



*Background image:* A high-resolution image generated by the Mars Orbiter Laser Altimeter (MOLA), an instrument on board NASA's Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft, showing the topography of Mars. Low-altitude areas are shown in blue, highlands in yellow to red. The deep-blue region in the south is the giant Hellas impact basin, which is nearly 9 km deep and 2100 km across. The pale-blue area in the centre of the image is the Isidis Planitia basin, which contains the proposed landing site for ESA's Mars Express/Beagle 2 mission.

*Thumbnail images:* (from left to right) Ultraviolet image of Venus taken from the Pioneer Venus orbiter, the main belt asteroid Gaspra (image taken by the Galileo spacecraft while en route to Jupiter), close-up of the surface of Jupiter's moon Io showing a volcanic region, close-up of the planet Mercury showing impact craters on its surface.

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The Open University  
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA

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# PLANETARY SCIENCE AND THE SEARCH FOR LIFE COURSE TEAM

## Course Team Chair Academic Editors Authors

Iain Gilmour  
Iain Gilmour, Neil McBride, Mark A. Sephton  
Philip A. Bland  
Andrew Conway  
Iain Gilmour  
Barrie W. Jones  
Neil McBride  
Tony McDonnell  
Elaine A. Moore  
David A. Rothery  
Mark A. Sephton  
Mike Widdowson  
Ian Wright  
John Zarnecki

## Course Manager

Jennie Neve

## Course Secretary

Valerie Cliff

## Editors

Peter Twomey  
Pamela Wardell

## Software Designers

Will Rawes  
Fiona Thomson

## Multimedia Producer

Kate Bradshaw

## Web Developer

Hong Yu

## Graphic Designer

Debbie Crouch

## Graphic Artist

Sara Hack

## Picture Researcher

Lydia Eaton

## Book Assessors

Prof. F.W. Taylor, Atmospheric,  
Oceanic and Planetary Physics,  
Department of Physics, University of Oxford.  
Dr Alan Penny, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory.

## Course Assessor

Prof. David W. Hughes, Department of Physics  
and Astronomy, The University, Sheffield.

The book made use of material originally produced for the S281 *Astronomy and Planetary Science* Course Team by David A. Rothery (Chapters 2 and 3), Peter Francis (Chapters 3 and 4) and Charlie Harding (Chapter 5).





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## INTRODUCTION

In astronomical terms, the Solar System is our own backyard. Set against the vast numbers of stars in our Galaxy, the vast number of other galaxies in the observable universe and the incredible distances involved, our Solar System is an almost unimaginably tiny part of the Universe. However, this is where we live. It is where life on Earth developed, and it gives us our only vantage point from which to view the rest of the Universe.

Unlike other planetary systems, the objects in our Solar System are close enough to allow us to see ‘close up’ the splendour and diversity of the planets. We are close enough to study in detail the planets and other objects, and try and understand ‘what makes the Solar System tick’. By doing this, we not only attempt to understand the system in which life evolved, but also gain an insight into how other planetary systems must evolve all over the Universe.

One of the more fundamental questions often asked is, ‘Why is the Solar System the way it is?’ In answering this question, we have to address more detailed questions such as, how were the planets made? What were the planets made of? Were all the planets made from the same material? Why do they look so different? Do the planets have the same internal structure? Does their surface appearance change with time? The answers to these questions lie in the physical and chemical *processes* that act on the bodies within the Solar System. Understanding these processes allows us to appreciate how the planets and the other Solar System bodies have formed and have been changed over time, and hence why they look the way they do today. In this book, you will be looking at these *processes* in detail.



# CHAPTER 1

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOLAR SYSTEM

A great way to start your study of the **Solar System** is to get an overview of what our planetary system looks like by taking a tour of the **planets**. In this introductory chapter, you will see the incredible diversity that the Solar System offers, made accessible by the use of spacecraft sent into space to gather scientific data (an important part of which is in the form of high-resolution images). The tour will set the scene and highlight the planetary features that will be explained by the processes considered in detail later on. So let us begin our tour of the Solar System.

### 1.1 A grand tour

There are nine planets in our Solar System. Each planet travels on an approximately circular **orbit** around the Sun, which lies at the heart of the Solar System. In order of increasing distance from the Sun, the nine planets are Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. The sizes of the planets vary greatly, but all are dwarfed by the Sun. Figure 1.1 shows the relative sizes of the planets and the Sun. In the figure, the planets are aligned in the correct order with increasing distance from the Sun, although the relative distance from the Sun is *not* shown (you will consider this later). You can see that there appears to be a broad division between the four small inner planets and the much larger outer planets (with the exception of Pluto, which is the outermost ‘planet’ and a relatively small body).

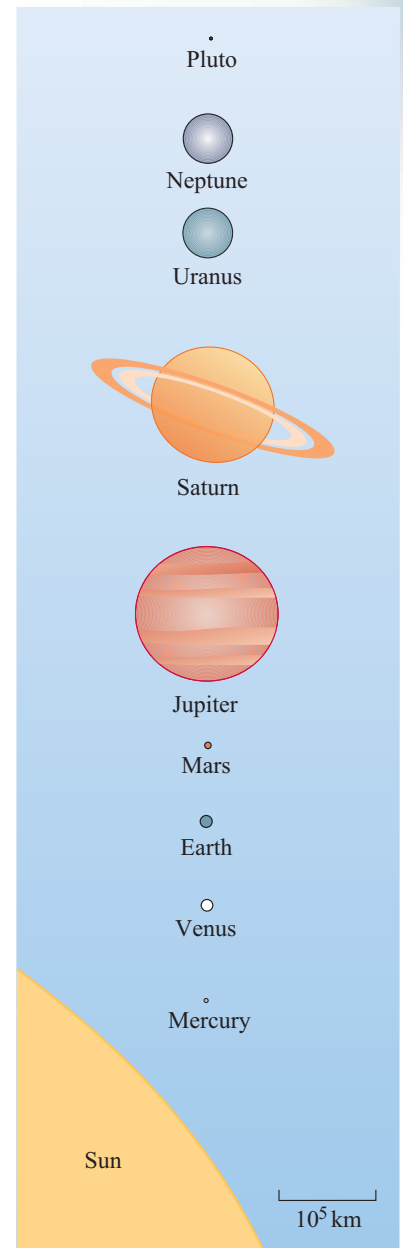
The four inner bodies (Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars) are called the **terrestrial planets**, whereas Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune are usually referred to as the **giant planets**.

Many of the planets have **moons** (also called **satellites**) that orbit the planet in the same way as the Moon orbits the Earth. Some of the satellites that you will meet on our tour are similar to the terrestrial planets in terms of their composition or structure, and are sometimes called **terrestrial-like** bodies.

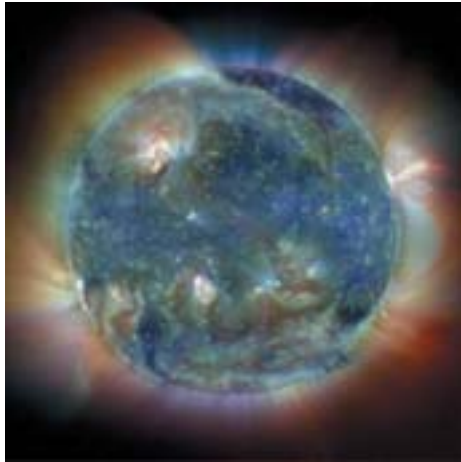
We start our tour by taking a closer look at each member of the Solar System. As the Sun lies at the centre of the Solar System, it seems a sensible place to start. Although the topic of this book focuses on **planetary bodies** (a term that refers not only to the planets, but also to their satellites and other small bodies such as asteroids) you should appreciate that the Sun is *not* a planet, but a **star**. As such, it is a huge ball of gas, consisting mainly of hydrogen and helium (although other elements are also present in smaller amounts). At the centre, nuclear reactions release energy. This is why the Sun is hot – about 5770 K at its surface and an amazing 15 000 000 K at its centre. (Note the SI unit of absolute temperature is the kelvin, K.  $0\text{ K} = -273\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and  $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C} = 273\text{ K}$ .)

Figure 1.2 shows an impressive image of the Sun. Material, seen above the surface, can be lost to space. Ejection of material from the Sun can have consequences here on Earth (you will meet this in Chapter 5).

Some major missions are listed in Appendix A, Table A7.



**Figure 1.1** The relative sizes of the planets and the Sun. The planets are shown in the correct order (with increasing distance from the Sun), although the relative distance from the Sun is *not* shown to scale.



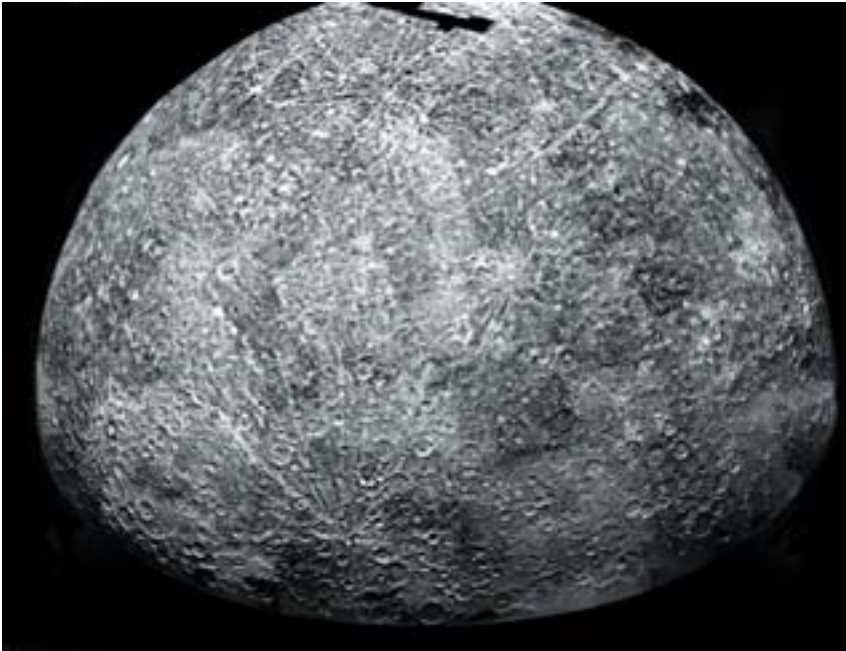
**Figure 1.2** The Sun (radius 695 500 km). The image, taken in ultraviolet light using the Soho spacecraft, shows that the Sun is rather complex and ‘active’.

### 1.1.1 Mercury

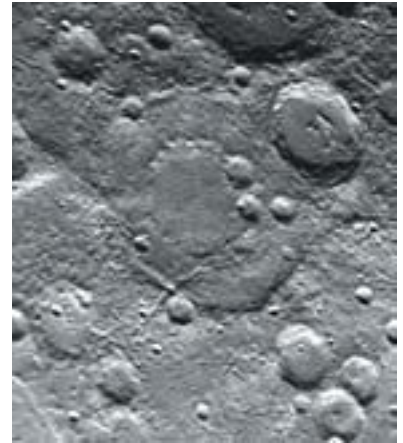
The first planetary body on our tour is Mercury (Figure 1.3). Mercury, being the closest planet to the Sun, can get very hot. In sunlight, parts of the surface can reach about 740 K (approximately 470 °C), whereas in darkness the temperature can drop to about 80 K (−190 °C). Clearly, the surface of Mercury is not a very hospitable place. Looking at Figure 1.3, perhaps the most striking features are the round ‘scars’ on the surface. These are **impact craters**. A close-up view of some impact craters on Mercury is shown in Figure 1.4 and you will consider impacts in detail in Chapter 4. These impact craters have been made by the ‘leftovers’ of the planetary formation process, namely **asteroids** and **comets** (both of which you will be looking at in detail in Chapter 7). Asteroids are predominantly rocky and metallic bodies, whereas comets have a large fraction of icy material in them. However, both have broadly similar effects when they slam into the surface of a planet at great speed – they leave impact craters. Any undisturbed surface of a planetary body will accumulate impact craters over time. Thus a very cratered surface implies that the surface is relatively old, whereas a lack of craters might indicate that the surface has been renewed in some way, wiping out the craters from the surface. The most prevalent mechanism for resurfacing is **volcanism**, whereby **lava** (the melted rock we are familiar with on Earth) flows and covers pre-existing terrain. Furthermore, the surface can develop fractures and cracks. These concepts will be dealt with in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Returning to Mercury, the cratering over the surface appears reasonably uniform, although there are some relatively small areas that look smoother, indicating some volcanic resurfacing has taken place. There are also linear features, indicating that the surface has ‘cracked’ at some time in the past. You can see from the clarity of the images in Figures 1.3 and 1.4 that Mercury does not have an obscuring atmosphere. In fact, Mercury does have some *extremely* tenuous atmosphere, but it is  $10^{15}$  (a thousand million million) times less dense than the atmosphere on Earth, which is actually a better vacuum than any vacuum we can create in a laboratory.

Before you leave Mercury, there is another property of interest to be considered, which is mean **density** (see Box 1.1). Mercury’s mean density is about  $5.4 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ , which is almost as high as that of Earth. You will consider densities of the planetary bodies at the end of this chapter, and you will see that this is quite a surprising result considering that Mercury is the smallest of the terrestrial planets. It indicates that Mercury must include a relatively large proportion of dense material.



**Figure 1.3** The planet Mercury (radius 2440 km). This image was obtained by the Mariner 10 spacecraft in 1974 (so far the only spacecraft to go to Mercury). Impact craters cover the surface.



**Figure 1.4** A close-up of the planet Mercury. Impact craters are clearly visible. The region shown is approximately 550 km across.

### BOX 1.1 DENSITY

Density (sometimes called bulk density) is a measure of the mass per unit volume of a substance:

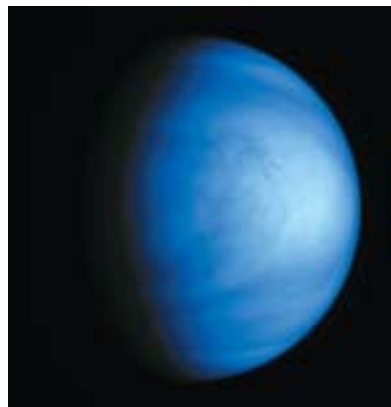
$$\text{density} = \frac{\text{mass/kg}}{\text{volume/m}^3} \quad (1.1)$$

The SI units of density are thus kilograms per cubic metre ( $\text{kg m}^{-3}$ ). Density values of common materials can cover quite a wide range. Water has a density of  $1.0 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ , whereas a rock such as granite is around  $2.7 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ , and iron is  $7.9 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ . In other words, a cubic metre of granite would weigh 2700 kg, or 2.7 tonnes! Since one cubic metre is somewhat larger than, for instance, the average pebble or rock you might pick up on a beach, these large numerical values for density are often difficult to grasp. Instead, it is often convenient to think of densities in smaller units, so you may come across, or prefer to think of, density values expressed as grams per cubic centimetre (i.e.  $\text{g cm}^{-3}$ ). Thus a density of  $2.7 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  could be expressed as  $2.7 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$ . However, when making calculations involving density, always ensure you use the SI units for density.

It is important to appreciate that a planetary body might be made of layers of material that have quite different densities, for example it may have high-density material (such as iron) at its core and somewhat lower-density material (such as rock) nearer the surface. The calculation of mass/volume gives rise to a value of *mean density* for the body.



### 1.1.2 Venus



**Figure 1.5** The planet Venus (radius 6052 km). This image, taken by the Galileo spacecraft, is falsely coloured to highlight the subtle structure of the clouds which are not usually seen (normally Venus looks more of a uniform white in appearance).

The next planet on our tour is Venus. The chances are that you have seen Venus with the naked eye, even if you didn't realize it at the time. Venus is often seen as an extremely bright 'star' an hour or two before sunrise or after sunset, depending on the relative positions of Venus and the Earth in their orbits. A small telescope can resolve Venus as a disc. The planet may also look like a crescent or a gibbous object, depending on the Earth–Venus–Sun geometry at the time. Even powerful telescopes tend to show Venus as a featureless planet due to the presence of a thick atmosphere. In terms of its size and mean density, and the fact that it has a significant atmosphere, Venus could be considered as the 'twin' of Earth. In fact, there are very important differences, particularly regarding the composition of the atmosphere and the resulting surface environment. Figure 1.5 shows an image of Venus, which picks out some cloud structure that is not normally apparent. The clouds are made from tiny droplets of sulfuric acid, hinting that Venus might not be the most welcoming environment for us to visit!

A view of the surface terrain can be obtained using cloud-penetrating radar. One such image is shown in Figure 1.6. The surface of Venus is very complex, with far fewer impact craters than on Mercury, but with many volcanoes and lava plains suggesting significant surface renewal. The only images obtained from the surface of Venus were taken from a series of Soviet Union spacecraft, called Venera. Taking images of Venus was an impressive technical feat considering the hostility of the surface environment. The surface atmospheric pressure was almost a hundred times that on Earth, and the temperature was around 670 K (400 °C). A high-pressure oven is not a good place for sensitive scientific instruments! However before the equipment expired, the Venera spacecraft returned their precious images.



**Figure 1.6** Details of the surface of the planet Venus, which is usually totally obscured by clouds, taken by the Magellan spacecraft using cloud-penetrating radar.



Figure 1.7 shows one of the few colour images obtained by the Venera 13 spacecraft. The surface shows evidence of old lava flows, with a cracked and rugged appearance. The action of the atmosphere has also given rise to surface erosion. The atmosphere of Venus is mostly (97% by volume) carbon dioxide (unlike Earth which is mostly nitrogen and oxygen). The carbon dioxide gives rise to a strong ‘greenhouse effect’ that traps heat below the lower layers of the atmosphere – hence the very high surface temperature. Venus, while an Earth-twin in some respects, would definitely not be a hospitable place to visit.



**Figure 1.7** The surface of Venus obtained by the Venera 13 spacecraft in 1982. Part of the spacecraft is seen at the bottom of the image.

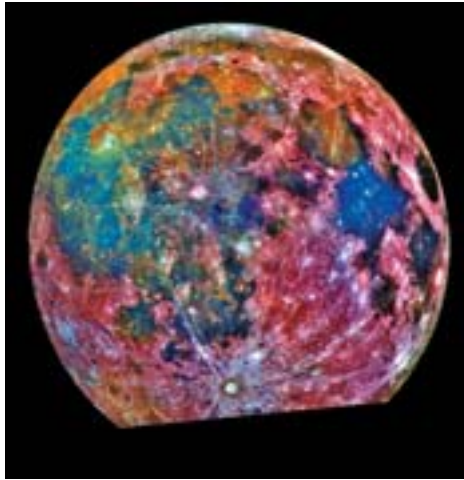
### 1.1.3 Earth

The next planet on our itinerary is Earth. The familiar blue planet is shown splendidly in Figure 1.8. Although Earth may seem rather familiar, and even rather boring in the context of exploring exciting new worlds in the Solar System, it is worth pausing for thought when looking at Figure 1.8. Consider just how important this image is for showing us our home planet and its place in the Solar System. Before the space age, we could only imagine seeing our planet from afar. But now we have an appreciation of the Earth as a finite, isolated and even rather fragile planet in space. This view of Earth is probably very important in appreciating global ecology issues and the need to look after our planet.

The Earth also allows us to study at close quarters many of the mechanisms that influence and characterize the other bodies in the Solar System. Our understanding of the internal structure of large terrestrial-like bodies, volcanism and atmospheres, is greatly enhanced by looking at what happens on (or *in*) the Earth, and using this



**Figure 1.8** The planet Earth (radius 6371 km). This image was taken from Apollo 16 in 1972. The image shows the oceans (blue), land (brown) and cloud (white) as well as the Antarctic ice-cap (uniform white at the bottom of the figure).



**Figure 1.9** The Moon (radius 1738 km). This image was taken by the Galileo spacecraft. The various colours of the image highlight the dissimilar mineralogy of the regions.



**Figure 1.10** An image of the Moon, taken from Apollo 16, showing some of its heavily cratered far side (right-hand part of the image).

knowledge to consider what must happen elsewhere. For this reason much of the material considered in the following chapters looks closely at the Earth to enhance our understanding of the other planets.

The atmosphere of the Earth (which you will look at in more detail in Chapter 5) is crucial for the survival of life on the planet. Our atmosphere causes a significant rise in surface temperature because of a ‘greenhouse effect’, which is mainly due to carbon dioxide and water vapour (modest compared to Venus, but still accounting for a 33 K higher temperature than an atmosphereless Earth would have). This means that the *mean* temperature at the surface is 288 K (15 °C), allowing liquid water to exist over much of the planet. The atmosphere also carries heat away from the Equator, so that the Equator is not as hot as it might be and the polar regions are not as cold as they might be. This allows life to survive at a greater range of latitudes than would otherwise be the case if we didn’t have atmospheric circulation. The Earth’s atmosphere comprises (by volume) 78% nitrogen and 21% oxygen, with other gases (including carbon dioxide) being just a small part. It is perhaps a sobering thought to bear in mind that Venus is an example of what could happen if greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide became a really significant proportion of the Earth’s atmosphere.

The other familiar planetary body on our tour is the Earth’s only natural satellite, the Moon. Often ignored due to over familiarity, the Moon offers a spectacular (if rather monochromatic) terrain. Viewed with the naked eye or, better still, through binoculars or a small telescope (best viewed when *not* at full Moon to obtain the best visual contrast), the relatively bright ‘highland’ regions peppered with impact craters, and the darker and less cratered *mare* (pronounced mar-ray) regions, are clearly seen.

The Moon orbits the Earth about thirteen times each year, and presents the same face to us all the time. This means its **rotation period** (the time it takes to turn once on its axis) exactly matches its **orbital period** (the time it takes to travel once around the Earth). This is called **synchronous rotation**, and is common among satellites throughout the Solar System. Figure 1.9 shows an image of the Moon. False colours have been used in this figure to differentiate predominant surface minerals. Figure 1.10 shows a photograph that reveals some of the far side of the Moon. Fewer mare

regions are seen and more impact craters are obvious in this image. The mare regions are younger formations formed by the flooding of lava that wiped away ancient impact craters. You will consider the formation and composition of the Moon in Chapter 2, and the historical impact record of the Moon in Chapter 4.

### 1.1.4 Mars

Continuing our tour outwards from the Sun, we next encounter Mars (Figure 1.11). It is not hard to understand why it is often referred to as ‘the red planet’ (although in fact, most people would probably describe it as orange). Mars can often be seen with the naked eye as a ‘star’ that has a very obvious orange hue to it. Figure 1.11 shows some striking features. The image shows a huge canyon system (called *Valles Marineris*), which represents a fracture in the planet’s surface that extends about 4000 km across the planet. This canyon dwarfs the Earth’s Grand Canyon, having regions that are 11 km deep and 200 km wide. Also very obvious are the dark, circular features near the left-hand side of the image. These are enormous, old volcanoes. The largest volcano on Mars, *Olympus Mons* (not shown in Figure 1.11), which is also the largest volcano in the Solar System, is 24 km high and has a volume a hundred times greater than Mauna Loa in Hawaii – the largest equivalent feature on Earth.



**Figure 1.11** The planet Mars (radius 3390 km). This is a composite image produced from images obtained by the Viking Orbiter spacecraft.

**Figure 1.12** The surface of the planet Mars, as imaged by the Mars Pathfinder lander mission in 1997.



Figure 1.12 shows an image from the surface of Mars. Large boulders embedded in dust and ‘soil’ can be seen in the rather barren landscape. Lava flows have altered the terrain in other regions of the planet, and even evidence of ancient running water has now been identified. The atmosphere of Mars is mainly carbon dioxide (95% by volume) and in this respect it is similar to the atmosphere of Venus. However, on Mars, the atmospheric pressure at the surface is much reduced, being only about 0.006 times that on Earth. This rather tenuous atmosphere means that the greenhouse effect you might expect from the high carbon dioxide content is very modest, adding only about 6 K to the mean temperature of the planet (which is 223 K). The surface is desert-like – it is very dry and can get reasonably warm during the day and extremely cold at night. Although the atmosphere is thin, winds on the planet can be formidable, giving rise to large dust storms that can last for weeks or months.

Mars has two relatively tiny satellites, Phobos (Figure 1.13) and Deimos (Figure 1.14), which are thought to be asteroids that have been captured by the gravitational influence of Mars. The bodies are irregularly shaped: Phobos is approximately  $26 \text{ km} \times 18 \text{ km}$  in size, Deimos is approximately  $16 \text{ km} \times 10 \text{ km}$  in size. Phobos is shown in Figure 1.13, and you can see a large (relative to the size of the body) impact crater on the left-hand side, as well as other smaller impact craters. Phobos orbits only 6000 km above the surface of Mars, and will probably collide with Mars within the next 50 million years. Deimos is shown in Figure 1.14. There are few craters seen, and the surface may be covered in fine dust, or **regolith**.



**Figure 1.13** Phobos ( $26 \text{ km} \times 18 \text{ km}$ ), a satellite of Mars. This body is thought to be a captured asteroid.



**Figure 1.14** Deimos ( $16 \text{ km} \times 10 \text{ km}$ ), a satellite of Mars. As with Phobos, this body is also thought to be a captured asteroid.

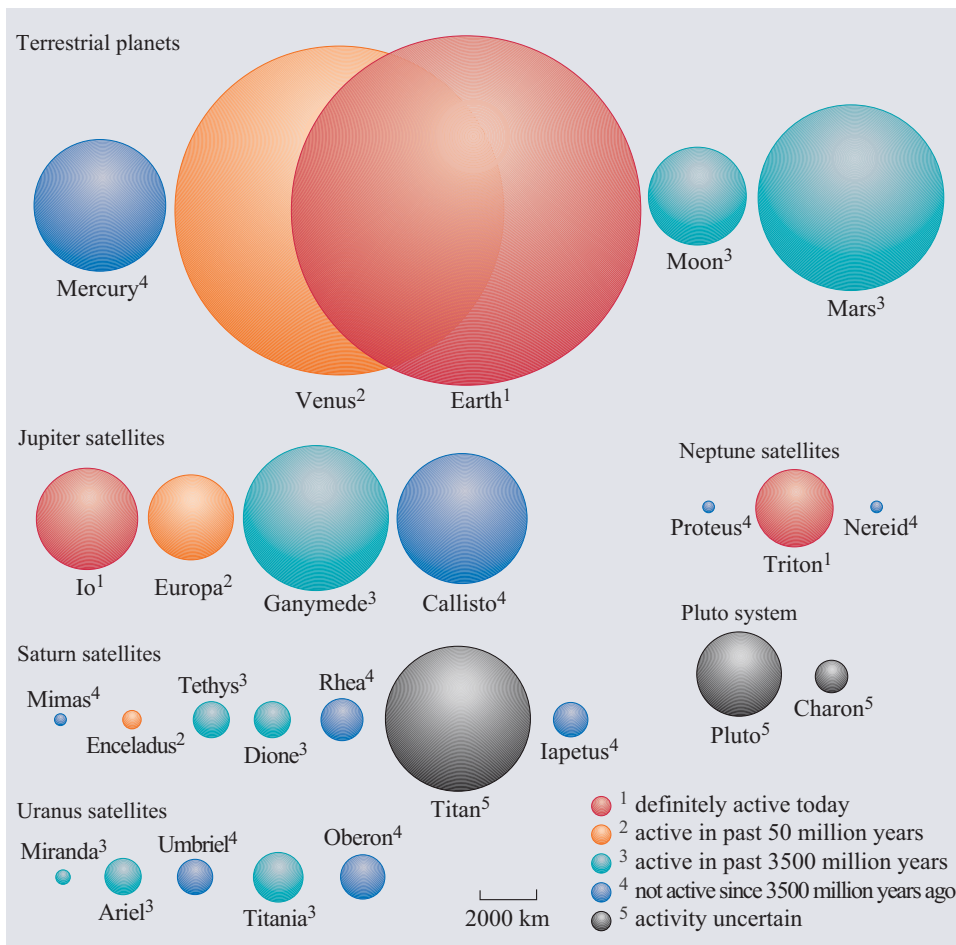


Phobos and Deimos are tiny compared to the Moon, and to the other satellites you will encounter in the outer Solar System part of our tour. However they lead nicely into the next objects on our tour, asteroids.

### 1.1.5 Asteroids

Between Mars and Jupiter is the **asteroid belt**, which is a ‘swarm’ of rocky and metallic bodies. The asteroid belt extends all the way round the Sun and each asteroid orbits the Sun. It is from this reservoir of bodies that Phobos and Deimos may have originated. Figure 1.15 shows an image of the asteroid Gaspra. You can see that impact craters pepper the surface, just like on Mercury and the Moon. Even small bodies like Gaspra cannot avoid getting hit by other objects. You will look at asteroids, and their orbits, in much more detail in Chapter 7.

Our grand tour now takes you from the terrestrial planets to the outer Solar System and into the domain of the giant planets. You will explore the giant planets and their many satellites. In comparison to the terrestrial planets, some of these satellites are quite significant in size. Figure 1.16 shows the relative sizes of the major satellites of the giant planets (only bodies with a radius larger than about 200 km have been included) compared to the terrestrial planets. You can see that satellites such as Io, Ganymede, Callisto and Titan are really like small planets, being comparable in size to Mercury and not too far from the size of Mars. The figure also indicates the timescale of the most recent surface-altering ‘activity’, such as volcanism, on each planet and satellite shown.



**Figure 1.15** Gaspra (19 km × 11 km), a main-belt asteroid, i.e. an asteroid in the asteroid belt. This image was taken by the Galileo spacecraft while en route to Jupiter.

**Figure 1.16** The terrestrial planets and the satellites of the giant planets (with radii greater than about 200 km). Pluto and its satellite, Charon, are also shown. The colour and number coding shows how recently the surfaces have been affected by surface-altering ‘activity’ such as volcanism, fracturing or buckling.

### 1.1.6 Jupiter

Continuing our tour, Jupiter is the next stop (Figure 1.17). This planet is massively different from what we have seen so far. Jupiter is the largest planet (see Figure 1.1). Its radius is over ten times that of Earth and its mass about three hundred times that of Earth. Its density therefore is about a quarter of that of Earth; the reason for this is that Jupiter consists mostly of gas. The other giant planets also share this property, hence they are sometimes referred to as **gas giants**.

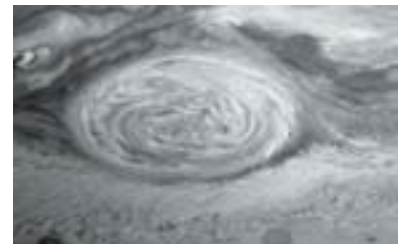
The most striking features of Jupiter are the colourful bands and the swirling clouds. What you are seeing in Figure 1.17, is the top of a dynamic gaseous atmosphere that extends deep into the planet. The whole planet rotates in just 9.9 hours, although the atmosphere at the poles and the equator rotates at slightly different rates, giving rise to ‘winds’ of  $150 \text{ m s}^{-1}$  at the equator. The largest feature is the Great Red Spot (clearly shown in Figure 1.17, with a close-up shown in Figure 1.18), which is around 20 000 km across. It is a huge storm that has been observed for the last few hundred years, continuously rotating in an anti-clockwise direction with wind speeds of around  $100 \text{ m s}^{-1}$  at the edges. The atmosphere itself is 90% hydrogen and 10% helium, with traces of methane, ammonia and water vapour. The cloud-top temperature is around 120 K ( $-150^\circ\text{C}$ ), although beneath the surface the temperature and pressure must rise rapidly due to gravitational compression. At a depth of 10 000 km, the pressure is likely to be a million times that on Earth, with a temperature of 6000 K (approximately the temperature of the surface of the Sun). At Jupiter’s core, the pressure is likely to be an amazing 40 million times that on Earth, and the temperature 16 000 K. You will discover much more about Jupiter (and the other giant planets) in Chapter 6.

The many satellites of Jupiter (there are at least 39) offer an incredibly diverse selection of planetary bodies. Figure 1.19 shows an image of Io, a satellite of Jupiter. Its incredible surface (sometimes described as pizza-like in appearance) shows evidence of a vast amount of volcanic activity. An example of a volcanic region is shown in Figure 1.20. Indeed, Io is the most volcanically active body in the Solar System. To be this active, Io must have an input of energy to heat the body. But how? The answer lies in its orbit. Io is the innermost major satellite of Jupiter, and as such



**Figure 1.17** The planet Jupiter (radius 69 910 km). The image was taken by the Cassini spacecraft in 2000, while en route to Saturn. The Great Red Spot is by far the largest feature of the planet.

**Figure 1.18** Jupiter’s Great Red Spot. The spot is about 20 000 km across.

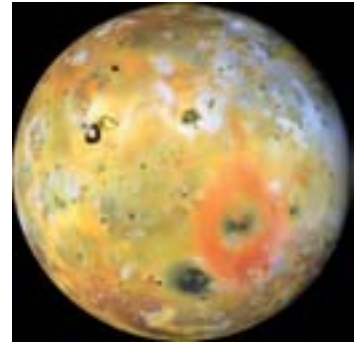


undergoes major **tidal heating**. You will return to this concept in Chapters 2, 3 and 7. Io is mainly ‘rocky’ in composition, making it a terrestrial-like body. Temperatures in the region of 1000 K and more are required to melt these rocky materials. This is in stark contrast to the cold cloud tops of Jupiter!

The next satellite we consider could hardly be more of a contrast to Io. Europa (Figure 1.21) has an icy surface that is covered in cracks, with hardly any impact craters, indicating a very young surface. Europa is a predominantly rocky body. However, it has a layer of ice, about 100 km deep, on the surface. Europa would also be expected to undergo significant tidal heating (albeit to a much lesser extent than Io as it is farther from Jupiter). This presents a fascinating possibility that beneath Europa’s icy ‘crust’ there is a global ocean of melted ice (i.e. water). This also leads to speculation that, where there is liquid water, there might be primitive life!

The possibility of an icy crust on top of a sub-surface ocean does appear consistent with the surface features on Europa, which look remarkably like broken ice packs and fractured ice plains (see Figure 1.22). The surface of Europa also leads us to a new concept – that of **cryovolcanism**. This is the name given to the effect where cold slurries of ice and liquid erupt and flow across the surface like ‘cool volcanoes’, just as hot molten rock erupts and flows as lava. It appears that cryovolcanism is commonplace amongst the icy satellites of the giant planets, and the surface of Europa is one such case. The relatively recent activity has wiped clean the impact craters that would otherwise have been visible on Europa’s surface.

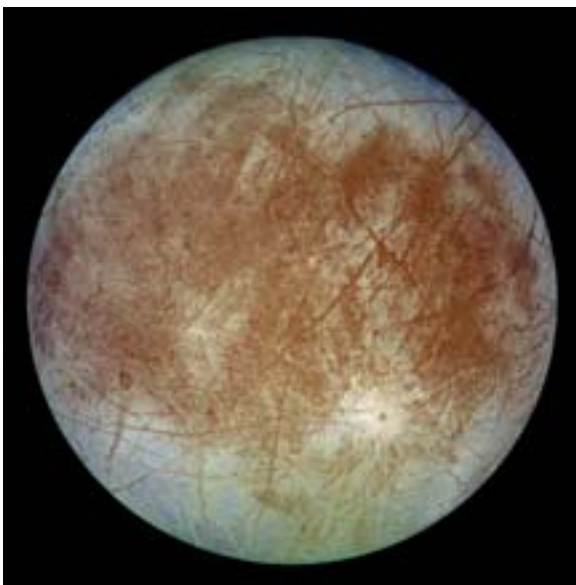
Jupiter has two even larger satellites than Io and Europa. These are Ganymede and Callisto (Figures 1.23 and 1.24). Ganymede is the largest satellite in the Solar System and is actually bigger than the planet Mercury. However, it contains much less mass than Mercury because, like Callisto, it is a predominantly icy body. Both these large satellites are heavily cratered, showing that their surfaces are much more ancient than those of Io and Europa.



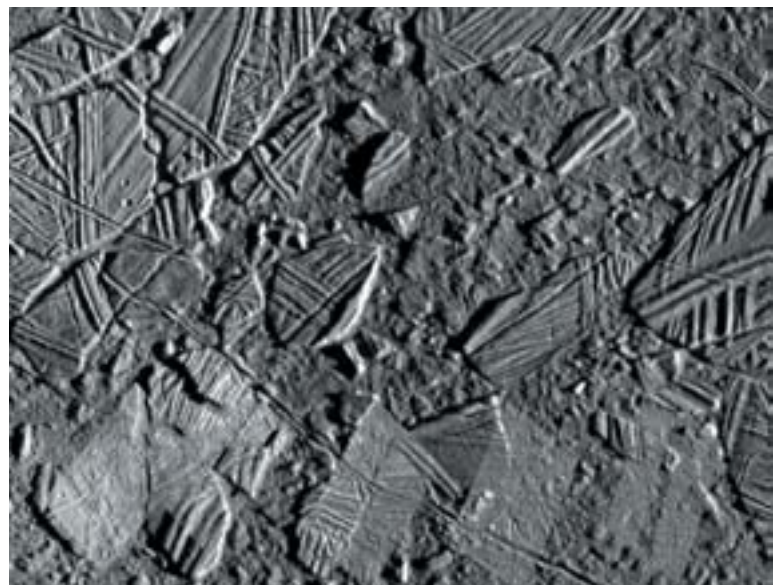
**Figure 1.19** Io (radius 1821 km), a satellite of Jupiter. This image was taken by the Galileo spacecraft.



**Figure 1.20** A close-up of the surface of Io, a satellite of Jupiter, taken by the Galileo spacecraft. This image shows a volcanic region about 250 km across. The bright red–orange feature at the left-hand side of the image indicates a recent flow of hot lava.



**Figure 1.21** Europa (radius 1565 km), a satellite of Jupiter.



**Figure 1.22** A close-up of Europa, showing the fractured icy surface. The region shown is approximately 35 km × 50 km.





**Figure 1.23** Ganymede (radius 2634 km), the largest satellite of Jupiter. The belts of paler terrain are younger than the darker terrain and have been resurfaced by a combination of cryovolcanism and tectonic processes.

**Figure 1.24** Callisto (radius 2403 km), the outermost large satellite of Jupiter. The whole surface is heavily cratered.



### 1.1.7 Saturn

We leave the Jupiter system and move on to Saturn and its satellites. Figure 1.25 shows the planet, instantly recognizable because of the prominent system of rings around it. Saturn itself is not quite as massive as Jupiter, being ‘only’ 95 Earth masses and about 15% smaller than Jupiter in radius. The clouds seen in Figure 1.25, with somewhat enhanced colours, form bands across the disc that are parallel to its equator. They are rather like the bands and clouds of Jupiter, although obvious storms and swirling structures are not apparent. The planet rotates in just 10.7 hours. This gives rise to the atmosphere bulging at the equator. You may have noticed in Figure 1.25 that the planetary disc does not appear to be perfectly circular, but is somewhat



**Figure 1.25** The planet Saturn (radius 58 230 km). This Voyager image has had the colours enhanced slightly to make the banding in the clouds more obvious. The apparent break in the rings just to the right of the planetary disc is simply where the rings are in shadow.



flattened. This is a real effect and not just a distortion in the image. Winds on the equator reach speeds of around  $500 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , and storms and even ‘spots’ can evolve (although not to the extent seen on Jupiter).

The rings of Saturn are remarkable, and beautiful. They are not solid, but are made of icy particles and boulders, the majority of which are between about a centimetre and a few metres in size. These particles most probably originate from the catastrophic break-up of a satellite due to impact. The ring particles all orbit the planet in the same plane (Saturn’s equatorial plane), creating an amazingly thin disc – the inner rings are only about 100 m thick. The ring particles, being icy, are highly reflective. This makes them easy to see in reflected sunlight. If you could gather up all the particles in the entire ring system, and put them together into one object, this object would be about 3000 km in diameter. Figure 1.26 shows a close-up image of the rings. Notice that there are distinct ‘gaps’ in the rings. These arise because of the gravitational influence of Saturn’s satellites ‘shepherding’ the ring particles. You will consider the mechanism for this in Chapter 7. You may be surprised to learn that the other giant planets also have ring systems, albeit not on the same scale as Saturn, making them much harder to see.

Saturn has at least 30 satellites. On this tour, we will consider the seven major satellites (those with radii greater than about 200 km). Figure 1.27 shows the innermost major satellite, Mimas. Although the image is not particularly sharp, you can see that the icy surface appears heavily cratered and that one relatively massive crater is a quarter of the diameter of the entire body. This crater, 130 km in diameter, will have been produced by the impact of a body about 10 km across. If it had been slightly larger it would have broken Mimas apart.

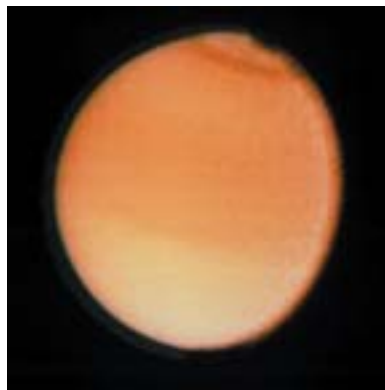
The next satellite is very different. Titan is one of the larger satellites in the Solar System, being a little under half the size of Earth. What makes it very interesting is that it has a thick, predominantly nitrogen, atmosphere – a description that also fits Earth. Although the exact composition is not yet known, it is likely that nitrogen accounts for 82–99% by volume (Earth’s atmosphere is 78% nitrogen by volume), with the rest being mainly methane and other hydrocarbons (which gives Titan its orange colour). Because the atmosphere is opaque, we have very little information



**Figure 1.26** The rings of Saturn. This Voyager image shows clearly the gaps between the rings.



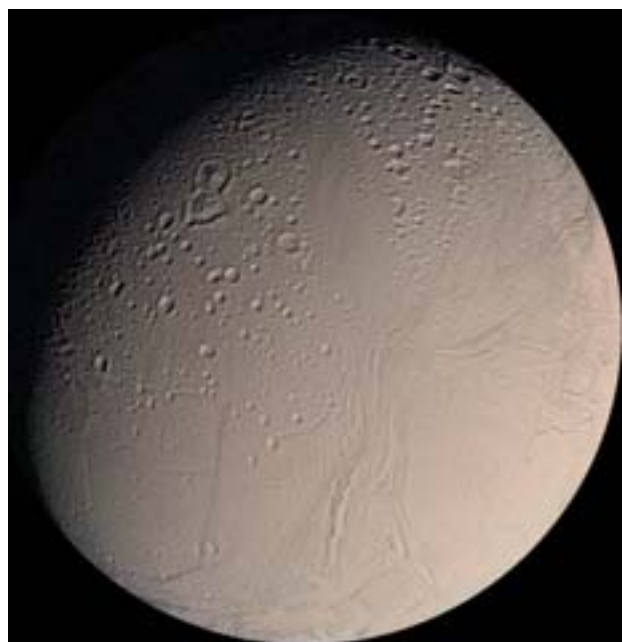
**Figure 1.27** Mimas (radius 199 km), a satellite of Saturn. The large crater *Herschel*, 130 km in diameter, is evidence of an impact that came close to breaking Mimas apart.



**Figure 1.28** Titan (radius 2575 km), a satellite of Saturn. Titan is potentially one of the most interesting satellites in the Solar System although, as seen in this Voyager image, its thick atmosphere makes it look featureless and somewhat unexciting.

about the surface. It is likely to be icy, with a surface temperature of around 90 K ( $-180^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), and an atmospheric pressure about 1.5 times that of Earth. It is possible that ethane and methane in the atmosphere could condense into droplets, producing a hydrocarbon rain. This would give rise to lakes or seas of liquid methane and ethane. One can imagine that the surface might bear some resemblance to a deep frozen Earth.

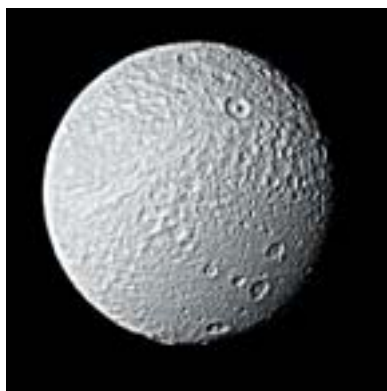
The European Space Agency (ESA) Huygens probe, a small spacecraft about one metre across carried aboard the NASA Cassini spacecraft, is designed to answer many questions about Titan. Upon arrival at Saturn in 2004, the Huygens probe is released from the Cassini spacecraft in order to enter the atmosphere of Titan and make a 2-hour descent to the surface by parachute. Various instruments on board Huygens are designed to measure the properties of the atmosphere and the icy, rocky or liquid nature of the surface, thus allowing us to learn a great deal about Titan.



**Figure 1.29** Enceladus (radius 249 km), a satellite of Saturn. The cratered region (upper left) is in contrast to the smoother region (lower right), which shows evidence for cryovolcanism.

The next satellite on our tour is Enceladus. Its icy surface is smoother than the surface of Mimas. In fact there are some areas that are only weakly cratered and have long ridges and fractures. This is evidence of cryovolcanism with cryolavas filling some of the regions at some time in the past (Figure 1.29). Enceladus is one of the most highly reflective bodies in the Solar System, probably indicating that the surface is coated in a thin, reflective frost (possibly as a result of some cryovolcanic eruptions).

Moving on to the larger satellites, Tethys and Dione (Figures 1.30 and 1.31), you can see rugged icy terrains with prominent impact craters. Fractures and ridges on Tethys are consistent with cryovolcanic activity, although Dione shows more evidence of flooding by cryogenic lavas. Dione's pale, wispy streaks appear to be fault lines. Dione has probably undergone at least two major episodes of cryovolcanic activity in the past, which has wiped many smaller craters from the surface. Tethys has a very low density, indicating very little rock content in the body.



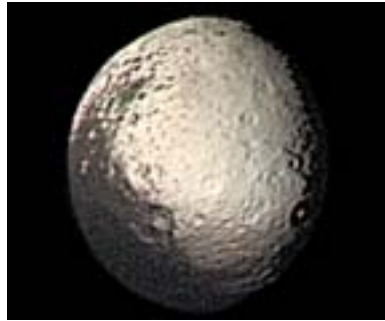
**Figure 1.30** Tethys (radius 530 km), a satellite of Saturn.



**Figure 1.31** Dione (radius 560 km), a satellite of Saturn. This Voyager image shows several reasonably large craters (the largest is near the top, being 160 km across), with evidence of cryogenic lavas flooding some regions.



**Figure 1.32** Rhea (radius 764 km), a satellite of Saturn.



**Figure 1.33** Iapetus (radius 718 km), a satellite of Saturn. This Voyager image shows the dark leading edge of the body, and the reflective trailing edge.

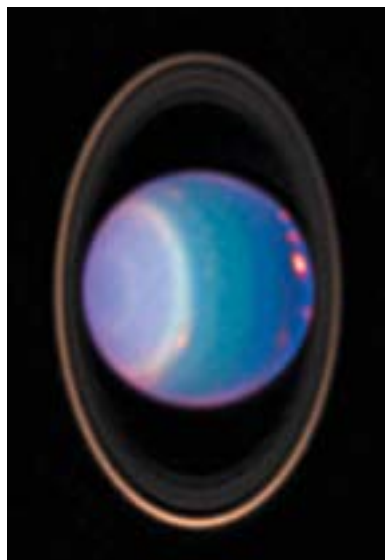
The satellites Rhea and Iapetus are a similar size, but are quite different in appearance (Figures 1.32 and 1.33). Rhea shows quite a uniformly cratered surface indicating that the satellite has been relatively inactive, with many small craters being maintained. However, Iapetus has one hemisphere that is very bright and highly reflective (consistent with the icy surfaces you have seen in other satellites), and one hemisphere that is very dark, as if covered by an obscuring ‘sooty’ deposit.

