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Solar neutrino observations from the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory

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Abstract. Solar neutrino observations from the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory are presented from preliminary analyses. Based on energy, direction and location, the data in the region of interest appear to be dominated by ^{8}B solar neutrinos, detected by the charged current reaction on deuterium and elastic scattering from electrons, with very little background. Measurements of radioactive backgrounds indicate that the measurement of all active neutrino types via the neutral current reaction on deuterium will be possible with small systematic uncertainties. Quantitative results for the fluxes observed with these reactions will be provided when further calibrations have been completed.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Sudbury Neutrino Observatory (Boger 2000) (SNO), is a 1000 tonne heavy-water-based Cherenkov detector situated 2 km underground in INCO's Creighton mine near Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. After a commissioning period, the detector parameters were fixed at the start of November 1999 and neutrino data acquisition and associated calibrations have been taking place almost continuously since then. In this initial phase of the project, the detector is filled with pure heavy water. Neutrinos from ^{8}B decay in the sun are observed from Cherenkov processes following these reactions:
1. The Charged Current (CC) reaction, specific to electron neutrinos:

$$d + \nu_e \rightarrow p + p + e^- \tag{1}$$

This reaction has a Q value of -1.4 MeV and the electron energy is strongly correlated with the neutrino energy, providing very good sensitivity to spectral distortions.
2. Neutral Current (NC) reaction, equally sensitive to all non-sterile neutrino types:

$$\nu_x + d \rightarrow n + p + \nu_x \tag{2}$$

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This reaction has a threshold of 2.2 MeV and is observed through the detection of neutrons by three different techniques in separate phases of the experiment.
3. Elastic Scattering (ES) reaction:

$$\nu_x + e^- \rightarrow e^- + \nu_x \tag{3}$$

This reaction has a substantially lower cross section than the other two and is predominantly sensitive to electron neutrinos; they have about six times greater cross-section than μ or τ neutrinos.

The SNO experimental plan calls for three phases of about one year each wherein different techniques will be employed for the detection of neutrons from the NC reaction. During the first phase, with pure heavy water, neutrons are observed through the Cherenkov light produced when neutrons are captured in deuterium, producing 6.25 MeV gammas. In this phase, the capture probability for such neutrons is about 25% and the Cherenkov light is relatively close to the threshold of about 5 MeV electron energy, imposed by radioactivity in the detector. (Figure 1). For the second phase, about 2.5 tonnes of NaCl will be added to the heavy water and neutron detection will be enhanced through capture on Cl, with about 8.6 MeV gamma energy release and about 83% capture efficiency. (See Figure 1). For the third phase, the salt is removed and an array of ^{3}He- filled proportional counters will be installed to provide direct detection of neutrons with a capture efficiency of about 45%.

2 PHYSICS OBJECTIVES

The ratio of CC/NC can be observed during all three phases of operation. The sensitivity to the NC reaction is limited during the first phase, but there will be excellent sensitivity with different systematic uncertainties during the other two phases. The ratio of fluxes detected by the CC and ES reaction has a smaller dependence on flavor change to active species through the sensitivity to μ and τ neutrinos in the ES cross section. Events from the CC and ES reactions

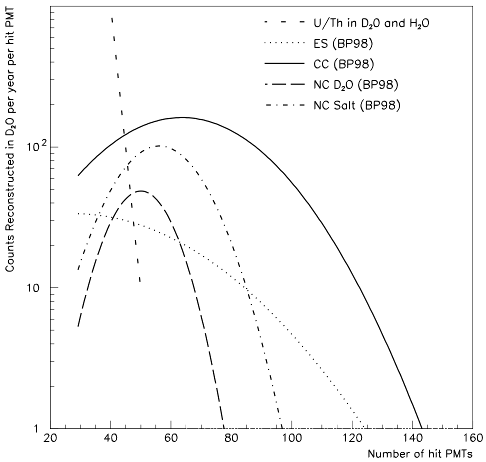

Fig. 1. Simulations of spectra obtained from the three detection reactions (CC,ES,NC)for neutrino fluxes as calculated (Bahcall 1998) by BP98. Spectra from the NC reaction are shown for pure heavy water and with added salt. The expected counting rate from U and Th radioactivity in the water is also shown. An MeV of electron energy corresponds to about 9 photomultipliers (PMTs) hit.

