

Three-Dimensional Structure and Evolution of the Mixed Layer in the Arabian Sea

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Grant Number: N00014-94-1-0226
<http://www.whoi.edu/science/PO/dept>

LONG-TERM GOALS

The long term goal of this effort is to understand better how the upper ocean responds to realistic, spatially complex wind stress patterns. Specifically, upper ocean effects related to both mid-ocean and coastal upwelling are of interest.

OBJECTIVES

The main scientific objective is to understand the physical processes that control the structure and evolution of the mixed layer in the Arabian Sea. Of particular interest are the effects of these variations and processes upon the bio-optical properties of the mixed layer and upper ocean. One of the main hypotheses of the Arabian Sea ARI is that the large scale structure of the atmospheric fields associated with the Findlater jet determines the mixed layer structure and that the variations across the northern Arabian Sea are due to the cyclonic or anticyclonic nature of the wind field on the two flanks of the jet. We are interested in observing the upper ocean structure in various regimes, including both monsoon periods as well as the near-coastal environment off Oman to observe filament structures and comparing them to those observed during the ONR Coastal Transition Zone study.

APPROACH

Our approach is to carry out upper ocean surveys in the Arabian Sea using SeaSoar, a towed undulating vehicle. The system was configured to measure temperature, pressure, conductivity, fluorescence, light transmission, dissolved oxygen, photosynthetically available radiation (PAR) and acoustic backscatter. The surveys took place during 1994 and 1995 along a repeated pattern involving mapping surveys ("radiators") on either side of the climatological Findlater jet, as well as a detailed survey in the vicinity of the moored array (Weller, Rudnick and Eriksen components). Some repeat sampling took place to investigate shorter-scale time dependence, and a filament radiator pattern was executed during the June 1995 cruise. Spatial resolution of the surveys was about 1-2 km horizontally along a cruise track, and about 25 km in the across-track direction. These data are being analyzed in cooperation with Jones (USC) to investigate how the spatial physical and biological patterns evolve and relate to wind forcing.

WORK COMPLETED

We carried out four cruises in the Arabian Sea: December 1994 (northeast monsoon), February 1995 (transitional), June 1995 (southwest monsoon), and September 1995 (transitional). We have thus

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 1998		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1998 to 00-00-1998	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Three-Dimensional Structure and Evolution of the Mixed Layer in the Arabian Sea				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole, MA, 02543				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES See also ADM002252.					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 3	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

documented the entire upper ocean seasonal evolution for a one-year period. The data from these cruises have now been completely edited, calibrated and archived. We are now carrying out the analysis phase of the project, including cooperation with scientists from other components. One manuscript is ready for submission, and others are nearing completion. Numerous presentations have been made at national or international meetings.

RESULTS

We have shown that a cool filamentary structure observed during the summer (coastal upwelling season) has many properties (latitude-scaled size, transport, and nutrient distributions) in common with features off the west coast of the US. The intense jet associated with the filament is largely in thermal wind balance. Away from the filament, during the Southwest Monsoon, lateral advection and vertical mixing often obscure the weaker effects of vertical motion driven by surface Ekman pumping. Estimates using ECMWF wind fields suggest that offshore vertical displacements are of the order of 20m over a seasonal cycle. In contrast to initial expectations of alternating upwelling and downwelling offshore of the Findlater jet, wind data indicate downward Ekman pumping throughout the year in the region of our offshore radiator, with enhanced downwelling during the Southwest Monsoon. The net result is that coastal upwelling, eddy processes and mixed layer deepening seem to play much more of a role in determining the upper ocean structure than does open-ocean upwelling.

IMPACT/IMPLICATIONS

We expect that our results will help to explain the evolution of upper ocean physical and biological patterns in the Arabian Sea. By coordination with modeling and other observational groups, we expect that results from this area will deepen our understanding of upper ocean dynamics in other regions as well. The spatial resolution of our measurements has helped to refine ideas of what is resolved with the more traditional sampling used by JGOFS chemists and biologists.

TRANSITIONS

RELATED PROJECTS

This effort is a component funded through the ONR Arabian Sea ARI. As such, we have had close cooperations with the moored array group (Weller, Rudnick and Eriksen), remote sensing personnel (Arnone, Coble, Davis), and with biological investigators (Jones, Wood, Yentsch/Phinney). Further, we have cooperated with the NRL numerical modeling team (Kindle) at sea and during the analysis stage.

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