### 1.1.8 Uranus

Our tour now leaves the Saturnian system and continues outwards towards the next giant planet, Uranus. Uranus (and Neptune) are smaller than Jupiter and Saturn. Uranus has a mass of almost fifteen times that of Earth and is about four times larger in size than Earth. The planet was discovered by Sir William Herschel in 1781. Images show a rather featureless blue–green planet, as shown in Figure 1.34. One oddity of Uranus is that its spin axis is tilted over, 98 degrees from the ‘vertical’. This is most likely due to a huge impact event early in the planet’s history that literally knocked Uranus over on its side. It means that one pole of the planet can point towards the Sun for long periods of time. The resulting polar heating drives the atmospheric flow on



**Figure 1.34** The planet Uranus (radius 25 360 km). This image is from Voyager 2, taken in 1986. The planet has a rather featureless blue–green atmosphere.



**Figure 1.35** The planet Uranus, showing its rings. This image was taken using the Hubble Space Telescope.



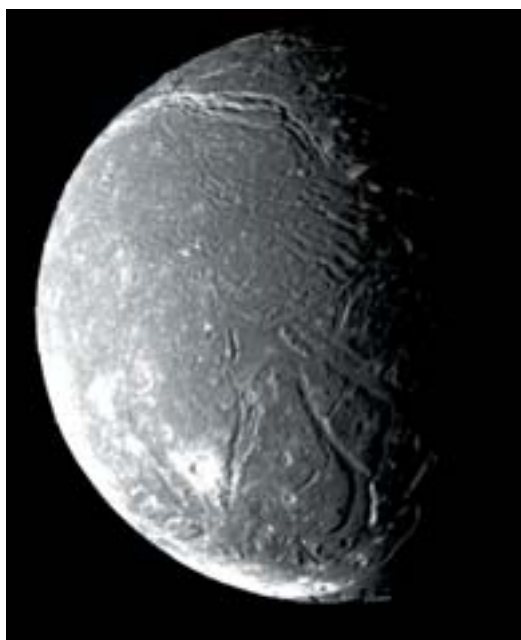
**Figure 1.36** Miranda (radius 236 km), a satellite of Uranus. This Voyager image shows the cratered surface covered with a layer of dust or ‘snow’ and distinct regions (left- and right-hand sides of the image) related to some icy volcanic activity.

the planet, with winds flowing from the (south) pole to the equatorial regions. The prominent banding and storms seen on Jupiter and Saturn are not seen on Uranus, although some subtle structure is exposed in some false-colour images.

You may recall all the giant planets have ring systems, although they are only really obvious in the Saturnian system. The rings of Uranus (discovered in 1977) are the next most obvious. Figure 1.35 shows an image obtained using the Hubble Space Telescope. The particles in the rings of Uranus are extremely dark (unlike Saturn’s rings). There is evidence of small dust particles and metre-sized boulders. As in the Saturnian system, the rings are separated by gaps, and will be gravitationally influenced by satellites.

Uranus, like Saturn, has a multitude of satellites (at least 21 and probably more), although only five are considered major bodies (radii greater than 200 km). The first of these to consider is Miranda (Figure 1.36). This body has an extremely rugged and exotic terrain. There are areas that are mostly craterless, and are distinctly different from the rest of the body. It is likely that these regions have been formed by some cryovolcanism processes. The other regions on the satellite have more impact craters and therefore a somewhat older surface. The craters (except for a few sharply defined relatively recent craters) appear to be blanketed with dust or ‘snow’, presumably as a result of some explosive cryovolcanic eruptions.

Ariel and Umbriel (Figures 1.37 and 1.38) are similar in size, and each is over double the size of Miranda. Ariel shows impressive trough-like fractures that break up the impact-scarred surface. Many of the troughs will have been subsequently filled by icy lavas, although it is unlikely that Ariel has suffered any major cryovolcanism in the recent past. The surface of Umbriel appears quite different, being much darker than Ariel (and other icy surfaces) and the surface appears to be heavily cratered. The most notable feature is the bright structure at the top of the image. This is an impact crater that is about 100 km in diameter. It is lighter in colour because the impact has penetrated, and excavated material from, the subsurface layers, which appear to be of a somewhat different composition from the surface material.



**Figure 1.37** Ariel (radius 579 km), a satellite of Uranus. This Voyager image shows large trough-like fractures in the surface of the body.



**Figure 1.38** Umbriel (radius 585 km), a satellite of Uranus. Although this Voyager image is of quite low resolution, the heavily cratered surface is clearly visible. The bright patch (top) is an impact crater that is 100 km in diameter.





**Figure 1.39** Titania (radius 789 km), a satellite of Uranus. This satellite has an appearance quite similar to Ariel.



**Figure 1.40** Oberon (radius 761 km), a satellite of Uranus. This Voyager image shows an 11 km high mountain range, silhouetted against space, in the lower-left region.

The satellites Titania and Oberon (Figures 1.39 and 1.40) are larger than Ariel and Umbriel. Titania is similar in appearance to Ariel, although it is more heavily cratered. There are fault regions on the surface that are 1500 km long and 2–5 km high. There are no signs of lava flooding in the faults although Titania has certainly had some cryovolcanic activity in the past. Oberon is more like Umbriel (although not quite as dark). Bright patches are seen on the surface that are most likely to be regions of ejecta from relatively recent impact craters (similar to the one obvious bright crater on Umbriel).

### 1.1.9 Neptune



**Figure 1.41** The planet Neptune (radius 24 620 km). This Voyager 2 image, showing a ‘Great Dark Spot’, was obtained in 1986.



**Figure 1.42** Proteus (radius 209 km), a satellite of Neptune. This image shows a heavily cratered surface with one huge (relative to the size of the body) impact crater.

Our tour now arrives at the last of the giant planets, Neptune (Figure 1.41). Neptune has a mass of about seventeen times that of the Earth and is only slightly smaller than Uranus (being about four times larger than Earth). The existence of Neptune was suspected for some time, after detailed observations of the motion of Uranus suggested that there must be another large planet in the outer Solar System gravitationally influencing the orbit of Uranus. Neptune was discovered in 1846 by astronomers Johann Galle and Heinrich D'Arrest. Its atmosphere has a glorious 'electric blue' colour. More features are apparent in the atmosphere than for Uranus, with some banding and pale clouds being evident. Neptune also appears to have its own version of Jupiter's Great Red Spot. Neptune's 'Great Dark Spot' is also an oval-shaped storm system, although it is much less long-lived than Jupiter's spot (Hubble Space Telescope images reveal that the Great Dark Spot has already dispersed).

Neptune has at least eight satellites, although only three are of any great size. Proteus, shown in Figure 1.42, is a non-spherical body, and although the image is of quite low resolution, the surface appears to be heavily cratered. In addition, and reminiscent of Saturn's satellite Mimas, Proteus has one very large impact crater. As with Mimas, the impact must have come close to breaking up the entire body.

Triton (Figure 1.43) is Neptune's only large satellite. The surface is an icy mixture of nitrogen, carbon monoxide, methane and carbon dioxide. It has a temperature of just 40 K (−233 °C). One of the unusual things about Triton is that it orbits Neptune in the

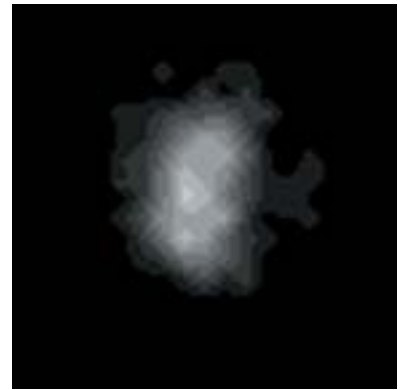


**Figure 1.43** Triton (radius 1353 km), a satellite of Neptune. Triton is Neptune's only large satellite.

opposite direction to most other satellites. This is evidence that Triton was captured rather than forming near Neptune from ‘leftover’ material. This capture process will probably have involved violent impacts with other existing satellites, and will have left Triton in an orbit that gave rise to significant tidal heating. This all means that the surface of Triton has undoubtedly had a complex geological history, and that the surface is probably heavily modified from its original appearance.

The terrain on Triton (Figure 1.43) appears divided. The area on the left is Triton’s southern polar cap. Some dark streaks are apparent in this region. These are due to cryogenic geyser-like eruptions that send plumes of dust about 10 km above the surface, and then leave dark stains across the surface. These geyser plumes were actually seen by Voyager 2, showing that activity is ongoing. This sort of activity gives rise to a very tenuous nitrogen atmosphere. The right-hand part of the image (Figure 1.43) shows a different texture, which has been likened to the skin of a cantaloupe melon. Cryogenic lavas have probably flooded much of this region. Triton has probably got much in common with Pluto (the last planet on our tour) and will have originated from the same region of the outer Solar System.

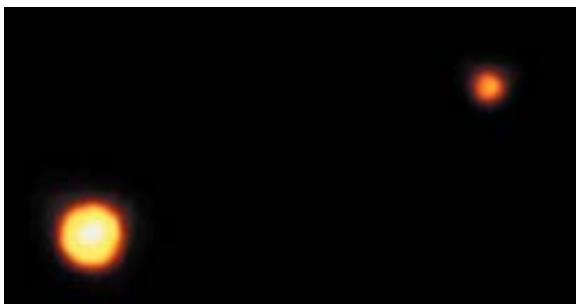
The third Neptunian satellite we will consider is Nereid (Figure 1.44). It is somewhat smaller than other satellites that our tour has included but is noteworthy as its orbit around Neptune traces out a path that is a very elongated ellipse. This suggests that Nereid might be a collisional fragment, thrown onto an unusual orbit. Whether it is related to the capture of Triton is unclear, but it does hint at the violent history that the satellites of Neptune had to endure.



**Figure 1.44** Nereid (radius 170 km), a satellite of Neptune. This Voyager 2 image is of very low resolution, but hints at a significantly non-spherical body. This irregular shape, combined with the fact that its orbit around Neptune is very elliptical, suggests that Nereid is probably a collisional fragment.

### 1.1.10 Pluto

Our grand tour now moves on to the last planet, Pluto. It is the only planet that has not yet had a spacecraft mission fly near it (although hopefully this will change over the next ten years or so). For this reason we know less about Pluto than the other planets. However, we do know that it would be an extremely interesting place to visit. Pluto was discovered in 1930 after a huge photographic search by astronomer Clyde Tombaugh. This little planet offered a big surprise in 1978 when a satellite, named Charon, was discovered. However Charon is about half the size of Pluto, and so the system is not so much a planet with a satellite, as a binary planetary system (or ‘double planet’). Figure 1.45 shows a Hubble Space Telescope image of the Pluto–Charon system. The bodies orbit each other, separated by about 19 400 km. Although this image does not show any detail on the bodies, some important properties have been determined by various other means. Both objects have synchronous rotation, such that the same hemispheres face each other all the time. The Charon-facing side of Pluto is a lot brighter (more reflective) than the other side. Pluto also has a very tenuous (mainly nitrogen) atmosphere, similar to that seen on Triton. Indeed, it is likely that Pluto is quite similar to Triton (although



**Figure 1.45** Pluto (radius 1 137 km) and its satellite Charon (radius 586 km). This image was obtained using the Hubble Space Telescope and shows the two bodies 19 400 km apart. This is the closest our Solar System comes to a binary planetary system.

The Kuiper Belt is sometimes also referred to as the 'Edgeworth–Kuiper Belt'.

less geologically processed). Both Pluto and Charon are believed to have formed beyond Neptune in the region called the **Kuiper Belt**. The Kuiper Belt refers to a belt of planetary bodies beyond Neptune, of which Pluto appears to be the largest member. You will be considering the Kuiper Belt in detail in Chapter 7.

### 1.1.11 Comets

Our tour of the Solar System is almost complete. However one type of body has not had much of a mention so far – comets. Comets are small bodies that pervade the entire Solar System and, along with asteroids, are responsible for many of the impact craters found on the other planetary bodies. The usual view of a comet from Earth is that of a long, wispy structure (Figure 1.46). The long tail is seen because of tiny dust particles reflecting sunlight and can extend millions of kilometres into space. However, the actual source of the dust comes from a rather small object, which looks a bit like an asteroid. Figure 1.47 shows Halley's comet as imaged by the Giotto spacecraft that flew within 600 km of the body in 1986. The actual comet, which was about 15 km by 7 km in size, is very dark and irregularly shaped. Gas and dust particles stream from its surface. These are released as the sunlight heats the icy surface. You will take a closer look at comets in Chapter 7.

Our grand tour is now complete. You have seen the diverse nature of the planetary bodies in our Solar System, and have seen that clues to their geological history and internal structure can be gathered from their surfaces. You will be considering the origin of the Solar System in detail in Chapters 8 and 9, particularly looking at the evidence from meteorites, which tells us about how, and when, Solar System bodies were formed. You will also look at how they came to have particular chemical compositions. But first we will give a brief *overview* of the formation process, to put our observations of the current Solar System into context.



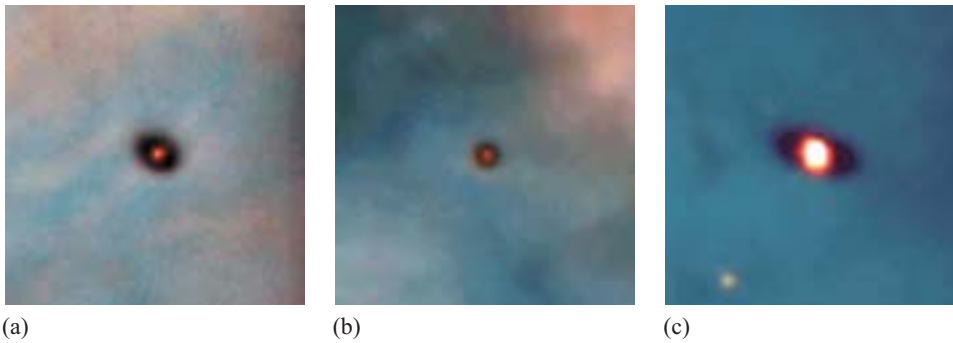
**Figure 1.46** A beautiful example of a comet, called Ikeya–Zhang, as seen in April 2002.



**Figure 1.47** Halley's comet, as seen from the Giotto spacecraft that flew within 600 km of the comet in 1986. The dark irregularly shaped body (15 km × 7 km) is emitting large amounts of dust, and gas produced from melting ices.



## 1.2 The formation of the Solar System



**Figure 1.48** Images, taken with the Hubble Space Telescope, showing young stars with protoplanetary discs around them. These discs will probably result in solar systems.

Theories of Solar System formation are by no means complete, with details of some particular processes being poorly understood. But the overall formation scenario is well accepted, and was first put forward in its original form in 1796 by the French scientist Pierre-Simon Laplace. Laplace suggested that the Solar System was formed by the collapse of a large, initially spherical, rotating cloud of gas and dust. Modern work has refined this idea, but the overall theme remains.

The formation process started with a huge tenuous cloud of gas and dust, which underwent contraction due to mutual gravitational attraction. The contracting cloud inevitably had some rotational motion and, as it contracted further under gravity, the rate of spin would have increased, rather like a spinning ice skater pulling in their arms. As the resulting cloud spun, it flattened into a disc, with the young Sun at the centre. This structure is referred to as a **protoplanetary disc** (or **solar nebula**). Such discs can be observed around some other stars, as shown in Figure 1.48.

In the protoplanetary disc, the dust particles collided and stuck together. As more and more stuck together, larger particles were formed. This is called **accretion**. Then objects several metres across, and before long kilometres across, would have formed. These objects, called **planetesimals**, were the ‘building blocks’ of the planets. Collisions between the numerous planetesimals then built a fewer number of larger bodies, called **planetary embryos**. Figure 1.49 shows an artist’s impression of this process. Eventually, one planetary embryo will have dominated and accreted all the other significantly sized bodies in its region of the disc. When all the material in that region had been exhausted, the planet was ‘complete’. This whole process would have taken in the region of  $10^8$  years, which is *relatively* quick when compared to the present age of the Solar System ( $4.6 \times 10^9$  years).

It is important to broadly consider the temperature distribution of the protoplanetary disc while all this was going on. The material was hotter near the young Sun, and the temperature fell towards the edges of the disc. In the inner, hotter regions (that had temperatures of  $>500$  K), small ice particles could not exist and so accretion of rocky and metallic material dominated. In the outer regions however (which had temperatures of  $<300$  K), ices could remain frozen and go to form planets – the ices could of course be melted in the formation of the planet, but would be retained as gas due to the gravitational field of the planet.

The term *dust* in this context refers to solid particles or ‘grains’ which have formed by the agglomeration of individual atoms, molecules, or smaller dust grains. They can be thought of as fragments of rock and ice, often with rather randomized structures.



**Figure 1.49** An artist’s impression of accretion within the protoplanetary disc. The end result of this process would be finished planets.

Thus, we have a brief overview of the formation process and of why rocky and metallic planets (the terrestrial planets) are generally observed in the inner Solar System and gaseous planets in the outer Solar System. It explains, if somewhat briefly, why the planets formed in a disc (in the same plane) and why all the planets go around the Sun in the same direction of motion.

## 1.3 The layout of the Solar System

For millennia, the stars visible in the night sky have been the subject of study. Naturally, the Sun and Moon dominated thinking about the Earth's place in the cosmos, but five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) were well known to early civilizations because of their brightness and rapid motions relative to the 'fixed' stars. Indeed, quite sophisticated knowledge of planetary motions developed in several early cultures, defining the idea of a Solar System (as opposed to the fixed stars). However, it was only in 1512 that Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, after studying records of naked-eye observations of the motions of the planets against the starry background, realized that the Earth went around the Sun. Furthermore, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler deduced in 1604 that the planets move in elliptical, rather than circular, orbits. It was not until the Italian scientist Galileo Galilei discovered four satellites of Jupiter in 1610, with one of the first telescopes ever made, that the existence of other bodies in the Solar System became known, and it was 1801 before the first asteroid was observed.

Since the invention of the telescope, the number of known bodies in the Solar System has increased enormously. Technological progress has led to occasional surges in that number. The construction of larger and larger telescopes during the 19th and early 20th centuries led to the discovery of many planetary satellites and huge numbers of asteroids. In the 1970s and 1980s, spacecraft explorations of the planets revealed yet more satellites and entire planetary ring systems. Developments in the technology of light-sensitive semiconductors such as charge-coupled devices (CCDs), which form the basis of digital cameras, meant that photographic film for astronomical work was mostly abandoned by the 1990s. Using CCDs, astronomers could record virtually all the light passing through the telescope, allowing incredibly faint objects to be detected. Using this technology, a new belt of asteroid-like bodies was discovered at the edge of our Solar System in 1992. Called the Kuiper Belt, this huge reservoir of 'mini planets' represents the furthest reaches of our planetary disc.

We will now consider the actual orbits of the planets and the layout of the Solar System.

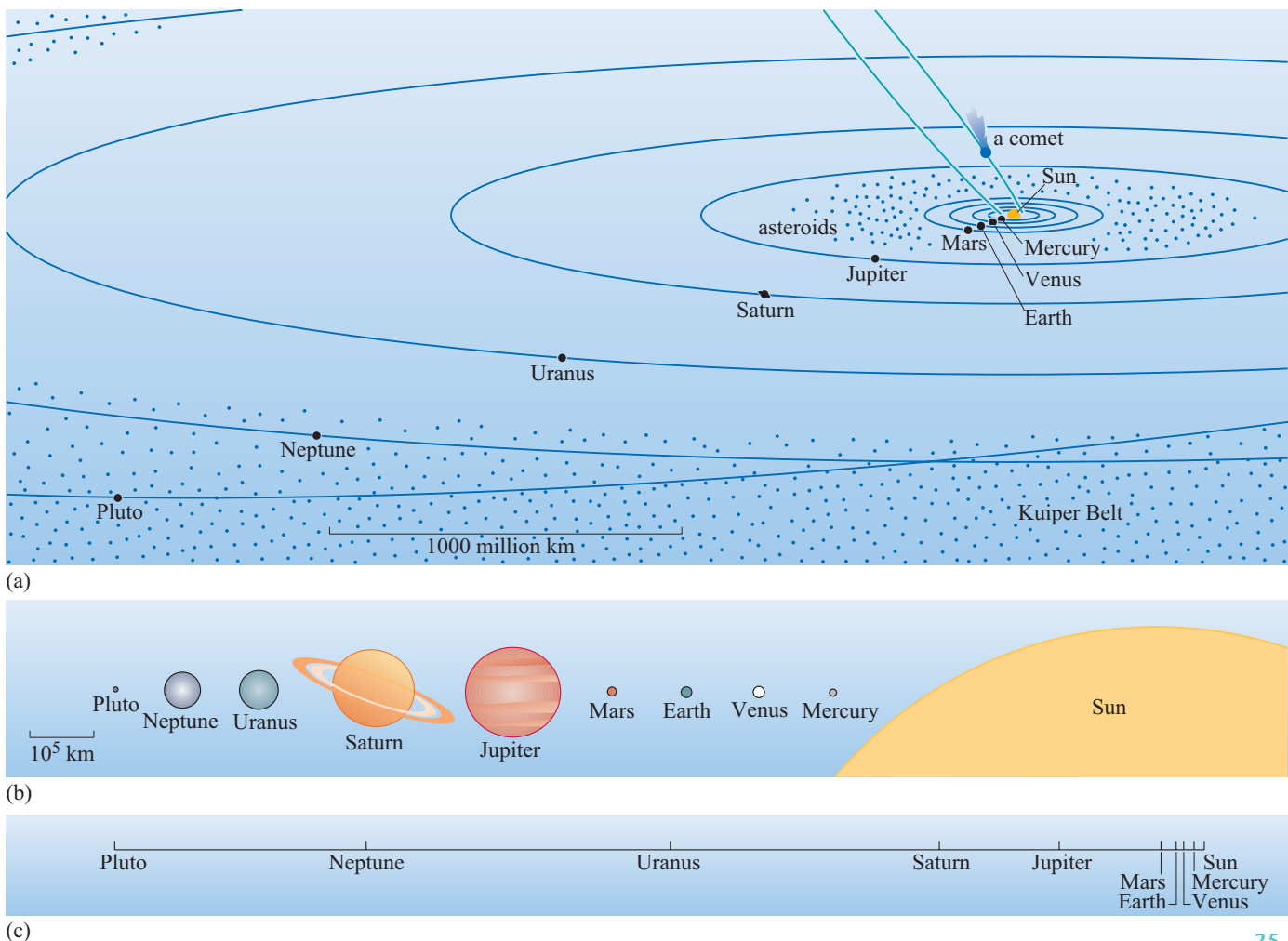
The Sun, being by far the most massive body, lies at the heart of the Solar System, with the planets orbiting around it. When considering the distances of the planets from the Sun, we inevitably find we are using huge numbers. For example, the Earth lies about 150 000 000 000 m ( $1.5 \times 10^{11}$  m, or 150 million km) from the (centre of the) Sun. It is much more convenient to define this distance as one **astronomical unit** (AU). Thus Earth is at 1.0 AU, Jupiter at 5.2 AU and Neptune at 30.1 AU from the Sun. Note however, that one must take care to use SI units when appropriate.

- How long does it take sunlight, travelling at  $3 \times 10^8 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , to make its journey from the Sun to the Earth?
- The Earth is at 1 AU, which is  $1.5 \times 10^{11} \text{ m}$  from the Sun, thus the light travel time is  $(1.5 \times 10^{11} \text{ m}) / (3 \times 10^8 \text{ m s}^{-1})$ , which is 500 s, or about 8.3 minutes.

The nine planets in the Solar System (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto) orbit the Sun very close to the same plane, known as the **ecliptic plane**. As we saw in Section 1.2, this is a consequence of the formation process. Planetary bodies orbit the Sun on elliptical orbits although seven out of the nine planets have orbits that are only very slightly elliptical, and indeed the orbits can often be approximated to a circle. Pluto and Mercury have orbits that are significantly elliptical. In fact Pluto's orbit takes it within the orbit of Neptune at its closest point to the Sun, and far beyond Neptune at its farthest point from the Sun (thus Pluto is the outermost planet only *some* of the time). Pluto's orbit is also significantly more inclined to the ecliptic plane than the other planets.

The asteroid belt (sometimes referred to as the asteroid *main belt*) lies between Mars and Jupiter, and the Kuiper Belt lies beyond Neptune, although it should be appreciated that **minor bodies** (asteroids and comets) can be found outside these limits. Figure 1.50 illustrates graphically the relative positions of the major bodies (the figure also includes a reminder of the relative sizes of the planets).

**Figure 1.50** (a) Diagrammatic summary of the Solar System, showing that the planets orbit the Sun close to the ecliptic plane. Note that this is an oblique view – the orbits are actually nearly circular. (b) The relative sizes of the planets and the Sun. (c) The relative distances of the planets from the Sun.



### BOX 1.2 RELATIVE DISTANCES OF THE PLANETS FROM THE SUN

Although the relative distances of the planets from the Sun are shown in Figure 1.50c, it is perhaps hard to appreciate the relative distances involved from a small diagram. Here is a great way of gaining an intuitive appreciation of how much further from the Sun the outer planets are when compared to those in the inner Solar System. Get a ball of string and knot it at distances scaled to represent the distance of each planet – say 10 cm to represent every  $10^8$  km. (The orbital distances of the planets are given in Appendix A, Table A1.)

- If you need 5.9 m of string to reach Pluto, how much would you need to reach the nearest star, 4.2 light years ( $4 \times 10^{16}$  m) away?
- As 10 cm (0.1 m) of string represents  $10^8$  km ( $10^{11}$  m), then 1 m of string represents  $10^{12}$  m. Thus 4.2 light years would take  $(4 \times 10^{16}/10^{12})$  m, i.e.  $4 \times 10^4$  m, or 40 km.

The Oort Cloud is sometimes also referred to as the Oort–Öpik Cloud.

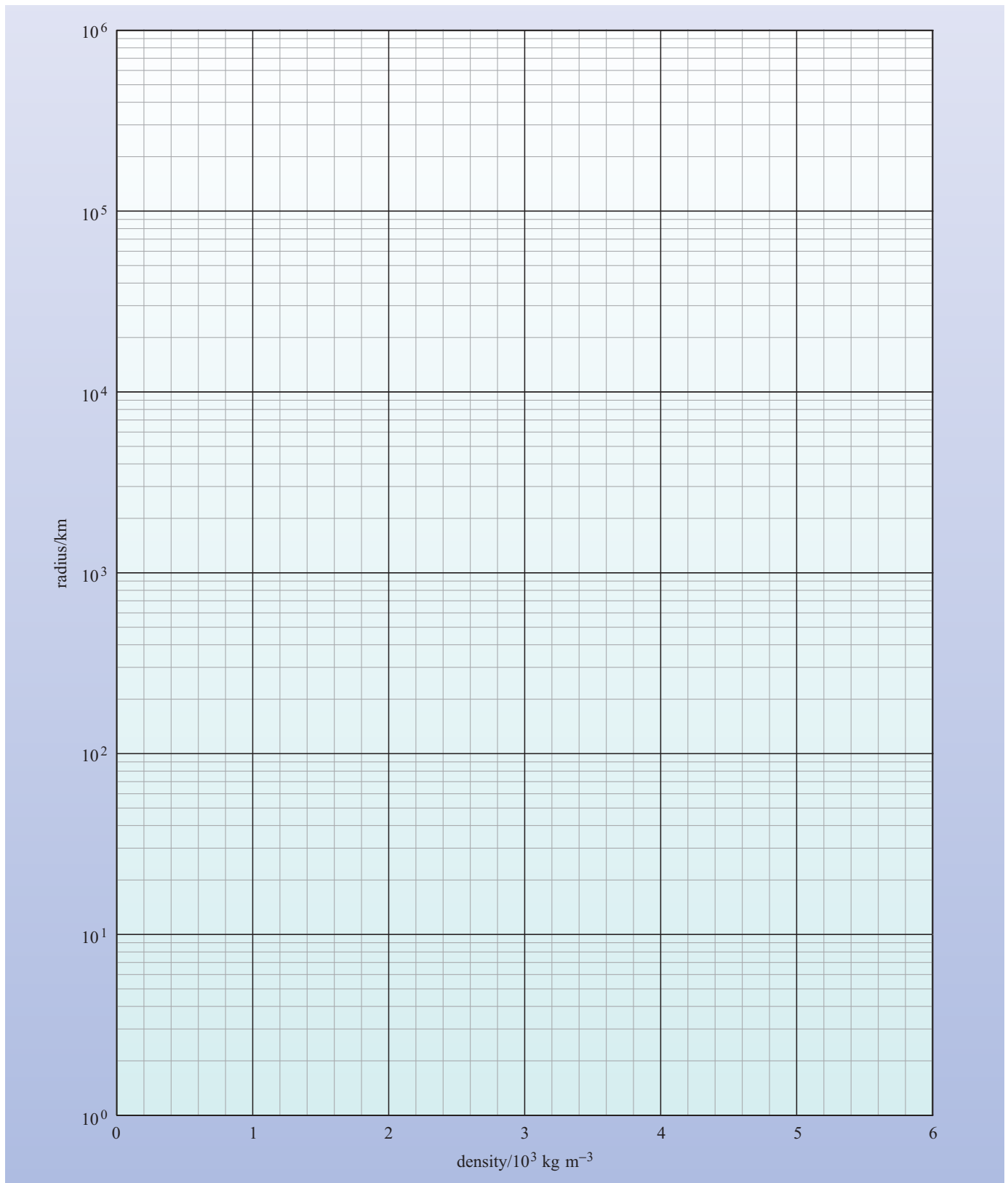
Although you have seen that the Solar System extends out to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt, strictly speaking this is not the full picture. We are aware of comets being found in our inner Solar System, but in fact the whole Solar System is surrounded by a huge spherical cloud of comets, at distances stretching up to tens of thousands of AU. This cloud, first postulated by Dutch astronomer Jan Oort, is likely to contain over  $10^{11}$  comets that were formed in the inner Solar System, but then ‘thrown out’ by the influence of gravity from the giant planets. The inner **Oort cloud** occasionally supplies us with errant comets entering our Solar System.

## 1.4 Physical properties of Solar System bodies

You have now looked at the layout of the Solar System, the orbits and distances associated with Solar System bodies, and briefly, the sizes of the planets. Let us look more closely at one important physical property, density, and how it varies between the planetary bodies. Tables A1, A2 and A3, in Appendix A, list the sizes and densities of the planets, their major satellites and a selection of asteroids. To investigate how planetary radius varies with density, we could plot a graph of these quantities. This sounds reasonably straightforward, but looking at the range of radii you have to consider, perhaps it is more complicated.

- Why would it be difficult to plot the radii of planetary objects on a linear graph?
- The range in radius values is so enormous (from a few kilometres to about 70 000 km) that the data would not all usefully fit on an ordinary linear graph – the smaller-sized objects would all be crammed up at one end.

The problem is overcome by using a graph with one logarithmic axis for radii and one ‘ordinary’ axis, for densities. Such graphs are often termed ‘log–linear’. On the logarithmic axis, each major interval is a power of ten, for example  $10^1$ ,  $10^2$ ,  $10^3$  and so on, and these intervals are equally spaced. Note, however, that the divisions within each large square are not equally spaced (Figure 1.51). Such graphs are a convenient way of plotting data that range across many powers of ten.



**Figure 1.51** Log–linear graph paper for plotting planetary radius against density.

**QUESTION 1.1**

Show how the radii of the planetary bodies vary with density.

To answer this question, use the graph shown in Figure 1.51, and plot the radius against the density of each of the planetary bodies given in Tables A1, A2 and A3 (planets, satellites and asteroids). Write the name of each object (abbreviated if necessary) alongside its position on the graph to help you identify it.

**QUESTION 1.2**

On the graph you have prepared for Question 1.1, try to identify groupings of the objects. Identify these groupings on your graph. For example, you could identify the icy satellites, terrestrial planets (or terrestrial-like bodies) etc.

Four planets form an obvious family, characterized by their huge dimensions (radii greater than 10 000 km) and low densities. These are the giant planets (or gas giants), which are dominated by Jupiter, whose mass is more than that of all the other planets put together.

A second group straggles off towards the high-density area at the right-hand side of the graph. This group includes rather dense, but fairly large bodies, with radii of more than 1000 km, notably the terrestrial planets, Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars, and three dense satellites – our own Moon, plus Jupiter’s satellites Io and Europa. Their densities suggest that these bodies are predominantly rocky, similar to the Earth (terrestrial-like bodies).

- The minerals that make up rock have densities between about  $2.5 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  and  $3.5 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ . Is it likely that the terrestrial planets could consist *exclusively* of rocky material?
- No, they must contain a denser component as their densities (particularly the densities of Earth, Venus and Mercury) are considerably higher.

This denser component is thought to be mostly metallic iron. In the next chapter you will consider in detail why this is the case.

Clustered towards the left-hand side of the graph are a large number of satellites, which form a third group, with radii of a few hundred to a few thousand kilometres, and densities between  $1 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  and about  $2 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ . These satellites consist mostly of ice, with varying proportions of rocky materials. Low-density satellites such as Mimas, Tethys and Iapetus must consist almost entirely of ice, whereas denser examples such as Ganymede, Callisto and Titan must contain substantial proportions of rock. Pluto and Charon also lie in this icy satellite group. Europa comes closest to straddling the icy satellites and terrestrial-like bodies group. This is due to its icy surface layer, which is about 100 km thick and overlies its rocky interior.

The asteroids that you plotted form another group. The asteroids listed in Table A3 are relatively small bodies, but we might expect that larger asteroids would lie further up the graph, towards the icy satellite and terrestrial groups. Note that the

two tiny satellites of Mars (Phobos and Deimos) also plot right at the bottom of the graph within the small asteroid group, consistent with the ‘captured asteroids’ idea that you met earlier.

You have now completed our tour of the Solar System, considered in broad terms its formation, and looked at one aspect of ‘comparative planetology’ by considering the sizes and densities of the planetary bodies. In the next chapter you will look at the internal structure of the terrestrial planets and consider in detail how the internal structure is not only related to the formation processes, but also dependent on ongoing geological processes – processes that largely explain the appearance of the planetary bodies you have studied in this introductory chapter.

## 1.5 Summary of Chapter 1

- The Solar System formed due to the gravitational contraction of a huge cloud of gas and dust, forming a protoplanetary disc (or solar nebula). Planetesimals grew from the material in the protoplanetary disc, and planetesimals accreted to form planetary embryos, and thus, eventually, the planets.
- The Solar System is broadly separated into terrestrial planets (predominantly rocky and metallic in composition) in the inner region, and giant planets (predominantly gaseous) in the outer regions. This is a consequence of the formation process where lower temperatures existed in the solar nebula farther away from the (young) Sun.
- The planets orbit the Sun on elliptical orbits, although the orbit of each planet, with the exception of Pluto and Mercury, can be approximated to a circle.
- The planets, in order of increasing distance from the Sun, are Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto (although Pluto is closer to the Sun than Neptune for part of its orbit).
- The distance between the Sun and the Earth (more correctly the mean distance between their centres) is defined as one astronomical unit (AU).
- There is a belt of asteroids (rocky and/or metallic minor bodies) lying mainly between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter (although asteroids can be found elsewhere in the Solar System albeit in smaller numbers).
- There is another belt of minor bodies lying beyond Neptune called the Kuiper Belt.
- Comets (icy minor bodies) can be found throughout the Solar System (particularly the inner Solar System). Comets also make up the Oort cloud (a massive spherical shell of comets at great distances from the inner Solar System).
- Images of planetary bodies reveal a great diversity in the surfaces. Impact craters (made by asteroids and comets) are common on most bodies. A lack of impact craters implies that there has been some resurfacing (the surface is relatively young).
- Evidence of volcanism and lava flows can be seen on the terrestrial planets, and evidence of cryovolcanism can be seen on many of the icy satellites.
- Io, a satellite of Jupiter, is volcanically active, due to the body undergoing significant tidal heating.





## CHAPTER 2

# THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE TERRESTRIAL PLANETS

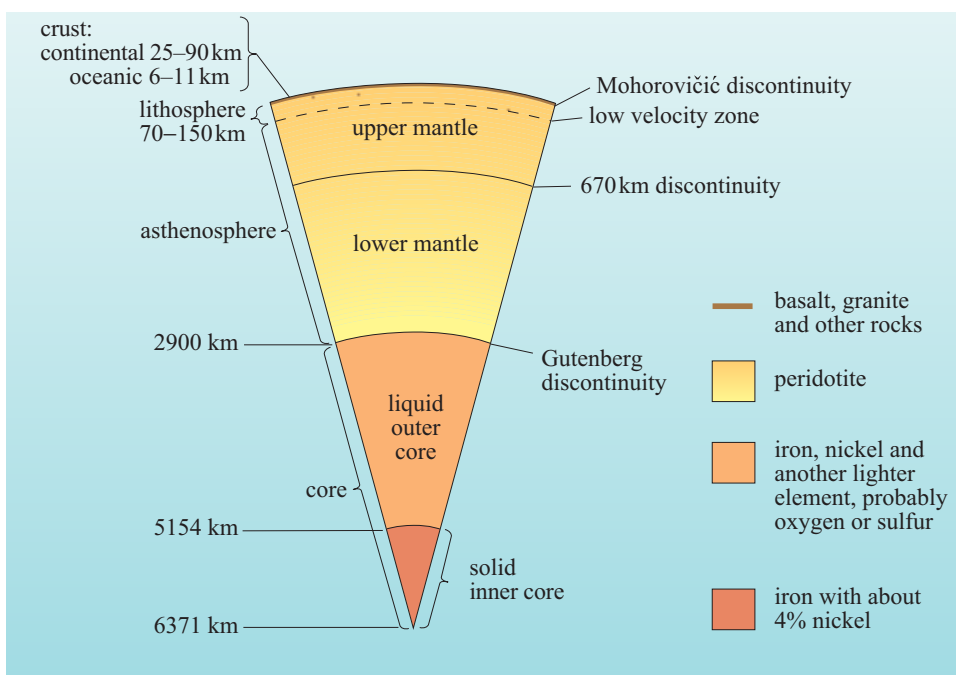
### 2.1 Introduction

Section 1.2 briefly outlined how a planet-sized body can form through the process of accretion, but this represents the completion of only the earliest stage of a planet's evolution. In this chapter we examine the processes that occur during the next developmental stages of the terrestrial planets, and how we can obtain and interpret information regarding their internal composition.

Earth scientists often refer to the Earth's core, **mantle** and **crust**, indicating different layers exist within our planet. These layers display distinct properties based on the various **mineral** and rock compositions within the Earth (Figure 2.1). It could also be argued that the atmosphere and hydrosphere (i.e. the oceans and ice-caps) are also layers within our planet (the evolution and properties of planetary atmospheres will be dealt with in later chapters).

We live on planet Earth, so it is only natural that we have a wealth of knowledge regarding Earth's composition and structure. Much of this information is derived from the study of rocks. However, we do not know precisely what the Earth is composed of, since direct geological evidence from rock samples tells us only about its outermost part.

The different layers within the Earth have been identified through a variety of methods and observations. It is believed that these layers owe their origins to the early stages of our planet's history that followed accretion. If we can begin to understand how to detect and interpret the evolution of layering within the Earth, it will help us in examining the evidence for layering within the other terrestrial planets, for which data are much more limited.



**Figure 2.1** The compositional layers within the Earth. The thicknesses of the crust and lithosphere have been exaggerated for clarity.

So how does a planet-sized ball of matter, created from the raw materials of the early Solar System, attain a layered structure? Is the layering observed within Earth peculiar to our planet, or is it part of the normal pattern of evolution of the terrestrial planets? Can the presence of a layered structure within Mercury, Venus, Mars and the other terrestrial-like bodies, be detected? If these other bodies are indeed layered, then what properties and structures does the layering confer upon them? All these are questions that will be investigated in this chapter, but first the evidence for Earth's layering will be explored.

## 2.2 Investigating Earth's internal structure

Earth's radius is about 6400 km, yet even the deepest mines can only provide us with samples from a maximum depth of about 15 km, in other words only the outermost 0.25% of our planet! Nevertheless, geologists can find examples of materials formed at much greater depths, up to 100 km for instance. This is because, geologically speaking, Earth is a highly active planet. Lateral movement in our planet's outermost layers creates folding and buckling in crustal rocks, especially on the margins of the huge areas that make up the continents. Such areas, together with those forming the ocean floors, comprise immense 'plates', and the processes and effects of the relative motion of these plates is known as **plate tectonics** and is described in detail in Section 2.4.5. Plate tectonic processes, together with deep-seated volcanic activity, can bring rock material, which originally formed at greater depths, nearer to the surface. For instance, **plutonic** rocks, which are those formed at depth, can be broken off and carried to the surface in molten lava as exotic nodules or **xenoliths** (from the Greek *xenos* meaning strange or foreign, and *lithos* meaning rock) and then preserved inside lava flows when this molten rock solidifies at the Earth's surface. Alternatively, the buckling, folding and faulting of the Earth's crust, together with surface erosion, can eventually lead to the exhumation of materials which originated at a similarly deep level. However, if we relied upon this material alone, we would still know very little about Earth's composition and structure below 100 km depth, therefore much of our understanding of Earth's deeper structure is necessarily based upon indirect evidence.

### 2.2.1 Density and the messages in the rocks

Density (Box 1.1) is the first piece of evidence that indicates the rocks at deeper levels of the Earth may be different from the rock materials that can be examined at the surface. Earth's density can be calculated very accurately because both its size and mass can be determined.

#### QUESTION 2.1

(a) The mass of the Earth has been determined as  $5.9737 \times 10^{24}$  kg. Calculate the Earth's bulk (i.e. mean) density. You should assume the Earth is a sphere with a radius of 6371 km. Quote your answer to 3 significant figures.

(b) Examination of the composition of rocks comprising Earth's continental crust and ocean floor crust gives a bulk density of  $2.7 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  and  $3.0 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ , respectively, whilst that of the most dense rocks (i.e. xenoliths brought up from depths of up to 100 km) is about  $3.5 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ . How do these densities compare with Earth's bulk density, and what does your result from (a) suggest about density variation with depth?

Question 2.1 demonstrates that the interior of the Earth must be more dense than that of the materials found at its surface. Two key factors contribute to this argument. The first of these factors is **self-compression**, resulting from the increase of pressure with depth (Box 2.1).

### QUESTION 2.2

Using the density values of ocean floor crust and a mantle xenolith given in Question 2.1, what would be the density of material at 2900 km depth (where Earth's core begins) if we could assume that density increases linearly with depth?

So how does the density of rock material respond to the increasing pressure within the Earth, and is the composition of this rock material always similar at different depths? As you might expect, there are other important factors controlling the density and composition of materials within the Earth, and self-compression alone is not the entire story.

The atomic structures of minerals are sensitive to pressure. When pressure is increased a mineral becomes slightly more dense because its constituent atoms are forced closer together. However, eventually a point is reached where the degree of compression becomes too much for a mineral to retain its original crystal structure, so forcing a major readjustment of the atoms to form a more stable arrangement. This more stable form can be achieved in two ways. First, the atoms can arrange themselves into a more compact crystal structure – this is what happens with carbon when diamonds are created industrially by compressing graphite (another crystalline form of carbon) to very high pressures. As might be expected, the density of diamond ( $3.5 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ) is much greater than that of graphite ( $2.0 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ). The second type of readjustment involves a chemical reaction between the constituent minerals within a rock to produce a denser assemblage of minerals.

### BOX 2.1 UNITS OF PRESSURE

The SI unit of pressure is the pascal, abbreviated to Pa.

$$1\text{Pa} = 1\text{ N m}^{-2} = 1\text{ kg m}^{-1}\text{ s}^{-2}.$$

Very high pressures are experienced at depth within planetary bodies (Chapters 2 and 3), or during impact events (Chapter 4). In instances such as these where high pressures are usual, values are more commonly expressed as megapascals (MPa) or gigapascals (GPa).

For instance:

$$5 \times 10^9 \text{ pascals (Pa)} = 5000 \text{ megapascals (MPa)} = 5 \text{ gigapascals (GPa)}.$$

Alternatively, pressure at depth within the Earth (and similarly within other planetary bodies) is often given in kilobars (kbar). Atmospheric pressure is 1 bar at sea-level, so a value of 1 kbar is a thousand times atmospheric pressure. As  $1\text{ bar} = 10^5\text{ Pa}$ , then the conversion of kilobars to gigapascals is given by:

$$10 \text{ kilobar (kbar)} = 1 \text{ gigapascal (GPa)}$$

To illustrate how self-compression resulting from the increase of pressure with depth can fundamentally affect the nature of a rock's constituent minerals, we can consider the physical and chemical changes which occur in the rock type **peridotite**. This is a rock composition commonly occurring as xenoliths, and which is regarded as being typical of the Earth's mantle. Table 2.1 shows some of the properties of minerals commonly found in peridotite. Three different aluminium-bearing minerals, plagioclase feldspar, spinel and garnet, can exist in peridotite according to the depth at which the xenolith originated. Each of these minerals has a different composition which means that, in order for them to develop, a chemical reaction must have taken place using elements derived from the other minerals present in the peridotite. Importantly, as pressure on the rock increases with depth, the chemical composition and internal crystal structures of the constituent minerals adjust accordingly by generating more compact configurations. One effect of this adjustment is that even greater temperatures become necessary to break apart the mineral structure in order to allow melting. This is why much of Earth's interior is solid, even though temperature is known to increase with depth.

The idea of mineral structure changes and associated *compositional variation* with increasing pressure, is the second key factor that helps explain why Earth's density varies with depth. It is perhaps surprising, but we will demonstrate that the composition of Earth must vary significantly with depth, by looking at the abundances of major and trace elements (Box 2.2) of Earth's surface rocks, and comparing these abundances with those found in meteorites. (See Box 2.3.)

Looking at the abundances of major and trace elements of Earth's surface rocks and of meteorites may at first appear to be an odd comparison, so let us begin by first considering the differences between peridotite and crustal rocks (Table 2.2).

## BOX 2.2 MAJOR AND TRACE ELEMENTS IN ROCK MATERIALS

Conventionally, geochemical data are divided into major and trace elements. The major elements are those which predominate in any rock analysis, so the term is used to describe those elements whose concentrations can be measured in percentages (%) of the element present in the whole rock. Trace elements are defined as those whose concentrations are present at less than the 0.1% level, and are therefore conveniently expressed in parts per million (ppm) or, in some instances, parts per billion (ppb). For example 0.01% is equivalent to 100 ppm. Some elements can behave as a major element in one group of rocks, and as trace elements in others, these may include K, Cr, Ti, and Ni (Table 2.2).

Following a convention inherited from early 20th century techniques of analytical chemistry, the

concentrations of major elements are usually expressed as 'weight per cent (wt %) oxide'. However, this *does not* necessarily mean they are actually present as oxides in the rock. In fact they are most commonly combined together in the form of **silicate minerals** (see Table 2.1 for chemical formulae of some typical rock-forming minerals). It is important to note that since these major elements are given as percentages, the concentration of these 'oxides' in a given rock should sum to 100%. Therefore, it follows that if, for instance, one rock has a very high MgO content, and a second rock a much lower MgO content, then one or more other elements in the second must be correspondingly higher in concentration.

**Table 2.1** Chemical formulae, density and stability range of minerals commonly found in peridotite.

Mineral	Chemical formula	Density ( $\text{kg m}^{-3}$ )	Stability range (GPa)	Depth (km)
olivine	$(\text{Mg,Fe})_2\text{SiO}_4$	3.2–4.4	to >12	to >400
pyroxene	$(\text{Ca,Mg,Fe})_2\text{Si}_2\text{O}_6$	3.0–4.0	to >9	to >300
plagioclase feldspar	$(\text{NaSi,CaAl})\text{AlSi}_2\text{O}_8$	2.77	0.75–0.9	25–30
spinel	$(\text{Mg,Fe})(\text{Al,Cr,Fe}^{3+})_2\text{O}_4$	3.55	0.9–2.4	30–80
garnet	$(\text{Ca,Mg,Fe})_3\text{Al}_2\text{Si}_3\text{O}_{12}$	3.58	>2.25	>75

**Table 2.2** Chemical compositions of average oceanic and continental crust, mantle (peridotite) and meteoritic (CI carbonaceous chondrite) materials.