can be distinguished through the very different directional response. The ES reaction is strongly peaked away from the Sun, whereas the CC reaction has a form of approximately $1 - 1/3cos\theta_{sun}$, with about a factor of two difference in rate between forward and backward directions relative to the Sun. The angular resolution of the detector is better than 25 degrees. The NC rate may be determined during the pure D_2O phase partly through a distinctive variation as a function of radius. However, the definition of the number of events observed with this reaction is clearly enhanced by the addition of salt (see Fig. 1), and will be determined independently of the Cherenkov signals when the ^{3}He-filled proportional counters are installed. The observed spectrum for the CC reaction is a very sensitive indicator of distortions caused by the MSW effect (Wolfenstein 1978) because the energy of outgoing electrons is strongly correlated with the incoming neutrino energy and the detector energy resolution is better than 20% for the range of interest. With the relatively high statistical accuracy indicated by Fig. 1, the SNO detector will also provide sensitive measurements of the solar neutrino flux as a function of zenith angle to search for MSW regeneration in the Earth. Correlations between flux, energy spectrum, zenith angle and time of year will also be studied. With the variety of reactions to be studied, the SNO detector can explore oscillations via the MSW effect or vacuum oscillation processes over the full range of parameters consistent with previous experiments. It could provide clear evidence for electron neutrino flavor change, including transformations to either active or sterile types.

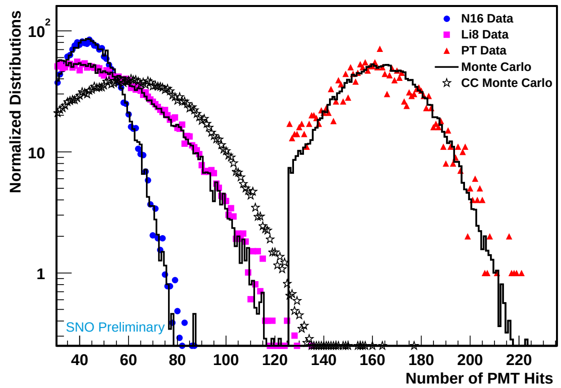

Fig. 2. Data from SNO calibration sources in the detector centre, compared with Monte Carlo simulation. From left to right the spectra are (a) ^{16}N 6.13 MeV γ-ray source, (b) ^{8}Li β-source, 13 MeV endpoint, (c) Monte Carlo CC spectrum, (d) 19.8 MeV γ-rays from ^{3}H(p,γ) ion source.

3 DETECTOR PERFORMANCE

The SNO detector consists of 1000 tonnes of pure D_2O contained within an acrylic vessel (12 m diameter, 5 cm thick), viewed by 9438 PMTs mounted on a geodesic structure 18 m in diameter, all contained within a polyurethane-coated barrel-shaped cavity (22m diameter by 34 m high). The cavity volume outside the acrylic vessel (AV) is filled with purified H_2O. There are 91 PMTs looking outward from the geodesic structure, viewing the outer H_2O volume. Radon-224 gas in the air above the heavy water was reduced to acceptable levels by flushing with boil-off gas from liquid nitrogen. More than 98.5% (***) of all channels are operational; a total event rate of less than 5 Hz above a threshold of about 20 hit PMTs; PMT individual noise rates of less than 500 Hz for a threshold of about 0.3 photoelectrons, providing fewer than 2 noise hits per event.

4 CALIBRATION

Detector calibration is being carried out with a variety of techniques and sources. Electronic calibrations of pedestals, slopes and timing are performed regularly with pulsers. The 600,000 electronic constants are very stable. Optical properties of the detector have been studied using a diffusing ball, (Laserball) receiving light from a pulsed laser system providing wavelengths between 337 and 700 nm with variable intensity and repetition rates. This source and other calibration sources are moved within the D_2O volume using a manipulator system capable of positioning them to better than 5 cm. Positions in the H_2O volume between the D_2O and the PMTs are also accessible along vertical paths from above. A nearly mono-energetic ^{16}N γ-ray source has also been deployed.

Other sources deployed include a 19.8 MeV gamma source produced by the ^{3}H(p,γ) reaction (Poon 2000), a triggered source for the ^{232}Th and ^{238}U chains producing 2.6 and 2.4 MeV gammas and a source of ^{8}Li, emitting betas up to 13 MeV. The short-lived ^{16}N and ^{8}Li activities are produced by a pulsed neutron generator located near the SNO detector and are transported via capillary tubing to decay chambers within the detector volume.

