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MESONETWORK ARRAY: ITS EFFECT  
ON THUNDERSTORM FLOW RESOLUTION

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The fidelity of thunderstorm surface wind analyses is examined objectively in relation to the pattern and density of observation points. Analyses using all data recorded in a 44-station mesonet network are compared with analyses based on data from 75, 50 and 25% of the stations. Stations are eliminated both randomly and selectively to achieve in one test approximate even spacing and in another test dense observation lines across storm motion.

With time-series data (observations at 5-min intervals for  $\pm 30$  min), it requires only 22 stations to delineate adequately surface flows associated with one multicell and one supercell thunderstorm. However, pattern fidelity deteriorates quickly when observations are analyzed only synoptically. In fact, all station density reductions produce unacceptable synoptic analyses.

Quasi-steady thunderstorm flows can be well depicted by 5 min interval time-series observations at stations 15 km apart on the vertices of equilateral triangles.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL) has experimented with several arrays of surface mesonet networks in its yearly acquisition of data concerning severe thunderstorms. Beginning in 1961, a Beta network (Fujita, 1963) of automatically recording stations 20-30 km apart was established in southwestern Oklahoma to study squall line thunderstorms (Staff, 1961; Lee, 1962; Fujita, 1962). The network was operated essentially unchanged every spring until, in 1968, it was partly relocated to form a cross of closely spaced (10 km) stations near the Beta array center (Barnes et al., 1971). The purpose of the cross was to detect significant thunderstorm features, if any, missed by the Beta network. However, the cross data have not been analyzed; the dense 1969 and 1970 networks produced more complete data sets (Barnes et al., 1971) on which subsequent studies have been based.

Since 1969, the network station density has been designed to sense structures associated with individual large thunderstorms, and particularly gust fronts. Although no rigorous study had been accomplished prior to 1969 to determine the scale of flow features associated with thunderstorms, these networks resolved successfully the principal features of thunderstorm-related surface wind fields (Operations Staff, 1971; Lemon, 1974; Barnes, 1974). The development of an objective technique for analyzing these data (Barnes, 1973) provided a means to evaluate quantitatively network sensing capabilities. Our meteorological studies showed redundancy in the network sampled storm features. The test suggested itself: exclude a progressively larger number of stations from the analyses and determine for which station arrays the representation of known storm features significantly degenerates.

Wind field was chosen as the test parameter. Winds observed at 1-min intervals were averaged over 5-min periods. Rainfall amounts also were analyzed in the initial tests, but significant pattern degeneration accompanied any reduction in station density.<sup>1</sup>

Our test data were obtained from the 29-30 April 1970 Oklahoma storms, a principal subject of NSSL's meteorological research during the past 4 years (Barnes, 1974). The 1970 mesonet network comprised 44 stations arrayed approximately 11 km apart (Fig. 1). Objectively interpolated values at points on a 20 by 24 grid (3.175 km mesh) were analyzed with a technique incorporating weighted time-series observations. Details of the analysis technique are published in Barnes (1973).

## 2. TEST PROCEDURE

Five test networks were produced by excluding selected stations. Three of these networks were based on random draws and two were more orderly arrays. Dot patterns (Fig. 2-7) illustrate station arrays for the standard and test networks.

For the three random draws, station identifiers were written on paper slips, which were then folded and mixed in a container. The 33 and 22 station networks (Fig. 3 and 4) were determined by eliminating stations marked on the first 11 and first 22 slips drawn. The 75%-reduced 11 station network (Fig. 5) was drawn from the 44 stations after returning all slips to the container, mixing, and drawing 11 retained stations.

Another network (Fig. 6) was designed by selecting 22 evenly spaced stations (50%) from the standard network. The fifth network designed to measure storms with greater resolution across their direction of travel included 23 stations selected along lines oriented approximately southeast-northwest (Fig. 7).

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<sup>1</sup>Rainfall distributions from convective storms are known to exhibit larger spatial variability than the 1970 network could detect. Radar reflectivity data more adequately represents the rainfall distribution. Brandes (1974) demonstrated a technique to incorporate these data into an objective rainfall analysis.

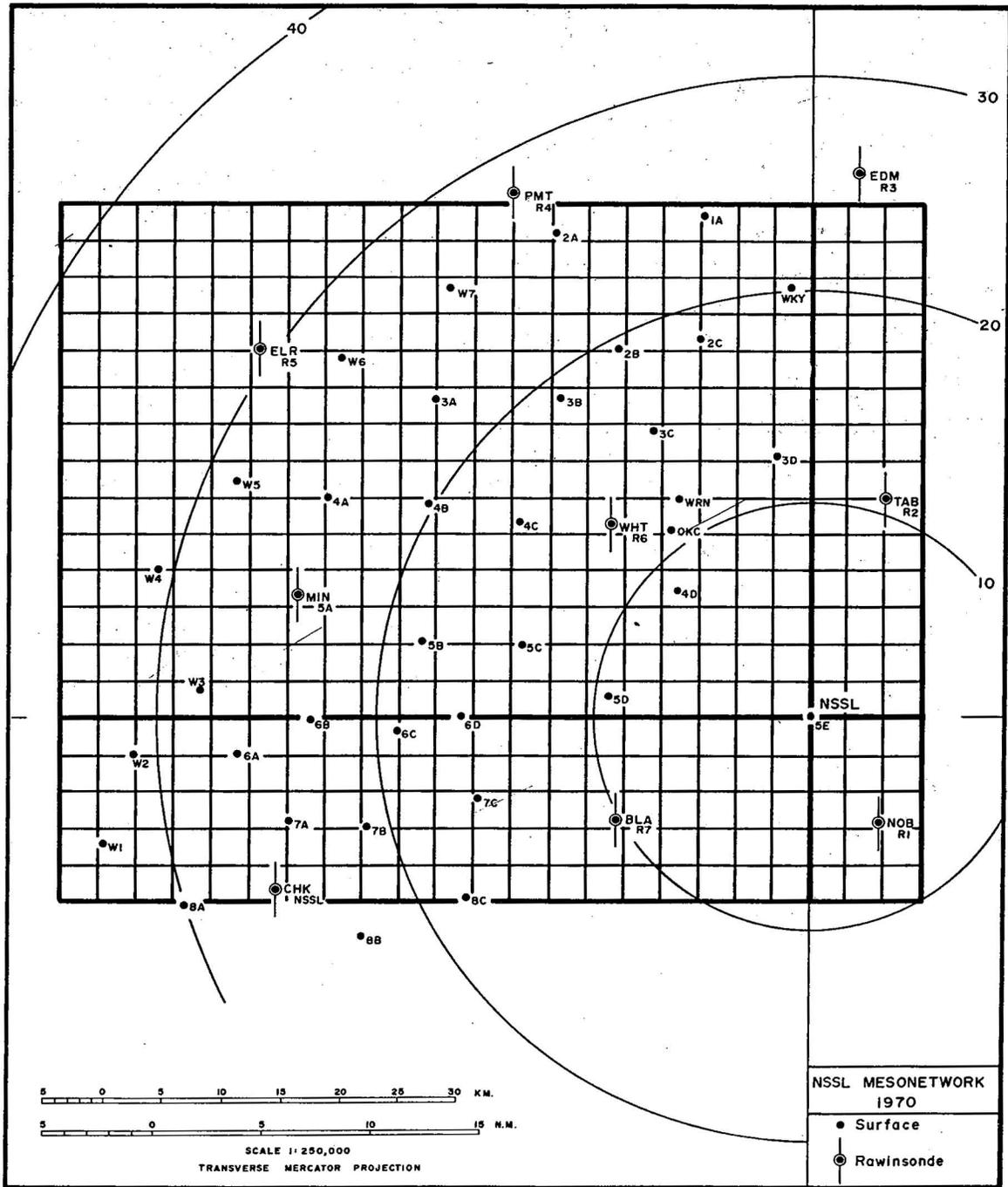


Figure 1. NSSL's 1970 mesonet network composed of 44 stations at 11 km spacing (average) and 3.175 km mesh used for objective interpolation of field parameters.