Wt % oxide	Xenolith (mantle peridotite)	Oceanic crust (basalt)	Continental crust (average)	Meteorite (CI carbonaceous chondrite)
$\text{SiO}_2$	45.35	48.18	59.67	34.68
$\text{TiO}_2^*$	0.16	1.4	0.78	0.07
$\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$	4.26	15.4	15.94	3.28
$\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$	8.24	10.75	7.48	30.42
MnO	0.14	0.17	0.11	0.19
MgO	38.17	9.58	4.42	25.07
CaO	3.39	11.06	6.43	2.67
$\text{Na}_2\text{O}$	0.29	3.36	3.21	0.5
$\text{K}_2\text{O}^*$	0.03	0.07	1.91	0.05
$\text{NiO}^*$	0.31	0.02	0.01	2.1
$\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3^*$	0.43	0.05	0.02	0.6
Totals:	100.77	100.04	99.98	99.63
Element (ppm)				
Ba	7	12	707	2.41
Cr*	2970	370	120	3975
K*	180	600	15773	545
Nb	0.713	2.5	13	0.25
Ni*	2460	138	51	16500
Rb	0.64	3	61	2.32
Sr	21.1	136	503	7.26
Th	0.084	0.2	5.7	0.03
Ti*	960	8400	4676	445
U	0.021	0.1	1.3	0.01
Y	4.55	35	14	1.57
Zn	29.5	70	74	462
Zr	11.2	88	124	3.87

\* Elements that behave as a major element in one group of rocks, and as trace elements in others.

Note: due to analytical variation, the oxide totals do not always add up to precisely 100%.

### Comparing terrestrial rock types

A straightforward numerical comparison of concentrations in Table 2.2 reveals that many major elements, such as  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{TiO}_2$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ,  $\text{CaO}$ ,  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$ , and many trace elements such as Ba, Nb, Rb, Sr, Th, U, Y, Zn and Zr, are more abundant (i.e. show relative enrichment) in both the oceanic and continental crust compared with xenoliths (i.e. peridotite). In particular,  $\text{TiO}_2$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ,  $\text{CaO}$  and  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  are significantly concentrated in these crustal materials and, conversely, both crustal types display much lower concentrations (i.e. relative depletion) of  $\text{MgO}$  compared with peridotite, together with significantly lower concentrations of the trace elements Cr and Ni.

A similar comparison of the two types of crustal material reveals a further relationship. For instance, the continental crust is more enriched in  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$ , together with the trace elements such as Ba, Rb, Sr, Th, U and Zr. However, compared with oceanic crust, it is relatively depleted in  $\text{TiO}_2$ ,  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ,  $\text{MgO}$  and  $\text{CaO}$ , and the trace elements Cr and Ni.

Clearly, chemical segregation has occurred between the rocks comprising the deeper and shallower levels of the Earth (i.e. peridotite and crustal materials). There are also important compositional differences between the less dense continental crust and its denser oceanic counterpart. These broad patterns of relative enrichment and depletion commonly occur between these types of terrestrial rocks, and reveal important clues regarding the behaviour of constituent elements during the evolution of the planet, and the melting of one rock to form another.

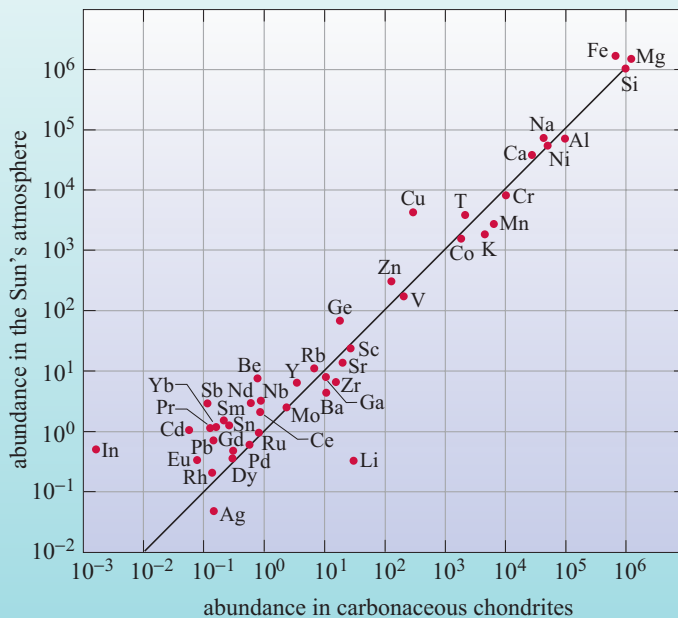
### BOX 2.3 METEORITES AND THE ORIGINAL COMPOSITION OF THE SOLAR NEBULA

Most people are familiar with the term ‘shooting star’ or **meteor**, but few are aware of its importance. Shooting stars are actually caused by small pieces of solid matter, called **meteoroids**, colliding with the atmosphere. The friction created as the meteoroid enters the Earth’s atmosphere causes its surface to heat up, and the brilliant flash of light records its passage. However, if the object survives this fiery plunge and hits the ground, it is then called a **meteorite**. Therefore, meteorites are bits of extraterrestrial material that have survived descent through the Earth’s atmosphere. Meteorites of various types and origins occur. Most of these originate from asteroids, but a small number have been shown to be of lunar or Martian origin. When scientists study a meteorite they look for clues to its origin by studying its mineral, chemical and isotopic composition. These data reveal information about the conditions in which the meteorite formed, such as from where in the Solar System it came, how long it has been in space, and its age since formation.

Mineralogically, meteorites consist of varying amounts of nickel–iron alloys, silicates, sulfides, and several other minor minerals. Detailed analyses of collected meteorites reveal they display a wide range of chemical compositions and mineralogical textures. Due to these differences, they are classified into three main groups: irons, stony-irons, and stones.



Stony meteorites are the most abundant of the three meteorite groups and come closest to resembling rocks found at the Earth's surface in their appearance and composition. The major portion of these meteorites consists of the silicate minerals olivine, pyroxene, and plagioclase feldspar (Table 2.1). Metallic nickel–iron occurs in varying percentages and is accompanied by an iron sulfide mineral. In addition, they can contain 2–5% carbon in the form of carbon compounds, and up to 20% by mass of water in chemical combination with these carbon compounds and with the silicate minerals. The presence or absence of **chondrules** (glassy, sub-spherical ‘droplets’ 0.1–2.0 mm in diameter) divides the stony meteorites into two main subgroups: *chondrites* (having chondrules) and *achondrites* (without chondrules). Scientists believe that the material in which these small, rounded, nearly spherical chondrules occur (i.e. the meteorite matrix) represents the chemical composition that condensed from the solar nebula, and therefore provides a record of some of the earliest material in the Solar System. Chemical analysis of the **CI carbonaceous chondrites** (Table 2.2), thought to be the most **primitive** of all the meteorite classes, reveals that the elements they contain are present in the same proportions as those determined for the Sun (Figure 2.2) and other stars in the solar neighbourhood by spectrographic analysis (less the gaseous elements such as hydrogen, of course). This similarity with the Sun's composition (see below) demonstrates that they have not had any secondary (i.e. later) alteration of their chemistry throughout the entire history of the Solar System, and so gives an important insight as to the composition of the primitive materials from which the terrestrial planets and terrestrial-like bodies originally accreted.



**Figure 2.2** A comparison of element abundances in the Sun's atmosphere and in CI carbonaceous chondrite meteorites. By convention, the abundances are plotted as the number of atoms of each element for every  $10^6$  atoms of silicon present, and are shown on logarithmic scales. The straight line indicates where elements would plot if there were identical abundances present in both the Sun and the meteorites.

### Comparing terrestrial rocks and meteorites

You may remember from Section 1.2 how planetesimals and eventually planetary embryos coalesced from material condensing in the solar nebula. Importantly, some of this primitive material left over after planetary accretion continues to arrive on Earth today in the form of meteorites (Box 2.3). Given that the Earth and CI carbonaceous chondrite meteorites are thought to have originally formed from solar-nebula material of similar composition (Figure 2.2), then it might be expected that they should display broadly similar bulk compositions. A simple comparison similar to that described above for mantle and crustal rocks can be performed to illustrate differences between these terrestrial rocks and meteorite composition. Geochemists usually present these types of enrichments and depletions in concentration on a ‘spider diagram’ or **spidergram**. This graphical method is particularly helpful because it can show all the differences and similarities at a glance. In order to do this, the relative concentrations of each element in the two rock types must first be determined. This can be expressed as the relative concentration ( $\text{conc}_{\text{rel}}$ ) as follows:

$$\text{conc}_{\text{rel}} \text{ of rock A compared to } \text{conc}_{\text{rel}} \text{ rock B} = \frac{\text{conc}_{\text{rel}} \text{ of rock A}}{\text{conc}_{\text{rel}} \text{ rock B}} = n$$

when  $n > 1$ , there is a relative *enrichment* in A compared with B.

when  $n < 1$  there is a relative *depletion* in A compared with B.

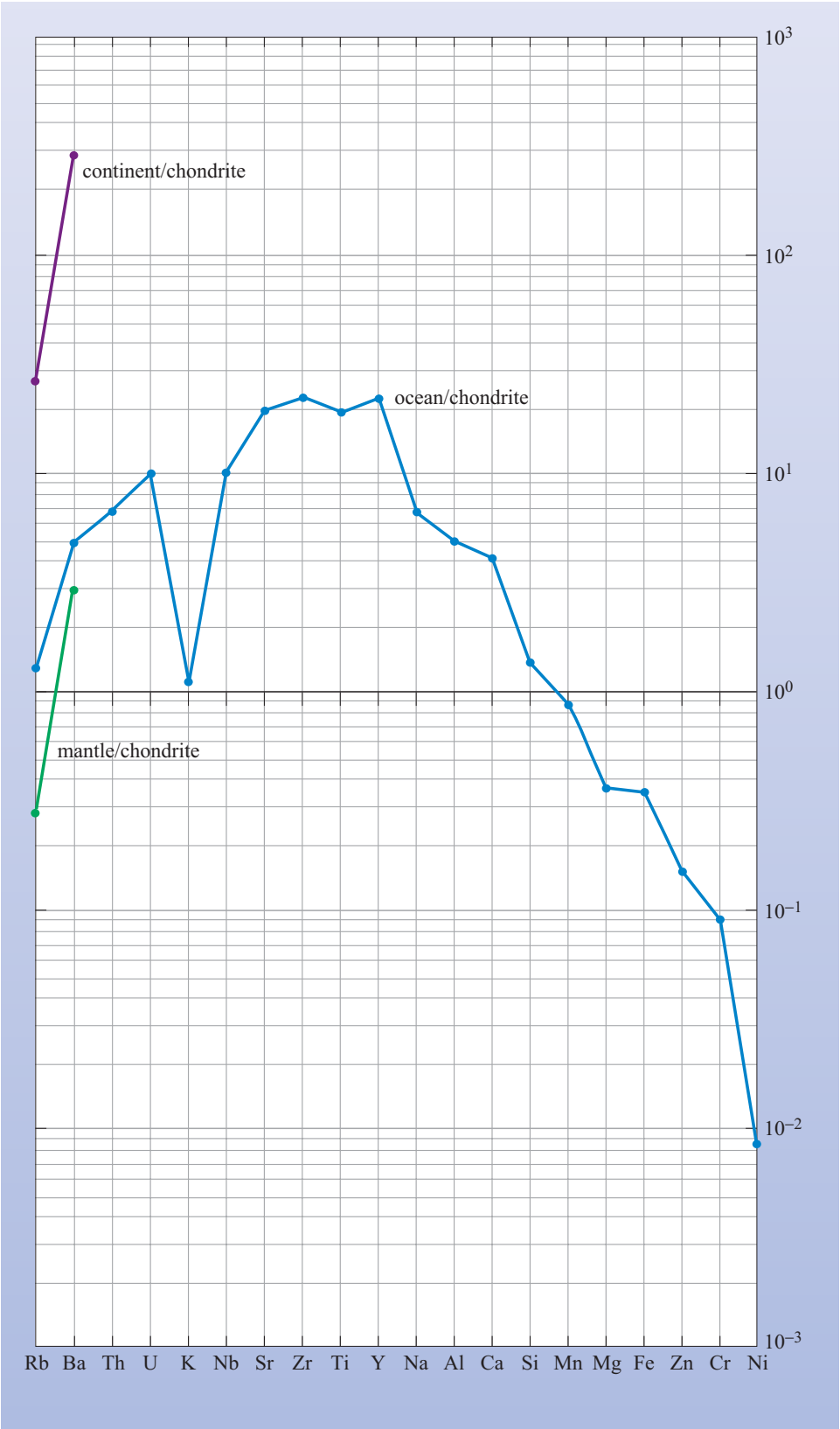
This procedure of comparing data by calculating a numerical value that indicates enrichment or depletion is known as ‘normalizing’ the data. If we were to perform this series of calculations comparing a terrestrial rock type (rock A) with carbonaceous chondrite meteorite composition (rock B), the resulting data is said to be ‘chondrite normalized’.

#### QUESTION 2.3

- (a) Using the data provided in Table 2.2, complete Table 2.3 by calculating the relative concentration ( $\text{conc}_{\text{rel}}$ ) values for (i) mantle (peridotite) rocks, (ii) oceanic crust rocks, and (iii) continental crust rocks, compared with carbonaceous chondrite composition. Indicate whether each of the calculated values represents relative enrichment or relative depletion for the different elements in the terrestrial rocks. Express your results to 3 decimal places where appropriate.
- (b) Plot your results from Table 2.3 on the graph in Figure 2.3. Consider Cr, Ni, K and Ti as ppm values only. Data for chondrite normalized ocean crust, together with the first two points for chondrite normalized peridotite (mantle) and continental crust, have already been plotted. The order of elements has been chosen to illustrate the main differences and similarities in these three chondrite normalized (i.e. spidergram) patterns.
- (c) What can you deduce must have happened to the element distribution within the Earth since its condensation and accretion from the solar nebula?

**Table 2.3** CI carbonaceous chondrite normalized values of oceanic and continental crust, and mantle materials (to be completed).

	Mantle/chondrite	Oceanic crust /chondrite	Continental crust/chondrite
SiO <sub>2</sub>	1.31 enriched	1.39 enriched	1.72 enriched
TiO <sub>2</sub> *			
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>			
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>		0.35 depleted	
MnO			
MgO			
CaO			
Na <sub>2</sub> O			6.42 enriched
K <sub>2</sub> O*			
Ba	2.90 enriched		
Cr*			0.030 depleted
K*			
Nb			
Ni*			
Rb			
Sr			
Th	2.80 enriched		
Ti*			
U			130.00 enriched
Y			
Zn			
Zr		22.74 enriched	



**Figure 2.3** Chondrite normalized spidergram (to be completed). Note  $10^0 = 1$ .

To summarize, when compared with primitive meteorites, elements such as Fe and Ni are much *less* abundant in the Earth's mantle and crust. Others, such as Si, Ti, Ba, Nb, Th, U and Zr are much *more* abundant. Furthermore, compared with CI chondritic compositions the majority of elements in the mantle are depleted whereas the majority of the elements in crustal rocks show a relative enrichment.

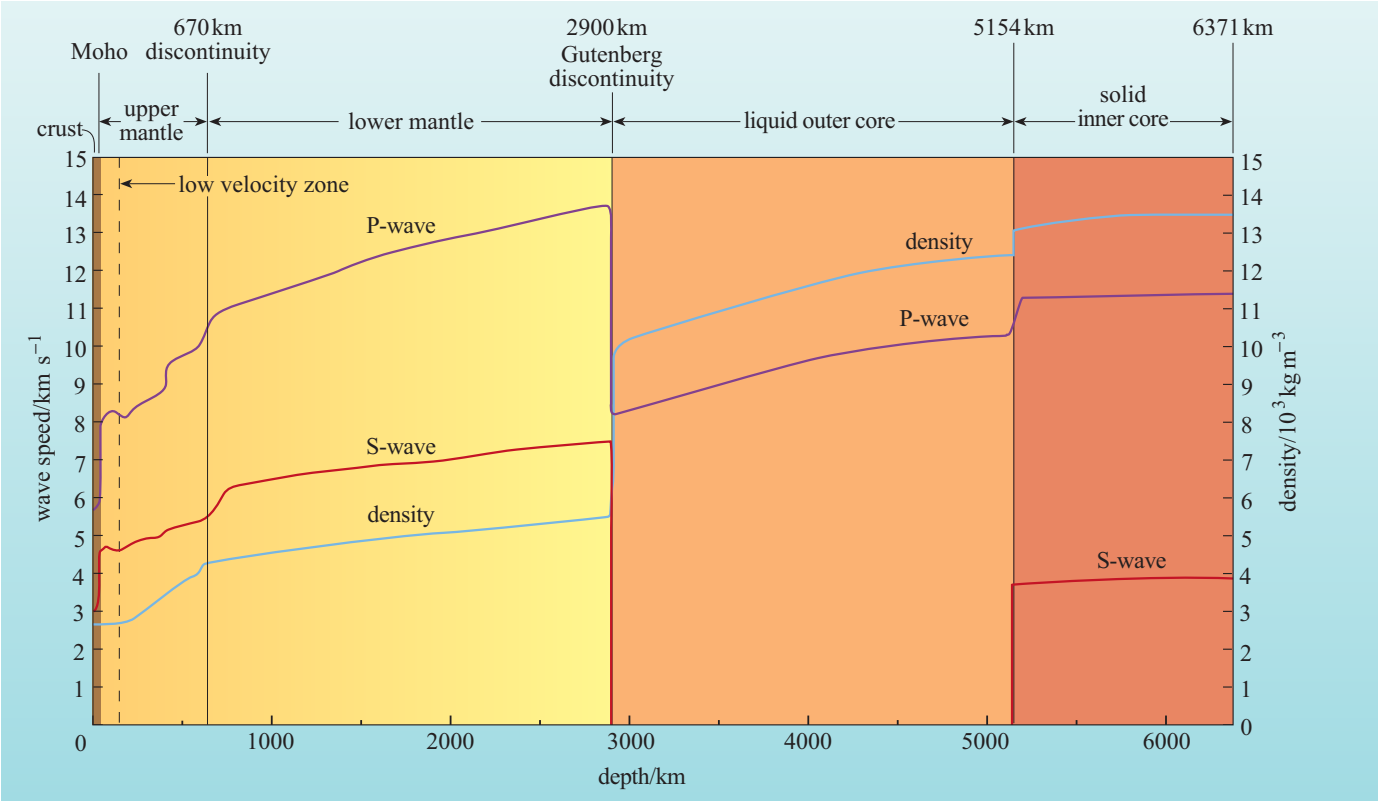
If both meteorites and the Earth (and, by analogy, the other terrestrial planets and comparable bodies) originally started with similar bulk compositions of broadly chondritic abundances, then clearly some elements appear to have since become more concentrated towards the Earth's surface. This must mean that the other elements have become concentrated deeper down. Most importantly, all of these relative enrichments and depletions indicate that there is now a significant compositional variation within the Earth. Moreover, since Fe and Ni are depleted in *both* the peridotite and crustal materials (i.e. oceanic and continental rocks) compared with chondritic composition, this variation in their abundances cannot be simply explained in terms of an exchange of these elements between Earth's mantle and crust. Evidently, a large proportion of the original Fe and Ni must have migrated elsewhere, and this particular issue will be explored further in Section 2.4.1. However, the question next examined is whether the compositional variation observed between mantle and crustal rocks changes gradually with increasing depth, or whether it occurs as discrete compositional zones or layers within our planet.

### 2.2.2 Seismic evidence for layering

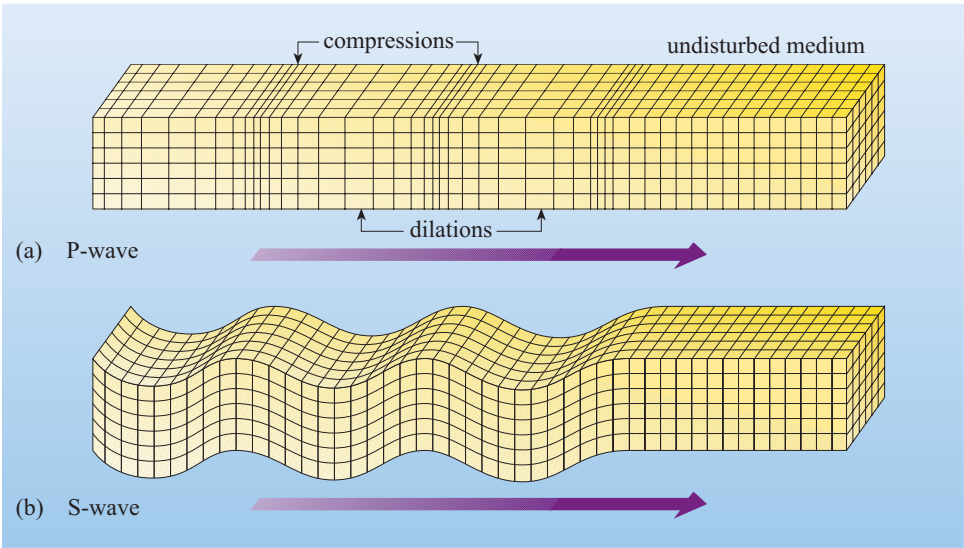
Most of the evidence regarding Earth's internal structure and composition comes not from rocks, but indirectly from **seismic waves** (from the Greek *seismos* meaning earthquake). These waves are vibrations or shocks that can pass through the Earth, and can be recorded by geophysical monitoring equipment. They are created by either natural earthquakes or artificial explosions. Since these vibrations often pass through the deep interior of the Earth, monitoring them provides estimates of important physical properties such as the velocity of seismic waves deep within the planet. Seismic wave velocity and the manner in which the waves pass through the deeper levels are related to the mineralogical composition and hence the chemical composition. If, for example, Earth's composition and density were uniform, then the velocity of propagation of seismic waves would be the same throughout the Earth's structure. However, experiments that monitor and record wave velocities from both artificial and natural seismic events demonstrate that this is not the case (Figure 2.4). There are two main types of wave that travel through the Earth. **P-waves** are pressure or compression waves and can pass through both solid and liquid. **S-waves** are created by a shearing movement and so can only travel through solids (Figure 2.5).

P-waves, also known as primary waves, typically are the fastest waves throughout the Earth. S-waves, also known as shear waves or secondary waves, travel more slowly at 60% to 70% of the speed of P-waves. The relationships between depth and velocity of P-waves and S-waves within the Earth are given in Figure 2.4, and on this basis three major seismic divisions can be recognized and provide a basis for defining layering within the Earth. This tripartite division is most obvious for the recorded P-wave velocities

because the Earth’s outermost ‘skin’ is characterized by low P-wave velocities and this corresponds to the crust, which is 25–90 km thick in continental areas, and 6–11 km thick in the ocean basins. At the base of the crust, the seismic velocity of P-waves increases dramatically from about  $5 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  to  $8 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ , thus marking the top of the mantle. This change in velocity is created by a compositional boundary between crustal and mantle materials. This boundary is known as the Mohorovičić discontinuity, or ‘Moho’ (Box 2.4). This important seismic boundary provides excellent evidence for a fundamental compositional layering structure within our planet.



**Figure 2.4** Velocity profiles of P-waves and S-waves within the Earth, and inferred densities. The term ‘velocity profile’ refers to the changes in velocity of seismic waves with increasing depth.



**Figure 2.5** Propagation of (a) P-waves and (b) S-waves through a medium.



## BOX 2.4 ANDRIJA MOHOROVIČIĆ AND THE 'MOHO'



**Figure 2.6** Andrija Mohorovičić.

Andrija Mohorovičić (1857–1936) was a prominent Croatian scientist (Figure 2.6). Although he devoted most of his energy to meteorology, he had most success in the field of seismology. After becoming the head of the Meteorological Observatory in Zagreb in 1892, he gradually extended the activities of the observatory to include the field of geophysics, including seismology, geomagnetism and gravitation.

After the turn of the century, Mohorovičić's scientific interest focused on the problems of seismology. He advanced insight into the way in which seismic waves, created by shallow-depth earthquakes, spread through the Earth's interior. Using these seismic studies, he was the first to establish a velocity discontinuity 'surface' that separated the crust of the Earth from the mantle beneath. Soon afterwards, scientists elsewhere confirmed the existence of this discontinuity under all the continents and oceans and, once recognized, it was named the 'Mohorovičić discontinuity' in his honour. Mohorovičić's thoughts and ideas were far-sighted, and many came to be developed years later, such as the importance of using deep-focus earthquakes in constraining models of the Earth's interior, locating earthquake epicentres through the use of seismograph arrays, and the importance of building design in the mitigation of earthquake damage.

The term 'Moho' has now become the abbreviated form of Mohorovičić discontinuity. For many years the Moho was considered to be a well-defined, continuous plane that divided the crust from the mantle. However, more recently, detailed deep seismic studies have revealed it to be a much more complex feature that is flat in some areas, but laterally discontinuous and jumping between depths in others. Whatever its expression, this discontinuity represents a fundamental change in chemical composition at depth, and defines an important boundary in the form of a sharp seismic velocity discontinuity that separates the compositionally distinct layers of Earth's crust and underlying mantle.

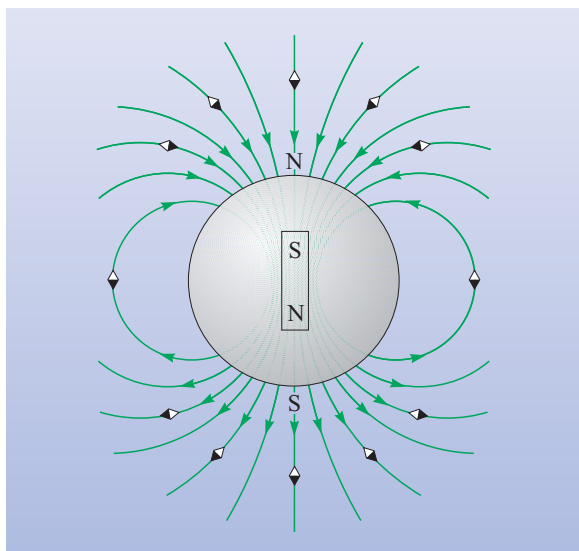
P-wave velocities typically increase continuously through the mantle to a depth of nearly 3000 km, producing a rising velocity profile that is punctuated by a series of ‘steps’ at shallower depths, indicating more rapid increases in velocity. This rising profile is largely due to the increasing density of mantle material created by self-compression. One such increase, at about 670 km (known as the 670 discontinuity), marks the boundary between the upper and lower mantle (Figures 2.1 and 2.4), and also corresponds to the depth to which earthquakes associated with tectonic processes may be recognized. However, at the base of the mantle, around 2900 km, there is a sharp fall in P-wave velocity, creating another discontinuity (known as the Gutenberg discontinuity) in the seismic-wave velocity profile, and marking the interface between the mantle and the Earth’s core. Interestingly, whilst the slower S-waves also increase in velocity through the mantle they are not transmitted through the outer part of the core.

- Can you suggest a reason why S-waves might not be transmitted through the outer core?
- Since S-waves cannot travel through liquids, the outer core must be liquid. In fact, seismic evidence indicates that at least 95% of its volume is liquid. Nevertheless, under very special circumstances, S-waves have been recorded passing through the *innermost* part of the core, revealing that this centremost portion of the Earth must be solid.

Additional evidence that part of the core is liquid comes indirectly from the fact that the Earth has a magnetic field. In fact, Earth’s magnetic field is the strongest of all the terrestrial planets and is similar in its properties to a **magnetic dipole**, which means it appears to act like a bar magnet (Figure 2.7). Traces of ancient magnetism, known as remnant palaeomagnetism, have been frozen into some of Earth’s earliest volcanic rocks and demonstrate that this type of dipole field has been in existence for much of Earth’s history.

Because there is no known solid that has magnetic properties above 1200 °C and, since the lower mantle and core are known to be considerably hotter than this, the only way that the Earth’s magnetic field may be generated and maintained is if the core can conduct electricity and is in motion. Thus, the dipole field is thought to be an interaction between the Earth’s rotational motion (i.e. once every 24 hours) and core convection, which together generate currents within the liquid part. It is this constant ‘stirring up’ of the liquid core that generates Earth’s strong magnetic field.

A consequence of this strong field is that high-energy, ionized particles emitted from the Sun (i.e. the *solar wind*) that pass near to Earth are affected and attracted into Earth’s magnetic field. In some instances these ‘trapped’ particles interact with the high atmosphere to produce aurorae (i.e. the northern and southern lights). The space around a planet in which these ionized particles become affected by the planet’s magnetic field is known as the **magnetosphere**. You will look at this in more detail in Chapter 5.



**Figure 2.7** Schematic cross-section through the Earth showing the form of the dipole magnetic field created by convection currents within the liquid outer core (lines show the attitude of freely suspended compass needles at different latitudes).

It is intriguing to note that Venus, although similar in size to Earth and presumably also having a liquid core, does not possess a dipole field. In fact, the magnetic field of Venus is very weak. An explanation may lie in the fact that Venus has a much slower rotation rate (i.e. once every 243 days), and may also lack a solid inner core. It is thought that the presence of a very hot, solid central core may be necessary in order to heat the surrounding liquid core to a point where it begins to convect.

### 2.2.3 The composition of Earth's layers

#### Core

There are no methods available for sampling or obtaining core material. However, using seismic and magnetic data, together with information concerning the relative abundances of elements during the condensation process of the early Solar System, it is now believed that the *inner* core is probably an alloy, that is a mixture of iron with about 4% nickel in similar proportions to those found in iron meteorites. Iron is likely to be present since it is cosmically abundant, conducts electricity, and is relatively depleted in the overlying mantle and crust compared with meteorites (Table 2.2). The liquid *outer* core is thought to be broadly similar in composition (i.e. predominantly nickel and iron), but its lower density suggests that other lighter elements such as sulfur, potassium or oxygen must also be present.

#### Mantle

As mentioned in Section 2.2.1, both tectonic and volcanic processes can bring samples of the upper mantle to the Earth's surface. These rocks typically have the composition of peridotite. Peridotite is dominated by the ferromagnesian (Fe–Mg-rich) minerals olivine and pyroxene, together with either garnet, spinel or plagioclase feldspar. The bulk composition of this mantle material is typically lower in  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  and higher in  $\text{MgO}$  than crustal rocks (Section 2.2.1). In fact, over 90% of peridotite comprises the ferromagnesian minerals olivine and pyroxene, together with small quantities of garnet, spinel or plagioclase feldspar. By contrast, pyroxene and olivine are less common in the crustal materials, whilst plagioclase feldspar is much more abundant. The fundamental differences in

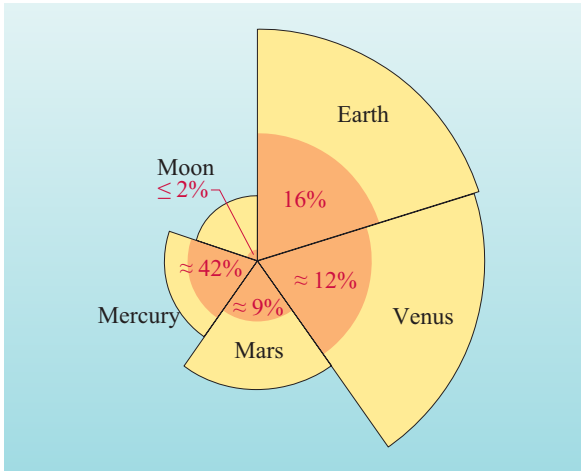
mineralogy, composition and bulk density of the mantle compared with crustal material (Tables 2.1 and 2.2) is the reason why the mantle has significantly higher seismic velocities than the overlying crust. Moreover, the junction between these two types of composition and mineralogy can be defined seismically as the Moho.

Although the mantle is thought to have a characteristic peridotite composition, an examination of Figure 2.4 shows that the seismic velocity profile of the mantle does not increase uniformly with depth as might be expected if increasing pressure were the only controlling factor. Instead, there are a series of steep rises in velocity in the topmost 1000 km of the mantle. These changes are interpreted as depths at which the pressure causes the crystalline structure of the constituent minerals to change to a more compact and denser form. For instance, in the shallower levels of the mantle (i.e. up to 100 km depth), the changes in velocity occur through chemical reactions involving aluminium-bearing minerals that generate increasingly more compact (i.e. more dense) mineral forms. As a consequence, plagioclase feldspar (density:  $2765 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ) is replaced by spinel (density:  $3550 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ), and then spinel by garnet (density:  $3580 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ). In general, plagioclase feldspar is stable only in the uppermost 25 km of the mantle, spinel is stable at 28–70 km depth, and garnet is stable at 70–80 km depth (Table 2.1).

Crust

The crust is the geologically highly active outer part of Earth’s layered structure. It is the least dense layer having a higher proportion of the silica- and aluminium-rich materials (Table 2.2). It is composed of two distinct types: the material that comprises the continents, and the material that forms the floor of the ocean basins. Both of these crustal compositions are dominated by silicate minerals, but the ocean crust (typically 6–11 km in thickness) in which ferromagnesian minerals are more common, is more homogeneous, being largely composed of **basalt**. By contrast, the continental crust (25–90 km in thickness) is much more variable in its composition because it is composed of many different rock types (for instance, **metamorphic**, **sedimentary** and **igneous** rocks) that have been added to the continental areas throughout geological time. However, continental crust may be considered to be broadly similar to that of **granite** in its composition. Ferromagnesian minerals are generally less common in the continental crust than in the ocean crust, so continental areas are the least dense part of Earth’s layers.

**Figure 2.8** Comparison of the sizes and core radii of the terrestrial planets (including the Moon), showing the percentage of each planet’s volume occupied by its core. The models of Mercury, Mars, and Venus are inferred from density and gravity field data.



Other terrestrial bodies

Most of the information regarding the nature of the deep layering of the Earth is derived from seismic studies (see Figure 2.1), with additional chemical and mineralogical information of the topmost 100 km of mantle and crust coming from rock samples. In the case of the other terrestrial planets, we have little or no seismic or direct compositional information, though important information about their internal structure and composition can be obtained from density and gravity field data collected by orbiting spacecraft and spacecraft flybys. Nevertheless, by assuming that similar processes operated during the evolution of these rocky planets, and by comparing their bulk densities with the composition of surface materials determined by both orbiting and lander probes, we can deduce they also have layered structures (Figure 2.8).

## BOX 2.5 CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS, IONIC AND MOLECULAR SUBSTANCES

Atoms of most elements form chemical compounds, and a compound can be expressed as a specific formula involving simple multiples of its constituent elements. Whether a compound or substance exists as a gas, liquid or solid (i.e. its *phase*) depends on some intrinsic properties of that substance, and these properties confer a vast range of behaviour. For instance, at normal atmospheric pressure, the element helium melts at a temperature of about 1 K, whereas the mineral corundum (an oxide of aluminium) does not melt until over 1750 K. Further illustration of this range is given by the materials in Table 2.4, most of which are relevant to this and the following chapters. Those substances with high melting temperatures and boiling temperatures are called *refractory*, whilst those with low values are called *volatile*. However, in order to understand why boiling temperatures and melting temperatures span such a large range, we must consider the ways in which the atoms are held together in these various compounds and substances.

**Table 2.4** Simplified condensation sequence for important substances forming from the solar nebula. The most refractory (i.e. least volatile) are at the top of the table, with progressively less refractory materials toward the bottom.

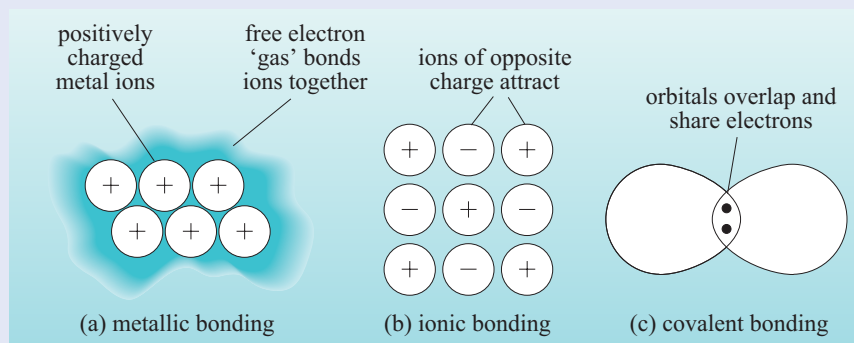
Substance	Formula	Temperature of condensation <sup>a</sup> (K)
<i>ionic substances</i>		
corundum	Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	1758
perovskite	CaTiO <sub>3</sub>	1647
spinel	MgAl <sub>2</sub> O <sub>4</sub>	1513
nickel–iron metal	Ni, Fe	1471
pyroxene (diopside)	CaMgSi <sub>2</sub> O <sub>6</sub>	1450
olivine (forsterite)	Mg <sub>2</sub> SiO <sub>4</sub>	1444
alkali feldspars	(Na,K)AlSi <sub>3</sub> O <sub>8</sub>	<1000
troilite	FeS	700
hydrated minerals <sup>b</sup>	(variable)	550–330
<i>molecular substances</i>		
water	H <sub>2</sub> O (as an ice)	180
ammonia	NH <sub>3</sub> .H <sub>2</sub> O (ice)	120
methane	CH <sub>4</sub> .6H <sub>2</sub> O (ice)	70
nitrogen	N <sub>2</sub> .6H <sub>2</sub> O (ice)	70

<sup>a</sup> The temperatures of condensation given are those that would occur if the pressure in the nebula had been about 10<sup>−3</sup> bar (10<sup>2</sup> Pa). At lower pressures, the condensation temperatures would have been reduced slightly.

<sup>b</sup> Hydrated minerals are chiefly silicates with OH or H<sub>2</sub>O in their formulae.

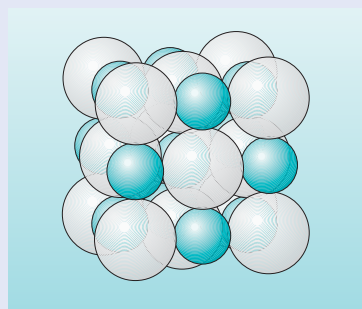
*Metallic bonding* occurs when atoms *donate* one or more outer electrons to an electron ‘cloud’ (Figure 2.9a). This negatively charged cloud flows between the positively charged metal ions and acts as a bonding agent that can operate in any direction, so holding them tightly together. As a result, metallic substances are dense and closely packed.

**Figure 2.9** Bonding between atoms: (a) metallic bonding, (b) ionic bonding and (c) covalent bonding.



*Ionic bonding* occurs by the *transfer* of one or more electrons from one atom to another (Figure 2.9b). This interaction produces two ions of opposite electrical charge which are then strongly attracted to each other, such as a positively charged sodium ion ( $\text{Na}^+$ ) and a negatively charged chlorine ion ( $\text{Cl}^-$ ). Ionic bonds tend to be stronger than metallic bonds and, in common with metallic bonds, the binding force can operate and exist in any direction. A substance that consists of ions held together in this manner is known as an ionic substance and such substances tend to have fairly dense, closely packed structures.

Sodium chloride (the mineral *halite*, best known as common salt) is an archetypal ionic solid. Each sodium atom has lost one electron, rendering it positively charged and denoted by the symbol  $\text{Na}^+$ . Each chlorine atom has gained one electron, becoming negatively charged and denoted by the symbol  $\text{Cl}^-$ . In the sodium chloride crystal structure each  $\text{Na}^+$  is surrounded by six  $\text{Cl}^-$  ions, and each  $\text{Cl}^-$  is surrounded by six  $\text{Na}^+$  ions (Figure 2.10). Since the electrical forces holding this structure together are strong, it is difficult to break down sodium chloride either physically or by heating.



**Figure 2.10** Model of sodium chloride (halite) structure.

Naturally occurring compounds that are found within rock are referred to as minerals, and the different minerals comprising a given rock type is known as the *mineral assemblage*. Most minerals are ionic solids. One of the most refractory of these is perovskite, or calcium titanate ( $\text{CaTiO}_3$ ) to give its chemical name (Table 2.4). In this substance, the interwoven networks of ions of calcium, titanium and oxygen (oxide) are held particularly strongly so that the melting temperature of  $\text{CaTiO}_3$  is one of the highest known of all naturally occurring substances.

However, many ionic substances that are minerals do not obey a precise formula. For example, the chemical formula of pyroxene is given as  $(\text{Ca,Mg,Fe})_2\text{Si}_2\text{O}_6$  (Table 2.1) to indicate that it can have any proportion of iron



(Fe) ions substituted in place of magnesium (Mg), and both iron and magnesium can substitute for calcium (Ca). All these ions have a charge of +2, so their relative abundances do not affect the balance of positive and negative ions. The mineral pyroxene can therefore be represented by the general formula  $X_2\text{Si}_2\text{O}_6$ , where  $X$  represents an atom of either Ca, Fe or Mg, (alternatively we can write the chemical formula explicitly as  $(\text{Ca,Mg,Fe})_2\text{Si}_2\text{O}_6$  so long as there is a total of 2 atoms of  $X$  for every 2 atoms of silicon (Si) and 6 of oxygen (O). A mineral having Si and O in its formula, which is typical of most common minerals in rock, is called a silicate.

*Covalent bonding* is formed when the atoms of two substances *share* two electrons through the overlap and merging of electron orbitals from each atom (Figure 2.9c). Covalent bonding requires precise overlap of the electron orbitals, and so bonds are usually restricted to specific directions. Consequently, covalently bonded atoms must be precisely positioned relative to one another, and the resulting covalent substance is not as closely packed, and so tends to have a lower density relative to ionic or metallic substances.

*Molecular bonding* occurs in many instances. Here, a number of previously bonded atoms (i.e. molecules) are themselves held together by covalent bonds. Such arrangements are known as molecular substances. However, since the bonds holding together the constituent molecules tend to be relatively weak, molecular substances are easily broken apart, and so tend to be characterized by high volatility. Water, for instance, is a relatively volatile molecular substance (Table 2.4) because, although individual water molecules consist of two hydrogens covalently bonded to a single oxygen, the water molecules themselves are held together by even weaker bonds, allowing ice to melt and water to boil at relatively low temperatures.

### In which types of substances did elements exist during the cooling of the solar nebula?

As you may now realize, the answer to this question depends mainly on the temperature within the nebula. Temperatures must have been greatest near the centre, but must also have changed over time once the Sun and its associated protoplanetary disc began to evolve. Unfortunately, astronomical observations of analogous circumstellar dust clouds have proved better at determining the sizes of the constituent grains rather than their compositions, and so it is unclear whether such grains are dominated by ices, carbon-rich material or silicate minerals. However, the compounds that are thought to have been important in the evolution of the solar nebula, and which gave rise to our Sun and its system of planets, include water ( $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), methane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ), troilite or iron sulfide ( $\text{FeS}$ ), corundum ( $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ), and pyroxene  $(\text{Ca,Mg,Fe})_2\text{Si}_2\text{O}_6$ . The story of the solar nebula, and of how solid material might have been gathered together, will be considered further in Section 2.3.1.

## 2.3 Origins of planets and of planetary layering

Before we consider layering in other planets, we should first consider how the planets became to be assembled in the first place. In Section 1.2 you were introduced to the idea that the accretion of planetesimals, followed by the subsequent collision of larger planetary embryos, is the most likely process by which the planets were built.

Due to the nature of the accretion process, the early planetesimal-sized bodies would have had an homogenous internal structure. This is because the coalescence of impacting grains and clumps of condensed nebular material would have resulted in a churning and mixing during planetesimal growth. Once the planetesimals began to attain the proportions approaching those of planetary embryos, it is likely that the heat generated by collisions would have been sufficient to allow both melting and, as denser materials began to sink inwards, segregation of the original constituents. So, by the time bodies had reached the proportion of planetary embryos, a crude layering would have already begun to evolve. However, the development of a more evolved layering, such as that within our planet, would require this separation process to have reached its completion once giant impacts had ceased. The sequence of events leading to the assembly of the terrestrial planets is summarized in Box 2.6.

### BOX 2.6 THE PROCESS OF PLANET FORMATION

The evolution from condensation of grains in the solar nebula, through planetesimals and planetary embryos, and into planets, is summarized below and in Figure 2.11.

#### Condensation in the solar nebula

Our present understanding of how the Solar System came into being is that about 4.6 Ga ago the Sun formed by gravity-driven contraction of an interstellar gas cloud containing mostly hydrogen, but also traces of ‘dust’. The dust consisted of ices, carbon, metallic and silicate substances (Figure 2.11a). Once the Sun formed and began to shine (i.e. began to release energy from nuclear reactions), nearly all the original dust remaining in the solar nebula was vaporized by its heat. The nebula then began to cool and new ‘dust grains’ started to condense within the surrounding nebula disc (Figure 2.11b).

#### The accretion process begins

Collisions between the newly condensed grains and particles of rocky and icy material were relatively common, and when they collided they tended to stick together (Figure 2.11c). Over a period of about 10 000 years, these random collisions of dust and particles built

up into clumps up to 10 mm across. These clumps of matter would have been of silicate composition in the inner orbits, and their composition is preserved within the most primitive chondritic meteorites. This accretion process continued further, building to clumps of 0.1–10 m in size (Figure 2.11c).

#### Formation of planetesimals

After about 100 000 years, further random collisions during the accretion process had produced a profusion of bodies of 0.1–10 km across, termed planetesimals (‘tiny planets’). Once formed, the increased gravitational attraction exerted by the larger ones would become the major factor for continuing growth (Figure 2.11d). It would have meant that larger planetesimals began to grow preferentially at the expense of their smaller neighbours. This is the beginning of the phase known as ‘gravitational focusing’. At this time a significant temperature increase of the developing planetesimals would have arisen through the release of heat from impacts. The mineralogy and texture of the less-primitive material formed at this stage,

and subsequently preserved in some meteorites, indicates a complex history that may relate to fragmentation and heating of planetesimals during these impacts.

### **Accretion and the development of planetary embryos**

Above 10 km, the gravitational focusing created by the larger planetesimals would have resulted in increasingly frequent collisions (Figure 2.11e). In this fashion, nearby planetesimals would be ‘swept up’ by larger bodies. Where growth of one planetesimal outpaced that of its neighbouring rivals, it may have developed into a planetary embryo, which is the term given to accreted bodies reaching a few thousand kilometres in diameter (Figure 2.11f). It is estimated that within a few thousand years the growth of these planetary embryos would have captured and incorporated most of the smaller planetesimals and, as a result, the initial profusion of planetesimals would have been replaced by perhaps only a few hundred large planetary embryos.

### **Planetary embryos and giant impacts**

Having exhausted the nearby supply of planetesimals, the era of frequent collisions was over. The next stage of growth would have been slower and characterized by chance collisions between planetary embryos (Figure 2.11g). Giant impacts between embryos could have resulted in fragmentation of both, with the debris then recombining into a single mass. Moreover, the heat released during such massive impacts was, in some cases, capable of melting the newly combined mass, creating a body with a molten mantle termed a ‘magma ocean’ (Figure 2.11h). A thin crust would have developed as the amalgamated body began to cool. This crust would have been continually destroyed and reformed as impact debris fell back to the surface. Convection currents and degassing from within the body would also have disturbed and ruptured any solidified surface areas.

### **Differentiation of planetary embryos, and planetary assembly**

Collision of planetary embryos would have been totally devastating. Importantly, the associated impact melting of the planetary embryos would have allowed denser materials to segregate inwards and lighter materials to work their way outwards, leading to the crude separation into a nickel–iron rich core and an outer rocky, silicate-rich mantle (Figure 2.11h).