Figure 2 shows a spectrum from three sources compared with a Monte Carlo simulation, using optical parameters extracted from a preliminary analysis of the laserball data. A single constant corresponding to the average quantum efficiency of the PMTs has been adjusted to match the centroid of these spectra. A further comparison of centroids for over 20 other locations throughout the D_2O volume showed less than 2% difference between the data and the simulation at any point. An acrylic- encapsulated ^{242}Cf fission neutron source has also been deployed to study the neutron response of the detector.

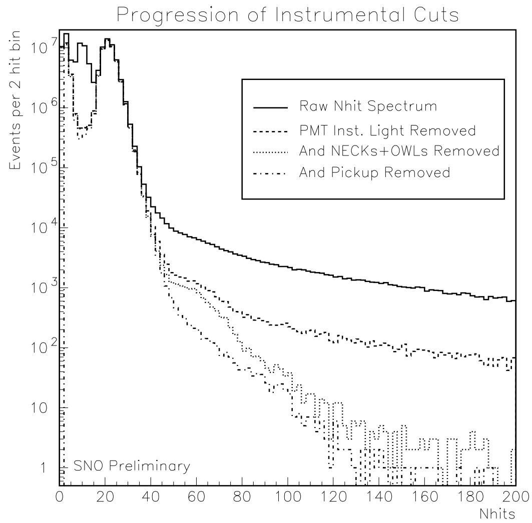

Fig. 3. Progression of instrumental cuts.

5 OBSERVATIONS TO DATE

In addition to Cherenkov light produced by neutrinos and radioactivity, there can be other sources of ”instrumental light” arising from parts of the detector. For example, it is well known that PMTs can occasionally emit light, perhaps through internal electrical discharges. Light from these sources has very different characteristics from the typical patterns observed for Cherenkov light at solar neutrino energies. The light from a flashing PMT shows an early trigger for the flashing PMT, followed by light observed across the detector, at least 70 ns later. For SNO, six or more electronic channels surrounding the flashing PMT typically show pickup signals, distinguishing the events further from Cherenkov events.
Figure 3 shows the raw spectrum of events (solid line) observed with the detector for a fraction of the data obtained since the start of data taking in November, 1999. The events are plotted against NHIT, the number of PMTs contained in a 400 ns second window surrounding the detector trigger (more than about 20 PMTs hit within a 100 ns window). NHIT is approximately proportional to the electron energy for a Cherenkov event, with about 9 NHIT corresponding to 1 MeV. Only a fraction of the data have been shown as the remainder are being saved for a comparison after the cuts have been fully defined.

The dashed line shows the residual data after cuts have been imposed to remove events that show characteristics matching the Flashing PMTs. The dotted line shows the residual data after further cuts are imposed to remove another class of events associated with bursts of light from the neck region of the detector. To ensure that these cuts do not remove a significant number of neutrino events, the fraction of signal loss was tested with the ^{16}N source.

Following these cuts, algorithms based on timing and spatial information were used to reconstruct the position and direction of the events. Figure 4 shows the resulting spectrum for a large fiducial volume.

Superimposed on the data is the simulated spectrum for the CC reaction in Fig. 1, scaled to the data. As the calibrations are not yet complete, the SNO collaboration has chosen not to quote a number for the flux of electron neutrinos measured by the CC reaction on deuterium. However, it should be apparent from the figure that the spectrum is well defined so that an accurate measurement will be obtained when further calibrations have been completed.

Figure 5 shows events as a function of the direction to the sun for a lower energy threshold and a larger fiducial volume. Even with somewhat more radioactive background included by these parameter choices, the peak at $\cos\theta_{sun} = 1$ from the ES reaction is apparent.