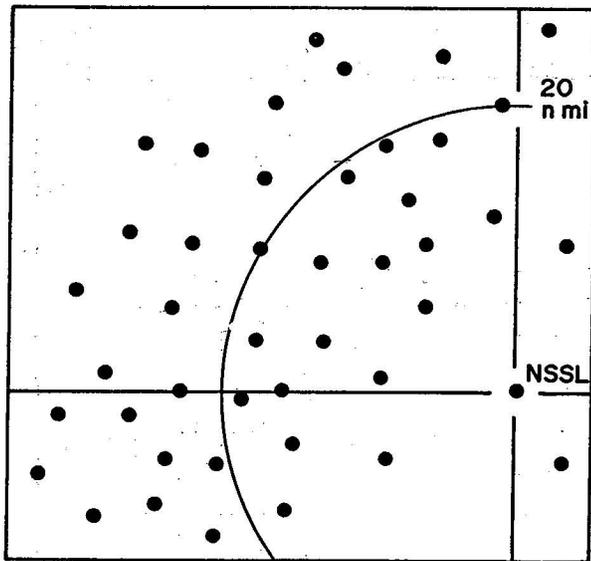


Figure 2. NSSL's 44-station mesonet standard configuration for all test comparisons.

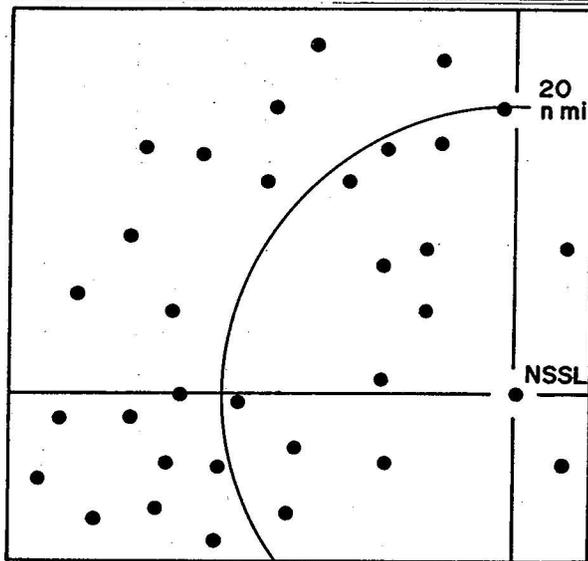


Figure 3. Network configured by eliminating randomly 25% of standard network: Tests 1 and 6; 33 stations.

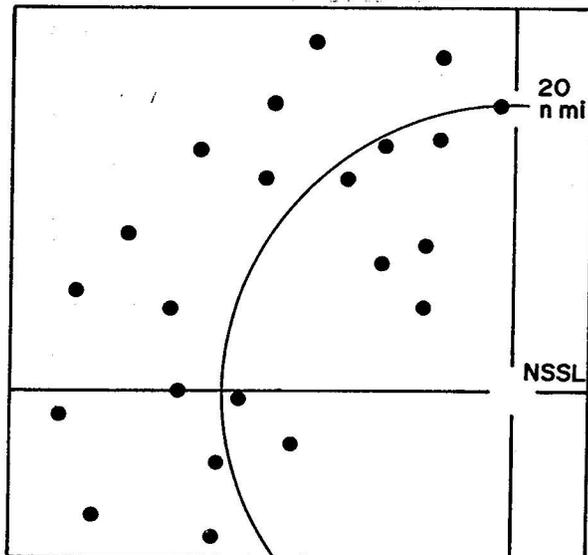


Figure 4. Network configured by eliminating randomly 50% of standard network: Tests 2 and 7; 22 stations.

Figure 5. Network configured by eliminating randomly 75% of standard network: Tests 3 and X; 11 stations.

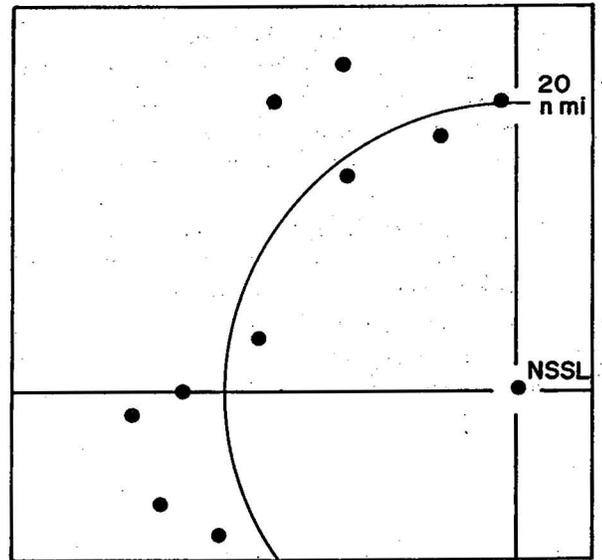


Figure 6. Network configured by selecting 22 evenly spaced stations from standard network: Tests 4 and 8.

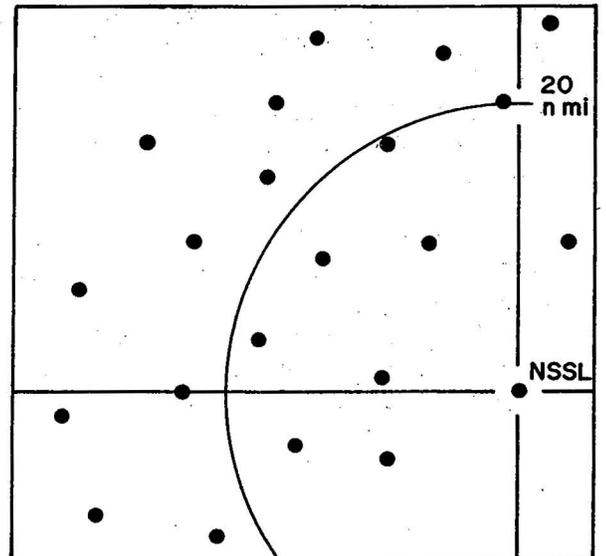
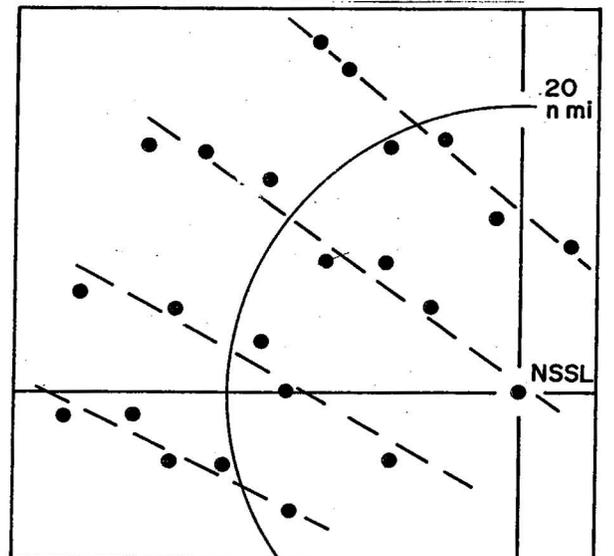