Giant impacts would have continued to occur between these larger, partially differentiated bodies, resulting in the amalgamation of core material and the assembly of even larger bodies. It is estimated that the terrestrial planets would have taken about 10 million years to reach half their mass, and about 100 million years to fully complete their growth and build an Earth-sized planet through a process of chance collisions between planetary embryos such as these. The later evolution and further internal differentiation of these planets was from then on driven mainly from processes within the body.

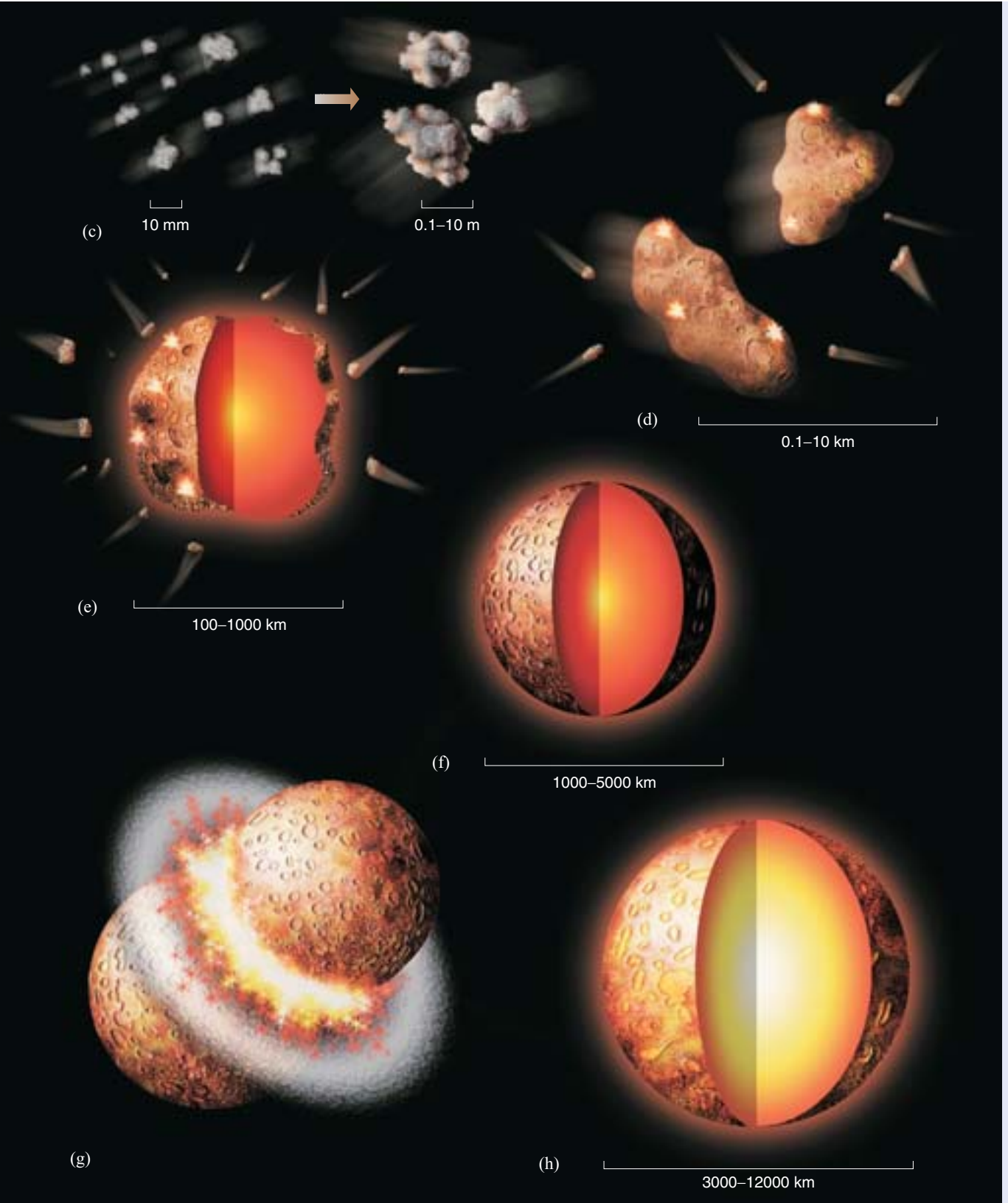
### **Completion of terrestrial planet formation**

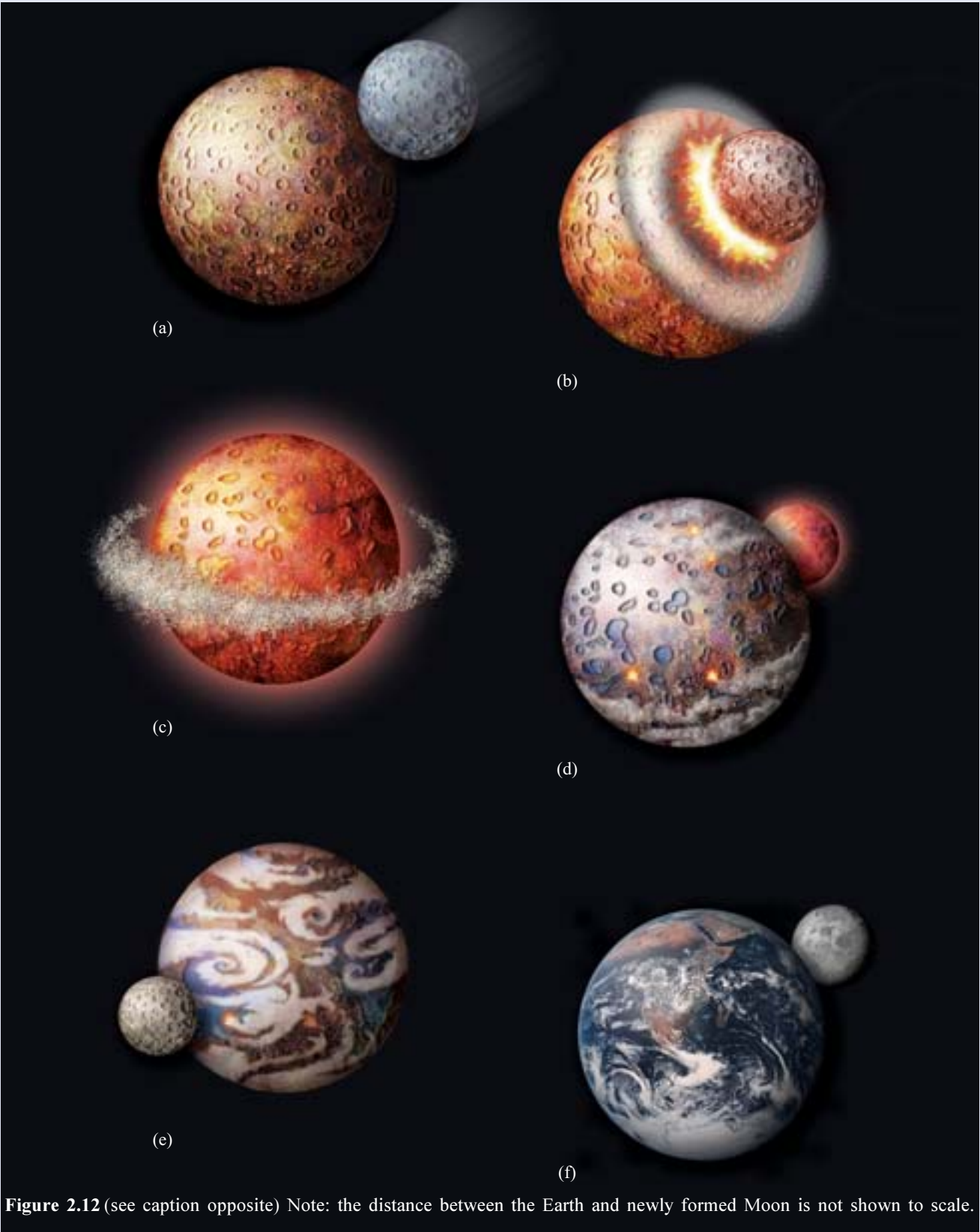
Once the last giant impact in the inner Solar System had occurred, there were just four surviving terrestrial planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars). The total goes up to five if you count the Moon. The Moon is a planet in a geological sense because of its size and character, though not in an astronomical sense because it orbits the Earth rather than the Sun. The Moon apparently owes its origin to a giant impact in which much of the debris from a fragmented impactor, plus some ejecta from the outer layers of the larger ‘target’ body, ended up in orbit about the larger body. The larger body subsequently cooled and developed into the Earth, and the orbiting debris accreted to form the Moon (Figure 2.12).



**Figure 2.11** (This and facing page) The process of planet formation.







**Figure 2.12** (see caption opposite) Note: the distance between the Earth and newly formed Moon is not shown to scale.



**Figure 2.12** The formation of the Moon. Collision and aftermath of a giant impact collision between two planetary embryos (a)–(c). Both embryos had already differentiated bodies. The larger one is thought to have been about four times the mass of the smaller one. Following the collision (b and c), the cores of the planetary embryos combined, and the mantle of both bodies became mixed, whilst some became fragmented, vaporized, and scattered into an arc (c). Some of this debris showered back to Earth, but the remainder came together as a clump under its own gravity and achieved a stable orbit around the neo-formed Earth, and from this material the molten Moon coalesced (d). The Moon then cooled and differentiated into its own crust, thick mantle, and (possibly) a small core. The Moon itself experienced bombardment and the formation of large craters, and the associated flooding of some craters by basalt lavas to form the mare (e). Over time, the Moon’s orbit has slowly decayed, taking it progressively further away from Earth (f).

### 2.3.1 Condensation, accretion and collision

The material that gave rise to the accretion process first had to condense into grains from the components of the solar nebula (i.e. protoplanetary disc). This occurred once the nebula had cooled below the point at which the elements and compounds could only exist in a gaseous (volatile) state. The initial grains would have consisted of the most **refractory** substances (i.e. those most resistant to heat, and which have the highest point of condensation or vaporization), with progressively more **volatile** components (i.e. those with the lowest condensation or vaporization points), condensing as temperatures within the protoplanetary disc began to fall. This is known as the **condensation sequence**. Moreover, at any given instant during the cooling of the solar nebula, there would also have been a progression of condensing compositions away from its centre. This is because the more refractory compounds would be able to condense nearest to the young Sun, with the more volatile materials condensing further away (Table 2.4 and Box 2.5). This progression away from the Sun of the most refractory to the most volatile substances is thought to be the principal reason why the terrestrial or rocky planets occupy the inner Solar System, whilst the gaseous and icy examples are located further out.

In the early stages of accretion, once the planetesimals had begun to form, they would have gravitationally attracted smaller bodies occupying similar or nearby orbits (Figure 2.11c). The combined gravity of these coalesced bodies would have attracted yet more small bodies through a phenomenon known as gravitational focusing. This would then have led to a situation where the growth of one larger planetesimal outpaced and eventually captured its rivals, producing a planetary embryo of a few thousand kilometres in diameter, and a mass of up to  $10^{22}$ – $10^{23}$  kg (Figure 2.11f). Numerous planetary embryos must have developed through this accretion process.

It is important to note when considering planetary formation from planetesimals and planetary embryos that modern models reject the idea that one particular planetary embryo was somehow destined to become a fully formed planet by preferential growth through the addition of planetesimal-sized bodies. Rather, once planetesimal accretion had reached the stage where numerous planetary embryos had been formed, relatively few planetesimals would have remained because only a small number would have escaped the gravitational attraction of these larger planetary embryos. By this stage the embryos could not grow any further through the process of planetesimal capture. Current scientific consensus considers collision and amalgamation of planetary embryos as the likely process that led to the assembly of the planets (Figure 2.11g). If this model is correct, fully assembled, planet-sized bodies would not have emerged until the final stages of this collision and amalgamation process because, in most instances, numerous embryos would have been required to generate masses equivalent to those of the larger terrestrial planets (Figure 2.11h).

## QUESTION 2.4

Estimate how many planetary embryos of mass  $5 \times 10^{22}$  kg would have been required to assemble (a) Mercury, and (b) Earth. The mass of each planet is available in Appendix A, Table A1.

Of course it should not be assumed that planetary bodies developed by the consecutive addition of planetary embryos of one particular size. It is much more probable that embryo collision first produced a number of larger embryos of varying sizes. These, themselves, then collided to create even more massive bodies. Eventually a few large amalgamated bodies, resulting from either a few or many such collisions, finally assembled into the planets. Although we can perhaps never know the sequence of such collisions, and the relative sizes of the bodies involved, what is certain is that the resulting giant impacts would have been cataclysmic events. Moreover, by considering the effects of such events, an insight into some of the key issues regarding the evolution of the terrestrial planets may be gained, such as the development of iron-rich planetary cores, why Mercury has such an anomalously large core, or the formation of the Moon (Sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3).

In summary, the assembly of the terrestrial planets is perhaps best considered as having come about through a few tens of cataclysmic giant impacts involving planetary embryos, rather than by a constant incoming ‘rain’ of millions of small planetesimals that gradually built up over time into a planet-sized body. The implications of the preferred ‘embryo impact’ model are profound, both in terms of the way in which we should think about the origin of Earth and the other terrestrial planets, and in terms of their subsequent evolution.

### 2.3.2 Assembly, melting and differentiation

To generate the type of compositional layering displayed by the Earth requires a differential mobility of the primary constituents. Such differences must occur as a result of the differences in the physical and chemical properties arising from the varying chemistries and mineralogies of these constituents. The process of separating out different constituents as a consequence of their physical or chemical behaviour is known as **differentiation**.

An obvious way of mobilizing constituents is by allowing them to begin to melt. When a rock is heated, different minerals within the rock will melt at different temperatures. This phenomenon is known as **partial melting** and is a key process in the formation of liquid rock or **magma**, as you will see in Chapter 3. Once constituents have been mobilized in this manner, they will begin to migrate under the influence of pressure or gravity.

- Imagine a body the size of a planetary embryo that had accreted from nickel–iron and silicate minerals. Nickel–iron has a density of about  $7.9 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ , and a melting point some hundreds of degrees higher than silicates. What would happen if temperatures within this planetary embryo were increased to a point at which the melting of silicates began?
- Since nickel–iron has a higher melting point it would remain solid after the silicates had begun to melt and, because it is much denser than any silicate minerals, it would begin to sink towards the centre of the body.

If temperatures then continued to rise beyond the melting point of nickel–iron itself, an emulsion of liquid silicate and liquid nickel–iron would form (an emulsion is a mixture in which one substance is suspended in another). However, separation would still occur because the globules of nickel–iron would not mix into the silicate (because the two are immiscible) and so would continue to sink under gravity towards the centre of the body. In effect, the nickel–iron would ‘rain out’ from the emulsion towards the centre of the body. This is known as the ‘rain-out’ model and is a process of differentiation that is thought to lead to the first stage of core formation and the development of associated layering.

- Consider what would happen if a fast-moving object such as a planetesimal collides with a larger one, such as a planetary embryo, during the accretion process. (Hint: Think of the energy involved.)
- Whilst some of the kinetic energy will be retained by fragments flung away from the impact site, a considerable amount of the original kinetic energy of the colliding bodies will be converted to heat.

The possibility of such melting processes operating during the final stages of planetary growth is likely because of the heat generated by the collision of planetary embryos. The energy released is dependent upon their relative velocities and masses. Consequently, the energy released from collisions between planetary embryos would, in many instances, be sufficient to cause a considerable degree of melting. In those instances where particularly large embryos are involved, it may have been enough to melt entirely their amalgamated masses. In those cases, the resulting combined body would be able to differentiate due to its molten state, and so begin to develop a core–mantle layering (Figure 2.11h).

According to the ‘rain-out’ model, it is estimated that once core formation had begun, it was an extremely rapid process taking only a few tens of thousands of years to reach completion. Such rapidity, however, has important implications regarding the timing of core formation. It is probable that long before the planets were fully assembled, some differentiation and separation of a nickel–iron component had already begun within the planetary embryos (Figure 2.11f). This process became accelerated through melting resulting from earlier embryo–embryo collisions. However, the formation of the core of an assembled planet, such as Earth, could not have been fully completed until all of the iron delivered via impacting bodies had arrived. Therefore, the formation of planetary cores must have occurred simultaneously with the assembly of the planet. It would have begun at the point at which the larger planetary embryos became molten and began to differentiate, and continued until the stage where amalgamation of these embryos had assembled a planet in which the separation of all the delivered nickel–iron could reach its completion.

Given that the other terrestrial planets are thought to be of a broadly similar bulk composition to Earth (i.e. silicates, iron and nickel), albeit in different proportions, the processes that formed Earth’s core are also likely to have operated within these planets. However, such separation processes are not restricted to silicates and metals, but could also operate on bodies composed of rock and ice, for example most of the satellites of the outer planets. In these cases, it would be the denser rocky material that would gravitate centrewards and form a rocky core when the ice components became molten or soft.

It is important to realize that the difference in composition between the Earth’s crust and mantle, although significant, is much less than that between the mantle and the

nickel–iron core. In both mantle and crust the dominant minerals are silicates. Chemical differences between the two arise from later partial melting of the mantle which occurred, and continues to occur, under special circumstances (these will be discussed in Chapter 3). When the mantle is partially melted, certain elements are mobilized more readily than others into the resulting liquid fraction. This process of differentiation involving exchange of elements between these solid and molten states is known as **element partitioning**. It is an important mechanism by which certain elements first become concentrated into the melt and then added into the overlying crust through migration via magma or other fluids. If continued over time, this concentration and migration will gradually augment the difference in composition between crust and mantle. This process has been fundamental in creating the chemical and mineralogical differences currently observed between Earth's mantle and crust.

#### QUESTION 2.5

Referring back to the completed spidergram (Figure 2.28), can you now offer an explanation as to why iron and nickel should be depleted in both crustal and mantle material when compared with chondrite composition?

### 2.3.3 Evidence from the Moon

The origin of Earth's Moon has long been the subject of debate. Seismic data collected by detectors deployed during the Apollo landings, which began in 1969 reveal that if the Moon has any core at all, it must be very small. If it is present, it is probably composed of nickel–iron, or nickel–iron and sulfur – like Earth's core. This lack of a core, or presence of only a small core, represents a significant difference between the Moon and the other terrestrial planets (Figure 2.8). Moreover, this lack of a large core yields important information regarding the timing of planetary accretion and differentiation of the Earth's layered structure. Analyses of lunar rock samples reveal that they share some very similar geochemical and **isotopic signatures** to analogous materials found on Earth, so lending support to the idea that both were created from material condensing in the same area of the solar nebula. However, their compositions differ markedly in other ways (Table 2.5).

The ratio of element abundances in the right-hand column of Table 2.5b demonstrates that the Moon is relatively depleted in volatile elements and enriched in refractory elements. Similarly, it is highly depleted in siderophile elements, since these would have already been scavenged by an earlier differentiation within the planetary embryos prior to the Moon-forming impact.

Relative to the Earth, the Moon is depleted in volatile elements such as K, Na and Rb but enriched in refractory elements such as Sr and U. The current theory to explain these similarities and differences is that the Moon was generated from the accretion of debris that was ejected from a late-stage giant impact between two planetary embryos (Figure 2.12). This seems to have been a very unusual result of a giant impact because in most cases the embryos should have merged into a single body. Moreover, it is likely that this Moon-forming impact, was the final giant impact to have affected Earth, since any subsequent giant impact would have almost certainly destroyed the Moon, or allowed it to escape. Whatever the case, this model has important implications for the origin and timing of layering in both bodies since the theory requires that both embryos had already become at least partially differentiated due to earlier impact heating (Figure 2.11f). In fact, the low abundances of siderophile

**Table 2.5a** Comparison of oxide abundances in primitive meteorites, Earth and Moon compositions (average crust + mantle material).

Wt% oxide	CI chondrite (primitive meteorite)	Earth (crust + mantle)	Moon (crust + mantle)
SiO <sub>2</sub>	34.68	49.9	43.4
TiO <sub>2</sub> *	0.07	0.16	0.3
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	3.28	3.64	6
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	30.42	8.8	14.3
MgO	25.07	35.1	32
CaO	2.67	2.89	4.5
Na <sub>2</sub> O	0.5	0.34	0.09
K <sub>2</sub> O*	0.05	0.02	0.01

\* Elements that behave as a major element in one group of rocks, and as trace elements in others.

**Table 2.5b** Comparison of elemental abundances in primitive meteorites, Earth and Moon compositions (average crust + mantle material).

	CI chondrite (primitive meteorite)	Earth (crust + mantle)	Moon (crust + mantle)	Ratio of trace element abundance Moon/Earth
Volatile <sup>a</sup> elements				
K (ppm)	545	180	83	0.46
Rb (ppm)	2.32	0.55	0.28	0.51
Cs (ppb)	279	18	12	0.67
Moderately volatile				
Mn (ppm)	1500	1000	1200	1.20
Refractory elements				
Cr (ppm)	3975	3000	4200	1.40
Th (ppb)	30	80	112	1.40
Eu (ppb)	87	131	210	1.60
La (ppb)	367	551	900	1.63
Sr (ppm)	7.26	17.8	30	1.69
U (ppb)	12	18	33	1.83
Siderophile <sup>b</sup> elements				
Ni (ppm)	16500	2000	400	0.200
Mo (ppb)	1380	59	1.4	0.024
Ir (ppb)	710	3	0.01	0.003
Ge (ppb)	48000	1200	3.5	0.003

<sup>a</sup> ‘Volatile’ refers to elements such as potassium (K) rather than gases.

<sup>b</sup> Siderophile elements are those which, when molten, have an affinity to, or combine with (i.e. scavenge) iron (for instance Ni), and so are removed from the silicates during differentiation processes.

Note: some elements are ppm and some are ppb.

elements such as Ni (Table 2.5b) within the Moon's mantle and crust can be attributed to the fact that these smaller concentrations were derived from the already depleted outer layers (i.e. mantle material) of the two impacting embryos.

- How is the sequence of events described above consistent with the observation that the Moon's core (if any) is very small relative to the size of the whole Moon?
- The Moon formed from mantle material derived from the colliding, and partially differentiated planetary embryos. This mantle material was already depleted in Ni, Fe, and S due to the development of cores within the embryos. There would have been relatively little Ni, Fe and S left to differentiate inwards once the Moon had formed.

For the Moon's crust and mantle, this depletion was probably further augmented by the fact that it also became further differentiated immediately after its formation. Moreover, the Moon's depletion in volatile elements, relative to the Earth, can be explained if the Moon accreted from the partially vaporized debris coalescing after the impact. In these circumstances the more volatile elements would have had the opportunity to escape into space prior to accretion.

Interestingly, a giant impact following partial differentiation of planetary embryos may also explain the anomalously large size of Mercury's core. In this case the impact between two such embryos, which had already developed a core–mantle layering, could have resulted in the amalgamation of the core materials, and partial vaporization of their silicate-rich mantles. A proportion of the vaporized mantle materials may subsequently have been dispersed and lost into space. This may explain why Mercury became relatively enriched in core-forming (i.e. Ni and Fe) materials, depleted in the lighter, mantle-forming silicates and, unlike the Earth, developed no moon.

- Given the arguments regarding planetary accretion, volatile elements, and their behaviour following giant impacts, can you suggest a reason why the concentrations of Rb, K, and Na differ between chondrite and Earth's mantle? (Hint: refer back to the spidergrams in Figures 2.3 and 2.28).
- Compared with chondritic composition, Earth's mantle is depleted in Rb, K and Na. This cannot be explained in terms of segregation of these elements into the core, as was the case for Fe and Ni depletion, since the core does not contain these elements. Instead, these depletions can be best explained using a similar argument to that offered to explain the Moon's depletion in volatiles. During the final stages of the assembly of Earth, the amalgamated planetary embryos were beginning to differentiate into layered bodies with dense cores, and with elements such as K, Na and Rb segregating toward the surface. Continuing impacts would have partially vaporized the surface layers, and some of the more volatile elements, including Rb, K and Na, (and probably Zn) may have been lost to space. Later in Earth history, the segregation of material to form oceanic and continental crust would have further augmented removal of these elements from the mantle. However, the spidergram patterns reveal that dips at Rb and K, and to a lesser extent Na and Zn, also occur in the continental and oceanic crust patterns. These dips reflect the fact that the mantle had already become depleted in volatiles prior to the segregation that formed the crust.



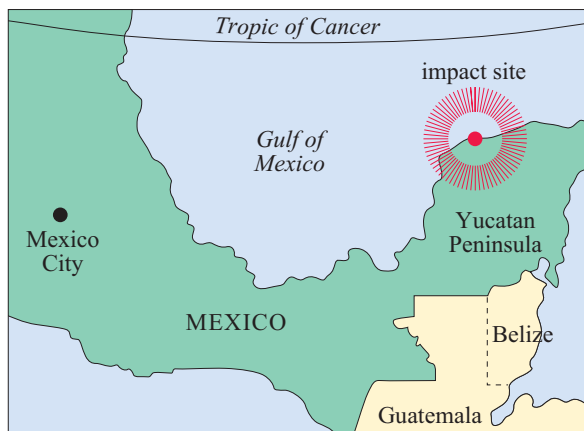
## 2.4 Turning up the heat – how to ‘cook’ a planet

The preceding sections have indicated that a planetary embryo, or planet, needs to be heated before differentiation can occur and layering can begin to develop. We have already discussed the role of impact heating during the accretion and assembly of the terrestrial planets, but there are several sources of heat that can occur during the evolution of a planetary body. The most important are, on the one hand, the so-called ‘primordial heat sources’ which develop in the early stages of planetary evolution (i.e. those associated with accretion, collision and, as will be described, core formation), and on the other hand, radiogenic and tidal heating processes that can operate long after the planet has been formed.

### 2.4.1 Origins of primordial heat, differentiation and core formation

We can observe the effects of heating from more recent impacts on Earth from its results in impact craters and the formation of droplets of glass called **tektites**, which were formed by instantaneous melting of target rock (i.e. Earth’s surface) and an impactor (this process will be examined in detail in Chapter 4). However, even the largest of these impacts for which we have evidence on Earth today, such as the Chicxulub impact site in the Gulf of Mexico (Figure 2.13), would have been tiny compared with those experienced during planetesimal–embryo and embryo–embryo collisions. These giant impacts would have been the main process of heating and melting these primordial bodies.

During their formation and early existence, all the terrestrial planets must have experienced this **accretional heating**. However, the intensity of this bombardment would have waned over time as the remaining debris was collected by the growing planetary embryos. This final stage of bombardment was probably the result of capturing debris derived from earlier giant impacts during the accretion phase, together with any remaining planetesimals and smaller debris. Once the planets had become assembled, the later impacts would, on average, have been progressively smaller and less frequent. Material delivered during this later bombardment stage could, therefore, really only have delivered heat to the planet’s newly formed surface crust.



**Figure 2.13** Locality map of Chicxulub, an impact feature 200 km in diameter, which occurred when a meteorite about 10 km in diameter hit the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico approximately 65 Ma ago. The effects of this huge impact may have been responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs and up to 50% of the faunal and floral species living at that time.

Throughout the later bombardment, the surface of the magma ocean would have continually chilled and solidified through radiative heat loss to space. But this thin skin would have been continually ruptured by vigorous convection in the underlying molten fraction, the associated escape of gases, and by other incoming impactors or previous impact debris falling back to the surface. Escaping gases would have supplied an early atmosphere, or else helped replenish or replace that which had been blasted away by the shock of further impacts. Accordingly, early crusts on magma oceans must have been created and destroyed many times. Whether such remnants of early planetary crusts survive today depends on how active the planet surface has been since major bombardment ended. Active planets such as the Earth are continually re-surfaced, and any ancient material, including the evidence of impact sites, is likely to have since been substantially modified or more probably entirely destroyed. However, tracts of ancient crust on the Moon and analogous terrains on several other planetary bodies do appear to record the waning phases of bombardment.

One of the consequences of ‘cooking’ a body in this manner, and allowing the core and mantle to separate, is that the ‘falling inwards’ of the nickel–iron-rich fraction to form the core would release gravitational potential energy (in the same way that much of the energy of a dropped stone is released in the form of heat and sound when it hits the ground). The gravitational energy lost by the inward movement of nickel–iron within the differentiating molten planetary body would be converted first to kinetic energy and then into thermal energy. It is estimated that the core-forming process would have contributed significantly to a planet’s primordial heating (although it would still have been an order of magnitude less than that generated by a collision with a large planetary embryo). This core-forming event is thought to have been largely completed very early in Earth’s history but, rather than being a single catastrophic event, it is likely to have been spasmodic, its rate increasing each time the planet’s mass was increased by addition of partially differentiated material from another giant impact.

Since both bombardment and core formation relate to events that occurred early in the history of planetary evolution, they are primordial processes and the heat generated by them was primordial heat. However, if these primordial heat sources had remained the only way of ‘cooking’ the planets, their intensity would have waned through time due to continual radiative heat loss to space. As you will learn later, the efficiency of this heat loss is also proportional to the size of the body (Section 2.4.3). The Moon, for instance, has lost most of its primordial heat. Even so, primordial heat stored from these early planet-forming processes is still thought to contribute a significant fraction of the internal heat energy of larger planets, such as Earth, but it is by no means the only source of energy within these planetary bodies. Since heat drives fundamental processes such as volcanism (Chapter 3), the fact that some terrestrial-like bodies have remained volcanically active for several billions of years whilst others have not, requires further explanation. In order to understand how such volcanic activity might have continued late into a planet’s history, rather than diminishing over time, we need to consider other processes of heat generation.

### 2.4.2 Tidal heating

One heat source known to be generated within planetary bodies is tidal heating. This is created by the distortion of shape resulting from mutual gravitational attraction. These effects are readily observed upon the Earth’s oceans where the attraction created by the Sun and Moon produce ‘bulges’ in the ocean water-masses which are then dragged around the planet as the Earth rotates. This produces the ebb and flow of

tides observed at coastal locations. In much the same way, the solid Earth is also distorted by these forces so producing ‘tides’, with a maximum vertical displacement of its rocky surface of up to 1 m. This deformation causes heating within the planet, though precisely where this heating is concentrated depends upon a planet’s internal properties. In the Earth’s case, it is thought to occur largely within the crust and mantle.

#### QUESTION 2.6

The current rate of heating generated within the Earth by tidal distortion is estimated at  $3.0 \times 10^{19} \text{ J yr}^{-1}$ . Given the mass of the Earth is approximately  $6.0 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}$ , determine the rate of tidal heating. Express your answer in  $\text{W kg}^{-1}$  ( $1 \text{ W} = 1 \text{ J s}^{-1}$ ).

One consequence of tidal interaction in the Earth–Moon system is to have slowed down the Earth’s rotation over time. This effect may be confirmed by counting growth rings on fossil organisms from the distant past (approximately 400 Ma ago), and comparing them with those recorded in modern living analogues. 400 Ma ago there were about 21.5 hours in a day, and 400 days in a year. An additional effect of this slowing of Earth’s rotation is that the Moon’s orbit is receding from the Earth at about 3 cm per year. Since tidal heating is proportional to the Earth–Moon distance, its influence must have diminished over time. Even so, tidal heating, past or present, probably never accounted for a major proportion of Earth’s heat budget. However, its importance elsewhere should not be underestimated because it is known to be of great importance in bodies such as the satellites of the giant planets Jupiter and Saturn. The most spectacular example is Io (Figure 1.19), a satellite of Jupiter, where active volcanism is generated by tidal effects created by the planet.

### 2.4.3 Radiogenic heating

During the latter half of the 19th century, the eminent physicist William Thomson (Lord Kelvin, 1824–1907) attempted to determine the age of the Earth. He attempted this by considering that it had cooled slowly after its formation from a molten body. In effect, he was assuming the main sources of energy were from primordial heat and tidal heating. Taking many factors into account, including the mass of the Earth, the current rate of heat loss at its surface (i.e. surface heat flux), and the melting points of various constituents, he concluded that our planet could not be much older than about 20–40 Ma. This conclusion was contrary to the ideas of eminent geologists such as James Hutton (1726–1797) and Charles Lyle (1797–1875) who had already argued that immense spans of time were required to complete the changes produced by the action of **tectonic**, erosional and depositional processes. It was also greatly at odds with the emerging theories of the evolution of life because scholars such as Darwin also argued for much longer periods based upon the evidence of species. As a consequence, a ‘heated’ controversy continued for many years. Even though Kelvin’s calculations did not gain wide acceptance with geologists, he was a powerful scientific influence of the time, and it was not until much later in the 1950s that accurate **radiometric dating** experiments eventually proved him wrong. These experiments were conducted on primordial lead in meteorites (Box 2.7) and demonstrated that the formation of the Earth occurred at about 4600 Ma ago (4.6 Ga ago). So why did Kelvin get the answer so wrong? The answer lies in the decay of unstable isotopes of certain radioactive elements, the discovery of which was not made until some decades after Kelvin’s initial calculations. An Irish physicist John Joly (1857–1933) was one of the first to

suggest radioactive decay, leading to radiogenic heating, was an important heat source within the Earth. It is now known that this radioactive decay creates an important, independent source of heat within the Earth which supplements that remaining from the primordial sources. This radiogenic heating is something which Kelvin could not possibly have known about when making his calculations.

**BOX 2.7 RADIOACTIVE DECAY AND HALF-LIVES**

The ‘half-life’ of a radioactive element is defined as the time taken for half of the original radioactive atoms of that element to decay spontaneously to form another element or isotope. If the rate of decay is rapid, then the half-life will be relatively short, as is the case for  $^{14}\text{C}$  (half-life 5700 years) which is often used for radiocarbon dating of archaeological artefacts and materials. It takes only a few half-lives for the concentrations of an original radiogenic element to fall to negligible quantities. This is why  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating is no use for dating ancient geological materials – after only 8 half-lives (45 600 years), less than 0.4% of any original  $^{14}\text{C}$  would remain. If radiogenic elements are not replenished by the decay of other radiogenic isotopes, then they will eventually be lost altogether.

This is thought to have been the case with the decay of  $^{26}\text{Al}$ , which has a half-life of 0.73 Ma. Studies of CI carbonaceous chondrites suggest that a significant proportion of the aluminium present at the time of condensation of the solar nebula was the unstable isotope  $^{26}\text{Al}$ . This was originally created during a supernova explosion pre-dating the birth of our Solar System, and cannot be replenished by the spontaneous decay of any other radiogenic elements. The decay of  $^{26}\text{Al}$  may have contributed significantly to the heating of planetary embryos but, because of its relatively short half-life compared to the age of the Solar System, any remaining  $^{26}\text{Al}$  has long since vanished within the terrestrial planets. Whilst such short-lived isotopes will have been important heat sources during the early stages of terrestrial planet evolution, study of Earth materials indicates that it is the isotopes of the elements uranium (U), thorium (Th) and potassium (K) which are responsible for most of the radiogenic heating that has occurred throughout the history of our planet. These isotopes all have particularly long half-lives (see Table 2.6), and were present in sufficient quantities after condensation and accretion to ensure that they have remained abundant within present-day Earth.

**Table 2.6** Half-lives of common isotopes in the Earth’s crust and mantle. The continuing decay of these isotopes is an important internal heat source within the Earth today.

Isotope	Half-life ( $10^9\text{yr}$ )	Present rate of heat generation in the Earth ( $10^{-12}\text{ W kg}^{-1}$ ) <sup>a</sup>
$^{235}\text{U}$	0.71	0.04
$^{238}\text{U}$	4.50	0.96
$^{232}\text{Th}$	13.9	1.04
$^{40}\text{K}$	1.30	2.8

<sup>a</sup> Values are in kg of average Earth materials, *not* of the isotope concerned.

The heating effect of radioactive decay can be illustrated by the example of  $^{235}\text{U}$ . The parent isotope  $^{235}\text{U}$  decays through a series of  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -particle emissions to the daughter isotope  $^{207}\text{Pb}$ .  $\alpha$ -particle collisions and  $\beta$ -particle collisions with adjacent nuclei during this process create heating through the loss of kinetic energy. The data in Table 2.6 indicate that, after  $0.71 \times 10^9$  years, half of the  $^{235}\text{U}$  originally present will have decayed to  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  and the remaining  $^{235}\text{U}$  will continue to halve every  $0.71 \times 10^9$  years. By determining the proportion of parent and daughter isotopes within a mineral originally containing only parent isotope, it is possible to calculate how long has elapsed since decay began. This is the basic principle of radiometric dating. For instance if a radioactive element X has experienced two half-lives since the formation of the Earth (about 4600 Ma ago) the amount remaining ( $X_{\text{rem}}$ ) can be expressed as:

$$X_{\text{rem}} = \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \text{ or } \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^2 \quad (2.1)$$

Hence  $X_{\text{rem}} = 0.25$  of the original amount after 2 half-lives.

Most of the common minerals contain small amounts of unstable isotopes, the most important of which are summarized in Table 2.6. Their decay to form more stable isotopes releases tiny increments of heat, as described in Box 2.7. This decay has produced a continuous source of heat within our planet since Earth's formation and, by analogy, also within the other terrestrial planets and the Moon. Of course, the total amount of heat produced will depend upon the concentration and type of radiogenic isotopes present in the constituent layers of the planet, and the mass of suitable material present in its different layers. Or, to put it another way, a smaller planetary body with fewer radiogenic elements will produce significantly less internal radiogenic heat than a larger, more radiogenic planetary mass. In addition, the efficiency of heat loss through the planet's surface will depend upon available surface area, which means that larger planets will cool more slowly than smaller ones (Box 2.8). Finally, whilst the rate of radiogenic decay is constant for each individual isotope system (Box 2.7), the total amount of radioactive decay, and hence heat generation, will decline over time as the reserves of the original radioactive materials are gradually used up. This gradual depletion of radioactive materials is expressed in 'half-lives', and each isotopic decay system has its own unique half-life.

#### QUESTION 2.7

- What proportion of the original  $^{40}\text{K}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$  currently remains since the formation of the Earth? (Hint: using the data in Table 2.6, determine how many half-lives of  $^{40}\text{K}$  and  $^{232}\text{Th}$  have expired since the Earth was formed.)
- Based upon the data in Table 2.6, what was the amount of radiogenic heating in the Earth 4.6 Ga ago, and how does this value compare with that of today?

**BOX 2.8 SURFACE AREA TO VOLUME RATIO**

It is a geometrical fact that larger bodies have a lower surface area per unit volume than smaller bodies. This can be expressed as the surface area to volume ratio. Consider two spheres, one with a radius ( $r$ ) of 1 m, another with a radius of 10 m.

$$\text{Surface area of a sphere is } 4\pi r^2 \quad (2.2)$$

$$\text{Volume of a sphere is } \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 \quad (2.3)$$

Using the above equations:

The surface area of the smaller sphere is 12.56 m<sup>2</sup>, and that of the larger is 1256 m<sup>2</sup>.

The volume of the smaller sphere is 4.19 m<sup>3</sup>, and that of the larger is 4190 m<sup>3</sup>.

$$\text{Surface area to volume ratio} = \frac{\text{surface area}}{\text{volume}} \quad (2.4)$$

$$\text{For the smaller sphere, surface area to volume ratio} = \frac{12.56}{4.19} = 3.0 \text{ (to 2 sig. figs)}$$

$$\text{For the larger sphere, surface area to volume ratio} = \frac{1256}{4190} = 0.30 \text{ (to 2 sig. figs)}$$

To summarize, the surface area to volume ratio of the smaller sphere is ten times that of the larger sphere. Therefore, because there is more surface area per unit mass for the internal heat to escape from, cooling through surface heat loss will be much more efficient for the smaller sphere (since there is more surface area, per unit mass, for the heat to escape through).

The elements U and Th and their radiogenic isotopes are particularly concentrated into the silicate-dominated outer layers of the Earth, and in particular within the continental crust. They are thought to be virtually absent in the core. As a result, the radiogenic heat produced per unit mass of the continental crust is, on average, over one hundred times greater than that of the underlying mantle. In effect, this means that the overall radiogenic heating budget is roughly split equally between mantle and crust despite the much greater mass of mantle material. It is the decay of these long-lived isotopes that provides sufficient heat energy to keep the Earth geologically active. This is achieved through constant convective and conductive heat loss, and is manifest at the surface as radiative heat loss into space. Therefore, the surface heat flux is not simply the slow cooling of a once molten body, as originally envisaged by Kelvin.

- Using the value determined in Question 2.6, what proportion of Earth's surface heat flux loss is due to radioactive decay, compared with the  $1.5 \times 10^{-13} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  created by tidal heating effects?
- By summing the four values quoted in Table 2.6, the present rate of radiogenic heating is about  $5 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ , which is about 30 times greater than that attributable to estimates of tidal heating, and so represents a much more important source of Earth's present-day internal heating.



We can see, therefore, that radiogenic heating is a very important source of heat generation. This heat is slowly lost through the surface, so cooling the planet. However, it is important to remember that the planet is also cooling by the loss of the primordial heat (Section 2.4.1) and, it turns out, that radiogenic and primordial heating make approximately equal contributions to the total present-day heat loss from the surface of the Earth. Geological activity on Venus may also be the result of internal radiogenic heating, because Venus is of a similar size to Earth and is thought to have a crust, mantle and core of comparable size. The smaller terrestrial planets Mercury and Mars may also have been geologically active in the past through heat loss supplemented by radiogenic heating. However, their smaller size, coupled with their greater surface area to volume ratio (Box 2.8), means that whilst they may have the same proportion of radiogenic isotopes as Earth, these would have been present in smaller amounts, and the heat they produce would be more efficiently radiated to space. These factors are compounded in the case of Mercury which contains a large and presumably unradiogenic core (Figure 2.8). By contrast, the small core and proportionally thicker mantle of Mars may have enabled it to have remained geologically active for much longer than its small size might otherwise dictate. The geological history of these planets is discussed further in following sections.

#### **2.4.4 Heat transfer and its effects within the terrestrial planets**

Layering in the other terrestrial planets is known to exist, and must have arisen by processes similar to those that created layering within Earth. The presence of this layering has been inferred by careful observation of data collected from space probe fly-bys. In the case of the Moon these data have been augmented by seismic monitoring experiments deployed during the Apollo missions of the late-1960s and early-1970s. The nature of surface materials and topography of the terrestrial planets can also provide important clues about the nature and development of planetary layering and subsequent geological history.

Having already discussed how planets came to differentiate into separate layers through the effects of various heating processes, and the processes by which the heating was (and continues to be) generated, it is now necessary to discuss how this heating might affect a planet once the core, mantle and crust have been formed. In the previous section it was stated that heat generated within a planet by tidal effects or radioactive decay, as well as the primordial heat, was eventually radiated into space from its surface. But how does this internal heat get to the surface? Three main mechanisms operate within a planet such as Earth; these are conduction, convection and advection.

##### **Conduction**

This is perhaps the most familiar since it is the process of heat transfer experienced when the handle of a pan becomes hot. The heat is conducted from the stove to the pan, and then to its handle. Different materials, such as rocks of various compositions, will conduct heat at different rates, and the efficiency of heat transfer in this manner is known as heat conductivity. This method of heat transfer is the most important in the outermost layer (i.e. crust).

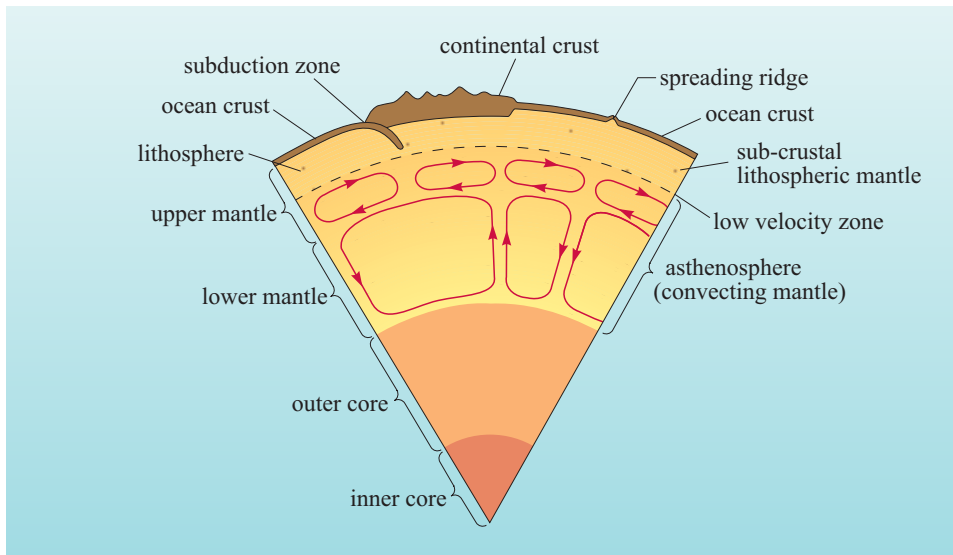
## Convection

This process relies on the fact that most materials expand when heated and, as a result, become less dense (i.e. more buoyant), allowing them to rise up through more dense surrounding material. In the case of a planet, this causes hot, deep material to rise up through the cooler outer regions during which the material gives up its heat, thus transferring heat to the cooler regions. Convection is a particularly efficient method of heat transfer, but the medium through which transfer takes place must be fluid. It should be noted, however, that the term ‘fluid’ describes any substance capable of flowing, and is not just restricted to liquids and gases. Under the correct conditions, solids, and even rocks can flow, albeit at a very slow rate. Thus, over long periods of geological time, the effects of such solid-state flow become a highly significant way of transferring heat toward a planet’s surface.

In Section 2.2.2 it was stated that the Earth’s outer core must be liquid since it does not conduct S-waves, and because the convection currents within it are thought to be responsible for generating our planet’s magnetic field. We know that the overlying mantle is solid because it conducts both P-waves and S-waves. However, the silicate rock that comprises the mantle does flow when pressure and temperature become sufficiently high. In fact, some peridotites contain highly deformed crystals which are thought to be indicative of this flow process. The process itself is known as **solid-state convection** and, whilst rates may be no more than a few centimetres per year, it is the most efficient form of heat transfer within all but the outermost part of the mantle. Near the Earth’s surface the rocks are too cold and rigid to permit convection, so conduction is the most significant process. The zone within the mantle in which both temperature and pressure are sufficient to permit flow is known as the **asthenosphere** (from the Greek *asthenos* meaning weak), and this comprises much of the mantle thickness down to the core (Figure 2.14). Above the asthenosphere the uppermost mantle and all of the overlying crust is solid and rigid and is given the name **lithosphere**. It is important to realize that the difference between the asthenosphere and lithosphere is not the same as the boundary that defines the difference between the mantle and the crust (i.e. the Moho) which is primarily a compositional change (Section 2.2.3). Instead, the division between asthenosphere and lithosphere is based upon their physical properties.

The lithosphere is an outer, rigid layer through which heat is transferred by conduction. The asthenosphere is an underlying, mechanically weaker layer that is capable of flow, and in which the principal process of heat transfer is convection.

The top of the convecting mantle can be identified using seismic data since the velocity profiles of both P-waves and S-waves briefly decrease through a thin layer known as the **low velocity zone** (LVZ), or more strictly low speed zone, created due to its partially liquid nature (Figure 2.4). Here, the drop in velocities is thought to be the result of tiny amounts (<0.1%) of partial melting of peridotite in the upper mantle. This melt collects in the interstices between crystals and, through this partial fluidity, aids in augmenting mobility of the mantle material. Importantly, at depths below Earth’s LVZ, the pressure created by self-compression and the associated changes in crystal structure or mineralogical composition (Section 2.2.1) prevent further melting of the mantle. Thus, seismic velocities rise, and mobility is entirely due to solid-state flow.



