidar group at the Atmospheric Lidar Observatory (ALO) at Utah State University has pushed such limits on existing Rayleigh scatter lidar technology and, through major upgrades to the previous lidar system, has been able to gather temperature measurements in the upper mesosphere and lower thermosphere from approximately 70-109 km. A data campaign with the new system was conducted around the annual temperature minimum, centered on late June 2012, in this region. The temperatures from this campaign show a considerable night-to-night variation as well as evidence of wave activity on several nights.

Background
The Rayleigh lidar group at the ALO on the campus of Utah State has been conducting mesospheric research since 1993. The original Rayleigh lidar system that operated at ALO primarily consisted of one 24 W Nd:YAG laser pulsed at a wavelength of 532 nm from a 44 cm diameter telescope; and one photomultiplier tube (PMT) to detect Rayleigh scatter. This Rayleigh lidar system was capable of obtaining temperature measurements throughout the mesosphere from 45-90 km, which are common altitude limits for most Rayleigh lidar systems.

As the necessity for extended observations throughout the middle atmosphere has grown, we have undertaken many upgrades of the original lidar to extend its measurement limits. Our group conducted the first data campaign with the new, large-aperture Rayleigh lidar system operating with two lasers for a combined 42 W, a four-mirror telescope with a 4.9 m receiving area, and one PMT detector (Fig. 1), in the summer of 2012.

Data Campaign and Analysis Methods

Once operational, the large-aperture Rayleigh lidar was used to conduct a month-long data campaign centered around the annual temperature minimum in the mesopause region 80-100 km. Twenty nights of data were collected between mid-June to mid-July. The traditional Rayleigh lidar temperature algorithm used by the ALO Rayleigh lidar group was used to reduce the lidar signal into nightly averaged temperature profiles. This algorithm uses the lidar signal equation to find the relative density profiles and then assumes hydrostatic equilibrium and the ideal gas law to derive an integral to find temperatures,

\[ T(h) = T(h_{max}) \frac{n(h_{max})}{n(h)} = \frac{1}{k} \int_{h_{min}}^{h} \frac{n(h) \ln(h)}{n(h)} dh. \]

This temperature algorithm allows us to take relative densities, given by the lidar signal, and reduce them to get absolute temperature profiles in the upper mesosphere and lower thermosphere.

The algorithm requires an initial temperature at a maximum height, \( h_{max} \). In the past, the initial temperature, or seed temperature, was taken from the Colorado State Na lidar climatology. Due to the increased upper altitude limit of the new large-aperture Rayleigh lidar, all of the initial temperatures for this study were taken from the MSISE90 Atmospheric Model.

Nightly-averaged temperature profiles were measured for some twenty nights during the month long summer data campaign. The altitude covered by these temperature profiles ranged, on average, from 70-105 km.

On a night with particularly good observing conditions, June 16, 2012, the temperature algorithm was pushed to 109 km. The profile from this night (Fig. 2), is the best example of the current capabilities of the large-aperture Rayleigh lidar.

In Figure 2, additional temperature profiles with seeded temperatures of 232 K (red curves) are plotted concurrently with the temperature profile using the MSISE90 model seed temperature. This illustrates how the choice of seed temperature has a diminishing effect as the temperature integration is brought down in altitude.

A great deal of variability in the structure of the temperature profiles was seen from night-to-night. The group of four consecutive nights from June 21st to June 24th exhibits this variability (Fig. 3). Between June 21st and June 22nd, a large-amplitude wave-like structure formed which seems to dissipate over the night of June 23rd and is completely gone by the night of the June 24th.

Temperature Observations

On several nights during the summer 2012 campaign, wave-like signatures were seen in the nightly averaged temperatures. To examine these wave structures further, hourly averages of the temperatures for the night of June 26, 2012 were plotted with 50 K offsets (Fig. 4). In this plot, one can see evidence of waves with a downward phase progression. The dominant wave appears to be monochromatic with a wavelength of 1 km and a phase speed of -1 km/hr, giving an approximate 12 hr period. Other waves are also present.

With further analysis, the horizontal wavelengths and phase velocities can also be found using the densities or temperatures measured with this Rayleigh lidar system.

Conclusions and Future Work

First observations were made with the new, large-aperture Rayleigh lidar at Utah State during the middle of the 2012 summer. The upper altitude limit for Rayleigh scatter lidar measurements has been extended, and we have also been obtained above 100 km with only a 2-hour integration. Observations on 20 nights have shown that temperatures in the region, consisting of the upper mesosphere and lower thermosphere, to be highly variable. The minimum temperature can occur at 80 km or at 90 km. This variability may well arise from waves. For instance, one long night showed a wave with \( \lambda \approx 11 \), \( \text{speed} \approx 1 \text{ km/hr} \), and \( \tau \approx 12 \text{ hrs} \). A much shorter night appeared to show much stronger waves.

Our Rayleigh group will continue with its plans for further upgrades to the system by adding more detection channels in the coming months. The new detection channels will allow for measurements to be made with the system over a larger altitude range, which will extend down to 15 km, and will allow for the detection of Rayleigh, Mie and Raman scatter. These additions, along with fine tuning of the completed Rayleigh-Mie-Raman (RMR) lidar will give an overall temperature and density measurement range of 15-110 km.

References


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