Figure 7. Network configured by selecting 23 station aligned across direction of storm travel: Tests 5 and 9.



Ten tests were performed on each of two independent data sets, 2240 CST 29 April 1970 (Fig. 8 and 9) and 0030 CST 30 April 1970 (Fig. 10 and 11). These sets were chosen because they represent wind patterns of different complexity beneath large thunderstorms. Meteorological conditions surrounding these two storms are described in Barnes (1974).

Observations from each test network were analyzed both synoptically and by a method that uses time-series observations. Each synoptic analysis was based only on observations for a specified time. Time-series observations were positioned relative to moving storms, and each influenced the analysis in proportion to its proximity with maptime (Barnes, 1973). Weight parameters are constant in all analyses.

### 3. TEST RESULTS

In Fig. 8-11, the time-series analyses (tests 1-5) are displayed on the left; the synoptic analyses (tests 6, 7, X, 8 and 9) are on the right. The standard results are based on the time-series data from all 44 stations (top frame; Fig. 8 and 10). Time-series test analyses are essentially similar to the standard result in tests that used at least 22 stations (tests 1 and 2, Fig. 8 and 10; tests 4 and 5, Fig. 9 and 11; see table 1 for summary of coded tests).

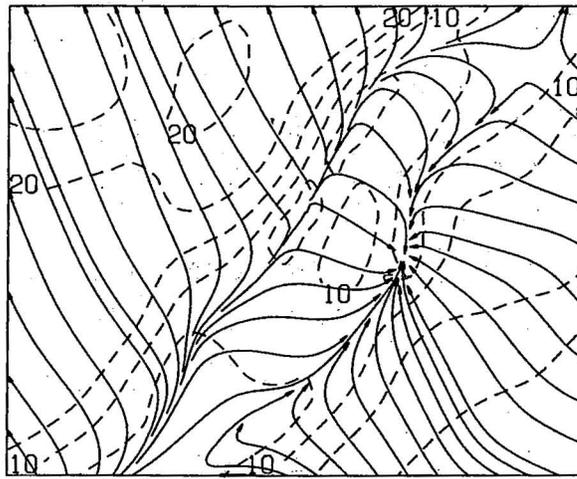
However, when only one observation at each station is analyzed, patterns quickly deteriorate and often contain superfluous details (aliasing?) not in the standard result (tests 6 and 7, Fig. 8 and 10; tests 8 and 9, Fig. 9 and 11). Test 3 (Fig. 9 and 11) with only 11 stations shows details similar to the standard, but they are conspicuously distorted. In the 11 station synoptic test, (test X; Fig. 9 and 11), pattern distortion is extreme and in the 0030 result, details are nonexistent—the circulation center is lost. The value of time-series data becomes clear.

Test analyses were compared quantitatively to standard analyses by forming the gridpoint by gridpoint differences and computing means and standard deviations for each map (480 points per map). Compared parameters included wind direction, wind speed, and the gradient-sensitive quantities divergence and vorticity. These numerical results (Fig. 12 and 13) confirm our subjective evaluations of pattern fidelity.

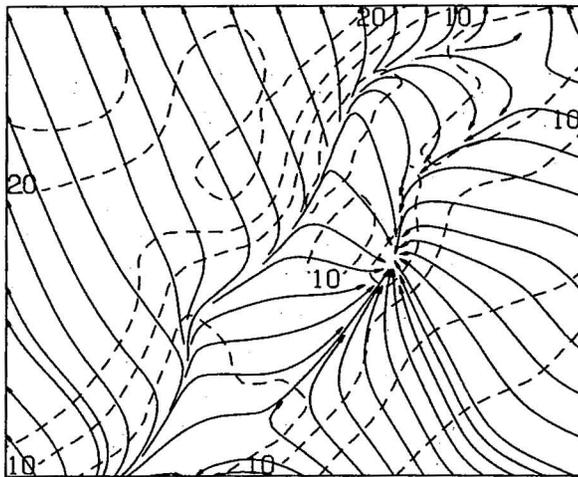
Test 1 (33 stations) comes closest to reproducing the standard analysis. Deviations in direction are  $14^\circ$  for the 2240 result and only  $6^\circ$  at 0030 (Fig. 12 and table 1). Considering the wind instrument's basic  $22.5^\circ$  measurement resolution, these deviations are definitely acceptable. Speed differences are on the order of 1 kt—also comparable to the accuracy of the observations (Operations Staff, 1971). Test 1 divergence and vorticity deviate from the standard result by about  $10^{-4} \text{ sec}^{-1}$ , the general level of background noise for these parameters on this observation scale (Barnes, 1974, pages 127-133). Significant storm induced centers of divergence and vorticity range in magnitude from  $5 \times 10^{-4} \text{ sec}^{-1}$  to  $5 \times 10^{-3} \text{ sec}^{-1}$ . The synoptic test for this network (test 6) has significantly larger deviation from

Table 1. WIND ANALYSES MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS. A gridpoint by gridpoint comparison to standard analyses for 2240 CST 29 April 1970 and 0030 CST 30 April 1970. Mean deviation is upper number in each row; standard deviation is lower number.