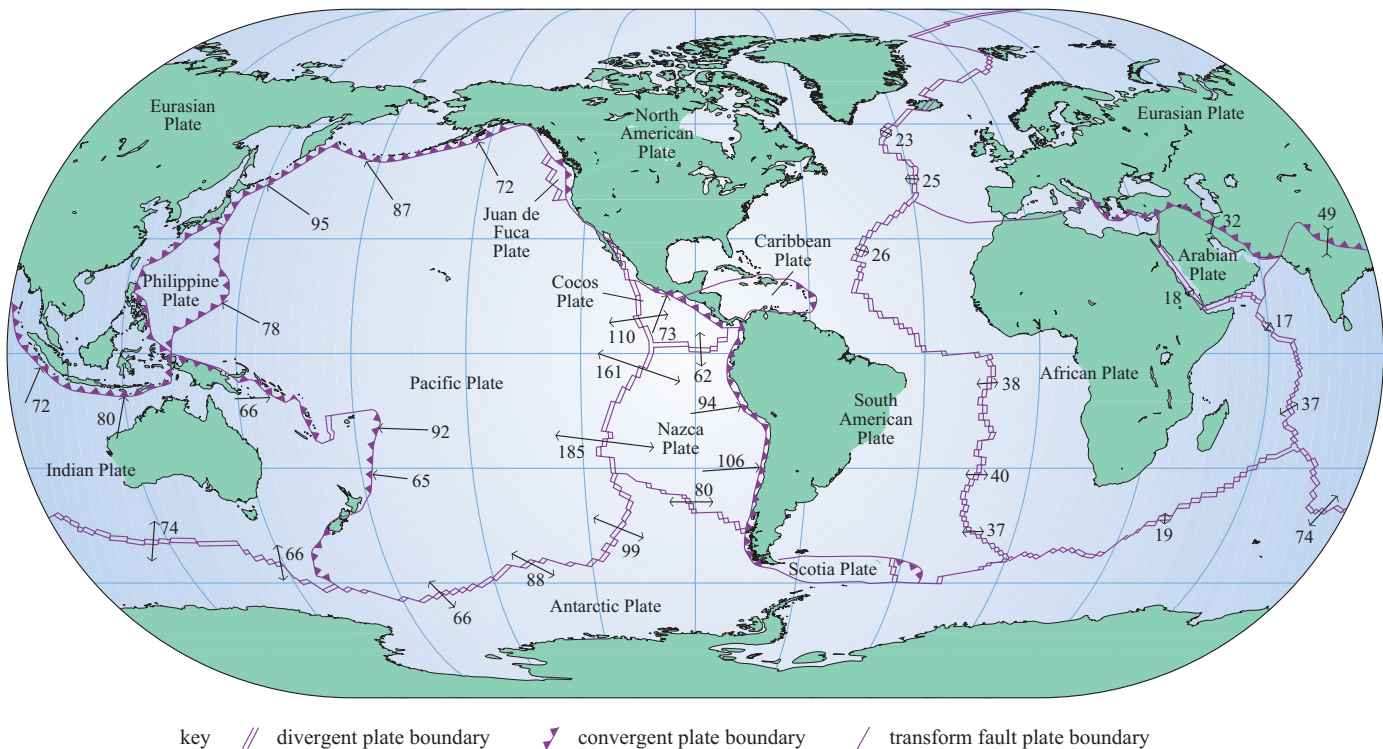
**Figure 2.14** Section through the Earth showing the division of the mantle into the uppermost rigid lithosphere, and the mobile, convecting asthenosphere (not to scale).

### Advection

The final process of transferring heat is by physically moving molten material (magma) up through fractures in the lithosphere. This process is termed advection and operates whether the magma spreads out at the surface as a lava flow or, if it is injected, whether it cools and crystallizes within the lithosphere itself. The effect is the same in both cases since heat is transferred by the molten rock from deeper levels where melting is taking place, to shallower levels where it solidifies, losing its heat by conduction into the overlying crust. Any planetary body which exhibits, or has exhibited, volcanic activity must have lost some of its internal heat in this manner.

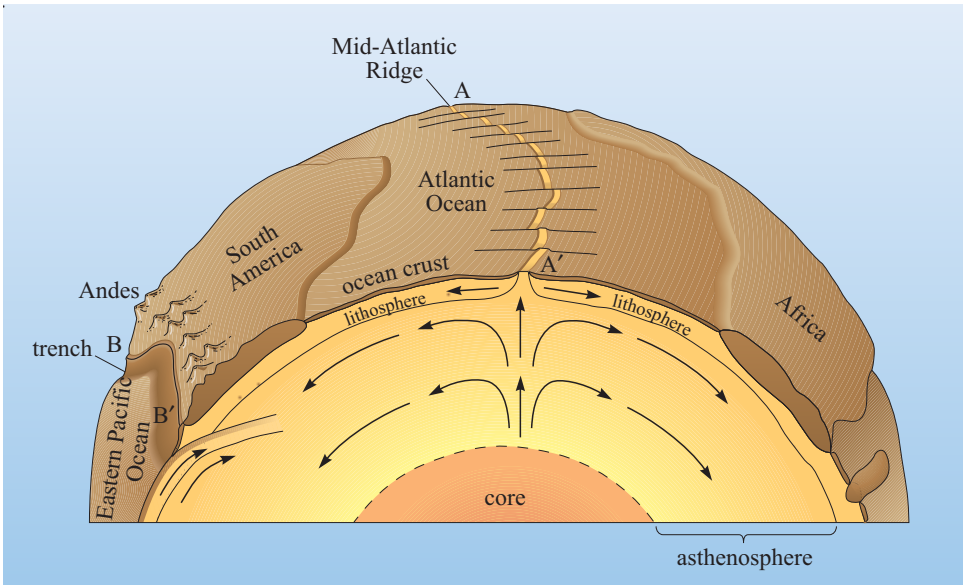
### 2.4.5 Heat loss and plate tectonics

The importance of the difference between the properties of the lithosphere and asthenosphere became apparent during the 1960s with the development of the theory of plate tectonics. This theory recognizes that the different parts of Earth's lithosphere, comprising the non-convecting upper mantle together with the overlying oceanic or continental crust, can move relative to each other as a series of rigid plates (Figure 2.15). Current rates of movement are mostly between 50 mm and 100 mm per year, and the motion is thought to be a response to convection and heat loss in the mantle below the lithosphere. The movement of Earth's tectonic plates is enabled by the fact that new crustal material is added incrementally along **mid-ocean ridge** systems, and re-absorbed into the mantle at **subduction zones** that are associated with deep trenches at the edges of ocean basins. The main features of the outer layers of the Earth that give rise to plate tectonic motion are summarized in Figure 2.16. A consequence of this generation and destruction of ocean lithosphere is that it recycles material within the upper mantle. **Plate recycling** in this manner effectively adds hot material to the lithosphere, and removes and re-absorbs cold, solidified material, and in doing so assists in the process of the surfaceward transfer of heat. A further consequence of tectonic recycling is that it can resurface large areas of a planet's lithospheric crust and, in the process, destroy the record of previous impact cratering or other surface-modifying processes.



**Figure 2.15** Map showing the global distribution of plates and plate boundaries. The black arrows and numbers give the direction and speed of relative motion between plates. Speeds of motion are given in  $\text{mm yr}^{-1}$ .

Another topographic effect observed on Earth is the generation of broad surface uplifts up to 1000 km across, which produce bulges of hundreds of metres elevation in the overlying lithosphere. These are apparently unrelated to plate boundaries and are thought to be created by pipe-like zones of anomalously hot material upwelling from deep within the mantle. The exact cause of these upwellings, or **mantle plumes** as they are more commonly called, is not yet known but they clearly represent another process by which heat may be transferred from deep within the Earth. Surface uplift occurs not only because there is a surfaceward (i.e. dynamic) movement of mantle material, but also because this rising mass of hotter mantle material expands due to the release of pressure in its upward journey. In addition, the release of pressure can result in the melting of the upwelling mantle (i.e. decompression melting), so such bulges are often associated with **hot spots** because the escape of this melted material produces volcanic activity. The best examples of present-day hot-spot volcanism related to mantle plumes are the volcanic islands of Hawaii and Iceland. Similar uplifted regions associated with volcanic constructions have been recognized on the surface of Mars in the form of the Tharsis ‘bulge’ (Section 2.5.5).



**Figure 2.16** A vertically exaggerated model showing the main elements leading to plate tectonic movement on Earth, and showing the relationships between three plates: the African plate, the South American plate and the Pacific Ocean plate, called the Nazcan plate (beneath the eastern Pacific Ocean). Since the lithosphere is rigid and comprises the crust and uppermost mantle, heat transfer is primarily by conduction, with a component of volcanically driven advection. The asthenosphere is weak and comprises the underlying convecting mantle. Lithospheric plates move apart at constructive plate margins (mid-ocean ridge systems), where material is continually added incrementally by volcanism (A–A'), and is destroyed at destructive plate margins where one plate is forced below another and reabsorbed into the asthenospheric mantle at depth (B–B').

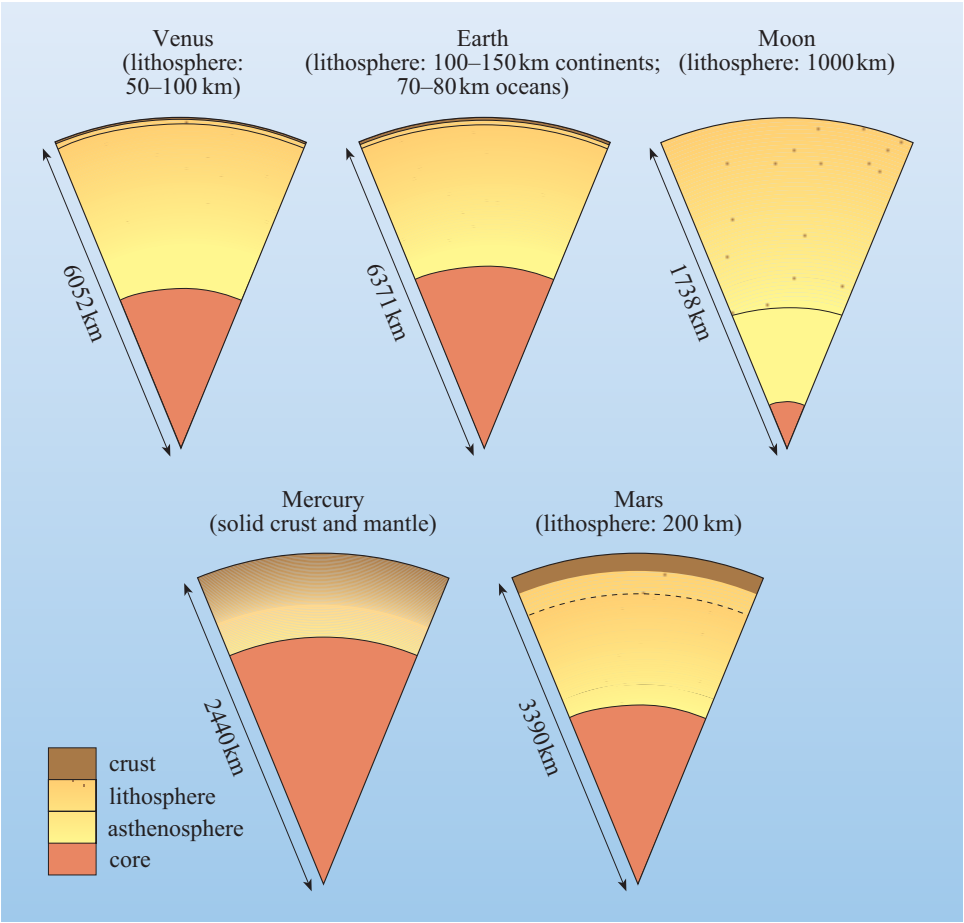
**QUESTION 2.8**

- (a) By completing Table 2.7, indicate which of the following list of Earth's layers are defined seismically, and which by other means. What properties do the differences between these layers represent?
- (b) Briefly outline the properties that the differences between these layers represent.

**Table 2.7** How the layers within Earth are defined (to be completed).

Layer	How layer is defined
lithosphere	
asthenosphere	
crust	
mantle	
core	

Figure 2.17 compares the relative thicknesses of the lithosphere, asthenosphere and core for each of the terrestrial planets, and the Moon.



**Figure 2.17** A comparison of lithospheric, and/or asthenospheric thicknesses, and core in the terrestrial planets and the Moon.

## 2.5 Dead or alive? Plate tectonics and resurfacing

The convection in Earth's asthenosphere is a response to internally generated heat sources and remaining primordial heat, and enables transferral of this heat to the lithosphere, after which it is conducted and eventually lost into space by radiative processes. These processes of heat loss are the main controls upon volcanic and tectonic activity on Earth. On Earth, resurfacing of the planet occurs largely in response to tectonism or volcanism. For instance, the effusion of lava flows or the deposition of volcanic ash are effective resurfacing processes. Resurfacing also occurs where the convergence of two lithospheric plates carrying continental crust cause buckling and deformation. The regions deformed in this manner form mountain belts such as the Alps or Himalayas, which are then eroded and supply sediments which cover lowlands and the floors of ocean basins. If plate tectonics were to occur on other planets then similar styles of deformation at the plate boundaries may be expected. However, unlike Earth, these will not necessarily be modified by the action of weathering, erosion and sedimentation. To examine the



possibility of planetary resurfacing having operated elsewhere, it is useful to consider how the heat sources may differ both in their total amount, and in their relative contribution to the heat budget in other planets. Clearly, the efficiency of heat loss may also vary from planet to planet due to differences in their size, or because of differences in the relative thicknesses of their asthenosphere and lithosphere. Differences such as these can lead to substantial variation in the degree and nature of volcanic activity and the tectonic features that may be expected.

As a consequence of heat transfer and radiative loss, all planetary bodies will gradually cool over time. This is because the available sources of internal heat cannot be renewed, a fact which is perhaps most apparent in the case of primordial or radiogenic heat sources (Section 2.4). However, any tidal heating effects must similarly diminish over time (Section 2.4.2). As this cooling progresses, the lithosphere will thicken, and the top of the convecting asthenosphere will retreat inwards. In a body which generates only modest amounts of internal heat, perhaps as a consequence of its small size or because it contains lower concentrations of radiogenic isotopes, this process will progress more rapidly. Correspondingly, any associated volcanism or tectonic movement will diminish. If the process continues to the point where asthenospheric convection ceases altogether, all the outer layers of the planet will, by definition, become lithosphere (Figure 2.17; as for Mercury). In such cases, the planet will become tectonically ‘dead’ and the associated resurfacing processes effectively terminated.

Whilst a diminishing degree and eventual cessation of tectonic activity may be the fate for all terrestrial planetary bodies, the timing of when this inactivity will take place depends upon the planet’s composition and size (Section 2.4.3 and Box 2.8). However, even on those bodies where plate tectonic movement has ceased altogether, there may still remain sufficient internal heat to allow partial melting to occur. Consequently, this molten material may continue to generate surface volcanism even on ‘tectonically dead’ planets, provided the thickened lithosphere can be breached by the rising magma. Under these circumstances volcanic resurfacing, such as blanketing of earlier topography by lava flows or ash deposits, could continue even after surface tectonic processes have apparently ceased altogether (e.g. on Mars). The terrestrial-like bodies within the Solar System display a wide variety of surface features. From studying such features it is possible to determine which of these bodies are tectonically and volcanically dead, and which examples display surface features which are indicative of geological activity.

### 2.5.1 Earth

Mantle convection, together with lithospheric conduction, are the processes that enable the generation of internal heat (i.e. by radiogenic and tidal processes) to be balanced efficiently over the short term by heat loss at the Earth’s surface. Above the convecting part of the mantle, Earth’s lithosphere is broken into a number of tectonic plates. Some are surfaced only by an oceanic crust, whilst others carry both oceanic and continental material (Table 2.8). The higher density oceanic crust lies on average 4–5 km below sea-level, whilst many of the continental plains lie just above sea-level. This confers a very distinct bimodal height distribution to the global topography (Figure 2.18).



**Figure 2.18** View of the east Pacific Ocean, the Americas and, in the Gulf of Mexico, Hurricane Andrew (25 August 1992).

**Table 2.8** Size, mass, density and layering within the terrestrial planets and the Moon.

	Mercury	Venus	Earth	(Moon)	Mars
mean radius/km	2440	6052	6371	1738	3390
mass relative to Earth	0.055	0.815	1	0.0123	0.107
density/10 <sup>3</sup> kg m <sup>-3</sup>	5.43	5.20	5.51	3.34	3.93
<i>layer thicknesses</i>					
crust/km	(see below)	20–40	25–90 (continents)  6–11 (ocean basins)	20–100 70 (average)	Thought to be highly variable  150–200
lithosphere/km (crust + rigid part of upper mantle)	600 (crust + all of the mantle)	50–100	100–150 (continents)  70–80 (ocean basins)	1000	200–300 (?)
asthenosphere/km	absent	3000–3100	2750–2850	300–500	1200–1900
core/km	1800	2900	3470	220–450 (if present)	1300–2000
magnetic field	yes (weak, 1% of Earth’s magnetic field)	no	yes (active field created by motion in liquid core)	no	very weak (largely remnant, but stronger in past. Solid core)

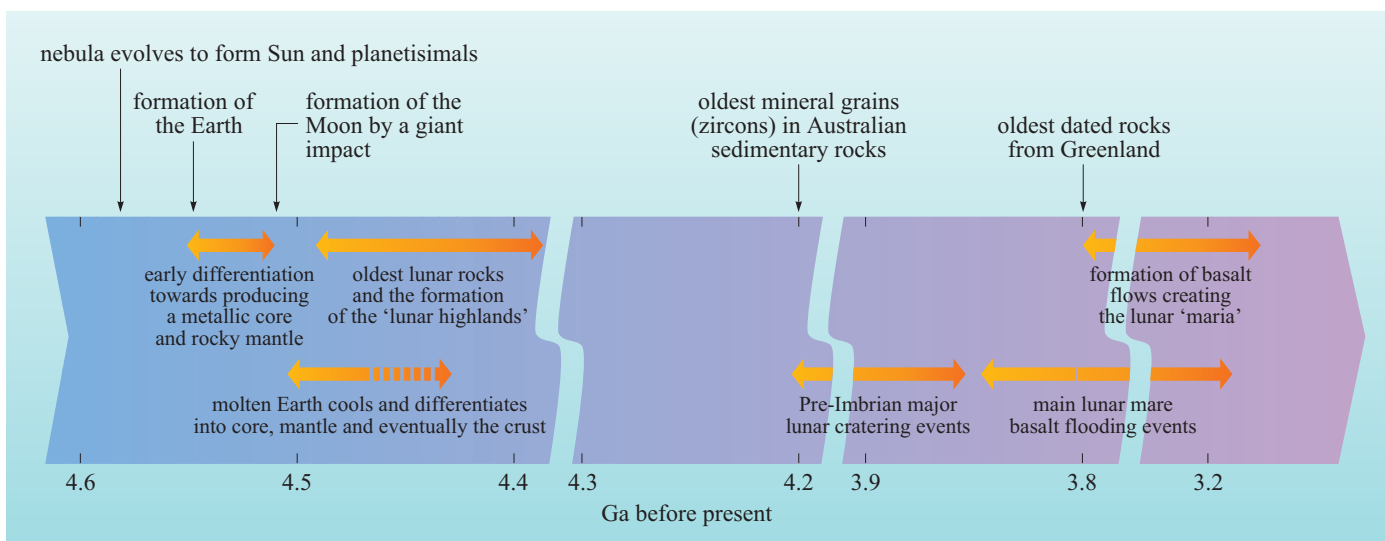
The movement of the different plates (plate tectonics) occurs through the generation of new oceanic crust at mid-ocean ridge boundaries where adjacent plates are moving apart, and the destruction of old, cold oceanic crust at boundaries where ocean crust descends either beneath the continental or oceanic edge of an adjacent plate (Figure 2.16) called, respectively, constructive and destructive plate boundaries. The generation of crust in one part of the globe is always balanced by its destruction elsewhere, so that the total surface of the Earth remains constant. The tectonic plates are in continual motion and it is thought that plate tectonic motion on Earth has been occurring for billions of years. However, in the distant past when the rate of radiogenic heat production was greater, tectonic plates may have been smaller, and their motion more rapid.

Much of the volcanic activity is closely associated with the boundaries of the tectonic plates (Figure 2.15), and most of the Earth’s best known **volcanoes** occur along destructive plate boundaries. These are located at a position on the over-riding plate above where the descending plate is being destroyed. Submarine volcanism also occurs along the mid-ocean ridges where oceanic crust is being created. Notable exceptions to this tectonically determined distribution of volcanoes do occur, such as the Hawaiian chain of volcanic islands. Here, the volcanic islands are the result of a rising ‘plume’ of anomalously hot mantle producing hot-spot volcanism characterized by **basalt lava** flows. The motion of a lithospheric plate over such a mantle plume creates a chain of progressively younger volcanic structures (Figure 2.19).



**Figure 2.19** View from an aeroplane looking toward the summits of the volcanoes of Mauna Kea (foreground), and Mauna Loa (background) on the island of Hawaii. Gradually rising to more than 4 km above sea-level, Mauna Loa is the largest volcano on our planet, covering half the island of Hawaii. Its submarine flanks descend an additional 5 km to the sea floor, and the sea floor in turn is flexed downwards another 8 km by Mauna Loa's great mass. This makes the entire volcanic construction about 17 km from base to summit.

Compared with the other terrestrial planets, our Earth is a very dynamic world and has a relatively young surface. There is very little remaining as a record of Earth's earliest past because evidence has been obliterated by the creation and destruction of crust through the action of plate tectonics. Additionally, surface weathering, erosion and deposition of sediment continually destroy, erase, and bury surface features, including ancient crust. This means that, unlike many of the other terrestrial planets, the preservation of ancient impact craters is very uncommon. By contrast, our nearest neighbour, the Moon, has no plate tectonics or processes of weathering and erosion comparable to those on Earth, and so its cratering record has largely been preserved. The timing of the formation of Earth and the Moon, based upon the available chronological data, is summarized in Figure 2.20.



**Figure 2.20** The timing of the formation of Earth and the Moon, based upon available chronological data, and indicating major planetary-forming and differentiation events.



**Figure 2.21** The Moon. The bright, cratered regions (for instance, at the top of the image) are the lunar highlands, and dark regions are the lunar maria. Dark maria are impact basins which have filled with basalt lavas. These include Oceanus Procellarum (on the left-hand side), Mare Imbrium (centre left), Mare Serenitatis and Mare Tranquillitatis (centre), and Mare Crisium (near the right edge). The distinct, bright ray crater at the bottom of the image is the Tycho impact basin.

2.5.2 The Moon

The Moon is not a planet in the strictest sense, but its composition indicates that it is a terrestrial-like body. The history of its formation, as determined by a wealth of observational data and some sample material, together with the nature of its surface-cratering record, provide a useful analogue, which aids in deciphering other planetary histories. The Moon’s formation is thought to be the result of a late-stage collision of large planetary embryos (Section 2.3.3). Energy from this impact melted much of the material that then coalesced into the Moon, giving rise to a deep, all-enveloping magma ocean.

The Moon’s surface is clearly composed of two types of surface – the darker **maria** or ‘lunar seas’ and the brighter, highly cratered, ‘highland regions’ (Figure 2.21). These two surfaces reflect a fundamental compositional variation. The highlands, standing about 2.75 km above the surrounding maria terrain, are the most ancient crust and are about 20 km thick. Samples from these areas have been dated as 4.4–4.5 Ga (Figure 2.20). This material is thought to have formed as a less dense, feldspar-rich differentiate, or crystal-rich ‘scum’, that rose to the surface of the magma ocean following accretion. The maria comprise basaltic lava flows dated at 3.8–3.2 Ga, and post-date the major crater-forming impact events that affected the highland regions (Table 2.9). However, these lunar lava flows differ compositionally from terrestrial basalts (Table 2.2) since they typically have a lower SiO<sub>2</sub> content (i.e. <45%). In most cases, these lavas welled up in ancient impact basins simply because the crust was thinner and more fractured in these regions. Internal heat is likely to have been responsible for this volcanism rather than heat generated by later crater-forming impact events. Some evidence suggests that the mare-forming lava flow eruptions may not have ceased completely until as late as 0.8–1.0 Ga ago, after which there was either insufficient internal heat generation or the continued cooling meant the Moon’s lithosphere had become too thick for surface volcanism to continue.

**Table 2.9** The stratigraphy of the Moon, based upon stratigraphical mapping of its surface, its cratering record, and radiometric dating of Moon rocks. Ages refer to the years before the present day.

System	Events
Copernican	Young ‘ray’ craters (younger than 1 Ga), and some final mare-forming eruptions
Eratosthenian	Older post-mare craters (about 1–3 Ga)
Imbrian	Main mare basalt flooding events, following the formation of the Imbrium and Orientale impact basins (<3.2–3.85 Ga)
Pre-Imbrian:	
Nectarian	Formation of 11 major impact basins preceded by the Nectaris basin (3.85–3.92 Ga)
Pre-Nectarian	Formation of about 30 impact basins preceded by the Procellarum basin (before 3.92–4.2? Ga)



### 2.5.3 Mercury

Mercury's highly cratered surface appears similar to that of the Moon (Figure 2.22). However, inspection reveals that even its most densely cratered region contains fewer impact sites than analogous regions of the Moon, suggesting it has a slightly younger, though still very ancient surface. Like the Moon, regions interpreted as ancient lava flows occur. Most notable, however, are the presence of sinuous ridges, 2 km in height and 200–500 km in length, which are thought to have been formed by lithospheric compression (Figure 2.23). However, unlike compressional structures in Earth's lithosphere (i.e. mountain belts) which are caused by tectonic convergence, Mercury's ridges are extremely ancient features that are several billions of years old. They have been interpreted as being a consequence of either mantle cooling or solidification of previously molten core material. This cooling and solidification would have caused thermal contraction resulting in an estimated 0.1% reduction of the planet's diameter, and making the lithosphere wrinkle into a series of ridges. Alternatively, some researchers believe the ridges are a consequence of a change in shape of the planet due to a decrease in its spin period over time.

Mercury is too small to have retained much of its accretional heat for long. Moreover, due to its large core (Table 2.8) and relatively thin mantle and crust, the effects of radiogenic heating are likely to have been smaller and less pronounced than those experienced by the larger terrestrial planets. It seems probable that these heat sources were insufficient to drive any long-term mantle convection and, consequently, the planet has been geologically inactive for a considerable part of its history. If this is the case, these ancient sinuous ridges may record the last geological activity to have affected Mercury's surface.



**Figure 2.22** A mosaic of images of Mercury's highly cratered surface taken from 125 000 miles away by Mariner 10.



**Figure 2.23** The ridges and fractures on part of the floor of Mercury's Caloris basin.

### 2.5.4 Venus

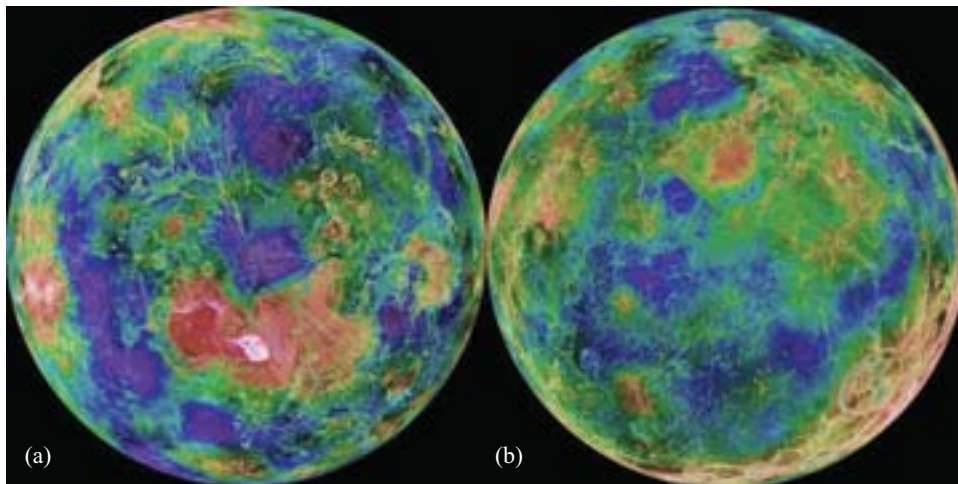
Venus is similar to Earth in size and density and, consequently, its core dimensions and mantle thickness may be comparable to those of Earth. If this assumption is correct, we may expect to observe similarities in the arrangement of the global terrain of both planets, and perhaps even evidence of Earth-like tectonism on the surface of Venus. However, inspection of elevational data does not reveal a bimodal distribution like that of Earth (Figure 2.24). Instead, although there are lowland and highland regions, much of the topography occurs within 500 m elevation of the average planetary radius. In addition, the cratering record reveals that much of the surface dates from around 500 Ma ago, indicating a catastrophic resurfacing took place, followed by a long period of relative quiescence.

If Venus really is currently geologically inactive, yet otherwise similar to Earth in its dimensions and structure, it prompts the question of how the planet is able to lose its internally generated heat. It is unlikely that the composition of its crust and mantle differ significantly to that of Earth with respect to radiogenic components, so the surface features must reflect a fundamentally different tectonic behaviour in response to radiogenic heat production.

Highland and lowland regions may correspond to the upwelling and downwelling of convection currents within Venus's asthenosphere. However, the apparent absence of any tectonic activity or active volcanoes suggests that conduction through the lithosphere is the only manner in which internal heat can currently be lost. Such lithospheric conduction is likely to be far too slow to balance the internal heating and so it is believed that Venus's interior is gradually heating up, and that the heat is becoming trapped in the upper mantle, below this slowly conducting lithospheric 'lid'. Continuation of this process over the long term will eventually lead to increased partial melting of the sub-lithospheric mantle, a key source of magma and volcanism on Earth, and associated reduction of mantle density. If this heating process continues, this hot mantle material may eventually become less dense than the overlying rigid lithosphere. This is an unstable situation that could lead to a catastrophic 'overturn', causing sinking of large areas of the lithosphere and a surfaceward escape of immense volumes of trapped magma. Such an overturn would produce a massive resurfacing of the planet. After this violent, but geologically short-lived, episode and associated release of trapped heat, the surface would once again cool, thicken and become rigid, and the slow process culminating

in lithospheric overturn would begin once again. Such periodic, planet-wide resurfacing may explain the apparently uniform age of much of Venus's surface, and is currently the most widely accepted model for the planet's long-term tectonic behaviour.

**Figure 2.24** Two hemispheric views of Venus (a) from the north pole and (b) from the south pole as revealed by radar investigations by the Magellan space probe. These composite images have been colour-coded to provide elevational information across Venus's 15 km topographic range (blue is lowest elevation, and green, brown and white progressively higher elevations).



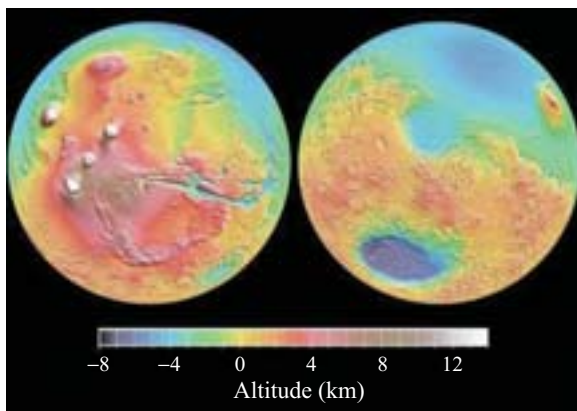


### 2.5.5 Mars

The mass of Mars is only one-tenth that of Earth, and its low density is most similar to that of the Moon (Table 2.8). This lower density may, in part, be due to its smaller mass, having generated less self-compression than that experienced by the larger terrestrial-like bodies. Mars also currently lacks any strong magnetic field, so its core has probably solidified.

There are superb examples of volcanoes on Mars but, unlike Earth, they do not occur in linear chains, which suggests that the Martian lithosphere is not divided into mobile plates. Martian volcanoes such as Olympus Mons contribute to the 30 km range in surface elevation (Figure 2.25), thus greatly exceeding both Earth and Venus, which have surface elevation ranges of 20 km and 15 km, respectively. The height of the Martian volcanoes may indicate the presence of a very thick lithosphere. The largest comparable structure on Earth, the volcano comprising the island of Hawaii, is only one-hundredth the volume of Olympus Mons, yet its mass has created a substantial moat-like depression in the surrounding oceanic lithosphere. Despite its size, no similar depression has been observed around Olympus Mons, which is 24 km in height.

Studies of the Martian surface suggest that whilst there are no obvious tectonic boundaries in the lithosphere, there does appear to be two distinct types of crust, which may be broadly analogous to continental and oceanic crust on Earth. The southern hemisphere and part of the northern hemisphere form a huge ancient region of heavily cratered highlands. This elevated, older crust could be compared with Earth's continental areas. By contrast, the northern hemisphere is low-lying, much less heavily cratered, and is apparently covered with lava flows and sedimentary material. Moreover, this low-lying region has remnant magnetic properties that are similar in pattern to those produced by ocean crust spreading ridges on Earth. This has led to speculation that there may have once been crustal



**Figure 2.25** Topographic maps of Mars. The left-hand image shows the elevated topography of the Tharsis bulge (in red), a region of thickened and uplifted crust. The huge volcanoes associated with the Tharsis region can easily be seen as three white dots, with two further volcanic structures located in the top left-hand quarter. The youngest and biggest of all is Olympus Mons, positioned on the western flank of the Tharsis bulge. The fissure-like complex of canyons crossing into the Tharsis region from the right (centre of the image) is the Valles Marineris. This may owe its origins to fracturing of the Martian crust during uplift of the Tharsis region. The right-hand image view shows the Hellas impact basin (in purple), which is 2000 km in diameter.

spreading on Mars, and that these regions are thus analogous to oceanic crust. However, the Martian lithosphere must have thickened significantly since, to such a point where any mantle convection must occur at depth, and the only likely surface expression of surfaceward transfer of internal heat is a globalwide distribution of volcanoes, and the presence of elevated surface regions such as the Tharsis bulge, which is 4000 km wide. The elevated Tharsis region, upon which large volcanoes including Olympus Mons are located, is believed to be the expression of a particularly persistent site of mantle upwelling. Such an upwelling is possibly analogous to Earth's mantle plumes, which are similarly associated with the construction of major volcanic edifices (e.g. Hawaii). Nevertheless, volcanic activity on Mars does appear to have waned. This must, in part, be a consequence of its small size since its radiogenic heat production will have undoubtedly significantly diminished over time. This, together with its greater surface to volume ratio, which promotes cooling, may explain why its lithosphere has thickened so much, and in so doing allowed less opportunity for surface volcanism to occur.

From cratering studies, Mars's highland crust, like that of the Moon, appears to have originated about 4.5 Ga ago (Section 3.2.5). However, on Mars this ancient terrain has been substantially modified by later volcanic activity. The volcanic lowlands in the northern hemisphere, and the equatorial Tharsis region probably began to develop no earlier than 3.0 Ga ago, and some lava flows here may be no older than 10 Ma. Martian volcanic activity cannot yet be considered as entirely extinct.

### 2.5.6 Io

Io is the innermost of Jupiter's large satellites. Although it is not strictly a terrestrial planet, it ranks as a terrestrial-like body due to its size and density (Appendix A, Table A2). Its density indicates that it is composed largely of silicates and probably also possesses a small core of Fe or FeS. It is worth discussing Io in detail for two reasons. First, its major source of internal heating is tidal. The energy released by tidal heating is estimated to be about  $4 \times 10^{13}$  W, two orders of magnitude greater than that likely to be generated by its own internal radioactive decay (about  $5 \times 10^{11}$  W). In this respect it is significantly different to the dominantly radiogenic heating that is characteristic of the terrestrial planets. Secondly, besides Earth, Io is the only body in the Solar System upon which active hot volcanism has been observed. This was one of the remarkable discoveries made by the space probe Voyager 1 during its Jupiter fly-by in March 1979 when no less than nine active volcanoes were detected. In fact Io's surface appears to be dominated by the products of volcanic eruptions – analysis of all returned images has failed to identify any impact craters which must mean that most of Io's surface is relatively young. The only other method of resurfacing that could be possible on Io would be through some form of tectonic activity and associated crustal deformation. However, other than a small number of minor features that may represent faults, convincing evidence for tectonism is absent.

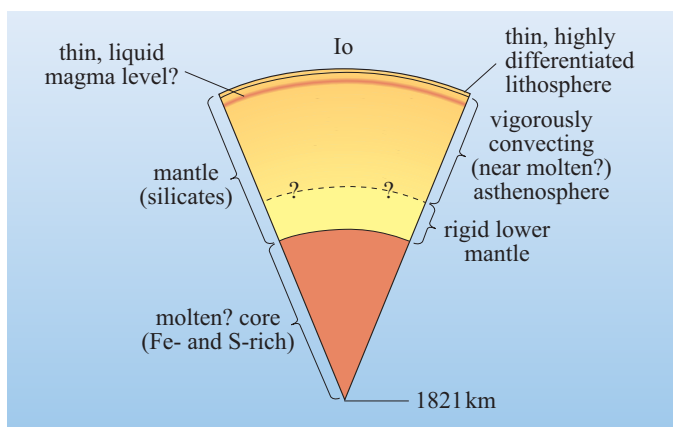
#### QUESTION 2.9

- (a) What changes will occur over time in the thickness of the lithosphere of a planetary body in which the dominant heat source is radiogenic decay?
- (b) Giving reasons, discuss whether the same conclusion can apply to bodies that are dominated by tidal heating.

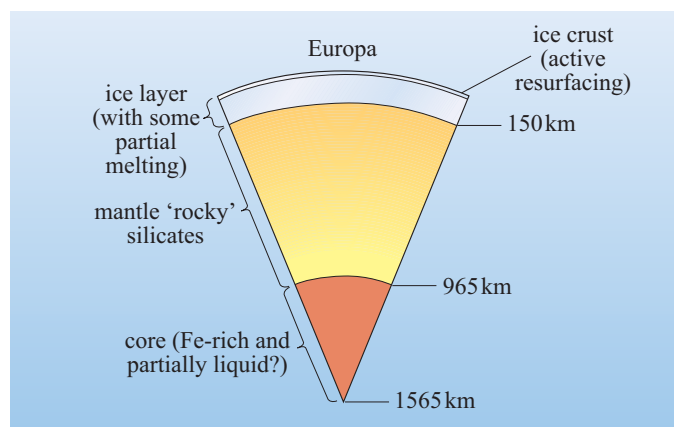
Io's internal structure is still a matter for conjecture, but the large amount of heat generated by tidal effects, together with its expression as active volcanism, suggest heat production has been sufficient to allow significant internal differentiation (Figure 2.26). Its core may be molten but much of the tidal-energy dissipation is thought to occur in its rigid lower mantle. The overlying asthenosphere must be convecting rapidly in order to transfer heat surfacewards, and here there may even be a thin liquid magma level. It is also likely that as a consequence of this continuing differentiation process the upper part of Io's lithosphere has become geologically very distinct. This is believed to have generated an outer Mg-poor silicate layer and an Fe–Mg-rich layer beneath what is effectively the lithospheric part of the upper mantle. If this interpretation is correct Io may have the thinnest lithosphere of all the terrestrial-like bodies, as well as a capacity to generate both silicate- and sulfur-rich styles of volcanism (Section 3.4.6). In this respect, it is perhaps surprising that there is no obvious expression of surface tectonics as might be expected with such a thin lithosphere overlying a vigorously convecting asthenosphere. Instead, it appears that heat loss is not achieved by convection and associated plate tectonics as on Earth, or by the periodic, catastrophic resurfacing thought to occur on Venus, but instead by conduction and surfaceward advective heat transfer via a network of highly active volcanic vents.

### 2.5.7 Europa

Europa is both slightly smaller and further away from Jupiter than Io. It is quite a different world, but it is described here because its density is similar to that of the terrestrial-like bodies. Gravity data collected by space probes indicate that below its rocky mantle Europa has a dense, iron-rich core, about 1250 km in diameter. Europa also has its own magnetic field, but it remains uncertain whether this is created by convection within a liquid part of the core. Like Io, it is probable that tidal heating of the rocky mantle occurs. This heat, produced by flexing and relaxation of the mantle, and supplemented by radioactive decay within its rocky mass, will be conducted surfacewards. Such conduction may then cause melting of the overlying ice layer and associated resurfacing through the eruption of 'icy lavas'. The nature of the intriguing phenomenon of icy volcanism will be discussed further in Chapter 3.



**Figure 2.26** Schematic model for the internal structure of Io. The planetary layering within Io is assumed to be highly differentiated because of continual partial melting resulting from the tidally generated high heat flow.



**Figure 2.27** Schematic model for the internal structure of Europa.

## 2.6 Summary of Chapter 2

- Detail of the internal structure of Earth is provided by both direct and indirect evidence. Composition of the lithosphere, that is the crust and upper mantle, can be determined by examination of key rock types. The structure and composition of the deep mantle and core is revealed from the properties and response of seismic waves that pass through the planet.
- The asthenosphere of a planet is the zone where pressure and temperature are sufficiently high to allow a material to flow, even in its solid state. Consequently, in this zone the internal heat is mainly transferred surfacewards by convection.
- The lithosphere of a planet is defined as the rigid outermost layer that cannot convect. Instead, the internal heat is carried through it by conduction. On geologically active worlds, such as Earth and Io, internal heat can also be transported by advection through the lithosphere by volcanic processes. In addition, heat is also transferred to Earth's surface by wholesale recycling of the lithosphere. This results in a phenomenon known as plate tectonics, which helps describe the movement of lithospheric plates. The Earth's lithosphere consists of oceanic and continental crust, and the uppermost part of the mantle. Convective and conductive processes of heat transfer can occur equally well in ice-dominated bodies as well as silicate bodies.
- The accretion and final assembly of Earth and other terrestrial planets is thought to have followed a similar pattern of evolution. As a consequence, their layered structure must have been the result of differentiation and element partitioning that operated during and after their assembly from colliding planetary embryos. The differentiation came about as a result of melting following energy release during these collisions.
- Primordial heat is that retained from processes operating in the early stages of planetary evolution, and represents one of the important heat sources within terrestrial-like bodies. The other two important sources are radiogenic heating and tidal heating. Primordial heat includes that derived from the collision and assembly of planetary embryos, and that delivered to the surface by incoming impactors after the planet had assembled. It also includes heat released by the separation of denser components during core formation.
- Internal heat generation within terrestrial planets such as Earth, is mainly the result of radioactive decay of  $^{235}\text{U}$ ,  $^{238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{232}\text{Th}$  and  $^{40}\text{K}$  in their silicate-rich mantle and crustal layers. The amount of radioactive decay was greater early in a planet's evolution because there would have been considerably more radioactive elements present. This radiogenic heat would have been augmented by the decay of short-lived isotopes such as  $^{26}\text{Al}$  in those early stages. In some instances, notably large orbiting satellite bodies such as the moons of Jupiter, tidal effects become the dominant process of generating internal heat.
- Geologically active bodies are those where heat is either more efficiently retained or continually generated in significant amounts. In larger bodies, radiogenic sources are likely to continue to be important because they contain a greater mass of radiogenic elements to begin with, and because cooling is less efficient due to a lower surface area to volume ratio. Tidal heating is a further process whereby internal heat can be generated over the long term.
- The heat retained or generated within a terrestrial-like planetary body represents a key control in shaping the nature of the planetary surface. It also controls the rapidity and extent to which planetary resurfacing has occurred, or continues to occur.



## CHAPTER 3 PLANETARY VOLCANISM – *ULTIMA THULE?*

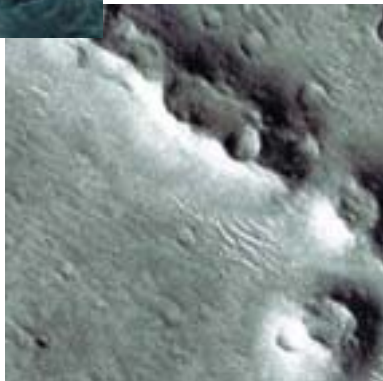
### 3.1 Introduction



The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that the mythical island of *Thule* existed some six days' sail north of Britain. This island represented the edge of their known world and, consequently, the Latin phrase *ultima Thule* became used to refer to journeys to the utmost limits of exploration. The expression is also particularly apt for this chapter for two reasons. First, the classic volcanic province of the North Atlantic, of which Iceland is the best known locality, is known by geologists as the Thulean province after the land of this ancient myth (Figure 3.1). Secondly, examination of features on the other terrestrial planets and terrestrial-like bodies provides much evidence for volcanism having existed on these distant worlds (Figures 3.2 and 3.3), and it could be argued that spacecraft investigations that allow us to see these features in detail represent the *utmost limits* of modern exploration.

**Figure 3.1** Aligned volcanic cinder cones on a basaltic flow field, Laki, Iceland. These cones were constructed as part of a line of over 100 vents that formed along a fissure, 27 km in length, from which  $14 \text{ km}^3$  of basalt lava erupted during 1783–84. Historical records indicate that toxic gas and ash from this eruption caused widespread crop failure in northern Europe and a short-term climatic cooling.

**Figure 3.2** Aligned cone features on Mars. The image shows an area of  $1.5 \text{ km}^2$  located within the 1100 km-diameter Isidis Planitia impact basin. Many such cones have been identified within the basin, often arranged in clusters or aligned in chains. Although no associated lava flows have been identified, a volcanic origin is favoured. It is thought that the cones were constructed from the eruption of ash and cinders at points along fractures and fissures in the Martian crust.



**Figure 3.3** The surface of Io (a satellite of Jupiter). The dark spots are volcanic centres from which a variety of effusive (lava flows) and explosive (ash deposits) volcanic products have been erupted. A dark, sinuous area of lava flows can be seen extending from the volcano in the centre towards the left of the image. Red and yellow-coloured halos around the volcanic centres near the upper region of the image are ash and sulfur products deposited by eruption plumes during phases of explosive activity.



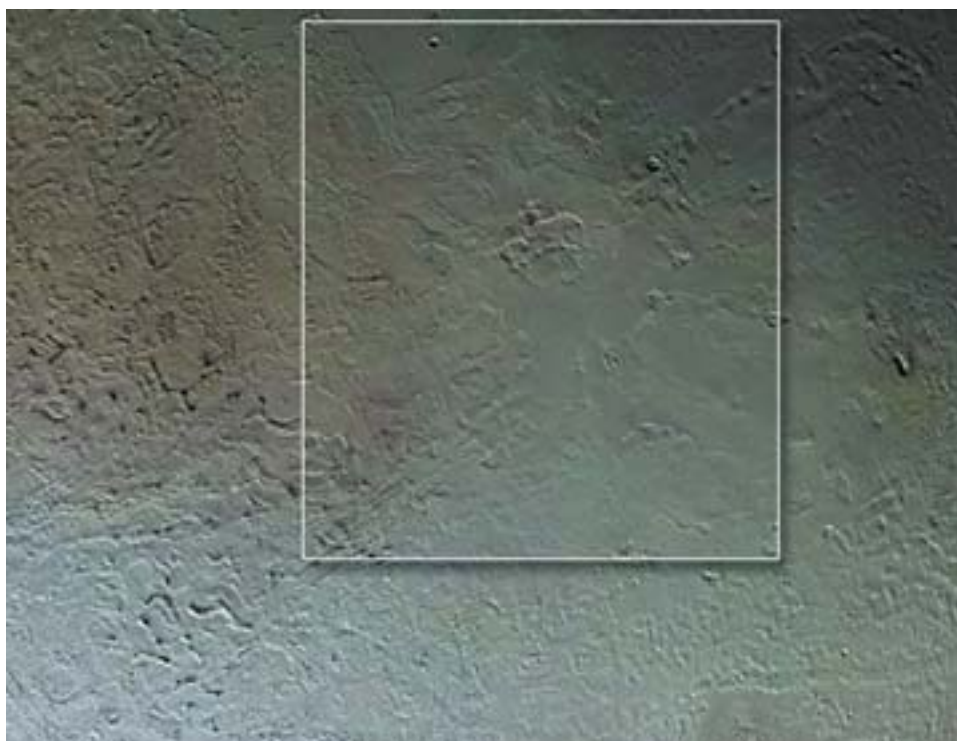
Exploration missions, including unmanned fly-bys, orbiters and landers, have returned a wealth of data that details the surfaces of the terrestrial planets and satellites of the giant planets. For geologists, and volcanologists in particular, one of the most exhilarating discoveries was that volcanism is a process that occurs throughout the Solar System. Its constructions and its effects can be observed from the alternately freezing and baking surface of Mercury located relatively near to the Sun, to the icy surface of Triton, the largest of Neptune's satellites that lies in the outer reaches of our Solar System. The products and style of the volcanism on these very contrasting worlds vary according to differences in their structure, layering and composition, since these factors control the type of materials erupted. Volcanic products also vary in response to the different planetary environments, including properties such as gravity, surface temperature and atmospheric pressure. These factors control the form and extent of lava flows and the pattern of volcanic ash deposition.