6 RADIOACTIVE BACKGROUNDS

Radioactive backgrounds which contribute to the Cherenkov light in the detector arise from the decay chains of ^{238}U and ^{232}Th impurities in the water and other detector materials. At low energies, the dominant contributions come from impurities in the water. These contributions can be measured through the radioassay of the light and heavy water. They can also be measured independently through observation of the low energy region of the Cherenkov spectrum for events reconstructing in the water regions. Sensitive techniques have been developed for radioassay of ^{224}Ra, ^{226}Ra and ^{222}Rn in the water. The measurements for Ra are performed by extracting the Ra on beads coated with manganese oxide or on ultrafiltration membranes coated with hydrous titanium oxide. After sampling hundreds of tonnes of water, these materials are measured for radioactive decay of the Ra with techniques sensitive to tens of atoms (Boger 2000). The ^{222}Rn is measured by degassing 50 or more tonnes of water and collecting the Rn gas with liquid nitrogen-cooled traps. The collected gas is then counted with Lucas cells to observe the alpha decays.

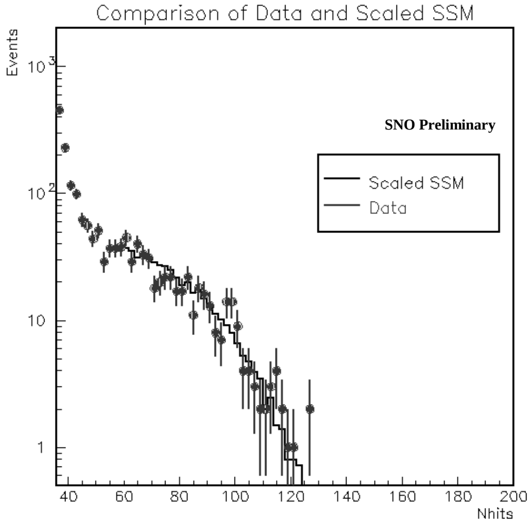

Fig. 4. Distribution of events versus number of hit PMTs.

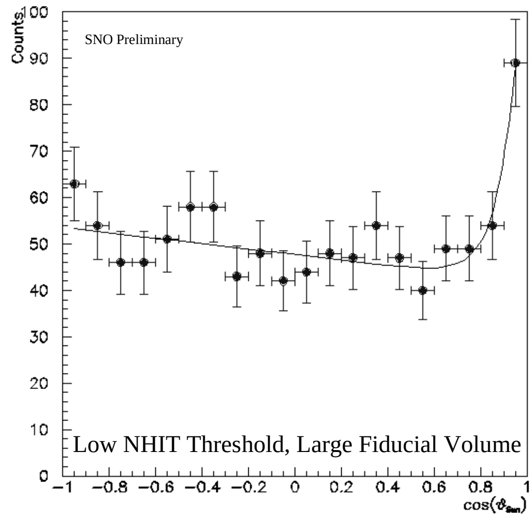

Fig. 5. Distribution of events versus $\cos\theta_{sun}$.

The Cherenkov light generated by the Th and U radioactivity can be observed at low energies as illustrated in figure 1 and observed in figures 3 and 4. As the decay products and sequence are different for the two chains it is also possible to use pattern recognition to obtain a statistical separation of the contributions from the two chains. Future calibrations will include the use of proportional counters containing Th and U chain sources to provide triggered events to calibrate the detector response in this region. However, the data to date, with large calibration uncertainties, do agree with the radioassay measurements. The light water in the SNO detector is designed to attenuate higher energy gamma rays (fission and alpha-induced) from radioactivity in the cavity walls and the PMT support structure. High energy events reconstructed in the light water volume outside the AV are found to be predominantly inward going and the numbers decrease rapidly as a function of radius. Using calibration data from the ^{16}N source positioned near the PMTs, extrapolations of the number of high energy gammas interacting within the D_2O volume indicate that less than a few % of the events above NHIT = 60 in Fig. 4 arise from external high energy gammas. In addition to the contributions to Cherenkov light, the presence of Th and U chain elements can produce a background for the NC reaction through the photodisintegration of deuterium by 2.6 MeV gammas from the Th chain and 2.4 MeV gammas from the U chain. Current assay results show all activities are near or below target values.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Based on energy, direction and location information, the data in the regions of interest in Fig. 4 appear to be dominated by ^{8}B solar neutrino events observed with the CC and ES reactions, with very little background. This implies that measurements during the pure heavy water phase will provide an accurate measurement of the electron neutrino flux via the CC reaction after completion of further calibrations. The measurements of radioactivity imply that the NC measurements can be made with only a small uncertainty from the radioactive background.

8 Acknowledgments

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