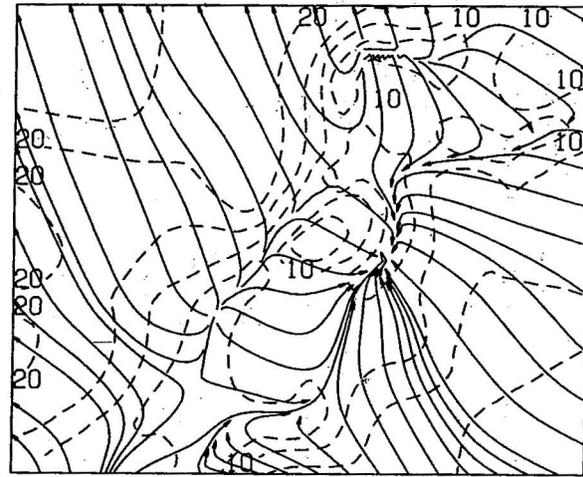
TEST	NO. STATIONS and SELECTION	DIRECTION (degrees)		SPEED (knots)		DIVERGENCE ( $10^{-5} \text{ sec}^{-1}$ )		VORTICITY ( $10^{-5} \text{ sec}^{-1}$ )	
		2240	0030	2240	0030	2240	0030	2240	0030
TIME-SERIES									
1	33 Random	-0.22 14.50	0.56 5.98	0.20 1.16	0.33 0.95	-0.51 16.28	0.18 10.86	-0.14 11.46	0.83 9.67
2	22 Random	1.50 25.52	-0.60 16.26	0.01 4.43	1.43 3.30	6.64 30.01	4.34 32.75	-3.00 19.50	7.43 26.27
3	11 Random	-5.08 48.89	14.52 35.44	0.17 4.17	0.61 5.42	4.07 75.90	-0.13 55.47	-8.16 34.46	-2.44 38.60
4	22 Uniform	3.48 30.69	0.13 8.21	-0.35 2.41	-0.19 1.78	2.35 28.29	1.26 15.94	-1.89 21.89	-1.37 17.59
5	23 In lines	-0.46 25.41	-1.66 7.85	-0.38 2.13	-0.32 1.63	1.90 22.43	0.03 12.43	-4.29 16.85	-1.04 13.89
SYNOPTIC									
6	33 Random	-4.23 39.46	-1.08 26.26	-0.20 3.32	0.88 3.60	-1.44 38.75	3.09 38.46	3.46 34.51	2.07 35.45
7	22 Random	-13.09 59.39	-2.99 35.11	0.90 4.53	2.67 5.19	-4.98 44.17	0.71 44.87	-4.17 51.11	0.50 40.39
8	22 Uniform	4.09 55.82	1.36 30.30	-1.10 4.12	1.02 4.47	0.99 51.80	3.28 41.56	-0.47 42.72	0.80 40.45
9	23 In lines	-1.42 36.67	-2.31 29.27	-0.88 3.31	-0.00 3.82	2.56 38.56	2.80 36.87	1.12 31.51	-0.29 33.07



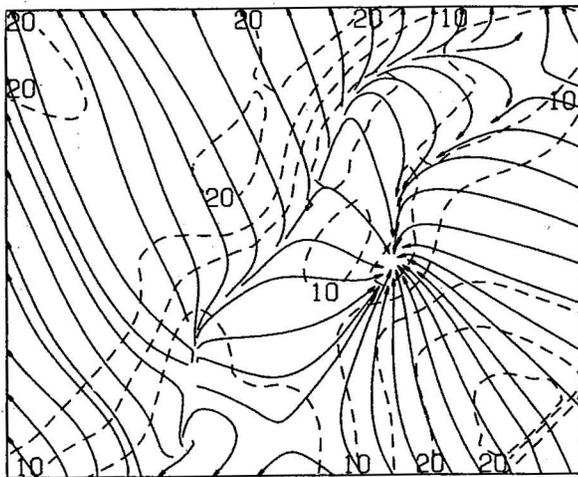
NETWORK DENSITY TEST STANDARD RESULT 44 STATIONS



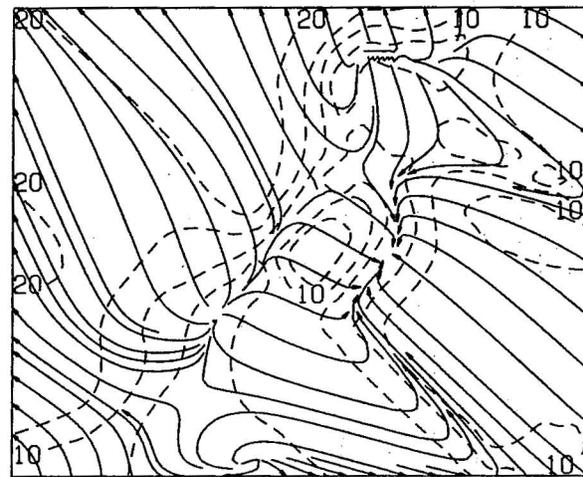
NETWORK DENSITY TEST 1 33 STATIONS RANDOM PICK



NETWORK DENSITY TEST 6 33 STATIONS RANDOM PICK

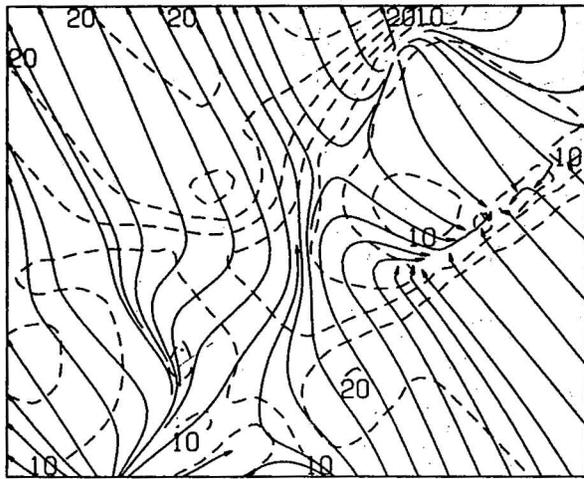


NETWORK DENSITY TEST 2 22 STATIONS RANDOM PICK

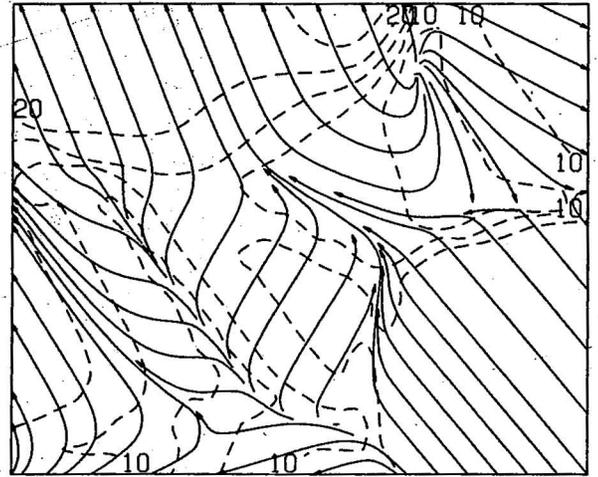


NETWORK DENSITY TEST 7 22 STATIONS RANDOM PICK

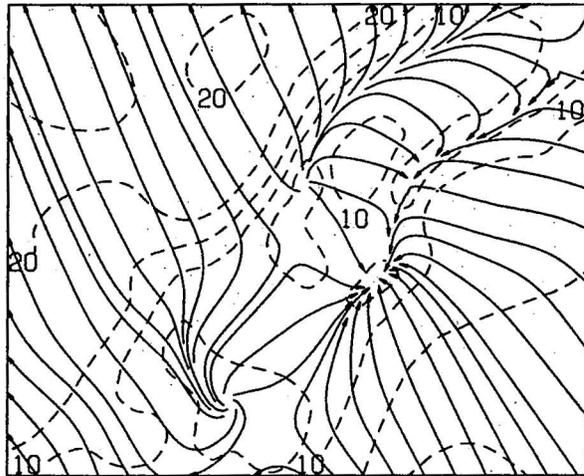
Figure 8. Wind field standard and test results 1, 2, 6 and 7 for 2240 CST 29 April 1970. Synoptic tests (right) use only 2240 observations; time-space tests (left) use 5 min observations from 2210 to 2310. Isotachs are labeled in knots; streamlines and isotachs drawn by a computer-driven plotter.