One of the most amazing manifestations of volcanism yet found is the eruption of **ices**.

The eruption of ices has occurred on numerous moons of the giant planets. Here, volcanism is not the result of rock melting, as is the case on Earth, but involves the melting of mixtures of water and other compounds formed from solidified gases. The term cryovolcanism (from the Greek *kryos*, meaning frost) is used for these icy examples.

**Figure 3.4** A high-resolution image, about 500 km across, of part of the equatorial region of Triton, the largest satellite of Neptune. Most of Triton's surface comprises water-ice mixed with frozen methane and probably ammonia. When melted, this mixed icy material behaves just as molten rock does on Earth. The various ridges and dimples appear to be the result of icy volcanic processes (cryovolcanism). Cryovolcanic icy lavas have probably flooded earlier impact craters and covered fractures to produce smooth terrains. For instance, note how the linear feature extending from the lower left-hand corner (inside the white box) becomes obscured by the smooth terrain located towards the centre of the image. The outline of a large irregular crater can be made out at the top edge of the white box. This has a smooth floor, interrupted only by a single small crater, suggesting that it has been flooded more recently by icy lavas.

Fortunately, despite these fundamental differences in lava composition and planetary surface conditions, understanding and interpreting extraterrestrial volcanism does not present as much of a problem as might first be anticipated. The laws of physics are universal and the nature of volcanism, whether it is the eruption of ices on a distant satellite (Figure 3.4), or a red-hot magma flowing down the side of Mount Etna, Sicily,





or Kilauea, Hawaii (Figure 3.5), or any other of Earth's spectacular volcanoes, can be understood by employing some basic principles. The object of this chapter is to provide you with an understanding of the underlying causes of volcanism and the physical processes that govern the style and extent of volcanic eruptions. You should then be able to make a prediction about the nature and style of volcanic phenomena likely to occur on even the most obscure planetary body, given only basic information about its size, mass, density and orbital parameters.

**Figure 3.5** A red-hot, blocky lava flow, given the Hawaiian name of a'a, which is advancing slowly across an earlier lava field consisting of toe-like flows of pahoehoe (another Hawaiian term) on the lower flanks of Kilauea volcano, Hawaii.



### 3.1.1 What is volcanism?

Volcanoes are the surface expression of the melting processes that occur deep within a body. The volcanic 'plumbing' systems beneath the volcano link these deep processes to the surface, and to the atmosphere, if present.

Volcanism can be defined as the processes associated with the transfer of molten material (magma), associated volatiles and any suspended load of crystallized material, from the interior of a planetary body to its surface.

On Earth, these processes are most obviously demonstrated by the presence of volcanoes that erupt lavas and produce ash clouds and toxic gases. There are many types of volcanoes on Earth—different styles of volcanic activity are largely controlled by the chemical and physical properties of the magma. As a result, volcanic activity ranges from relatively quiescent effusions of lava, such as might be seen on Hawaii (Figure 3.6) or Iceland, to massively explosive eruptions (Figure 3.7) such as those of Mount St Helens (USA, 1980) and Mount Pinatubo (Philippines, 1991). Yet, for any type of volcanic eruption there are two prerequisites: a process that causes melting, and material that can be melted.



**Figure 3.6** Quiescent lava eruption. Lobes of lava advance quietly across an earlier lava flow. This basalt eruption took place during 1999 on the lower flanks of Kilauea volcano, and was accompanied by only minor ash and gas release (see also Figure 3.5).



**Figure 3.7** A volcanic explosion. The eruption of Mount St Helens, Washington State, USA. At 8.32 am on 18 May 1980, an earthquake of magnitude 5.1 shook the volcano. Part of its flank slid away in a gigantic rockslide and debris avalanche, releasing pressure within the volcano. This triggered a major explosion, a pumice and ash eruption, and the generation of a huge eruption column.

You have already encountered the different sources of heat that are likely to exist in planetary bodies in Sections 2.4.1–2.4.4.

### QUESTION 3.1

(a) Given what you have already learned in Chapter 2, discuss the sources of heat that are likely to generate heat within:

(i) a young Earth-like planet with a stabilized crust, fully formed core, and convecting mantle.

(ii) an ancient, rocky planet half the size of Earth with a large solid core, and greatly thickened lithosphere.

(iii) a young satellite 3000 km in diameter, with a very small rocky core and a mantle and crust consisting predominantly of water-ice. This satellite is in a close elliptical orbit around a giant planet and displays recent evidence of widespread resurfacing.

(b) Which example (i, ii or iii) is least likely to exhibit volcanic activity, and which is most likely to exhibit volcanic activity? Give reasons for your answers.

### 3.1.2 Melting by other methods

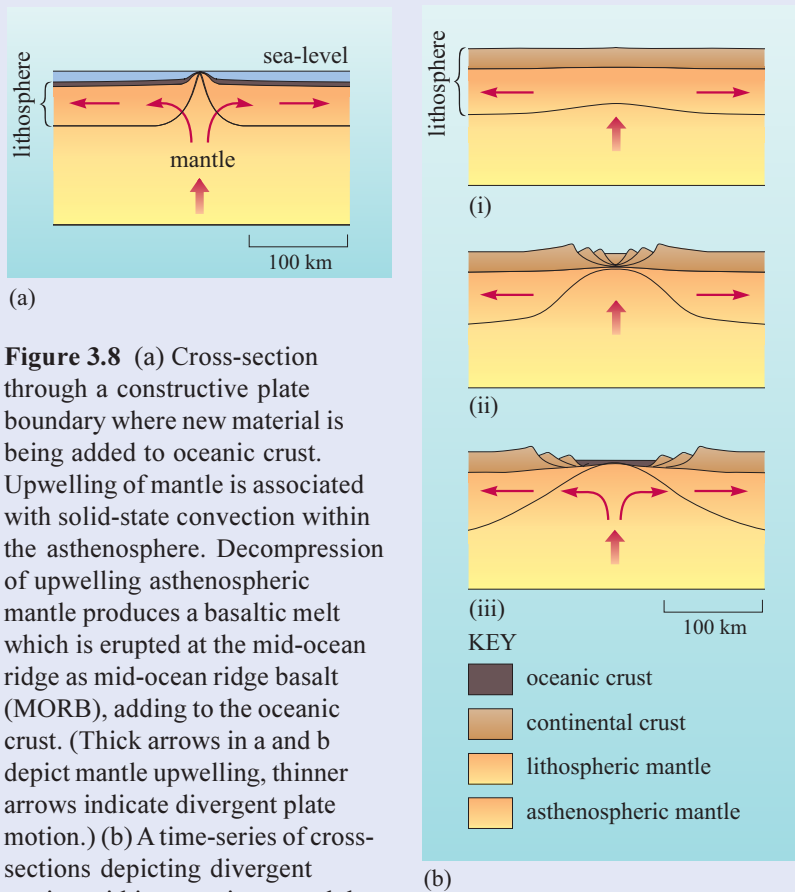
In Question 3.1 we considered different sources of heat and the manner by which they could lead to melting and volcanism. You may be surprised to learn that two quite different processes, other than temperature rise, are largely responsible for magma generation within the Earth. These two processes are **decompression melting** and **hydration-induced melting** and occur within the Earth's mantle (Box 3.1).

#### BOX 3.1 WHAT CAUSES EARTH'S MANTLE TO MELT?

Interestingly, an increase in temperature is not the only, or even the main, cause of melting in Earth's upper mantle. There are two other key processes: decompression melting, and hydration-induced melting.

You may recall from Section 2.2.1 that the pressure on rocks becomes greater with increasing depth. As a result of this, the constituent minerals adjust structurally and compositionally towards more compact configurations that are stable at these increased pressures. Consequently, even greater temperatures are required to melt these high-pressure minerals and increasingly higher temperatures are required to initiate melting at increasingly greater depths. This is the reason why the Earth's mantle is solid even though the temperature increases with depth. The converse of this relationship is that any solid mantle rising upwards sufficiently fast enough to avoid significant heat loss can begin to melt simply because it reaches a depth where the pressure is insufficient to keep it solid. This process is known as decompression melting.

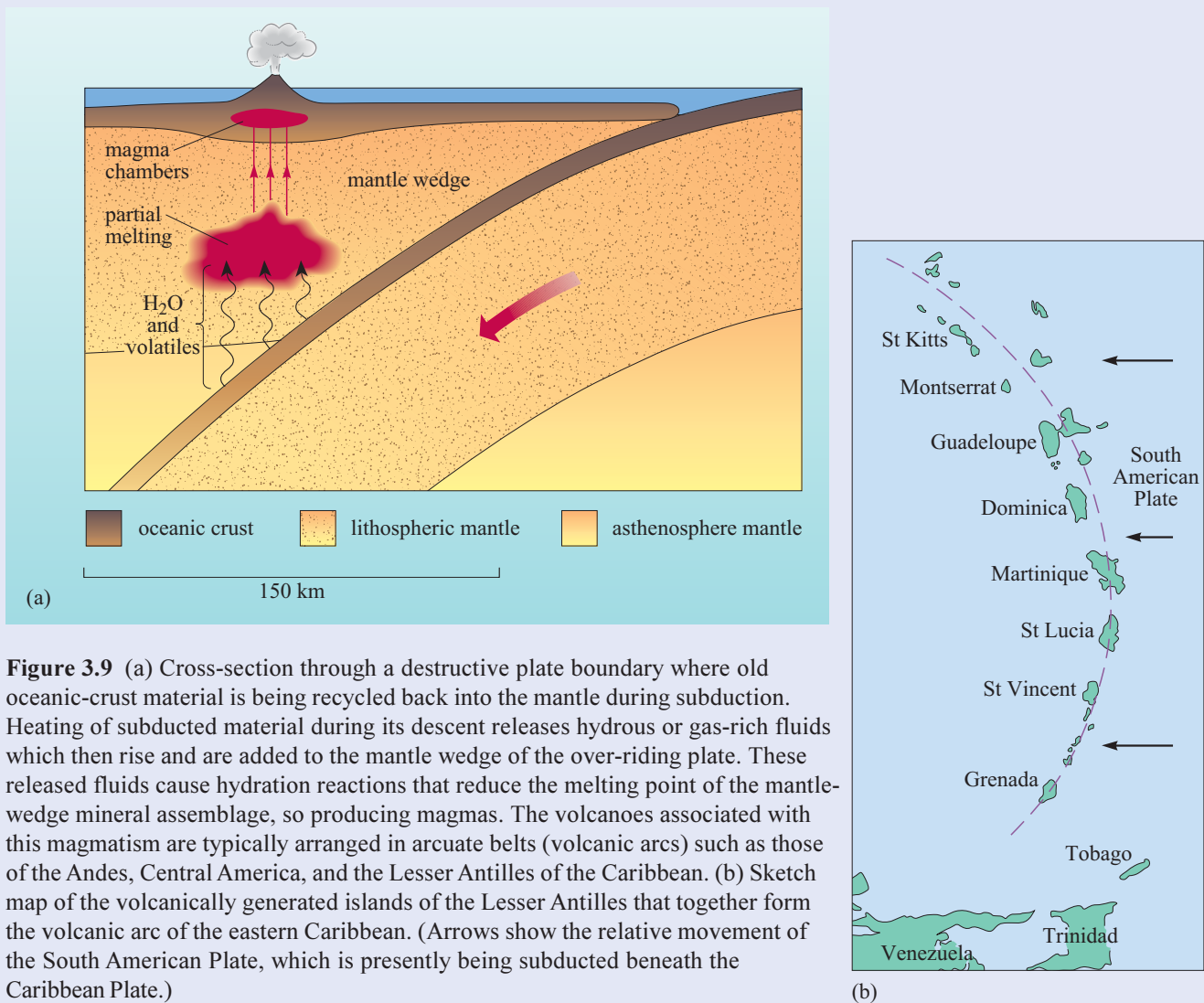
Decompression melting is the major process by which melts of a basaltic composition are generated in the Earth's mantle. It is important because it does not require any additional heating of the rock to create a magma. But how does decompression occur in the mantle? It occurs in two circumstances due to 'rising' mantle masses. First, it occurs as a consequence of solid-state convection within the mantle (Figure 3.8a), or as a result of mantle plumes that carry anomalously hot material surfacewards, creating hot-spot volcanism (Section 2.4.5). Second, it can occur as a result of thinning of the overlying crust which, for example, takes place due to lithospheric stretching during continental break-up (Figure 3.8b). In both instances it is the ascent and associated decompression of the mantle material and *not* the addition of heat that triggers melting, the generation of magma, and associated volcanism.



**Figure 3.8** (a) Cross-section through a constructive plate boundary where new material is being added to oceanic crust. Upwelling of mantle is associated with solid-state convection within the asthenosphere. Decompression of upwelling asthenospheric mantle produces a basaltic melt which is erupted at the mid-ocean ridge as mid-ocean ridge basalt (MORB), adding to the oceanic crust. (Thick arrows in a and b depict mantle upwelling, thinner arrows indicate divergent plate motion.) (b) A time-series of cross-sections depicting divergent motion within a continent, and the associated crustal thinning that occurs due to lithospheric stretching during continental break-up. In (i) and (ii), stretching and thinning of the continental crust results in mantle upwelling within the asthenosphere. This mantle upwelling causes decompression of the upper mantle, the generation of melt, and associated volcanic eruptions. By stage (iii) the continent has rifted apart and a new ocean (such as the Red Sea between Arabia and Africa) begins to open between the two rifted fragments.

The second key process that can lead to melting of the mantle occurs when volatiles such as hydrous (water-rich) or gas-rich fluids are added to the mantle and bring about reactions that alter the constituent minerals. When hydration or similar volatile-induced alteration of the mantle mineral assemblage occurs, it reduces the melting point of that assemblage. In other words, mantle altered in this manner begins to melt at lower temperatures and pressures than unaffected, or anhydrous, mantle. This is the process of hydration-induced melting.

Hydration of mantle peridotite occurs as a consequence of plate tectonic recycling (Sections 2.4.5 and 2.5.1). It takes place at depth within subduction zones where old, water-rich oceanic crust is reabsorbed into the mantle (Figure 3.9a). The resulting generation and surfaceward migration of magma produces arcuate belts of volcanoes, known as **volcanic arcs** (Figure 3.9b).



**Figure 3.9** (a) Cross-section through a destructive plate boundary where old oceanic-crust material is being recycled back into the mantle during subduction. Heating of subducted material during its descent releases hydrous or gas-rich fluids which then rise and are added to the mantle wedge of the over-riding plate. These released fluids cause hydration reactions that reduce the melting point of the mantle-wedge mineral assemblage, so producing magmas. The volcanoes associated with this magmatism are typically arranged in arcuate belts (volcanic arcs) such as those of the Andes, Central America, and the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean. (b) Sketch map of the volcanically generated islands of the Lesser Antilles that together form the volcanic arc of the eastern Caribbean. (Arrows show the relative movement of the South American Plate, which is presently being subducted beneath the Caribbean Plate.)

It is very important to realize that lithospheric recycling involving the creation of material at spreading ridges (constructive plate boundaries), and its re-assimilation at subduction zones (destructive plate boundaries), has *not* been identified on the other terrestrial planets or terrestrial-like bodies. Therefore, the generation of magma by hydration reactions, and associated volcanic arcs, may be a feature unique to Earth. However, by contrast, the rise of mantle material in response to plumes initiated by internal heat loss may have been, and in some instances may continue to be, a major process by which basaltic volcanism is generated on terrestrial planets.

### 3.1.3 The concepts of partial melting

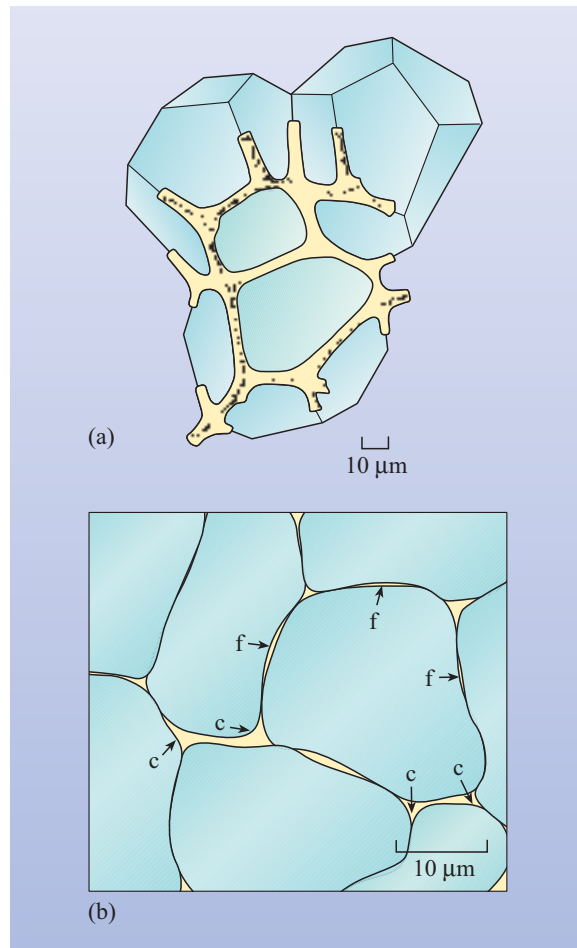
Following the brief discussion of melting processes, we now turn to the second fundamental prerequisite: the nature of the solid materials that can be melted to produce molten magmas. Remember that it is the surfaceward movement of materials and the eruption of magma and associated volatiles that eventually create surface volcanism.

Before we can investigate the different forms of volcanism, it is first necessary to examine the types of raw materials likely to be involved in the melting process, since these exert fundamental controls on the type of volcanism eventually produced. Clearly, the bulk composition of a planetary body and the nature of its layering will play a key role in determining the materials available for melting (Section 2.2.3). In the case of the terrestrial planets, their bulk composition is approximately chondritic since they represent condensation products of the more refractory elements and compounds in the inner part of the solar nebula. By contrast, some of the satellites of the giant planets consist of a significant proportion of water-ice and, with increasing remoteness from the Sun, progressively more volatile compounds such as ammonia and methane. Thus volcanism within the Solar System involves the melting of two different types of raw material: the high-temperature melting of silicates characteristic of the terrestrial planets; and the low-temperature melting of ices, resulting in the cryovolcanism characteristic of some of the satellites of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. The concept of partial melting was outlined in Section 2.3.2.

Partial melting is the incomplete melting of a parent material that characteristically produces a melt whose chemical composition is different to that of its parent.

When melting begins in rocks consisting of a mixture of silicate minerals, or in ices consisting of combinations of water-ice and other frozen volatiles, the minerals or constituent ices with a lower melting point naturally begin to melt first. This initial melt often occurs and collects at the interstices along the inter-crystalline boundaries between adjacent crystals (Figure 3.10a and b). However, at these initial very low degrees of partial melting, the melted material cannot migrate since it exists as a series of discrete, minute blobs. Only with further partial melting do these blobs begin to join up into a series of interconnecting networks along crystal boundaries, which eventually allow the partial melt to begin to migrate. The point at which interconnection of melt blobs occurs is a critical point of the melting process since only once the network of micro-conduits have been linked together can the





**Figure 3.10** (a) Sketch showing a three-dimensional view of adjacent crystals in a rock in which partial melting has begun. The melt initially forms in the pockets (interstices) where three crystals meet and, with further melting, the pockets then become connected by channels of melt running along the grain boundaries. Once interconnected, the melt can then begin to migrate and coalesce into a larger body of magma. (b) Magnified image of a rock beginning to melt (melt: yellow, crystals: blue). Features labelled 'c' are interconnecting melt channels at crystal interstices and boundaries; features labelled 'f' are thinner films of melt coating grain boundaries that have not yet sufficiently developed to form connections.

liberated melt begin to migrate away. Experimentally, this is normally found to occur when the melt-filled grains occupy about 5% of the source rock volume, at which point the pressure of overburden from the layers above causes the melt to move from regions of higher pressure to those of lower pressure conditions. In the case of partial melting within planetary bodies, this high pressure to low pressure migration is typically manifest as a surfaceward movement. Where these migrating magmas breach the surface marks the point at which volcanism occurs.

### 3.1.4 Magma generation in silicate bodies – peridotite to basalt alchemy

Considering the terrestrial planets as a whole, the most commonly erupted material is broadly basaltic in composition. You may remember from Section 2.2.3 that a typical basalt contains about 50%  $\text{SiO}_2$  and that such rocks are the main component of Earth's oceanic crust. Basaltic oceanic crust covers two-thirds of our planet and is continually being produced along the mid-ocean ridges at a global rate of about  $20 \text{ km}^3$  per year, as part of Earth's on-going tectonic activity. Similarly, examination of materials and images from the Moon, Mars, Venus and Mercury suggests that basalt lavas are a dominant product of past volcanic eruptions (Table 3.1). So, why should a basaltic composition be such a common volcanic product on these different worlds? To answer this, we need to investigate the composition of the source materials that give rise to basaltic magmas.



Clearly, basaltic compositions are generated from materials that were originally broadly chondritic in composition since this is the bulk composition of terrestrial planets. In other words, it is the chondritic composition of the terrestrial planets that places a fundamental control upon the magmas generated and the volcanic products erupted at the surface. However, if a rock of broadly chondritic composition was completely melted, transferred surfacewards and erupted as lava at a volcano, the bulk composition of the solidified lava would be exactly the same as that of the starting material (i.e. chondritic and with element abundances similar to that found in meteorites). Yet, as shown in Section 2.2.1, basalt is enriched in certain elements (e.g. Si, Al, Ca, Na and K) compared to primitive chondrite composition, and depleted in others (e.g. Fe, Mg, Ni and Cr). To understand how this change of composition takes place, it is necessary to describe the process of partial melting in more detail.

You have already determined that on Earth the mantle rocks (i.e. peridotite) are more chondrite-like than crustal rocks since they show lower degrees of element enrichment and depletion (Question 2.3). However, it has also been argued that Earth's mantle itself differs from primordial chondritic composition largely because some elements, predominantly Fe and Ni, have been extracted from the overlying mantle rocks since they have sunk to form the core. It has also been shown that much of the partial melting that generates Earth's basaltic volcanism occurs in the upper mantle, which is of peridotite composition. Therefore, the fact that the terrestrial planets have similarly experienced core- and lithosphere-forming events early in their history may aid in explaining why basaltic compositions are so widespread on their surfaces. Accordingly, it is logical to use the example of Earth's mantle to examine how materials of broadly peridotite composition give rise to basaltic volcanism at the surface.

When the mixtures of minerals that comprise peridotite begin to melt, some, such as plagioclase, start melting at lower temperatures than olivine and pyroxene (Table 2.1). In this state, the original rocks can be said to be 'partially melted'. If this partial melt is then extracted before any further melting occurs, the extracted melt will have a different composition to that of the bulk composition of the original parent rock. This effect is further reinforced by the fact that some elements within the remaining unmelted material also become mobilized and preferentially escape into the melt. These elements are said to be **incompatible** with the source rock since they 'prefer' to exist within the surrounding melted material. This process is known as element partitioning. With further melting, minerals with an increasingly higher melting point become molten, and progressively less of the incompatible elements become partitioned into the melt. By contrast **compatible** elements tend to remain in the solid residue in minerals that are stable at high temperatures. Much of the mobilization and partitioning into the melt of the more incompatible elements occurs during the initial stages of the melting process. The resulting small degrees of partial melt will, therefore, be the most highly enriched in incompatible elements and so the most different in their composition to that of the starting or 'parent' material. Increasing degrees of partial melting of the same source rock can give rise to quite different magma compositions because, depending upon the degree of incompatibility, different proportions of elements will exist within each increasing increment of the melting process. This is the manner in which the composition of the melt will evolve. Accordingly, those magmas representing very large degrees of partial melting will display an increasing compositional similarity to that of the parent since, by this stage, more of the original parent material will have been liberated to form the melt.

In the case of silicate minerals, like those comprising peridotite, incompatible elements such as K and Na are most readily mobilized into initial melt products (e.g. 1–2% partial melting), whilst compatible elements like Mg tend to remain in the solid residue of minerals that are stable at higher temperatures (e.g. olivine and pyroxene). After 25–30% partial melting of peridotite, the proportions of elements in the melt will have evolved significantly because more elements (e.g. Ca, Al, Ti and to a lesser degree Fe and Si), will have joined the more incompatible elements like K and Na. However, the element abundances in these larger degrees of melting are still very different to those of the parent peridotite and, by the time 25–30% partial melting is reached, will be broadly basaltic in composition. This process can be summarized as follows:

Mantle peridotite (*partial melting*) → basalt magma + solid unmelted residue

Given the relationship between peridotite partial melting and the basaltic magmas outlined above, it was thought for many years that basalts which were erupted at Earth's ocean ridges (i.e. mid-ocean ridge basalts (MORBs)) represented compositions derived *directly* from the partial melting of the mantle. This is now known to be incorrect since other important modifying processes are known to act upon the basaltic magma during its ascent to the surface. These include the crystallization and separation of mineral fractions that form due to cooling during ascent, and the assimilation of minerals and elements from the crustal material through which the basaltic magma passes. Laboratory experiments show that basaltic magmas derived from a peridotite parent, without any such modification (i.e. experimental 'primitive basalt' in Table 3.1) should be characterized by a higher Mg and lower Si content than typical oceanic basalt. In fact, basalts approaching this 'primitive' composition are known to have been erupted on Earth in its distant past. Unfortunately, due to active erosion on our planet, few examples have been preserved except for some rare occurrences on very ancient continental crust. These types of lavas are known as **komatiites** (pronounced komaty-ites), after a locality exposed in the Komati river valley in South Africa. It is thought that komatiites were erupted only during Earth's early history because Earth's internal heat budget was higher then than today (Section 2.4.3), so allowing the generation of larger degrees of partial melting at greater depths and at higher temperatures.

### QUESTION 3.2

- (a) Does the chemical composition of lunar and Martian basalts (Table 3.1) follow the pattern of element-partitioning behaviour expected during the partial melting of peridotite? What does this indicate regarding the source of basaltic magmas on these two bodies? (Hint: to determine the behaviour of the different elements, compare the patterns of element enrichment and depletion shown in the completed peridotite and oceanic basalt spidergrams in the answer to Question 2.3b.)
- (b) Which of the analyses listed in Table 3.1 are most like peridotite mantle (i.e. most 'primitive') and which have the most MORB-like composition? Briefly account for these differences.

**Table 3.1** Compositions of rocks from the Earth's mantle and other important basalt types.

Weight % oxide	Peridotite (mantle)	Primitive basalt (experimental)	Oceanic basalt (MORB)	Deccan (CFBP <sup>a</sup> ) basalt	Komatiite (ancient terrestrial lava)	Lunar mare basalt	Martian basalt <sup>b</sup>
SiO <sub>2</sub>	45.4	44.2	48.2	48.8	45.2	42.7	50.1
TiO <sub>2</sub>	0.2	3.7	1.4	2.5	0.2	2.6	0.9
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	4.3	12.1	15.4	13.7	3.7	7.7	6.7
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	8.2	12.1	10.8	14.8	12.2	23.6	20.8
MnO	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.5
MgO	38.2	13.1	9.6	6.2	32.2	14.6	9.4
CaO	3.4	10.1	11.1	10.6	5.3	8.1	10.0
Na <sub>2</sub> O	0.3	3.6	3.4	2.4	0.4	0.2	1.3
K <sub>2</sub> O	0.03	1.30	0.07	0.30	0.10	0.10	0.20
Cr <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	0.43	0.1	0.05	0.02	0.22	0.25	0.20
<i>Totals</i>	100.6	100.5	100.2	99.5	99.7	100.2	100.1

<sup>a</sup> CFBP = continental flood basalt provinces.<sup>b</sup> analytical data obtained from a meteorite derived from Mars (Shergotty meteorite).

Basalts with compositions similar to komatiites are also believed to be widespread in the ancient volcanic terrains of the terrestrial planets. The ubiquity of such basaltic compositions arises because they represent the products of melting peridotite mantle, which itself was originally derived from an initial chondritic composition. Since the terrestrial planets were created from the chondritic materials that condensed in the inner region of the solar nebula and, because they are thought to have experienced comparable core-forming events, the bulk composition of their respective silicate mantles is likely to be broadly similar. In their early histories there would have been sufficient remaining primordial heat, together with a much greater input from juvenile radioactive decay, to permit greater large degrees of partial melting at greater depths and higher temperatures. Such circumstances would have provided the necessary conditions for the generation and eruption of komatiitic lavas. Later on, once the primordial and radiogenic heat sources had begun to wane over time and lithospheres had become thicker, the conditions and degree of mantle melting would have also altered giving rise to less primitive, more MORB-like basaltic compositions.

- Why might komatiitic lavas be preserved in the volcanic terrains of other terrestrial planets whilst similar occurrences on Earth are so rare?
- Given that eruptions of komatiitic compositions were most probable whilst silicate planetary bodies were still relatively young, it should be no surprise that few have been preserved on Earth due to constant tectonic recycling and the processes of weathering and erosion. By contrast, on the other planets the effectiveness of these processes may be much reduced or even absent, permitting long-term preservation of ancient-surface elements. However, tectonic, volcanic and surface processes affecting the surfaces of Mars and Venus may have reduced their preservation potential.

### 3.1.5 Non-silicate partial melting and the generation of icy magmas

Partial melting of ices provides the magma source that produces volcanism on icy bodies.

- Is icy magmatism likely to differ significantly in the manner in which it is generated, and the nature of its eruption products, from the largely silicate-dominated magmatism of the terrestrial planets?
- Not really, because although icy volcanism sounds exotic, both silicate and icy magmatism require something to melt and a process to cause melting. Thereafter the same physical processes regarding partial melting, the migration of magma and eruption dynamics will apply.

Ices, which are mixtures of water and more volatile compounds such as ammonia or methane, melt at lower temperatures than pure water-ice, in fact about 100 K lower for a mixture of ammonia and water. This mixing effect is analogous to adding salt to water-ice and, incidentally, is the reason why salt is used to melt ice on road surfaces during freezing weather. Partial melting of a frozen water–ammonia mixture will yield an initial melt that will be much richer in ammonia and so quite different in its composition to that of the original mixture. This can be considered analogous to the manner in which basaltic magmas are generated from a peridotite parent.

Since most icy satellites typically contain little rocky material, internally generated radiogenic heat will be negligible, and therefore tidally heated melting within the outer layers of these bodies is the only conceivable way of generating magma. However, in these instances, the amount of tidally generated heat required to bring the ice to its melting point may be relatively small. For instance, if at depth the internal temperature of a small icy body is only 100 K (−173 °C), but the melting point of ice mixtures at this depth begins at 180 K (−93 °C), then a rise of only 80 K would be enough to initiate partial melting. However, as previously discussed (Box 3.1), decompression melting plays an important role on Earth, and could also occur within the mantle of icy bodies as a result of solid-state convection arising from tidally generated heat.

## 3.2 Styles of volcanism on Earth

The nature and style of volcanism on Earth vary greatly, and range from relatively quiescent lava eruptions with relatively little or no volcanic ash, to mighty explosions that create immense clouds of hazardous ash and gas that can profoundly affect the environment. Volcanologists recognize these two contrasting styles of activity as **effusive volcanism** and **explosive volcanism** (Figures 3.11 and 3.12).

Effusive volcanism is typically a quiet affair since it is characterized by lava emanating from a vent or fissure and then spreading out over the landscape. By contrast, explosive volcanism typically produces fragmented debris or **pyroclastic materials** (from the Greek, meaning ‘fire-broken’), which largely comprise ash and other ejected fragments.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 3.11** Effusive eruptions. (a) Basalt lava oozes from a vent on Etna. (b) Fire fountain during the eruption of basaltic lava at Pu'u'Ō'o, Hawaii.



**Figure 3.12** Explosive eruption. View of the eruption column from Mount St Helens, May 1980. The prevailing wind was blowing from right to left, and slightly away from the viewpoint. Much of the ash was deposited in the region downwind of the volcano.

The way in which magma is generated and makes its way to the surface, together with the style of the resulting volcanism, are controlled by a range of physical factors. These factors will be discussed in the following sections.

It is important to note that the relative importance of lava and pyroclastic materials varies according to the degree of explosivity of the eruption. We can quantify the degree of explosivity by assigning a volcanic explosivity index (VEI) (Table 3.2).

Large, extremely violent and voluminous pyroclastic eruptions have been associated with some of the major natural catastrophes in Earth's history. For instance, the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 73 buried the Roman city of Pompeii, whilst the effects of the 1620 BC explosion of the volcanic island of Santorini in the Aegean are thought to have destroyed the flourishing Minoan civilization. More recently, the eruption of Krakatau (Indonesia, 1883) as well as more modern examples such as Mount Pinatubo and Mount St Helens mentioned earlier (Section 3.1.1) have also had wide-ranging effects on communities and measurable effects upon global climate (Table 3.3).



**Table 3.2** Relative sizes of terrestrial volcanic eruptions and the volcanic explosivity index (VEI) showing the importance of pyroclastic materials according to the degree of explosivity of the eruption.

	Volcanic explosivity index (VEI)								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
general description	non-explosive	small	moderate	moderate –large	large	very large			
qualitative description	gentle	effusive	← explosive	→←	cataclysmic or paroxysmal	→←	super-eruptions	→	
maximum erupted pyroclastic volume (m³)	10 <sup>4</sup>	10 <sup>6</sup>	10 <sup>7</sup>	10 <sup>8</sup>	10 <sup>9</sup> (1km³)	10 <sup>10</sup> (10 km³)	10 <sup>11</sup> (100 km³)	10 <sup>12</sup> (1000 km³)	10 <sup>13</sup>
eruption cloud column height (km)	<0.1	0.1–1	1–5	3–15	10–25	>25	>25	>25	>25

**Table 3.3** Eruption examples: volcanic explosivity index (VEI) and eruption column height.

VEI rating	Eruption column height (km)	Example
0	<0.1	basalt lava eruptions, e.g. Hawaii and Iceland
1	0.1–1	fire fountains in basaltic lavas, e.g. Hawaii and Iceland
2	1–5	Hekla, Iceland, 2000
3	3–15	El Chichon, Mexico, 1982
4	10–25	Mount St Helens, USA, 1980
5	>25	Krakatau, Indonesia, 1883; Pinatubo, Philippines, 1991
6	>25	Bishop Tuff pyroclastic deposit, Long Valley caldera, California, USA, 700 000 years ago
7	>25	Toba, Lake Toba caldera, Sumatra, Indonesia, 75 000 years ago
8	>25	Yellowstone, USA, 2 Ma, 1.3 Ma and 640 000 years ago

3.2.1 Effusive volcanism and lava flow dynamics

When magma reaches the surface and flows across the surface to form a channel or a sheet it is called a **lava flow**. Erupted lavas are typically liquids derived from partial melting at depth. However, they can also contain crystals, which form during cooling as the magma rises, and dissolved gases, which begin to come out of solution with the reduction of pressure so forming bubbles once the magma nears the surface.

Differences in magma composition and gas content are crucially important in controlling the explosivity of the resulting volcanism, because it is these factors that fundamentally influence magma viscosity.



The viscosity of a substance is its internal resistance to flow when a stress is applied to it.

A simple example is when gravitational force exerts a stress upon a liquid (e.g. a lava) lying on an inclined surface, in which case the liquid begins to flow downslope. In fact, two forces control the rate at which the blob of lava can spread: gravity and viscous resistance. In addition to the viscous resistance of the liquid, molten lavas also possess a **yield strength** partly derived from the chilled crust that forms on their surfaces. Before the blob can spread, the yield strength must be exceeded by forces which are acting to make it flow (e.g. gravity). Since all lavas have a yield strength, they never form thin films and always have an appreciable thickness.

Consequently, whether a lava will flow readily at the surface of a planetary body depends upon factors such as the value of gravity, and surface and eruption temperatures, which will control the cooling rate of the lava. In addition, magmas with a higher  $\text{SiO}_2$  content tend to have a greater viscosity. Basalt magmas with a  $\text{SiO}_2$  content of 48–52% produce particularly fluid lavas, though even these are less fluid than komatiitic lavas. **Rhyolite** magmas containing in excess of 70%  $\text{SiO}_2$  are amongst the most viscous (Figure 3.13). Moreover, the greater the silicate content, the lower the melting point of the magma. In other words, a typical viscous rhyolite can be erupted at temperatures as low as 700 °C, whilst a fluid basalt lava can only be molten at temperatures above 1050 °C. Lavas, in common with many other fluids such as motor oil, become more runny (i.e. their viscosity decreases) with increasing temperature. Conversely, they will only remain runny if they continue to remain at temperatures well above their melting point (Figure 3.14). In other words, a magma erupted well above its melting point is more likely to produce a lava flow than one erupted at only a few degrees above its melting point since the latter will freeze before it can travel far. In the first instance, a thin, laterally extensive lava flow would be formed because the magma can spread outwards from the vent, whilst a taller mound or dome-like construction might be created around the vent in the second instance. Surface temperature will also play an important role since, if the surface conditions of a planet are significantly cooler than the temperature of erupting lava, it will be less likely to flow far due to rapid chilling.



**Figure 3.13** Dome-like features within the Mount St Helens summit crater produced by viscous rhyolite lavas erupted at about 700 °C. This type of viscous lava can flow only a short distance before freezing, so creating either thick flows or dome-like constructions in close proximity to the vent. This smouldering lava dome is about 250 m high and the crater wall in the background is 600 m high.

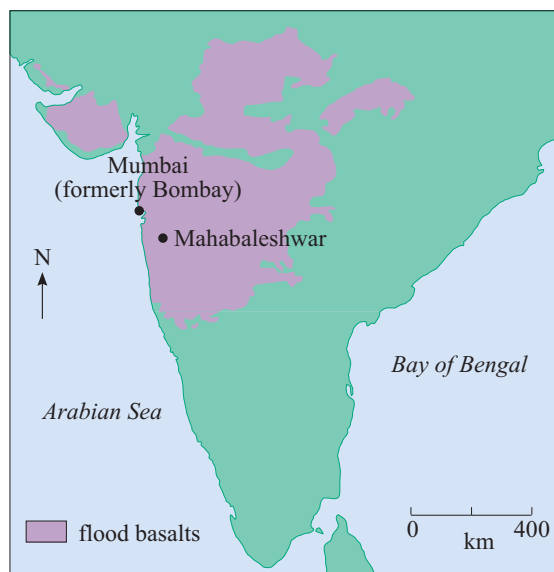


**Figure 3.14** Low viscosity basalt lava oozing out and advancing as a series of ‘toes’, which build and coalesce to form laterally extensive lava-flow sheets.

Eruption rate is another factor known to affect the pattern and structure of lava accumulations. Where magma rises and oozes slowly onto the surface, it rapidly chills and freezes. By comparison, at high rates of eruption the supply of magma is so rapid that chilling cannot occur efficiently, and the lavas can flow greater distances and cover a wider area. For many years, it was thought that eruption rate was the major control upon the distance lava flows could travel. This simple relationship initially seemed an adequate explanation for the extent and dimensions of the relatively small lava flows of  $0.1\text{--}10\text{ km}^3$ , typical of Hawaii and Iceland, since it was observed that when eruption was more rapid, the resulting flows travelled further. However, much larger flows ( $1000\text{--}1500\text{ km}^3$ ) are known to have erupted on Earth during the formation of continental flood basalt provinces (CFBPs) such as the Deccan (Box 3.2), which was erupted in northwest peninsular India between 67 million and 64 million years ago, and the Columbia River basalt province of North America which was erupted 14–15 million years ago (Figures 3.15 and 3.16). Some of the flows that comprise these CFBPs can be traced for hundreds of kilometres, but to achieve flows of these huge dimensions using the eruption-rate argument would require colossal rates of eruption. In fact, the eruption rates calculated for these examples were so large that many volcanologists began to consider them geologically improbable.

An alternative model to explain these huge flows was proposed by the volcanologist Steve Self (Open University). Whilst observing the formation and development of Hawaiian lava flows, Self noted that within a relatively short distance of the eruption vent most basalt lavas quickly formed a flexible, chilled, solid crust. However, the lava beneath this crust continued to flow for considerable distances, and progressed by a series of breakouts at the edges of a crusted-over sheet (Figure 3.14). In effect, the crust had formed an insulating layer between the chilling surface and atmospheric conditions above, and the hot magma supplied beneath. Once the crust had fully formed, it could drastically reduce heat loss – possibly to less than  $1.5\text{ K}$  for every kilometre of distance flowed. In this manner,

huge flows could be created gradually over decades, their crusted surfaces allowing the molten lava beneath to be transported tens or even hundreds of kilometres from the eruptive source via **lava tubes**. Moreover, this model allows the flexible, crusted-over flow to undergo **lava inflation** from within. A basalt flow may begin at its tip as only a few centimetres thick, but with a continuing supply of lava it can, over time, inflate to a thickness of several tens of metres (Figure 3.17).

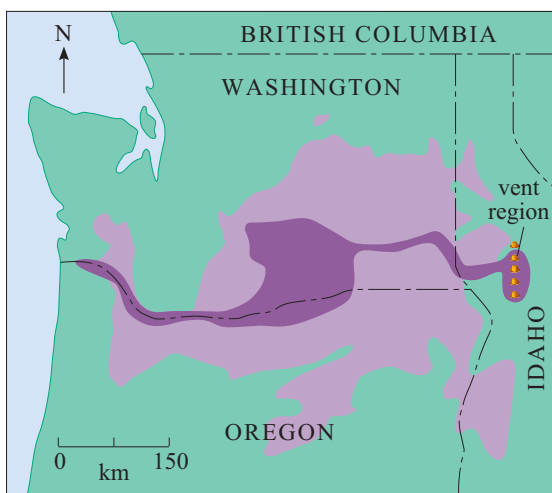


(a)



(b)

**Figure 3.15** (a) The areal extent of the Deccan Traps continental flood basalt province (CFBP). Much of northwest peninsular India is covered by these 64–67 million-year-old basalt lavas, which reach a maximum thickness of 2.5 km inland of Mumbai. (b) Panoramic view across approximately 1 km thickness of Deccan lava flows, Elphinstone Point, Western Ghats, Mahabaleshwar.



(a)

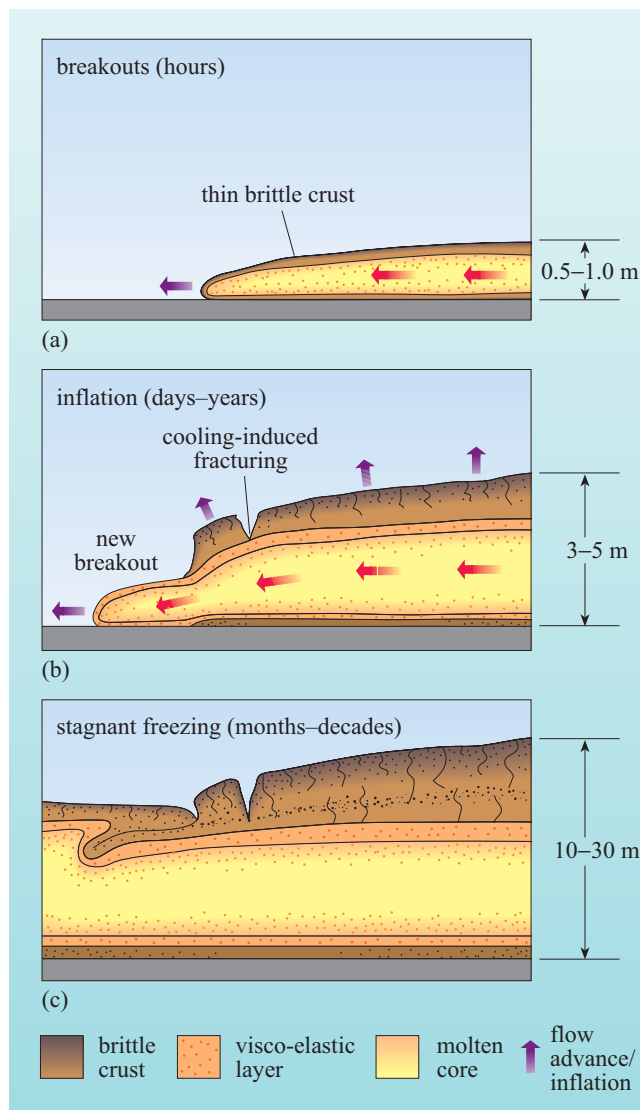


(b)

**Figure 3.16** (a) The Columbia River continental flood basalt province, covering parts of Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Much of this province was erupted between 14 million and 17 million years ago, and contains some of the largest flows and flow fields yet identified on Earth. The deep purple area defines the source and extent of the 14 million-year-old Pomoma flow that can be traced for over 550 km from its source. (b) Layers of stacked lava flows in the Columbia River province of the Columbia River. The flows shown represent just a small thickness of the voluminous and rapidly erupted Grande Ronde Formation part of the succession.



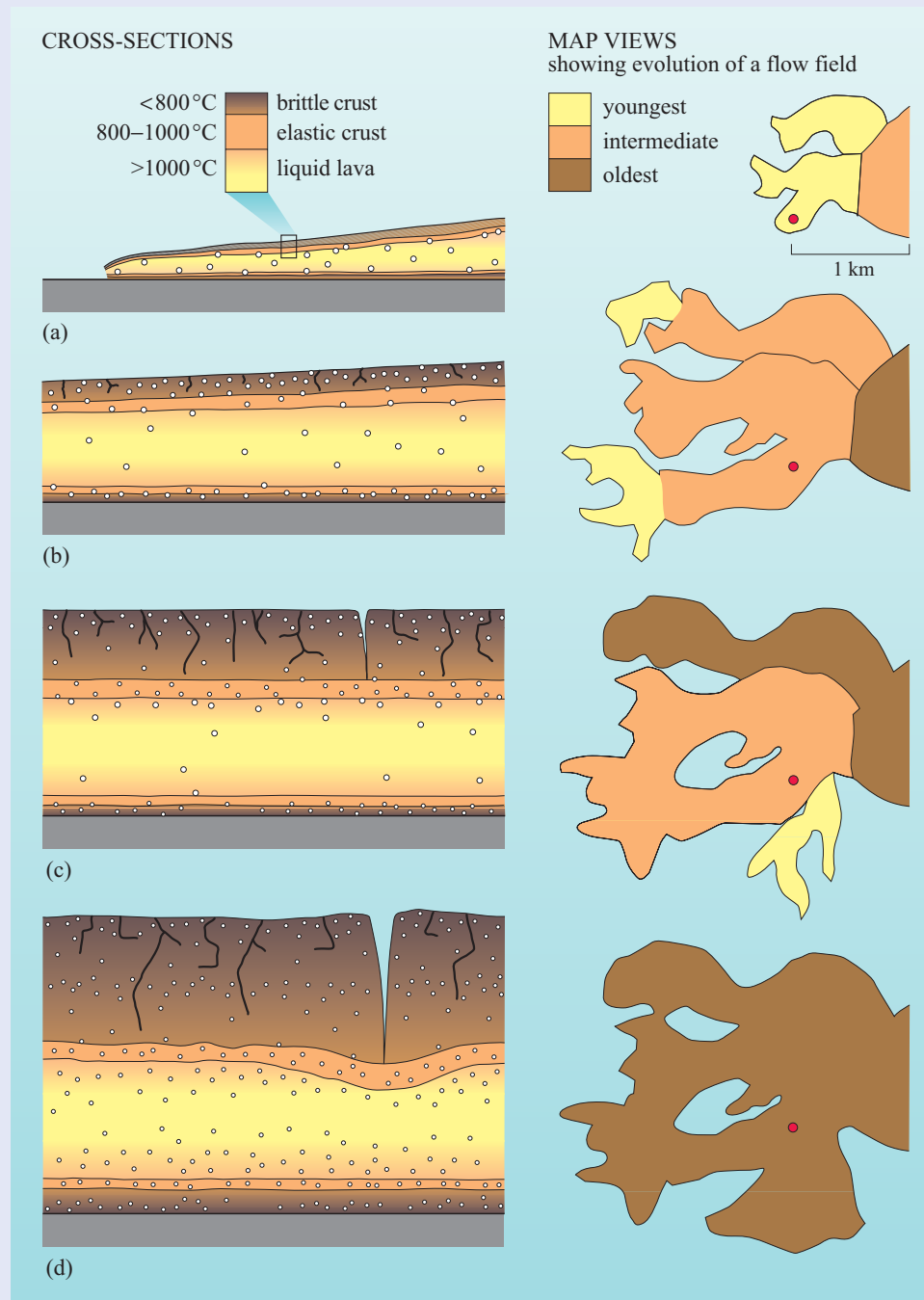
**Fig. 3.17** Schematic cross-sections of emplacement and inflation of a CFBP lava flow. (a) Flow arrives as a small, slow-moving lobe of molten lava held inside a stretchable, chilled elastic skin with brittle crust on top. Bubbles become trapped in both the upper and basal crusts. (b) Continued injection of lava into the lobe results in inflation (lifting of the upper crust) and new breakouts around its margin. The growth of the lower crust is much slower. Relatively rapid cooling and motion during inflation results in irregular jointing in the upper crust. (c) Stagnation and slow cooling of the stationary liquid core.



### BOX 3.2 FLOOD BASALTS

In addition to basaltic rocks of the ocean crust forming 70% of the Earth's surface area, immense areas of basalt lava can also be found covering large areas of continental crust. Regions of such accumulations are known as **continental flood basalt provinces (CFBPs)**, and represent Earth's largest outpourings of lava, producing volumes of up to 2 million cubic kilometres over periods of 1–5 million years. This represents annual eruption rates at least 20 times greater than those observed for a typical modern hot spot such as Hawaii. Particularly well known CFBP examples include the Columbia River basalt province of northwestern USA, and the Deccan Traps of northwest peninsular India.

In a CFBP, individual lava flows can be 20–50 m thick and extend tens, or even hundreds, of kilometres. Many such flows merge to form a single ‘flow field’ that can cover thousands of square kilometres (Figure 3.18). Each lava field represents a major volcanic episode and, if accompanied by ash and gas release, could have had environmentally devastating effects. In a typical CFBP tens or hundreds of such lava fields are stacked one upon another to a thickness of 1–3 km. Fortunately, the eruption of CFBPs are rare events because only 10 or so such episodes have occurred in the last 250 million



**Figure 3.18** Development of an inflated basaltic sheet flow and the evolution of a flow field. On the left are cross-sections at a fixed location, and on the right are concurrent map views of the development of the flow field. The map location of the cross-section is indicated by the red dot. The emplacement of a sheet lobe can take anywhere between days and years. In the cross-sections the shading darkens with cooling, and in the map view it darkens with age. (a) A new lobe advances from right to left. Incandescent lava is exposed only at the very tip of the flow. (b) The lobe thickens by inflation as it extends. Bubbles from the moving lava are trapped in the crust. The lower crust grows much more slowly than the upper crust. (c) Inflation continues. Some cracks in the upper crust become major clefts. (d) Flow stagnates, and cooling is enhanced around deep clefts. Note the complexity of a typical flow field.

years. Nevertheless, the effects of larger ones, such as the Deccan Traps and Siberian Traps, may be linked with major environmental changes 65 million and 248 million years ago, respectively.

These massive outpourings of basalt are thought to be largely the result of decompression melting of a huge mantle plume. Plumes giving rise to CFBPs are much larger than those that currently generate volcanism at hot spots such as Hawaii and Iceland. CFBP plumes are thought to originate as hot and hence unstable masses very deep within the mantle. They rise over millennia towards the surface because of their elevated temperature. However, their development and surfaceward movement appears to be independent of the wider patterns of convection within the mantle. Having risen to upper-mantle levels, the elevated temperatures within the head of these plumes causes the overlying lithosphere to heat up, weaken and thin. In regions where the overlying lithosphere consists of continental crust, this weakening and thinning may eventually result in the crust breaking apart. Where this breaking apart or **rifting** of the overlying crust occurs (Figure 3.8b), it allows the mantle beneath to rise further and so decompress. It is this decompression that produces the vast amounts of basaltic magma which finds its way up through the weakened or rifted lithosphere, and which then erupts to form huge sheets of basaltic lava that comprise the CFBP. This type of paroxysmal basaltic volcanism and associated outpouring of basaltic lavas may provide a possible analogue to major lava resurfacing events that have occurred on the other terrestrial planets.

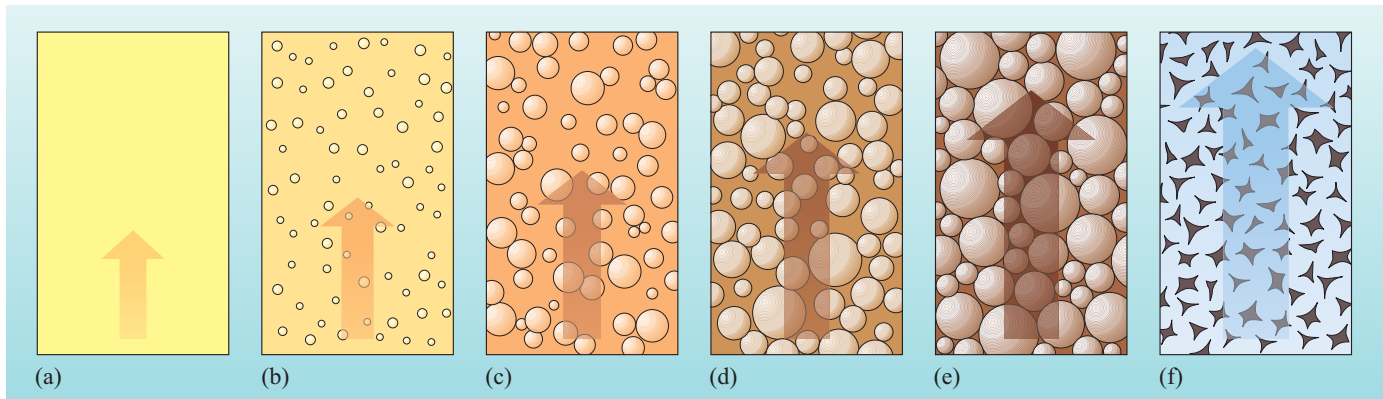
As described earlier, lava flows with a more silica-rich composition than basalt are typically erupted at lower temperatures so do not cool so rapidly. However, despite this, and the fact that they too can form thick crusts, their greater viscosity usually means they do not flow for very great distances. Instead, rhyolite lavas commonly have clinkery or boulder and rock-strewn surfaces of solidified material. They often build to a thickness of many metres within short distances from the eruption source and, in some instances, these more viscous lava eruptions may form high domes rather than laterally extensive lava flows typical of basaltic eruptions (Figure 3.13).

### 3.2.2 Explosive volcanism: eruption columns and pyroclastic eruptions

Explosive volcanism is largely the result of two main variables: the viscosity of the magma and the amount of gas it contains. Basaltic lavas have low viscosity (as discussed above) and relatively low gas contents of about 1% by mass. Both factors work together to produce relatively quiescent, effusive basaltic eruptions (Figure 3.11a). Where gas contents are higher in basaltic magmas, **fire fountains** may occur casting lava upwards for several tens to hundreds of metres.

Spectacular examples of fire fountains occur from time to time on both Hawaii (Figure 3.11b) and Iceland. Nevertheless, basalt fire fountains are small affairs compared with major explosive volcanoes. In these instances, the expanding magmatic gas not only fragments the erupting lava but also drives it upwards into the atmosphere creating **eruption columns** reaching heights of tens of kilometres above the vent (Figure 3.12).

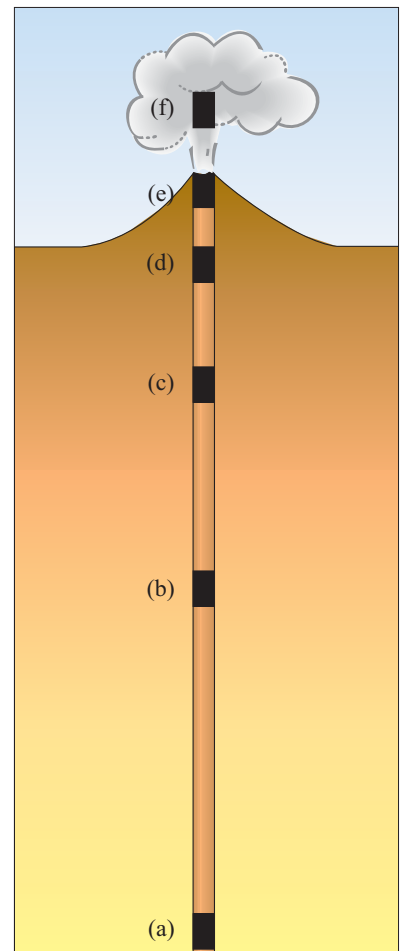




**Figure 3.19** Effects of degassing in a volcanic conduit: (a–b) as the magma begins to ascend in the conduit bubbles begin to form, so enhancing the rise of the magma; (b–d) with continued ascent in the conduit additional decompression allows a greater amount of degassing, and so leads to the formation of more bubbles which then coalesce into larger bubbles and further increase the buoyancy; (e) as the rising magma accelerates in the conduit, large amounts of degassing, or else rapid degassing within more viscous magmas, can result in fragmentation and the production of pyroclastic materials (f). Stages (a), (b) and (c) are most typical of the degassing characteristics of less viscous basaltic lavas, or else gas-poor magmas, whereas stages (d), (e) and (f) are more typical of the degassing of gas-rich, or highly viscous magmas such as rhyolite.

So, volcanologically speaking, what are the differences between these styles of eruption? To understand this, it is necessary to consider what happens as the magma approaches the surface. The ascent of magma is driven partly by buoyancy because partial melting typically produces liquids of different composition and lower density than the source, and partly by pressure because these liquids will flow towards the surface away from the higher pressures at depth. Buoyancy is further augmented because the magma will be hotter than the surrounding rocks as it rises surfacewards. Also, during magma ascent, pressure is reduced allowing any gases dissolved in the magma to expand and form bubbles (Figure 3.19). This bubble formation serves to make the magma even less dense and so more buoyant, thus further accelerating its ascent. Bubbles continue to expand as they rise in response to further decrease in confining pressure until they reach the surface where the gases escape into the atmosphere. If the magma is not viscous, then bubble escape may take place in an uninhibited, more gentle fashion, producing lavas with preserved bubbles, or causing fire fountaining in those cases where the gas content is higher.

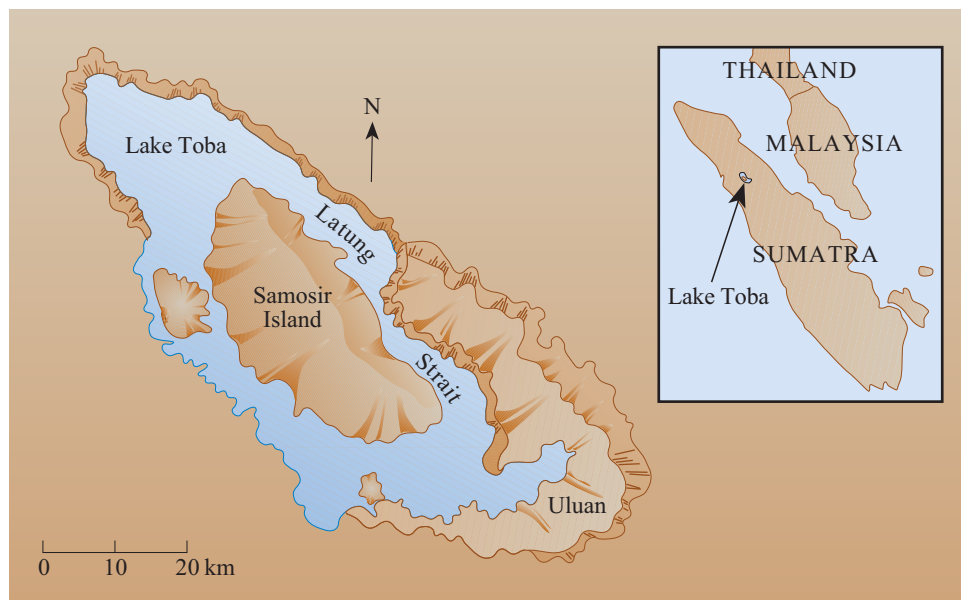
However, if the lava is viscous, such as that arising from magmas with a higher silica content, this expansion and release of gas cannot take place as easily. As a result, the magma reaches the surface containing highly pressurized bubbles which have been unable to expand fully and escape during magma ascent. Once beyond the confines of the lava conduit, the gases within the erupting lava expand rapidly creating an explosion. An excellent analogue to compare gentle and rapid escape of dissolved gas, is when opening a new bottle of fizzy drink. If opened slowly, the gas has time to escape and the drink can be poured without spillage; if opened quickly, the pressure release causes bubbles to form very rapidly producing a froth which then explodes from the bottle spout (Figure 3.19d–e). In a similar fashion, magma may also froth during gas release producing a low-density material called **pumice** when it freezes.



## Pyroclastic eruptions

Violent volcanic eruptions are much more common in volcanoes with more viscous and gas-rich magmas. The explosions they create literally blow apart the ascending magma, creating semi-molten clots of lava known as **volcanic bombs**, together with pumice, **spatter** and ash. These are all pyroclastic materials, since they are produced due to fragmentation of the magma due to gas expansion. The larger fragments thrown into the air cascade surfacewards around the vent, creating volcanic cones, whilst the finer ash material can be carried high into the atmosphere and, depending upon wind direction and the height to which they are thrown, return to the surface many tens, hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from the vent. Where this ash is preserved on land or in ocean sediments, it is given the name **tuff**. Geological evidence indicates that some ancient pyroclastic eruptions were colossal. For instance the explosive eruption of Toba, Sumatra, Indonesia, 75 000 years ago, is the largest single eruption widely known in the geological record (Figure 3.20a). It is estimated to have produced  $7.5 \times 10^{15}$  kg of magma, most of which was largely deposited as pyroclastic materials. Such super-eruptions can distribute thick pyroclastic deposits over huge regions of the globe, and may even generate tuffs that may be identified within the sedimentary record of entire oceans. Moreover,

The term 'super-eruptions' has been coined for the most powerful eruptions experienced on Earth.



(a)



(b)

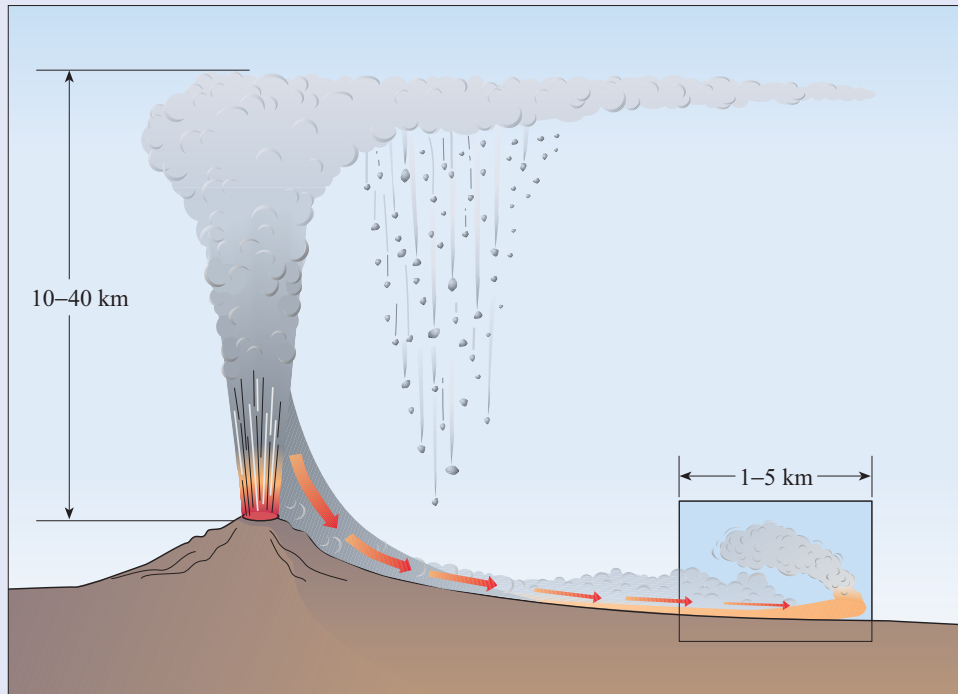
**Figure 3.20** (a) Topographic sketch and regional setting (inset), of the giant Toba caldera, Sumatra, which is 100 km in length. The caldera consists of a vast, elongate depression, now filled by Lake Toba. Towards the centre, Samosir Island marks a site where later magmatic movements have elevated the caldera floor by about 500 m. (b) View of part of the western caldera rim of Lake Toba.

since such huge volumes of material are ejected in these instances, large crater-like depressions, termed **calderas**, are left behind marking the site from which the material has been removed. In the case of Toba, a lake 100 km in length now fills the caldera, which was produced by the eruption (Figure 3.20b).

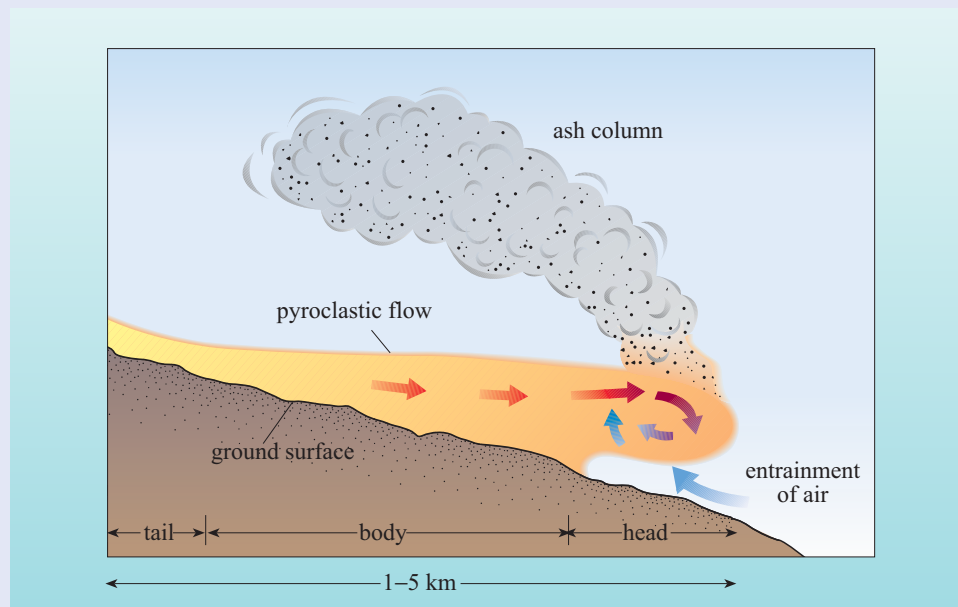
Whilst pyroclastic materials are often associated with rapid gas release and explosive eruptions, they may also be created by non-explosive volcanic phenomena (Box 3.3).

### BOX 3.3 PYROCLASTIC FLOWS

A turbulent, dense mixture of hot air, ash and larger fragments is known as a **pyroclastic flow**, since it behaves as a dense fluid. Once triggered, pyroclastic flows can sweep down hills at speeds in excess of 100 kilometres per hour (about  $30 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ ) leaving behind a blanket of rock and ash fragments covering the landscape (Figure 3.21).



(a)



(b)

**Figure 3.21** (a) Pyroclastic flows often form by collapse from an eruption column which is so dense that convective rise is inhibited. Descending material acquires enormous velocity and travels over the ground as avalanches of incandescent pumice and dust. Exceptionally, flows on Earth may travel over 100 km. (b) Cross-section through a pyroclastic flow (typically hundreds of metres to tens of kilometres in length), which is moving downslope from left to right.



**Figure 3.22** The town of St Pierre, Martinique, one week after the nuée ardente eruption of May 1902 from Mount Pelée. The town was completely destroyed although the resulting pyroclastic deposit amounted to only a few centimetres in thickness. Mount Pelée in the background is partially obscured by cloud.

There are several different processes by which pyroclastic flows may be generated. One is by the collapse of an eruption column. This occurs when part of the column becomes unstable and falls back to the ground, for instance when ash and debris pass outside the gas thrust or convecting region of the column. When this collapsing material hits the ground it creates turbulence, entraining more air, and becomes deflected along the surface topography where it can travel distances of 100 km or more. This type of pyroclastic flow is among the most devastating of all volcanic phenomena, since the fast moving cloud of debris is often extremely hot and can contain huge blocks of lava as well as ash.

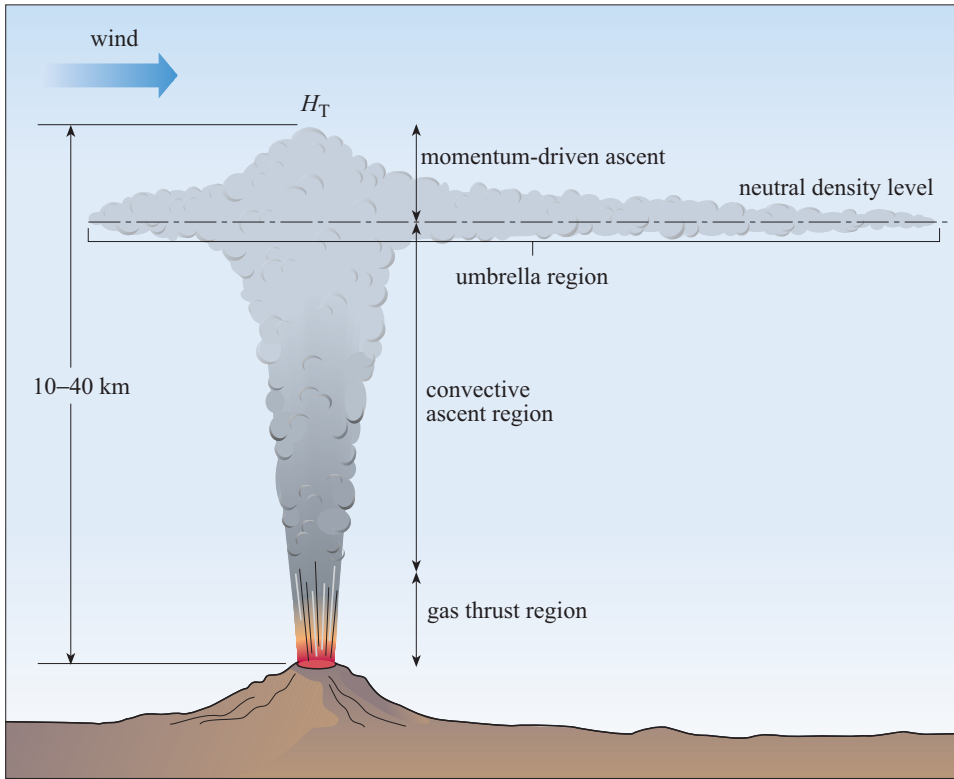
By contrast, ‘block and ash’ pyroclastic flows can be triggered by the collapse of a volcanic edifice such as a cone or a dome. This commonly occurs as a result of the continued growth of such features during a period of volcanic activity. Collapses may be activated either by an explosion of trapped gas within the edifice or simply by the over-steepening and mechanical failure of the growing volcanic structure. Once activated, the falling debris entrains air and travels across the landscape in a similar manner to the collapsing column example. Such pyroclastic eruptions can be ‘cold’ in instances where the entrained debris does not contain any hot magmatic products, or can form a glowing cloud or **nuée ardente** when hot materials are incorporated. Just such a nuée ardente from Mt Pelée devastated the town of St Pierre on Martinique in 1902 (Figure 3.22) killing over 25 000 inhabitants.

The final example of pyroclastic eruption occurs when the collapse of a volcanic structure results in the sudden removal of confining overburden, thus relieving the pressure upon magma and volatiles held within it. This is what happened during the eruption of Mount St Helens, USA in May 1980 (Figure 3.12) when the bulging mountainside slid away exposing the shallow magma chamber held within. In such a case, the volatiles are expelled explosively in the direction of pressure release, creating a directed blast that entrains both molten magma and avalanching debris from the collapsing segment.

## Eruption columns

A parabolic or ballistic trajectory describes the path of a projectile after the initial propulsive force stops and it is acted upon only by gravity.

Expanding magmatic gas drives eruption columns (sometimes termed eruption plumes), but the physics that governs the behaviour and evolution of these columns is complex. Nevertheless, observation shows that eruption columns can be divided into three main parts, each characterized by different processes (Figure 3.23). Immediately above the vent is the **gas thrust region** in which particles of all sizes are propelled upwards, driven by the rapid expansion and release of trapped gases. Larger particles, including rocks and boulders, fall back to the ground along parabolic (ballistic) trajectories. Above the gas thrust region is the **convective ascent region** in which the relative buoyancy of the hot volcanic gases is higher than the cooler surrounding atmosphere and so carries smaller fragments and particles further upward. This convection-driven process is further augmented by heat transfer from the hot particles entrained within the eruption column to the volcanic gases and air surrounding them. Huge volumes of the surrounding cooler atmosphere are sucked into, and heated within, the column in this manner, further



**Figure 3.23** Components of a volcanic eruption column rising through an atmosphere (see also Equation 3.1). In large eruptions on Earth, the convective ascent region may reach a height of more than 40 km, while the umbrella region may extend hundreds of kilometres downwind. A small amount of upwind spreading also takes place.

reinforcing the buoyancy effect. These are the main processes that allow the column to rise to such incredible heights. Finally, at high altitude, there is the **umbrella region** where cooling in the higher atmospheric levels eventually causes the plume to become neutrally buoyant, and so it spreads out laterally, much like the infamous ‘mushroom cloud’.

The maximum height ( $H_T$ ) a column can reach is largely dependent upon two variables: the mass eruption rate and the difference between the temperature of the erupted lava and the surrounding atmosphere at ground level.

The mass eruption rate is critical because it provides a measure of the amount of thermal energy that is supplied into the column during eruption (Equation 3.1).

$$H_T = k(M\Delta T)^{\frac{1}{4}} \quad (3.1)$$

where:

$k$  is a constant of proportionality

$M$  is the mass eruption rate of magma

$\Delta T$  is the difference in temperature between the erupting magma and surrounding atmosphere.



- According to Equation 3.1, what change in eruption rate would be required to double the height of a convecting eruption column?
- Since height ( $H_T$ ) depends upon the  $1/4$  power of eruption rate ( $M$ ), a sixteen-fold increase in the eruption rate would be needed.

The constant of proportionality,  $k$ , in Equation 3.1, depends on various properties, such as atmospheric density. Thus, the height,  $H_T$ , will vary between planets with different atmospheric conditions (for the same values of  $M$  and  $\Delta T$ ). Eruption columns can reach greater heights in lower density atmospheres. So eruption columns on Mars would typically reach greater heights than on Earth, whereas on Venus eruption columns would reach lesser heights than on Earth.

Mass eruption rate, and hence the density and stability of the eruption column, are controlled by two independent parameters. These are the gas content of the magma and the diameter of the volcanic vent. Basically, the higher the gas content, the more gas will be released, and so higher eruption velocities will be generated. This relationship is corroborated by model calculations which show that, for a vent of given diameter, eruption velocity increases sharply with increasing gas content. Similarly, if the vent diameter is increased, more magma can be delivered resulting in a faster eruption rate. Since eruption velocity in both cases translates to mass eruption rate, and this is directly related to column height (Equation 3.1), either increasing the gas content or increasing the vent diameter can lead to the development of higher eruption columns. However, in reality, after the initial eruption has peaked the mass eruption rate falls because the supply of magma becomes exhausted. When this occurs the column will begin to collapse.

### Dispersal of volcanic ejecta

Pyroclastic material ejected from a volcano is also known as **ejecta**. When an eruption column entrains and propels material high into the atmosphere, its return to the surface is controlled by the **terminal fall velocity** of the particles. The pattern of distribution during this fall will be profoundly influenced by particle size and prevailing wind directions (Figure 3.24). The terminal fall velocity is not a difficult concept. It describes the maximum velocity a particle can achieve when falling through an atmosphere. In effect, since **aerodynamic drag** increases with velocity, a point will arise during the fall of an object where its increase in velocity due to the gravitational force will be balanced by the force of aerodynamic drag that slows its descent. At this point, the particle can fall no faster and so is said to have reached its terminal fall velocity. The main controlling factors are summarized in Equation 3.2.

$$\text{Terminal fall velocity} = C_d \sqrt{\frac{dg\rho}{\beta}} \quad (3.2)$$

where

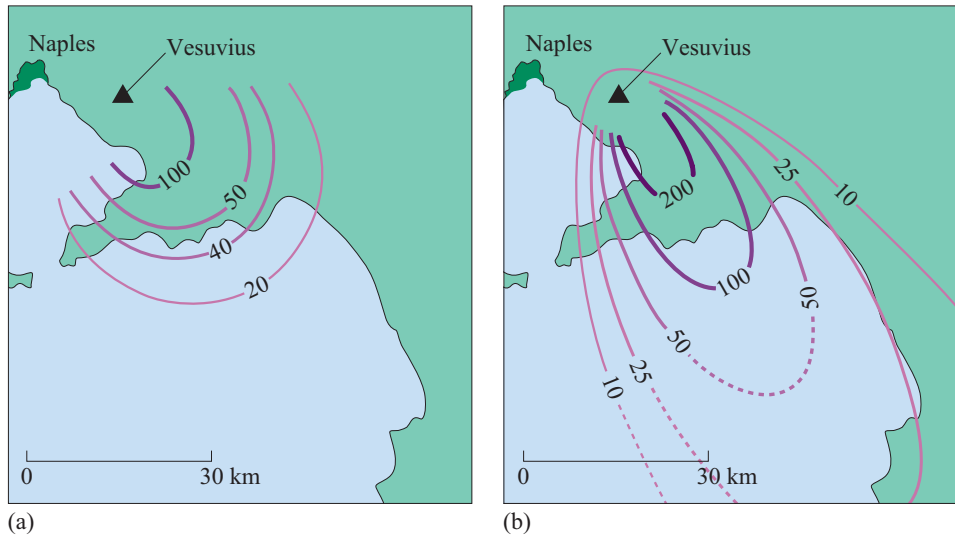
$C_d$  is the aerodynamic drag coefficient (which is 1.054 for volcanic ash)

$d$  is the particle diameter

$g$  is the acceleration due to gravity

$\rho$  is the particle density

$\beta$  is the atmospheric density.



**Figure 3.24** Examples of *isopleth* and *isopach* maps for the ash deposited by the famous AD 79 eruption of Vesuvius, which obliterated the city of Pompeii. (a) An isopleth map shows the distribution of maximum sizes (in millimetres) of pumice fragments in the deposit. (b) An isopach map shows the thickness of the deposit in centimetres. The effect of the northwesterly wind is evident from the asymmetrical distribution of ash.

The aerodynamic drag coefficient,  $C_d$ , is a dimensionless number that accounts for differences between shapes and surface smoothness. Motor cars and aircraft have a parameter similar to  $C_d$ . Volcanic ash fragments are, of course, far removed from the smoothness of luxury cars – they are irregularly shaped and have rough, drag-inducing surfaces. Values of  $C_d$  of about 1.054 have been found in experiments.

Terminal fall velocity is important in volcanic eruptions since it is key in controlling the degree of dispersal of pyroclastic materials such as ash. A particle will only continue to be carried upwards in the column and into the umbrella region if the upward velocity within the rising convecting part of the column exceeds its terminal fall velocity. Large eruptions on Earth can create convective velocities great enough to carry fist-sized pumice particles to the tops of columns at altitudes of 30–40 kilometres. However, because larger particles have higher terminal fall velocities, they naturally tend to fall out nearer to the vent (Fig. 3.24a). Thus by examining the particle size and geographical distribution of pyroclastic deposits, volcanologists can gain vital information about the nature and magnitude of ancient eruptions and even about the prevailing atmospheric conditions during the eruptive phase.

### 3.3 Factors affecting extraterrestrial volcanic eruptions

The same physical laws that govern eruption dynamics on Earth also govern the nature of eruptions on other planetary bodies. However, the physical parameters influencing extraterrestrial volcanism will be significantly different to those of our planet. Therefore, important differences might be expected in the manner in which lava flows evolve, the way in which gas escapes, or the manner in which volcanic products are distributed. You have already been introduced to some key equations that predict the behaviour of volcanic processes. These types of equations often contain terms relating to temperature, pressure and gravity. Clearly, on planetary bodies other than Earth, these parameters can differ significantly. This section briefly explores how these differences can influence the nature and style of extraterrestrial volcanism.

### 3.3.1 Gravity

Remember that weight is given by  $mg$ , where  $m$  is mass, and  $g$  is the gravitational acceleration.

Gravity is one of the most obvious variables that differs between planetary bodies. For instance, surface gravity on Mercury and Mars is only about one-third, and on the Moon only one-sixth, of that experienced on Earth (for exact values, see Appendix A, Table A1). Consider again the influence of gas on eruption dynamics discussed in Section 3.2.2. Under low-gravity conditions, the bubbles will begin to form at greater depths than on Earth. This is because for a given depth beneath the surface, the magma (of a given mass) in the conduit above will *weigh* less so the confining pressure will be lower, thus encouraging earlier gas release during ascent.

Other volcanic processes are also affected by low gravity. These include buoyancy and ascent because gravity gives rise to the buoyancy force that allows magma to rise. For a magma body, the magnitude of the buoyant force depends upon its depth, size, how much less dense it is than the surrounding material, and the value of gravity. Therefore, given basaltic magma bodies of equal volume held at comparable depths within similarly sized planets of different masses, the buoyancy effect upon the magma chamber will be greater within the more massive planet because of its greater gravity. Thus, in general, a magma will tend to rise more readily in planets with greater gravity.

Once the magma reaches the surface and begins to form a lava flow, its behaviour is also highly dependent upon gravity. For instance, the critical thickness ( $h$ ) that a body of lava resting on a slope must achieve before it begins to flow is given in Equation 3.3.

$$h = \frac{S_y}{g\rho \tan \alpha} \quad (3.3)$$

where:

$S_y$  is the lava yield strength

$g$  is the acceleration due to gravity

$\rho$  is the lava density

$\alpha$  is the angle of slope from the horizontal.

Changing the gravity to values more consistent with that experienced on Mars, Mercury or the Moon, whilst keeping all the other variables the same (for instance basaltic magmas erupted onto slopes of similar angles) will require greater thickness values before magma starts to flow. In other words, lavas of similar composition extruded on to similar topographic slopes would be thicker on Mars and Mercury than on Earth.

Gravity also affects the manner in which any pyroclastic products will be distributed since it is one of the variables that controls the terminal fall velocity of particles in an eruption cloud (Equation 3.2).

- For bodies with a lower gravity, are particles in an eruption column likely to be taken higher or lower than would be the case in a similar eruption column on Earth?
- Assuming none of the other variables alter, the terminal fall velocity should be lower on bodies with lower gravity, so for volcanic eruptions with a similar explosivity the particles should be taken higher.

In fact, the above answer is a rather simplistic view of the manner in which eruption cloud heights might be affected. This is because Equation 3.1 contains the constant  $k$ , which depends on (among other things) atmospheric density, which will fundamentally affect the nature, size and style of eruption columns that might occur on other planetary bodies.

### 3.3.2 Atmospheric density

An eruption column can rise only if the gas within it is less dense than the surrounding atmosphere (i.e. this is the requirement for buoyancy). If it is more dense, it will simply collapse under gravity once the momentum acquired in the gas thrust region ceases to carry the cloud particles upwards.

Column collapse occurs within terrestrial eruption columns once the heat within the convecting part begins to dissipate, or the rate of magma supply begins to wane. When this occurs, the materials held aloft plummet to the ground and spread outwards around the volcano. As these fall, the gravitational potential energy gained in the eruption column is transformed to kinetic energy that drives the fallen materials across the ground at high velocity. This effect creates the highly destructive pyroclastic surges around the volcano as the column material settles out. However, on bodies with an extremely tenuous atmosphere, the ejected pyroclastic materials and gases entrained in the eruption column are unlikely to achieve densities lower than that of the surrounding atmosphere. Therefore, unlike on Earth, eruption columns cannot achieve a convection phase. Indeed, on bodies with almost negligible atmospheres, such as Mercury and the Moon, eruptive columns cannot exist because convection is not possible, and so there is nothing to provide buoyant support to the column (and no atmospheric gases to be entrained and heated). Erupted gases therefore expand into the vacuum of space, driving ejected fragments along ballistic trajectories. Moreover, reference to Equation 3.2 also shows that the terminal fall velocity will be extremely high for ejecta in low-density atmospheres because the value of  $\beta$  is extremely small.

Finally, explosive eruption can only take place if the magma contains sufficient gas to expand, create bubbles and disrupt the ascending magma. Importantly, the degree of magmatic gas expansion is greatest when the atmospheric pressure is least. As a result, on Mars, where the surface atmospheric pressure is only 0.6% that experienced at the Earth's surface, a magma gas content of only 0.01% by mass would be required to drive explosive eruptions. On Earth, the minimum is 0.07% by mass, whilst on Venus, where the dense atmosphere creates a surface atmospheric pressure ninety times that of Earth, a gas content of 3% would be required to create an explosive eruption. Therefore, whilst it seems likely that explosive eruptions could have taken place on Mars, they are much less likely to have played a significant part in the volcanism of Venus.

### 3.3.3 Surface and atmospheric temperatures

Surface and atmospheric temperatures vary significantly upon and between the terrestrial planets. For instance, Mars's surface experiences extremes of about 290 K (20 °C) during the Martian day to about 130 K (−140 °C) during its night, whilst the surface of Venus is persistently hot at around 730 K (460 °C) due to its all-enveloping cloud cover. Also, the atmospheric temperature profile (the way in which temperature varies with height) is significantly different in the cases of Venus, Earth and Mars. Both atmospheric and surface temperatures will profoundly affect the way in which erupted lavas will cool, the dynamics of any eruption columns, and the associated dispersal of pyroclastic materials.

In Section 3.2.1, it was argued that the eruption temperature and the formation of a chilled crust were important factors that controlled the distances travelled, and hence the lateral extent of basaltic lava flows. In addition, factors such as eruption rate and degree of crust formation can also influence the distances flowed by basaltic and other lava types. As a consequence, it seems reasonable to assume that in environments characterized by lower ambient temperatures, lava flows of similar composition should travel shorter distances due to more rapid cooling. To some extent this will be true, but if extensive solid crusts are formed, these cooling effects will be significantly reduced and flow inflation and breakout may become the dominant process. Therefore, since solid crusts provide such effective insulation against heat loss, differences in style and extent of basaltic lava flows on planetary bodies with cooler ambient surface temperatures may be smaller than expected. Accordingly, whether laterally extensive lava flows or tall volcanic edifices are generated is probably influenced more by magma composition than by planetary surface temperatures.

Nevertheless, in cases such as Venus, the rate of lava cooling will be slower than that experienced on Earth because the differential between surface and eruption temperatures,  $\Delta T$ , is significantly smaller. For instance,  $\Delta T$  for a basalt erupted on Earth, is over 1000 K (i.e.  $1050 - 15^\circ\text{C}$ ), whilst on Venus,  $\Delta T$  would be nearer 600 K (i.e.  $1050 - 460^\circ\text{C}$ ).

More bizarre is the idea that unusually fluid lavas similar to **carbonatites** may erupt on Venus and flow immense distances in a manner similar to river waters on Earth. Carbonatite eruptions generate non-silicate lavas that are rich in calcium carbonate ( $\text{CaCO}_3$ ), and are known from rare instances in east Africa. Such eruptions produce particularly fluid flows and, unlike silicate magmas, have a particularly low eruption temperature of only about  $500^\circ\text{C}$ . If such lavas were erupted on the surface of Venus,  $\Delta T$  would be so small that freezing would take place only very slowly, thus providing opportunity for the fluid flows to travel great distances and cut ‘channels’ in much the same manner as rivers do on Earth (Figure 3.25).

Interestingly, the possibility of slow cooling rates also arises on some icy bodies since the temperature difference,  $\Delta T$ , between erupting cryovolcanic lavas and surface conditions may be relatively small compared with those characteristic of most terrestrial lava eruptions ( $\Delta T$  between 700 K and 1200 K). For instance, if an icy lava is erupted at 180 K and the surface temperature of the body is 140 K, then  $\Delta T$  is only 40 K.



**Figure 3.25** A sinuous channel, 2 km in width, crossing fractured lava plains on Venus. The image shows a region 130 km across. This is one of about 200 sinuous channels on the plains of Venus, the longest of which has been traced for 6800 km. Superficially, these resemble meandering river channels, but, unlike drainage patterns, they lack tributaries. Given Venus’s high surface temperature (about  $460^\circ\text{C}$ ) they are most likely to be channels cut by flowing lava rather than water. However, since it is unlikely that basaltic lava would remain molten long enough to travel such distances, it is more probable that they were carved by flows of carbonatite lava. Carbonatite does not solidify until it cools below  $500^\circ\text{C}$ , and so could remain liquid for a long time after its eruption on to the hot surface of Venus.



- If the  $\Delta T$  is only 40 K, would the resulting slow cooling of a cryovolcanic lava flow on a small icy body necessarily result in laterally extensive lava flows? (Hint: consider Equation 3.3.)
- Not necessarily. Although  $\Delta T$  is comparatively small (only 40 K), permitting slower rates of cooling and hence the opportunity to flow further before freezing, the production of laterally extensive lava flows is also dependent upon gravity (Equation 3.3). Therefore, even if a lava were to cool relatively slowly, on smaller bodies with low gravity such a lava could not flow and spread easily. Instead, it would form thick, locally restricted flows and edifices, rather than thin widespread flow sheets (i.e. the critical thickness,  $h$ , would be relatively large).

Following the earlier discussion regarding the development of eruption columns, it should now also be apparent that in addition to atmospheric density and gravity, atmospheric temperature will also play a key role. Equation 3.1 indicates that  $\Delta T$ , the difference between the temperature of the erupted magma and the surrounding atmosphere, will control eruption height. Broadly speaking, the lower the atmospheric temperature, the higher the eruption column can rise for a given magmatic temperature. However, as previously discussed, the relationship concerning eruption column height and the velocity of ejected volcanic materials is likely to be more complex on planets with particularly tenuous atmospheres. Even if such bodies had relatively cold surface and atmospheric conditions compared with magmatic temperatures, an extremely thin atmosphere would not allow the development of a convecting region in the column.

From the above arguments, it might be concluded that a dense atmosphere would promote tall eruption columns since such atmospheres would encourage convection within the column. However, this is not necessarily the case because the development of such a column requires the explosive release of gas, and this can only occur if there is sufficient pressure difference between the released magmatic volatiles and the ambient planetary atmosphere. Consequently, under particularly dense atmospheres (e.g. on Venus) the expansion of volatiles would be inhibited, and so explosive volcanism and associated eruption columns are less likely unless the magma is particularly volatile-rich (Section 3.3.2).

### 3.3.4 Cryovolcanism

As outlined earlier (Section 3.1.5), the melting processes that generate icy magmatism are controlled by factors similar to those which produce the silicate volcanism with which we are perhaps more familiar. However, given that the eruptive products are themselves ‘ices’, would it be correct to expect significant differences in the style of cryovolcanism compared with silicate lava eruptions and associated ash and gas release?

In fact, just because cryovolcanism describes the generation and eruption of magmas derived from ice rather than molten rock, it does not necessarily follow that the eruptive behaviour and the style of volcanism associated with these ices must be significantly different. Partial melting of an ice mixture can result in the release of volatiles and gases in a similar fashion to silicate melting, and so the resulting surface eruption can be either effusive or explosive depending on whether this gas is released progressively or instantaneously. If cryovolcanism becomes explosive, there then arises the possibility of eruption columns producing the ice equivalent of volcanic ash, which would be deposited around the vent area and further afield depending upon atmospheric and gravitational conditions. Similarly, icy lavas may also develop a solidified crust when chilled on exposure to surface conditions, and so present the possibility of lava tubes and laterally extensive inflated flows analogous to those of Earth.

Much more observational data is required to further our understanding of cryovolcanism, but the range of cryovolcanic styles is likely to be just as varied as those characteristic of silicate volcanism on Earth and the other terrestrial planets. However, these differences are largely the result of variation in planetary attributes such as gravity, atmospheric density and surface temperatures, rather than major differences in either the cause of melting or the material that is being melted. In other words, although cryovolcanic products may be different to those to which we are more familiar, the same physical laws control the eruption processes.

### 3.3.5 Summary

Gravity, atmospheric density, and the internal and surface temperature conditions of other planetary bodies place fundamental constraints upon the nature of any volcanic eruption and the manner in which its products are erupted.

The preceding sections have largely dealt with variation in these controlling factors in an unsophisticated manner since we have typically considered only one variable at a time. You may now have begun to realize that any investigation of the nature of volcanism and eruption on bodies elsewhere in the Solar System requires an understanding of the interaction between these controlling variables. Predicting the style and extent of extraterrestrial volcanism therefore requires complex modelling. This is a task that lies at the forefront of modern planetary research.

## 3.4 Volcanism on the terrestrial planets and planet-like bodies

Having examined and outlined the causes and nature of volcanism, together with the main factors that control volcanic eruptions, the evidence for volcanism on other terrestrial planets and terrestrial-like bodies can now be explored in more detail. In the following sections we briefly examine the evidence for volcanism in the Solar System, and the contrasts between the volcanic histories of different kinds of bodies. Focusing on the observable evidence for different volcanic phenomena, a short description of the observed volcanic features of each body is provided, together with a short account of their differing volcanic histories.

### 3.4.1 Earth

Terrestrial volcanism is an on-going process. Over 70% of the Earth's surface is covered by basalt lavas that have erupted within the last 200 million years, although most of them are hidden beneath the oceans. Several hundred active volcanoes around the world provide conclusive evidence of continuing thermal processes within the mantle, and both effusive and explosive eruptions are common. Although they are not the world's highest mountains, the volcanic edifices of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea in Hawaii are the largest volcanoes, reaching elevations of 9 km above their bases on the ocean floor.

In the Deccan area of northwest India, basalt flows that erupted 67–64 million years ago total more than 2 km in thickness and cover almost  $10^6 \text{ km}^2$ . Similar continental flood basalt provinces (CFBPs) are found in Brazil, Namibia, South Africa, Siberia and southern China, and testify to periods of intense basaltic volcanism during the last

250 million years. By contrast, evidence of much smaller but far more explosive volcanic eruptions are widespread in volcanic arc settings such as the Central Andes (Box 3.1) where pyroclastic flow deposits can cover hundreds of thousands of square kilometres.