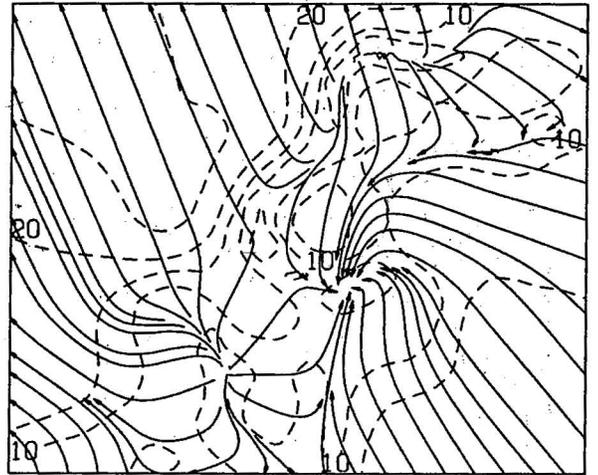
NETWORK DENSITY TEST 3 11 STATIONS RANDOM PICK



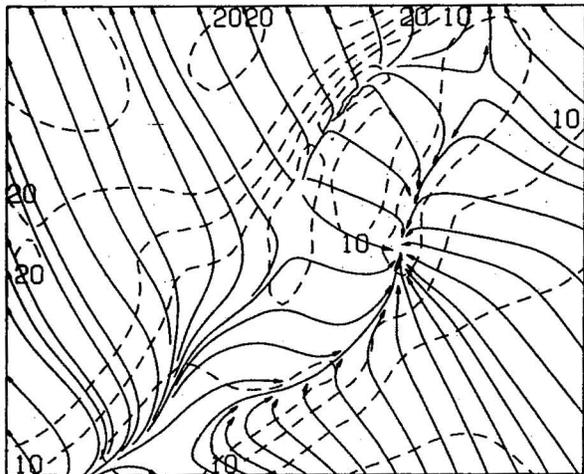
NETWORK DENSITY TEST X 11 STATIONS RANDOM PICK



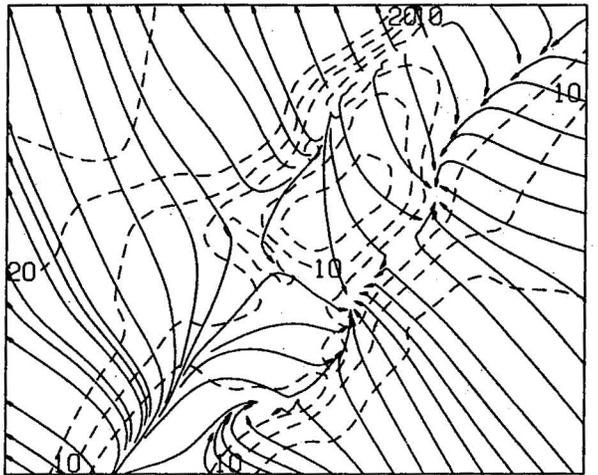
NETWORK DENSITY TEST 4 22 STATIONS EVENLY SPACED



NETWORK DENSITY TEST 8 22 STATIONS EVENLY SPACED

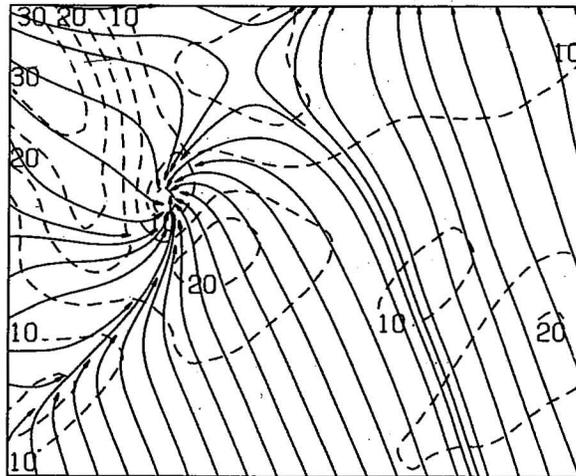


NETWORK DENSITY TEST 5 23 STATIONS IN LINES

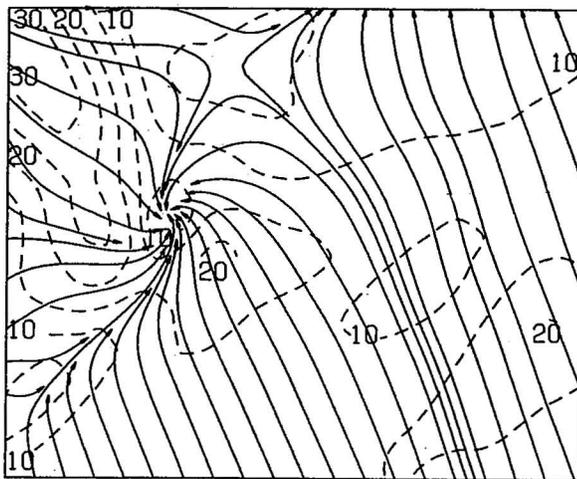


NETWORK DENSITY TEST 9 23 STATIONS IN LINES

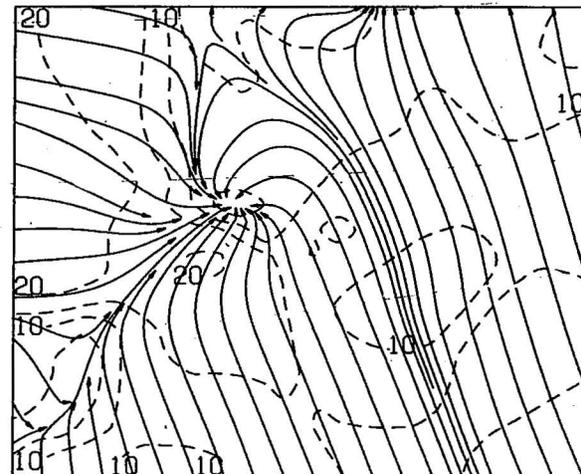
Figure 9. Wind field test results 3, 4, 5, X, 8 and 9 for 2240 CST 29 April 1970. Time-series results on left; synoptic analyses on right.



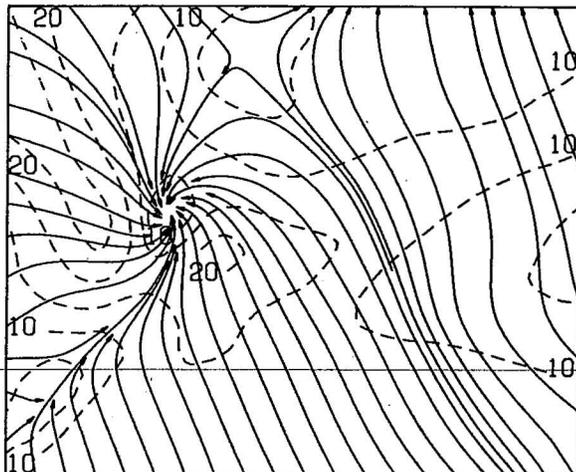
NETWORK DENSITY TEST STANDARD RESULT 44 STATIONS



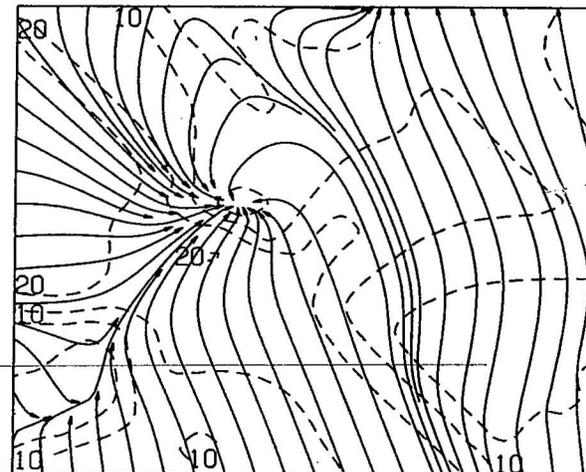
NETWORK DENSITY TEST 1 33 STATIONS RANDOM PICK



NETWORK DENSITY TEST 6 33 STATIONS RANDOM PICK

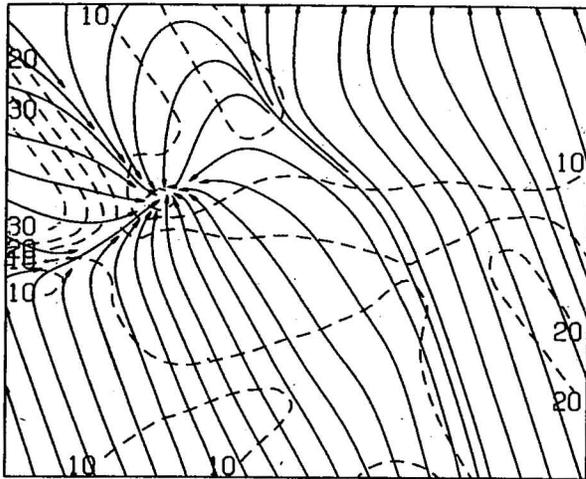


NETWORK DENSITY TEST 2 22 STATIONS RANDOM PICK

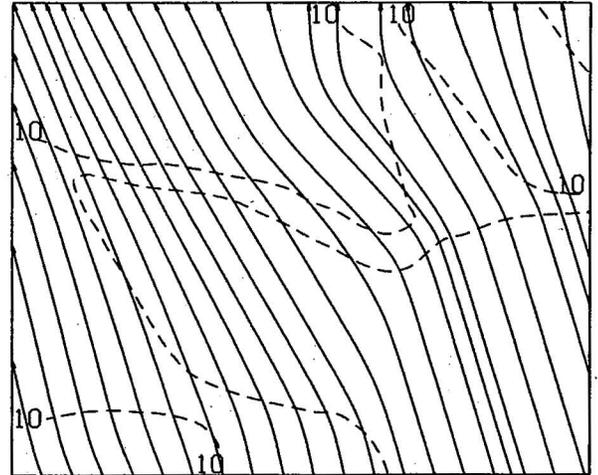


NETWORK DENSITY TEST 7 22 STATIONS RANDOM PICK

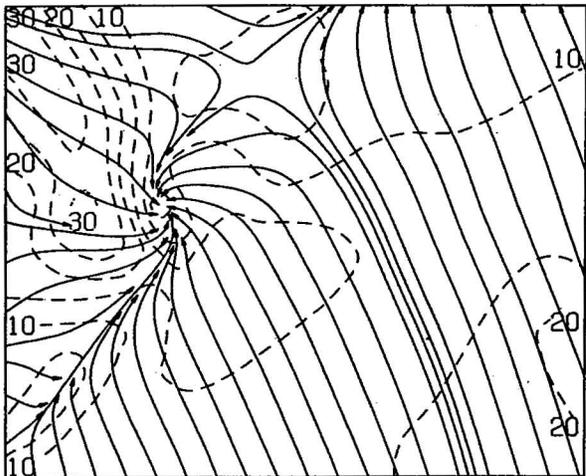
Figure 10. Wind Field standard and test results 1, 2, 6 and 7 for 0030 CST 30 April 1970. Time-series results on left; synoptic analyses on right.



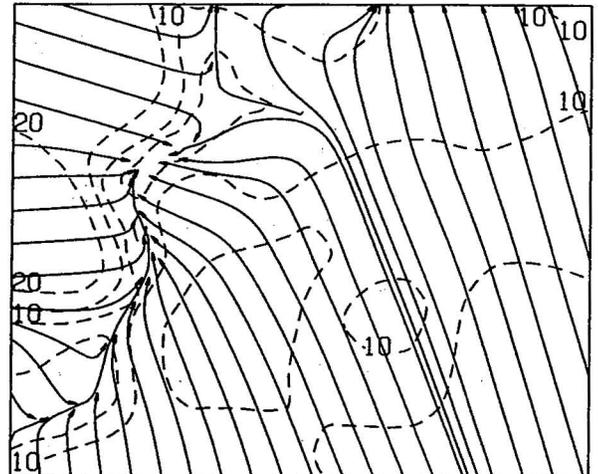
NETWORK DENSITY TEST 3 11 STATIONS RANDOM PICK



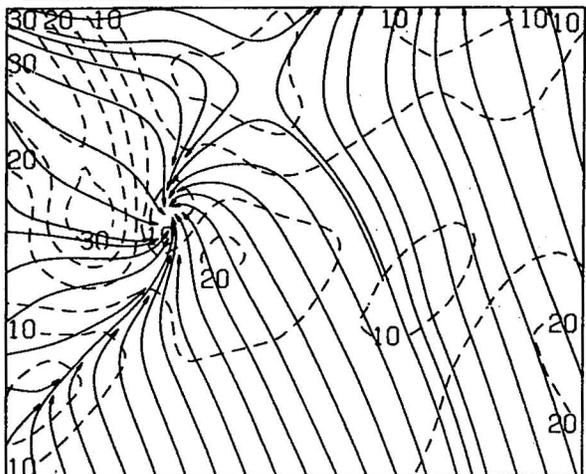
NETWORK DENSITY TEST X 11 STATIONS RANDOM PICK



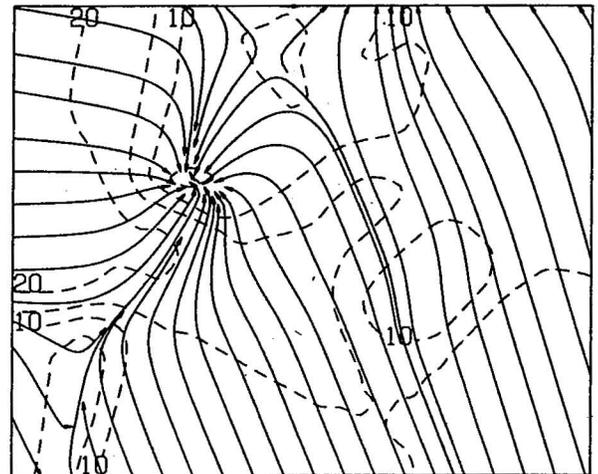
NETWORK DENSITY TEST 4 22 STATIONS EVENLY SPACED



NETWORK DENSITY TEST 8 22 STATIONS EVENLY SPACED



NETWORK DENSITY TEST 5 23 STATIONS IN LINES



NETWORK DENSITY TEST 9 23 STATIONS IN LINES

Figure 11. Wind field test results 3, 4, 5, X, 8 and 9 for 0030 CST 30 April 1970. Time-series results on left; synoptic analyses on right.

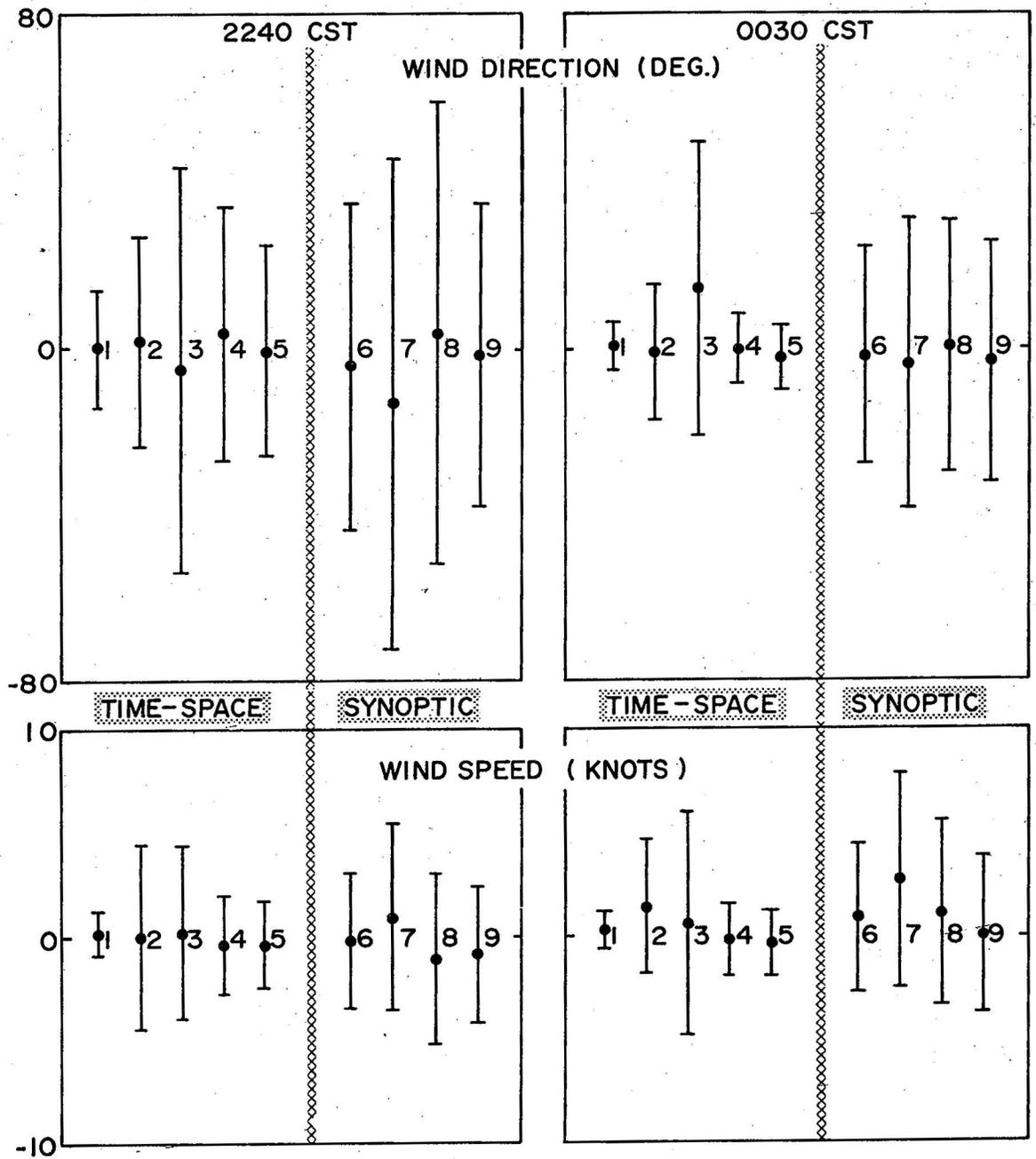


Figure 12. Means (dots) and standard deviations (bars) of test wind analyses compared to standard analyses for 2240 CST 29 April 1970 (left) and 0030 CST 30 April 1970 (right). Table 1 identifies numbered tests.

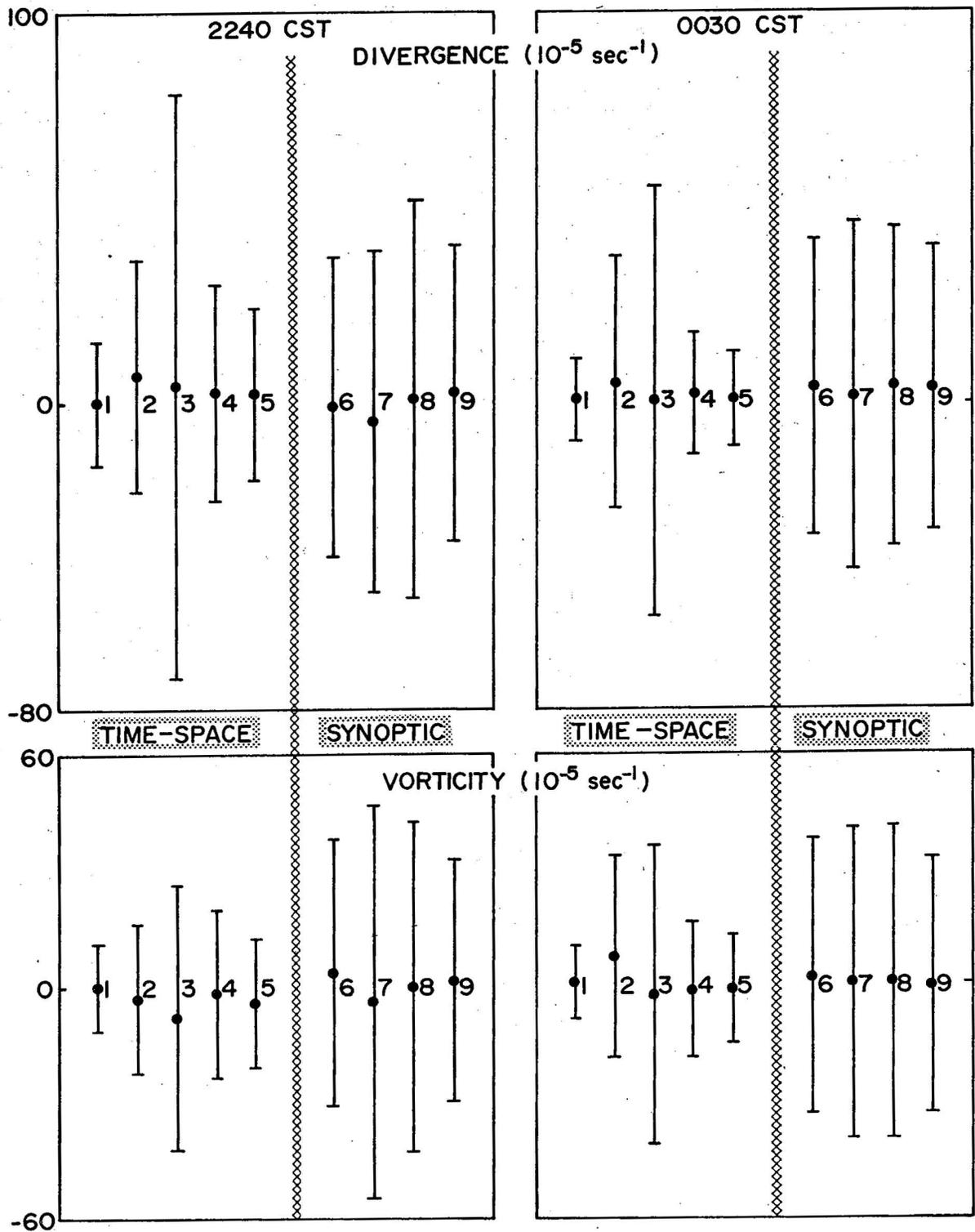


Figure 13. Means (dots) and standard deviations (bars) of test divergence and vorticity compared to standard analyses for 2240 CST 29 April 1970 (left) and 0030 CST 30 April 1970 (right). Table 1 identifies numbered tests.

the standard. Directions deviate 39° and 26° while speeds are 3-4 kt different (table 1).

The "half-as-dense" networks with time-series observations (tests 2, 4 and 5) produce relatively good results at 0030, but suffer apparent degradation at 2240. The 2240 standard pattern appears to have more small-scale features and larger areas of light (less than 5 kt) winds than does the 0030 standard map. This interpretation is consistent with what is known about the structure of these storms: the 2240 storm echo is multicellular while the 0030 storm is a supercell (see pages 111-140, Barnes, 1974). Had vector difference been the comparison parameter, the 2240 tests might have produced more favorable statistics. The best results for the "half dense" networks are obtained with uniform and lined station spacings (tests 4 and 5) at 0030 and are nearly equivalent to the 33-station network (test 1). In nearly every instance, the 22 station, randomly selected network produced poorer results than either test 4 (uniform) or 5 (in lines). This may be partly a consequence of the random selection process; there is a gaping hole in the middle of the network where many of the fine scale features lie (Fig. 4).

Again, the synoptically analyzed results (tests 7, 8 and 9) are not acceptable reproductions. Deviations in divergence and vorticity approach the magnitudes of meteorologically significant storm-related values ( $5 \times 10^{-4} \text{ sec}^{-1}$ ). Except for a seemingly fortuitous representation of the 2240 speed field (test 3, Fig. 12 and table 1), the 11-station network does not produce results of adequate fidelity.

The conclusion is that a 33-station network (incidentally containing a data void region) produces flow patterns essentially equivalent to the 44-station network when time-series observations are used for the analysis, even for rather fine scale features associated with the transient stages of multicelled thunderstorms. For more significant (larger scale, quasi-steady) features of surface flow near large thunderstorms (updraft sinks, wind shift line, col) a 22-station network adequately represents the flow field. Considering pattern only, stations densely arrayed in lines across the direction of storm motion are preferable (compare tests 4 and 5 in Fig. 9 and 11 with the standard analyses). However, because storms in Oklahoma move from a wide range of directions—typically, anywhere from south to north-northwest—it isn't practical to establish a lined network array that can accommodate this range of movements. For example, many important features could pass undetected should a storm move from the northwest between the rows of a network such as that in Fig. 7. For this reason, we recommend the evenly spaced network (Fig. 6) which depends less upon storm direction for sensing details in the flow field.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

By excluding data from an objective analysis of wind fields at the earth's surface, we determined that NSSL's 1970 44-station network oversampled in regard to quasi-steady features associated with updraft-downdraft

couplets in large thunderstorms provided that time-series observations were used ( $\pm$  30 min at 5 min intervals). Fidelity of analyses based only on synoptic (singular) observations from each station degenerated rapidly with decreasing station density.

On several occasions in 1970, the closely spaced network (about 11 km) did record singularly interesting events associated with passing tornadoes, but in every case these events were sensed at only one station. Thus, that network density was much too sparse for adequate sensing of tornado scale distributions, while it was more dense than needed to define flow associated with the larger tornado cyclones, gust fronts, and updraft-downdraft couplets. Network arrays containing as few as 22 stations (over the same area as the 44 stations) are judged adequate to resolve these storm features. In 1970, the network area encompassed 4400 km<sup>2</sup>. If equally spaced, each of the 22 stations would sample 200 km<sup>2</sup>. In consideration of this, the most recent NSSL surface mesonet network (spring 1974) was designed on a 15 km grid of equilateral triangles; each station samples 195 km<sup>2</sup>. Meteorological analyses of data acquired with this network are pending.

Appropriate network spacing will vary with the phenomenon to be observed. In 1970, our knowledge of the predominant scale of thunderstorm-related flow was less complete than it is now, and oversensing was then a decided advantage.

Finally, we emphasize the dangers inherent in under-sampling. Typical size of severe thunderstorms was known from radar studies long before the 1970 network was designed. Had the design called for only 11 stations in the same network area (perhaps to cover a larger total area and obtain more samples of thunderstorm phenomena), the resolved flow fields could have been misinterpreted.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are extended to my colleagues at NSSL for technical and editorial comments and assistance.

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## NATIONAL SEVERE STORMS LABORATORY

The NSSL Technical Memoranda, beginning with No. 28, continue the sequence established by the U. S. Weather Bureau National Severe Storms Project, Kansas City, Missouri. Numbers 1-22 were designated NSSP Reports. Numbers 23-27 were NSSL Reports, and 24-27 appeared as subseries of Weather Bureau Technical Notes. These reports are available from the National Technical Information Service, Operations Division, Springfield, Virginia 22151, for \$3.00, and a microfiche version for \$0.95. NTIS numbers are given below in parentheses.

- No. 1 National Severe Storms Project Objectives and Basic Design. Staff, NSSP. March 1961. (PB-168207)
- No. 2 The Development of Aircraft Investigations of Squall Lines from 1956-1960. B. B. Goddard. (PB-168208)
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