Super-eruptions are thought to be generated by huge volumes of viscous, gas-rich magma that rise to, and are held at, relatively shallow levels within the Earth's crust. A near-instantaneous release of pressure occurs when the magma eventually finds a route and breaks out at the surface, producing a cataclysmic explosion that sends hot gas and pyroclastic materials high into the atmosphere. Such eruptions would have been tens of thousands of times greater than that of Mount St Helens (USA, 1980). Accordingly, the volume of ash is enormous, and can cover huge areas of continent and ocean with many metres of material within only a few hours or days (Figure 3.26). Such eruptions are known in the geological record from the widespread ash 'horizons' preserved in both sea-floor sediments and deposits on land (e.g. Toba, Indonesia which erupted about 75 000 years ago), and from the immense calderas (surface depressions) that are left behind through surface collapse once all the magma beneath the volcano has been expelled. Such eruptions are known to have profoundly affected the environment since they are thought to have produced massive ash clouds and toxic gases which circled the globe, reflected incoming sunlight, and cooled the climate. The term 'volcanic winter' has been given to the cool twilight conditions that are thought to have been experienced at Earth's surface following such eruptions. Indeed, these conditions have many similarities with those that would occur following a large asteroid or comet impact with the Earth. In fact, there is considerable argument within the scientific community as to whether asteroid/comet impact, or volcanism, was the dominant factor in the demise of the dinosaurs (and many other species) 65 million years ago. (You will consider the effects of impacts in detail in Chapter 4.)



**Figure 3.26** Thick volcanic ash deposits in Yellowstone Park, Wyoming, USA. These deposits were produced during a major eruption of the Yellowstone caldera complex about 1.3 million years ago. Two units can be seen. The lower layer was formed from ash and pumice falling out from the eruption column, and consists of larger fragments near the base, with progressively finer material towards the top (the holes at the top are the entrances to birds' nests). The overlying unit also contains coarse material at its base, but was formed later in the eruption when a pyroclastic flow cascaded across the land surface carrying with it more ash and debris. At the very top, the brownish material is ash that became welded together due to the heat in the pyroclastic flow.

### 3.4.2 The Moon

As discussed in Section 2.5.2, basaltic-type lava flows form the youngest and most extensive rocks on the Moon. Flows filling the mare basins are generally 3.8–3.2 Ga old, although some may be as young as 0.8–1.0 Ga old. Spacecraft images reveal evidence of many flows, some of them extending hundreds of kilometres, but the sources of these flows remain obscure. There are no obvious volcanoes and it is thought that the lavas must have flooded to the surface via relatively narrow cracks and fissures (Figure 3.27).

Since the Moon is extremely deficient in volatiles (Table 2.4), including those elements that would normally form volcanic gases, large-scale pyroclastic activity is not expected to have formed a significant part of the Moon's volcanic history. Nevertheless, some evidence for some pyroclastic activity has been detected on spacecraft images and in surface samples.

- Given the absence of an atmosphere on the Moon and its low surface gravity, how would you expect pyroclastic materials to be dispersed? What might the deposits look like?
- Explosive eruptions taking place into the vacuum of space on a low-gravity planetary body would propel ejecta long distances on ballistic trajectories. The deposited material would form thin sheets around the vent, with larger fragments concentrated towards the vent.

Promising-looking deposits of ejecta have been noted in a few sites around the Moon. Termed **dark halo craters**, they are best seen on the floor of the large crater Alphonsus. There, aprons of dark ejecta surround small craters developed on fissures that cut the floor of the larger crater. They have been described as the lunar counterparts of small terrestrial volcanoes such as Stromboli.



**Figure 3.27** An astronaut's view looking southeastwards across the Mare Imbrium region of the Moon. The prominent crater towards the upper left is Aristarchus, which is thought to be one of the youngest large craters on the Moon (about 400 Ma). Closer than Aristarchus are the traces of a much older crater, Prinz, which was flooded by the lavas that spread to form the Mare basins 3.5 Ga ago. The sinuous features are lunar rilles. These are thought to be channels or collapsed lava tubes produced by flowing lava towards the end of the Mare-forming events.



### 3.4.3 Mercury

Only one spacecraft, Mariner 10, has visited Mercury and it imaged less than half the planet. Consequently, we know much less of its volcanic history than we do of the Moon, or even Io (Section 3.4.6). Mercury is a small, dense body that lacks an atmosphere and so we might expect it to demonstrate evidence of volcanic activity similar to that of the Moon. Mariner 10 images show large areas of smooth plains on Mercury, notably around a large impact basin called Caloris, which are probably equivalents of the lunar mare lavas (Figure 3.28).

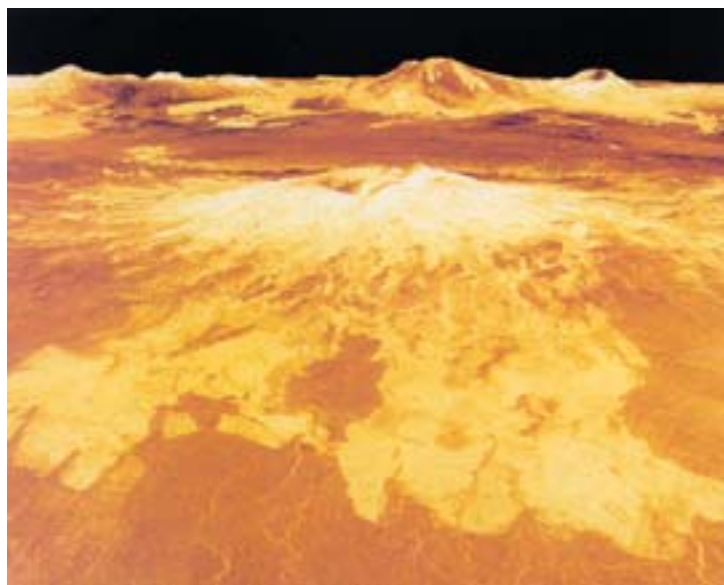
**Figure 3.28** Part of the Caloris Basin, which is 1100 km in diameter (left-hand side of the image). This is thought to have been formed by a giant impact early in Mercury's history (about 4 Ga ago), and subsequently filled by lava flows. The nature of the wrinkle ridges on its floor is a matter of debate. They probably represent lava flows escaping from fractures, surface contraction and subsidence effects. Beyond the outer ring of the crater, the right-hand part of the image reveals numerous secondary craters formed when ejecta from the Caloris impact struck the surface.



### 3.4.4 Venus

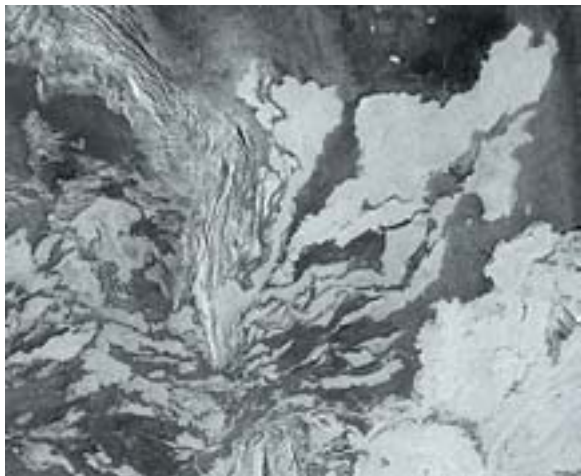
Venus is close in size, mass and density to Earth, but differs in having an atmospheric pressure ninety times greater than Earth's, and a surface temperature of about 730 K. The crushing atmospheric pressure would tend to limit both explosive pyroclastic activity and the formation of convecting eruption columns.

During 1990–94, the Magellan spacecraft mapped the surface of Venus by imaging radar so revealing many details of Venus's volcanic past. It is clear that there are numerous major volcanoes on Venus. Some rise many kilometres above its surface to form broad shields similar to those of Hawaii (Figure 3.29).



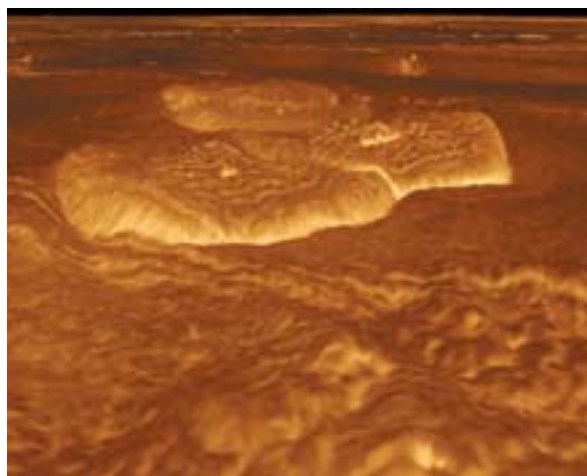
**Figure 3.29** Three-dimensional, computer-generated, perspective view of the 5 km high shield volcanoes Maat Mons (background), Sapas Mons (foreground), and adjacent region on Venus. The vertical scale has been exaggerated tenfold to show the topography more clearly, so in reality slopes are much gentler than implied here. These low slopes, together with the extensive lava flow fields extending across the adjacent lowland regions, indicate these were probably produced by basaltic eruptions.





**Figure 3.30** Lava flows on Venus. The flows that appear very bright to the radar have rough surfaces, whereas the darker flows are smoother. This mosaic highlights a system of east-trending, radar-bright and radar-dark lava flows that collide with and breach a north-trending sinuous ridge (running top to bottom, left of centre). Upon breaching the ridge, the lava pooled, forming a radar-bright deposit covering approximately 100 000 km<sup>2</sup> (right-hand side of image). The source of the lava is the Corona Derceto, which lies about 300 km west of the scene. Image shows an area 400 km in width.

**Figure 3.31** A three-dimensional perspective view of part of the Alpha Regio area on the surface of Venus. This view is of an area containing seven circular dome-like hills, three of which are visible in the centre of the image. Average diameter of the hills is 25 km, with maximum elevations of 750 m. The hills are thought to be the result of the eruption of viscous lava coming from a vent on a relatively level surface, allowing the lava to flow in an even, lateral pattern. These features have been compared to lava domes on Earth (Figure 3.13), but they are an order of magnitude greater in size. The concentric and radial fracture patterns on their surfaces suggest that a chilled outer layer formed, then further intrusion in the interior stretched the surface. The bright margins possibly indicate the presence of rock debris or talus at the slopes of the domes.



Volcanoes on Venus probably erupted lavas of basaltic composition. Many lava flows and extensive lava fields have been identified (Figure 3.30). Some long sinuous flows extending nearly 2000 km may be cut by particularly fluid lavas, possibly of carbonatite composition. In addition, there are innumerable small volcanoes a few hundred metres in height, some of which appear to have been the sources of minor pyroclastic eruptions. There are also a number of circular, pancake-like domes which would be consistent with the eruption of more viscous lavas (possibly rhyolitic in composition) (Figure 3.31).

The average age of Venus's surface is thought to be only about 500 million years old, and may indicate a paroxysmal planetary resurfacing event (Section 2.5.4). As yet, there has been no direct evidence for on-going volcanic activity, but given that Venus is so similar to Earth in size, mass and composition, it may be possible that volcanism continues to the present day. However, any current volcanism will be at a much reduced scale compared with that likely to have been associated with a major resurfacing event.

### 3.4.5 Mars

Much was learned about Mars's geology from the first mapping and lander missions of the 1970s. More recently, high-resolution images defining surface features of only a few metres in scale have been collected. These have provided detailed data for the interpretation of Martian geology and landforms.

#### QUESTION 3.3

Before reading further, note down what sort of volcanism you might expect to find evidence for on Mars. Think in terms of its sources of heat, thermal evolution, and the likelihood of lava and pyroclastic eruptions.

The volcanic processes described in this chapter should have helped you to formulate reasonable responses to the previous question. However, a complicating factor on Mars is that surface conditions, including its atmospheric pressure, appear to have varied greatly since its origin. These changes have been reflected in its volcanic history, notably the style of pyroclastic eruptions.

Spacecraft images show that Mars has the largest volcanoes in the Solar System. Olympus Mons, and three nearby major volcanoes, lie in an area known as the Tharsis volcanic province. Their morphology is reminiscent of the gently sloping Hawaiian volcanoes, but they are much bigger. Olympus Mons (Figure 3.32) has a base diameter in excess of 600 km, a nested summit caldera complex more than 60 km in diameter and over 2 km deep, and an elevation of nearly 25 km above the surrounding plains, giving it a volume 100 times that of the Hawaiian volcanic edifice. High-resolution images show myriads of fresh-looking flows draping the flanks of Olympus Mons that wind for hundreds of kilometres across the lowland plains. By contrast, some small Martian volcanoes rise abruptly out of the surrounding plains, leading to suggestions that their flanks were partially 'drowned' by extensive flood basalt lavas (the basaltic composition being confirmed by the



**Figure 3.32** A spectacular view of Olympus Mons, the youngest volcano in the planet's volcanic Tharsis region. It is thought that it was last active over 100 million years ago. This volcano is over 24 km high – three times taller than Mount Everest – and as wide as the entire Hawaiian Island chain. The three craters in the summit region are over 2 km deep, and are thought to be caldera collapses formed by the drainage of lava beneath during eruptions from the flanks of the volcano. Despite its large size, the angle of slope is only a few degrees, similar to those of Mauna Loa, Hawaii. Consequently, it has long been inferred that this volcano was built by the repeated eruption of low viscosity basaltic lava flows. The Martian crust is able to support such a large volcanic edifice because, being a smaller planet than Earth, it has lost much of its heat which has enabled its lithosphere to thicken and so become much stronger.

Sojourner rover, part of the Mars Pathfinder lander, Figure 3.33). These lavas are thought to have built up over time and may be up to about 40 km thick in the Tharsis area (Figure 3.34).

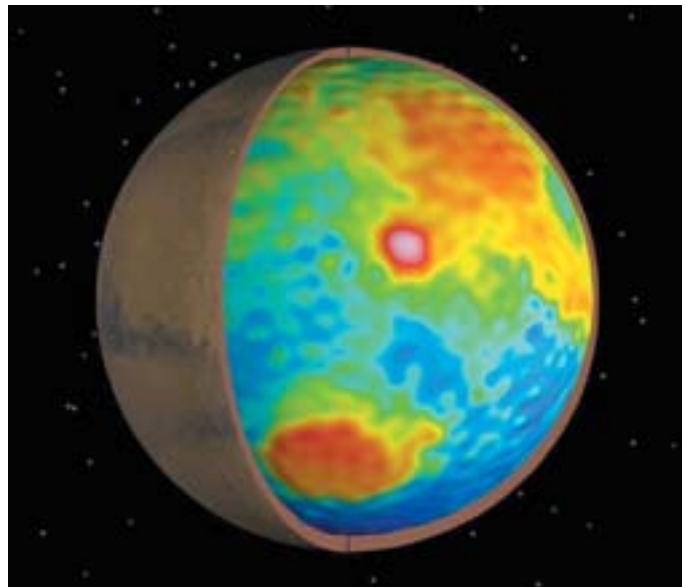
- Plate recycling movements do not take place on Mars. Can you suggest how this might account for the fact that Mars can sustain volcanoes much larger than even Earth's largest volcanoes?
- The Hawaiian volcanoes, riding on their lithospheric plate, are rapidly carried away from their thermal sources, thus limiting the maximum size they can achieve. By contrast, a volcano borne above a Martian mantle hot spot remains fixed above it, enabling it to grow indefinitely. Moreover, because the Martian lithosphere is thicker, and hence stronger, than that of Earth, it can support much larger volcanic constructions without flexing downwards, as is the case with the sea-floor around Hawaii.

Typical flows on the plains are about 10 km wide and 20–30 m thick and often display a lack of superimposed impact craters which may indicate that some flows are relatively youthful. However, assigning absolute ages is difficult given only the crater size–frequency statistics (you'll consider this in Chapter 4) to go on, and a relatively scant knowledge of Martian weathering and erosion processes that might otherwise erode and obscure such a record. Consequently, some crater counters suggest it is almost a billion years since the last eruption, whilst others consider that the youngest flows may be only a few hundred million years old.



**Figure 3.33** A close-up of the Sojourner rover taken during the Mars Pathfinder mission in 1997 as it placed its alpha proton X-ray spectrometer (APXS) upon the surface of the rock 'Yogi' to determine its composition. (The rover is about the size of a microwave oven.) Results show this rock has a composition similar to common basalts found on Earth.

**Figure 3.34** Inside Mars. A colour cut-away diagram revealing the thickness of the Martian crust. Red colours correspond to thin areas, and blue to thick crustal areas. The Martian crust typically ranges from about 30 km to 80 km in thickness and shows a dramatic difference between the generally thinner northern hemisphere crust and the thicker southern hemisphere crust. The region of thin crust in the southern hemisphere is the Hellas basin, whilst the other smaller, round area of thin crust just north of the equator is the Isidis Planitia region (see Figure 3.2). The areas of thickest crust associated with the huge volcanoes of the Tharsis region lie beyond the easterly limb of the globe.





Some Martian volcanoes may be largely of pyroclastic origin. Two lines of evidence support this suggestion. First, their remarkably flat topographic profiles are consistent with widespread dispersal of pyroclastic fall and flow deposits. Second, the erosion patterns of the deposits on their flanks do not look like those characteristic of lavas (Figure 3.35).

The small cones of Isidis Planitia are similarly thought to be the result of spatter around small vents. Mars's low atmospheric density should allow eruption columns to rise about five times higher than on Earth given the same mass eruption rate (i.e. as a consequence of the constant,  $k$ , in Equation 3.1 (Section 3.2.2) having a value larger than it has on Earth). For comparable eruptions, therefore, pyroclastic deposits could be much more widely dispersed on Mars than on Earth. Whenever things become widely dispersed, however, it becomes more difficult to identify them positively on spacecraft images. Thus, while explosive volcanic activity has probably been important on Mars, it will be difficult to resolve its full extent without further detailed investigation.

### 3.4.6 Io

Io is the most volcanically active body in the Solar System (Figure 3.36). It orbits about 422 000 km away from the colossal mass of Jupiter, and undergoes significant tidal heating due to the large gravitational influence of Jupiter 'kneading' Io as it travels around its orbit (you will consider this effect in more detail in Chapter 7). This perpetual tidal kneading maintains Io's hot interior (Section 2.5.6). It is estimated that the power liberated by this tidal dissipation is two orders of magnitude larger than that released by any internal radioactive decay. Spacecraft and telescopic infrared data suggest that the globally averaged **surface heat flow** on Io is about 30 times that of Earth.



**Figure 3.35** Appolinaris Patera, an isolated Martian volcano located near the equator. It is 5 km high, 400 km in diameter, and has a summit caldera that is 70 km in diameter. The dendritic channel-like patterns emanating from the summit caldera are thought to have been produced by erosion and deposition of pyroclastic flows cascading down the flank of the volcano. The pale-blue area is a patch of bright clouds hanging over the summit.



**Figure 3.36** Volcanism and the rapidly changing surface of Io. Over a period of three years images from NASA's Galileo spacecraft reveal that dramatic changes have occurred at a volcanically active region of Jupiter's moon Io. (a) Concentric pyroclastic deposits produced by fall-out from the volcano Pele, taken in April 1997. (b) The same area in September 1997 after a huge eruption had occurred producing the large, dark deposit just above and to the right of the centre. These new deposits (400 kilometres in diameter) are the fall-out from a new volcanic centre named Pillan Patera. This has developed on the flank of the older volcano covering part of the bright red ring which form the earlier deposits from Pele's plume. (c) Image acquired in July 1999 showing the changes that have taken place on the surface since the initial Pillan eruption almost two years ago. The red material from a later eruption by Pele has begun to cover, but has not yet entirely obscured, the dark material around Pillan. This image also shows that a small, unnamed volcano to the right of Pillan has erupted, depositing dark material surrounded by a yellow ring, which is most visible where it covers some of the dark material from Pillan's 1997 eruption. (Note: some of the differences in colour between the images are the result of different lighting conditions, for instance, the apparent change in brightness of the dark feature in the lower left-hand corner, and of parts of Pele's red plume deposit.)



During the Voyager 1 mission, nine distinct eruption columns were observed above the surface of Io. They reached heights of between 70 km and 280 km, implying eruption velocities between  $500 \text{ m s}^{-1}$  and  $1000 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . Some changed visibly over the course of a few hours, whilst others remained apparently unchanged for days. The largest column was 1000 km in diameter, and was fed from a fountain-like vent on a volcano about 35 km across (Figure 3.37). Eight of the columns were re-observed during the Voyager 2 encounter and, in the four months between the two mission encounters, there were considerable changes on Io.

**Figure 3.37** Pele in eruption. The vent is in the pale-coloured rugged area in the centre of the image. The plume of sulfur-rich material dispersed by the eruption column shows up against the blackness of space.

- In practical terms, Io lacks an atmosphere. How, then, would you expect the ejecta from its volcanic vents to be distributed?
- In the absence of a significant atmosphere, convecting eruption columns cannot be developed. Erupted material should fall back on ballistic trajectories to form sheet-like deposits around the vent areas. Halo-like surface features around volcanoes such as Pele (Figure 3.37) are good evidence for the accumulation of pyroclastic deposits.

Over 500 volcanoes have been identified on Io, although not all are currently active. These cover about 5% of its surface area, and most are low, gently sloping shields of less than 100 km in diameter (Figures 3.36 and 3.37). However, many of the larger shields have shallow summit calderas ranging from 2–200 km in diameter, and radial lava flows snake away from the summit regions, some reaching distances as far as 700 km from the volcano.

Rather than being organized according to obvious plate boundaries, the volcanoes so far identified on Io are randomly distributed, suggesting that Io's tectonic processes are quite different to those of Earth. It is thought that Io loses its internal heat predominantly by advection (Section 2.4.4) via hordes of active volcanoes, rather than by mantle convection and plate recycling as on Earth.

Spectroscopic evidence reveals that the volcanism produces a prodigious amount of sulfur, and Io's distinctive reddish colour is probably the result of the widespread sulfurous deposits ejected by its volcanoes. In addition to sulfur dioxide, lesser amounts of hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide, together with atomic oxygen, sodium and potassium also occur as gases in its thin atmosphere, and ionized sulfur has been detected dispersed along the track of Io's orbit about Jupiter. This latter represents the continuous 'leaking away' of Io's atmosphere into space, and is largely maintained through constant replenishment by the on-going volcanism.

The large amounts of sulfur detected in the eruption plumes initially prompted speculation that the volcanism was entirely sulfurous. However, whilst much of Io's

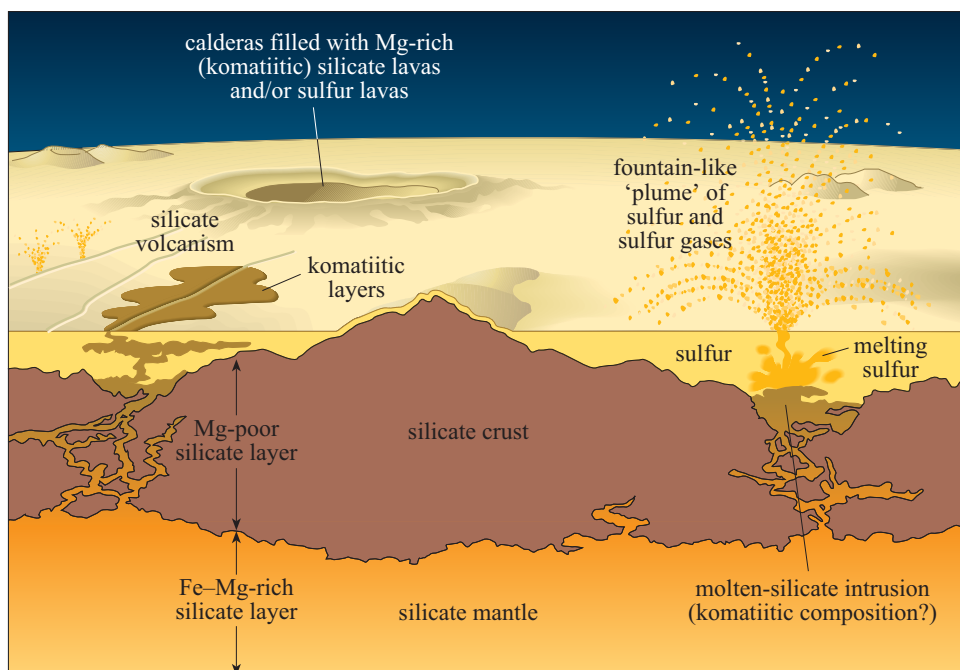


surface is covered by sulfur and sulfur oxides, this represents no more than a thin covering compared with the thickness of rocky layers that exist beneath. The fact that no impact craters are visible on Io has been attributed to the rapid deposition of fresh volcanic materials that are thought to accumulate at a global rate of one centimetre per year.

Density and gravitational data suggest Io is dominantly a silicate body with an iron-rich core beneath its rocky mantle. It is assumed that Io's bulk composition is broadly chondritic (i.e. Io is a terrestrial-like body). The huge amount of sulfur in its eruptive products is probably a result of an advanced degree of differentiation that has occurred through prolonged tidal heating and associated partial melting. In fact, the degree of tidal heating is such that it is possible that a large fraction of the mantle may be molten. The lithospheric part of Io's upper mantle is thought to be a Fe–Mg-rich silicate layer, with an overlying Mg-poor layer forming the crust. If this interpretation is correct, melting of the lithospheric mantle would result in Mg-rich lavas of komatiitic composition which, by analogy with examples on Earth (Section 3.1.4), are likely to have very high eruption temperatures (i.e. in excess of 1900 K). Interestingly, thermal images of some of the erupting lava flows on Io's surface indicate very high eruption temperatures, and so seem to support this interpretation (Figure 3.38). These types of lava flows are most probably the result of silicate melting rather than sulfur-based magmatism. Moreover, recent ideas also postulate that the rise of this hot silicate magma through Io's differentiated crust can, in some instances, cause rapid melting of the overlying sulfur-rich layers (Figure 3.39). The resulting release of gases and liquids produced in this manner would be rather like a volcanic 'geyser' on Earth, except that on Io the fountain would consist of liquid and vaporized sulfur, rather than water! If this explanation of Io's spectacular volcanism is correct, these types of eruption are probably more akin to continuous, long-lived 'fountains' (some lasting months or years) than 'eruption plumes' produced by the type of short-lived explosive volcanoes observed on Earth.



**Figure 3.38** A volcano on Io photographed during an on-going eruption. This image is colour-enhanced and reveals hot glowing lava, probably of silicate composition, visible on the left-hand side of the image and occurring amongst a landscape of plateau and valleys covered in sulfur. The image shows a region 250 km across.



**Figure 3.39** Schematic detail (not to scale) of the layers comprising Io's upper mantle and crust (i.e. lithosphere). As described, different types of magmatism and associated volcanism are causing resurfacing of this Jovian satellite, and so aiding in further differentiation of its upper mantle and crustal layers (see also Section 2.5.6).

### 3.4.7 Cryovolcanism on icy satellites

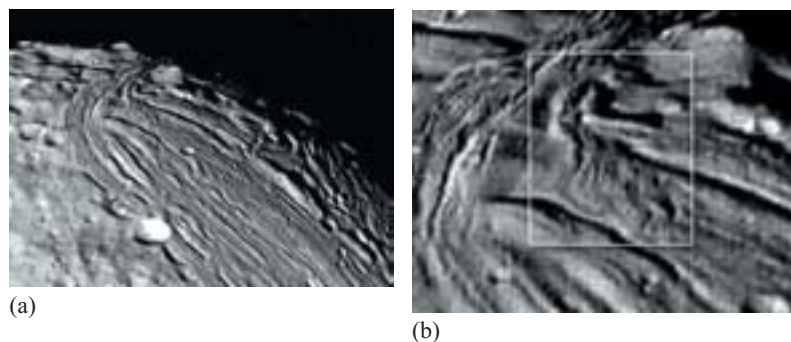
There is abundant evidence of cryovolcanic eruptions on many of the tidally heated icy satellites of the giant planets. Europa (Figure 3.40), a satellite of Jupiter, and parts of Enceladus (a satellite of Saturn), have very few superimposed impact craters, demonstrating relatively recent cryovolcanic resurfacing has taken place. On other icy satellites such as Ariel and Miranda (satellites of Uranus), the cryovolcanically resurfaced terrains are older but still identifiable, especially where eruptions have been effusive rather than explosive. The most spectacular of these ancient cryovolcanic features occur among the satellites of Uranus (Figures 3.41 and 3.42), whose ice is believed to consist predominantly of a frozen mixture of water and ammonia ( $\text{NH}_3$ ). Interestingly, the partial-melting behaviour of this mixed ice is a particularly close analogue to that occurring during the partial melting of silicate rock, and the resulting icy magma can sometimes produce an especially viscous lava when erupted at the surface.



**Figure 3.40** A close-up of part of Europa, a satellite of Jupiter. The general ridge-and-groove surface may be a result of cryovolcanic eruptions associated with fractures. The diffuse edges of the white band running across the top of the image may indicate pyroclastic deposits from an explosive fissure eruption. The smooth area in the lower right-hand corner may have been flooded by a low-viscosity cryovolcanic lava. Image shows an area 18 km across.



**Figure 3.41** Part of Ariel, a satellite of Uranus, whose lithosphere has been widely fractured, creating fault-bounded valleys. The floors of many of these valleys appear to have been flooded by cryovolcanic lavas. A half-flooded pre-existing impact crater can be seen at the edge of one such flow, which also has several later craters superimposed on it (in white box). Image shows an area 500 km wide.



**Figure 3.42** (a) Part of Miranda, a satellite of Uranus, where most of the landscape appears to be cryovolcanic in origin. Image shows an area 120 km across. (b) A 40 km-wide enlargement from the upper left-hand corner of (a), centred on a lobate viscous cryovolcanic lava flow that is 20 km in length (in white box).

## 3.5 Summary of chapter 3

- Volcanism is the surface expression of melting processes occurring within a planetary body. It describes the processes associated with the transfer of magma, volatiles, and suspended crystallized material from the interior to surface and, if present, into the atmosphere. On Earth, these processes are most obviously demonstrated by the presence of volcanoes that erupt lavas and produce ash and gas clouds. Two main types of activity may be identified: effusive volcanism is characterized by the production of lava flows, whilst explosive volcanism is characterized by the production of eruption columns and pyroclastic materials.
- There is abundant evidence for volcanism having affected the surfaces of all the larger silicate bodies in the Solar System, although most do not appear to be currently volcanically active. Io, a satellite of Jupiter is, however, highly active, with numerous volcanoes randomly distributed across its surface.
- Effusion of basaltic lavas has been the most widespread manifestation of volcanism, and is the result of partially melting mantle materials derived from the chondritic composition which is typical of the terrestrial planets and similar bodies. Consequently, basaltic lavas cover 70% of Earth's surface, and large fractions of the surfaces of the Moon, Mercury, Venus and Mars. In Earth's case, the widespread basaltic magmatism that generates ocean floor and continental flood basalt provinces is largely the result of partial melting due to decompression of the upper mantle.
- Partial melting of ices leads to volcanism on icy bodies. The eruption products of icy volcanism are subject to the same physical processes regarding the migration of magma, volatile release, and eruption dynamics that occur on silicate bodies. Both effusive cryovolcanic products in the form of icy lavas and explosive cryovolcanic products generated by volatile release have been recognized on the surfaces of bodies such as Europa and Enceladus.
- Decompression melting may be the source of silicate or icy partial melting on bodies other than Earth. However, Io is unique among silicate bodies in that its volcanism is driven by dissipation of tidal energy, and its dominant volatile is probably sulfur dioxide rather than water. Its lavas are erupted at high temperatures that are indicative of silicate magmas of komatiitic composition.
- The differences in gravity, atmosphere, surface temperature and magmatic composition can modify the style of eruption, and the manner in which the erupted products are distributed at the surface. For instance, Earth and Mars have atmospheric conditions sufficient to support convecting eruption columns, so drastically modifying the dispersal of pyroclastic ejecta.



## CHAPTER 4 PLANETARY SURFACE PROCESSES

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter you will be introduced to some of the processes that modify the surfaces of planets. As we have seen in the previous chapter, volcanism plays a part, but cratering – the results of the impact with a planetary surface of objects travelling at many kilometres per second – is probably the most significant factor affecting many planetary surfaces. Evidence for the ubiquity of this process has been provided by images of the heavily cratered surfaces of planetary bodies from Mercury to the satellites of Neptune. Although much of this chapter is given over to a discussion of cratering, it is not the only process that modifies planetary surfaces as erosion and sedimentation are also involved. We conclude with a discussion of the actions of erosion and sedimentation, as illustrated by recent images returned from missions to Mars.

In completing one revolution around the Sun, the Earth travels over 940 million kilometres on a well-defined orbit. But it is not alone. There are probably about 1000 objects over 1 km in diameter and possibly as many as a million over 50 m in diameter whose orbits cross or closely approach that of the Earth. These objects are a mixture of asteroids and comets. In our voyage around the Sun, we travel through a ‘shooting gallery’, and the same is true for all the planets and satellites in the Solar System. Two to three of those objects, about 1 km in diameter, hit our planet every 1 Ma. From a geological perspective they are a common occurrence – although on the scale of a human lifetime impacts are rare. This is the reason why **impact cratering** is by far the most widespread process shaping the surfaces of solid bodies in the Solar System. Figure 4.1 shows the Earth over the heavily cratered surface of the Moon. The lunar craters are the result of impacts by asteroids and comets. The crater Plaskett (110 km across) is clearly visible in the foreground.

Impacts are intimately associated with the formation and evolution of planets. Although some bodies in the Solar System were formed directly from the dust and gas in the primordial solar nebula (the Sun, and gas giants fall into this category), almost everything else was constructed by impact and accretion of solid objects in the early Solar System. This impact ‘cascade’ began with sub-millimetre objects that accreted to form bodies that ranged from about a metre to tens of metres in size. These then accreted to form bodies about a kilometre to tens of kilometres in size, which themselves accreted to form planetary embryos. Current models for the formation of the terrestrial planets indicate that the final stages of planetary accretion are characterized by collisions between tens and hundreds of Mercury- or Mars-sized planetary embryos.

Very large impacts appear to be a fundamental part of planet formation. One of these impacts, between a differentiated protoEarth and a Mars-sized body, is the preferred model for the formation of the Moon (Section 2.3.3) and probably occurred 50 Ma after the formation of the solar nebula. A later, heavy bombardment reshaped the lunar surface, and probably frustrated the proliferation of life on Earth until after about 3.9 Ga ago. Impacts with asteroids several hundreds of kilometres in diameter would have vaporized any terrestrial proto-ocean. Impact cratering remains a significant process on Earth, reshaping the surface and possibly causing



**Figure 4.1** View taken by the Clementine spacecraft showing the Earth and Moon, with the crater Plaskett (110 km across), the largest crater on the figure, in the foreground.

For craters, except for those specifically described as elongate, the terms ‘across’ and ‘diameter’ are interchangeable in this chapter.





**Figure 4.2** A mosaic of images of Mercury taken 190 000 km away from the planet by Mariner 10. The Mariner 10 spacecraft was launched in 1973, and had three encounters with Mercury in March and September 1974, and March 1975. No spacecraft has been to Mercury since Mariner 10, and the majority of the surface remains unmapped.

occasional mass extinction events, but there are very few obvious craters on the Earth's surface that are visible from space. This is because the surface of the Earth is continually being re-shaped by erosion, volcanism, and crustal deformation and destruction. These processes may be non-existent, less effective or, in some cases, have long since ceased on other planetary bodies, where craters are the dominant landform. Cratering remains *the* significant surface process on other terrestrial planets and many other satellites and asteroids. Figure 4.2 shows a mosaic of images of part of the surface of Mercury.

- If impact cratering is a ubiquitous process, why does the Earth show so little evidence of it?
- On Earth, several geological processes have been at work, wiping out all traces of the early heavy bombardment and evidence of many other large impacts since then.

Impacts that produce craters on terrestrial planets occur at **hypervelocity**, typically at speeds of several kilometres per second. The average encounter velocity at the top of Earth's atmosphere is about  $17 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  for asteroidal material, and up to about  $70 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  for comets.

Relative encounter velocities vary throughout the Solar System – asteroidal material at Mars has an average impact velocity of  $10\text{--}11 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ .

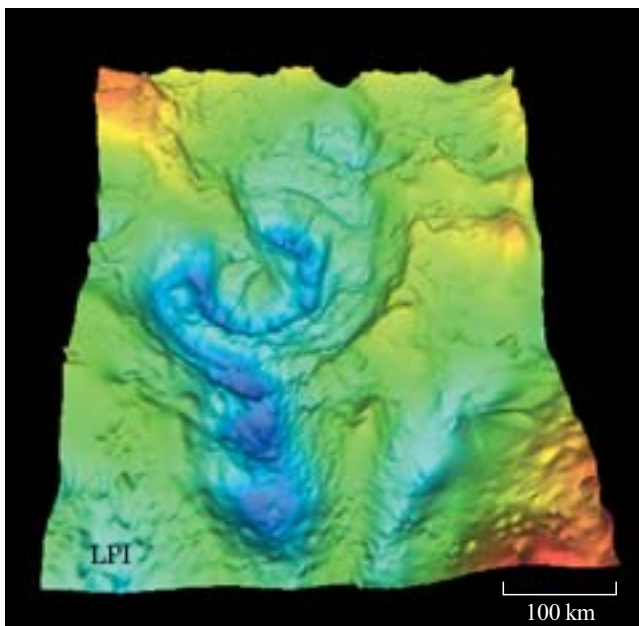
Encounter velocities also depend on the gravity of the target planet. Minimum impact velocities (as opposed to average impact velocities) are equal to the **escape velocity** of the target planet, so if any deceleration by atmospheric drag were discounted, the lowest velocity impact on Earth would be  $11 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  and the lowest on Mars approximately  $5 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ . Because of these high velocities, impact cratering is the most rapid geological process known. Asteroids traverse the Earth's atmosphere in seconds and, following impact with the planet's surface, can form craters that are hundreds of kilometres in diameter in minutes (we will discuss this process in more detail in Section 4.3).

The abrupt nature of the impact process has led some geologists to consider what effect large impacts might have had on the biosphere during the history of life on Earth. The geological history of the Earth can be thought of as a record of environmental conditions, with rocks being deposited one on top of another, with the youngest at the top and the oldest at the bottom. It has long been recognized that within this **stratigraphic record** there is evidence of rapid environmental change. At some of the boundaries between different sedimentary rock types, particularly those denoting dramatic changes in the environment, palaeontologists have documented **mass extinctions** where huge numbers of plant and animal species died out. A mass extinction occurred at the boundary between the Cretaceous and the Tertiary Periods, 65 Ma ago. During the 1980s and 1990s it became clear that a major impact had taken place at the time of this extinction event – diagnostic signatures of impact (many of which you will learn about later in this chapter) have been observed all over the world where the boundary layer is exposed. In addition, a buried crater about 200 km in diameter has been found at Chicxulub (pronounced '*chick-sulub*') on the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, and is

also 65 Ma old. Although the crater is buried, many of the distinctive features of a large crater can be seen in the gravity map of this crater shown in Figure 4.3. Variations in gravity and local magnetic field are commonly used to infer the presence of buried structures. Although some scientists question whether this impact was responsible for the Cretaceous–Tertiary mass extinction, the coincidence of one of the world’s largest impacts occurring at the same time as one of the largest mass extinctions is compelling evidence to many others.

In a few cases, it has been possible to document directly the effects of an impact. On 30 June 1908, a huge fireball was observed over Europe and Russia. A large detonation was also recorded by seismometers. Eyewitnesses in a remote part of Siberia reported feeling a powerful shock wave. Later, expeditions to the region found a huge area of forest, over 2000 km<sup>2</sup> in extent, flattened by the force of the blast. This is now thought to have been a small asteroid or comet fragment, about 20–30 m across, which exploded in the Earth’s atmosphere. The object was small, but the energy released was huge – equivalent to 10 megatonnes of TNT, which is similar to a large nuclear explosion. By comparison, the Chicxulub impact would have released more than 10<sup>8</sup> megatonnes of energy. More recently, in 1994, observatories around the world and the Galileo space probe en route to Jupiter observed as fragments of comet Shoemaker–Levy 9 plunged into Jupiter’s atmosphere and exploded. These observations have highlighted the hazard posed by impacts, and added significantly to our understanding of the impact process itself.

The fact that Earth will inevitably experience other substantial impacts in the future means that impactors and the craters they make are of more than purely academic interest. This chapter should give you an understanding of the cratering process, and enable you to describe the impact craters you would expect to find on an unknown planetary body, given only basic information about its size, mass, density and orbital parameters. In addition, you should be able to identify the diagnostic signatures of an impact in the terrestrial geological record, even if the original crater has been eroded. Finally, you should develop an understanding of the principles involved in using the numbers and sizes of craters in an area to estimate the age of a planetary surface.



**Figure 4.3** A computer-generated three-dimensional gravity anomaly map over the Chicxulub crater. The crater is represented by the near-circular gravity low, shown in blue, at the centre of the figure. This image does not show the shape of the crater; the negative gravity anomaly of the crater corresponds to the relatively low densities of the rocks within the crater. The double-humped central gravity high, shown in green, corresponds to the crater’s central uplift now buried deep within the crater. The blue area to the bottom of the figure is part of the regional gravity anomalies of the area.

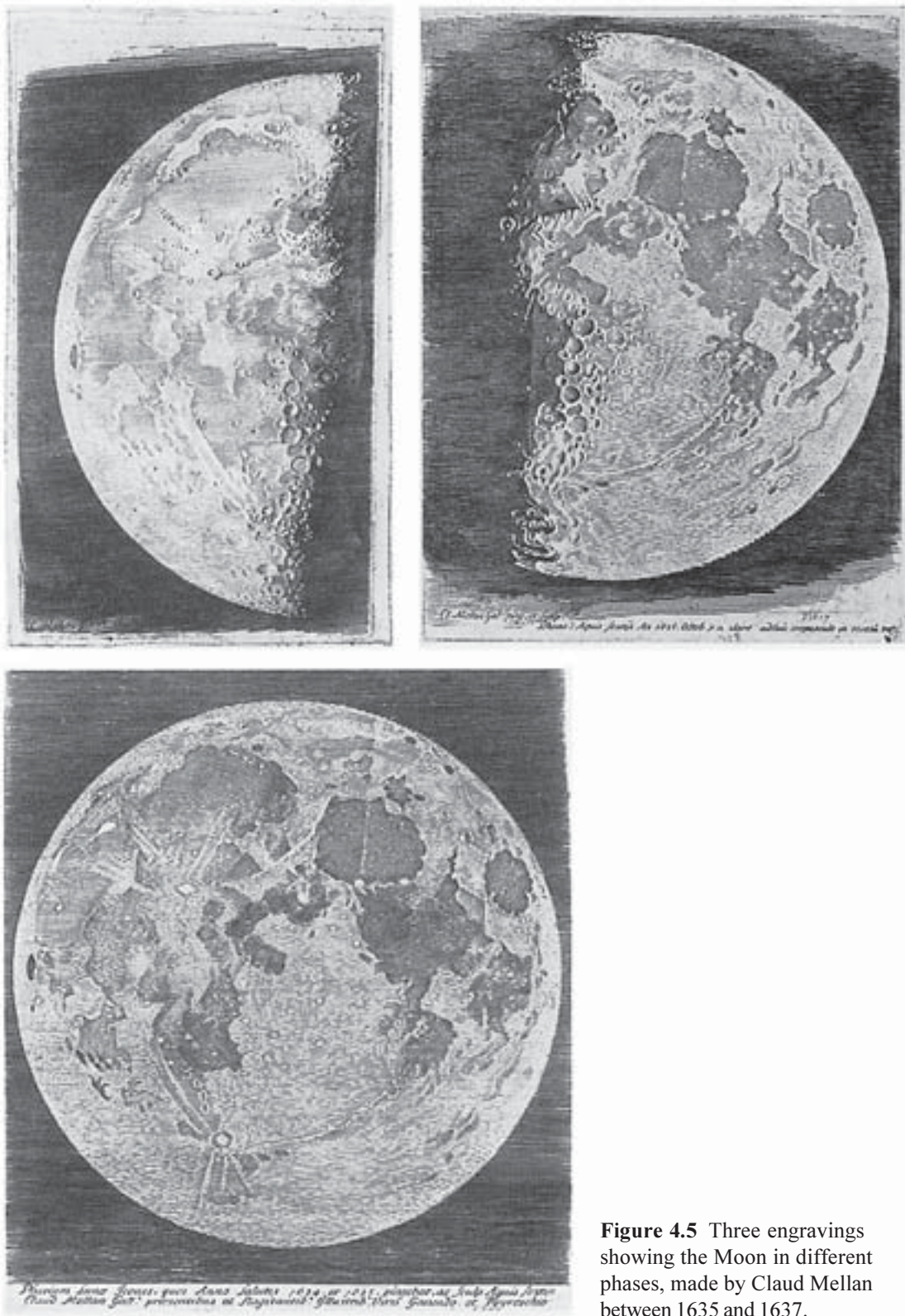
## 4.2 Historical background

The first specific observation of craters was probably made in 1609 by Thomas Harriot, an Englishman, when he used a telescope to look at the Moon (Figure 4.4). This was several months before Galileo made similar observations (although Galileo was the first to publish, in 1610). Their work triggered a flurry of activity, with progressively more detailed drawings being produced. The engravings of Claud Mellan, made between 1635 and 1637, are remarkably accurate (Figure 4.5). Maps of the Moon appeared throughout the 17th century. Many workers recognized that the features observed were depressions with raised rims and occasional central peaks, but made no attempt to explain their formation. For the majority of the time since then, lunar craters have almost unanimously been thought to be of volcanic origin, even though the topography of the Moon and its craters has been minutely studied by generations of observers. Dissenting voices, such as that of Robert Hooke, who postulated an impact origin in 1665, did little to sway majority opinion. The most serious challenge to the volcanic-formation hypothesis was made in 1893 by the geologist G. K. Gilbert. After analysing the depth-to-diameter ratios of craters, Gilbert suggested that the craters could only have been formed by impact. The central peaks that were commonly observed resulted from rebound of rock, in a similar manner to liquids (think of drops of water hitting a puddle). Bright rays surrounded many craters that were formed from material flung out during the



**Figure 4.4** Thomas Harriott's map of the Moon, published in 1611, showing the letters and numbers that were used to identify lunar features.





**Figure 4.5** Three engravings showing the Moon in different phases, made by Claud Mellan between 1635 and 1637.

impact – **impact ejecta**. In Section 4.3 you will see how accurate many of Gilbert's ideas were. The only proviso that Gilbert suggested was that the impact had to be vertical with respect to the surface.

Although impacts with a surface can occur at all angles, from  $<5^\circ$  to  $90^\circ$ , early experiments suggested that only vertical ( $90^\circ$ ) impacts were capable of producing circular craters. So the main argument against an impact mechanism for lunar crater formation was that only circular craters could be seen on the Moon. Gilbert himself showed that the average impact angle was  $45^\circ$  – in fact very few impacts are close to vertical.

In 1916, E. J. Öpik published work that recognized that the impact of meteoroids at very high velocities would be fundamentally different to low-velocity experiments that had previously been carried out. Such impacts would have a similar effect to an explosion, and craters would be circular even at low impact angles. In later years, some of the most persuasive arguments for the impact origin of lunar craters came not from professional scientists, but from R. B. Baldwin, a talented American businessman. He studied the Moon in his spare time and published an influential book entitled *The Face of the Moon* in 1949.

In spite of this and other work, the volcanic hypothesis remained intact, and there was significant unwillingness amongst the scientific community about accepting impact cratering. This began to change in the 1960s with the work of the American geologist Gene Shoemaker, who made a lifetime study of cratering.

- Terrestrial volcanic craters are poor analogues of lunar craters, as they only occasionally possess central peaks, and have very different ejecta patterns. Suggest one reason why the volcanic hypothesis for lunar crater formation was popular.
- Craters produced by early impact experiments at low velocity showed a range of shapes, suggesting that circular craters were formed by a different method.



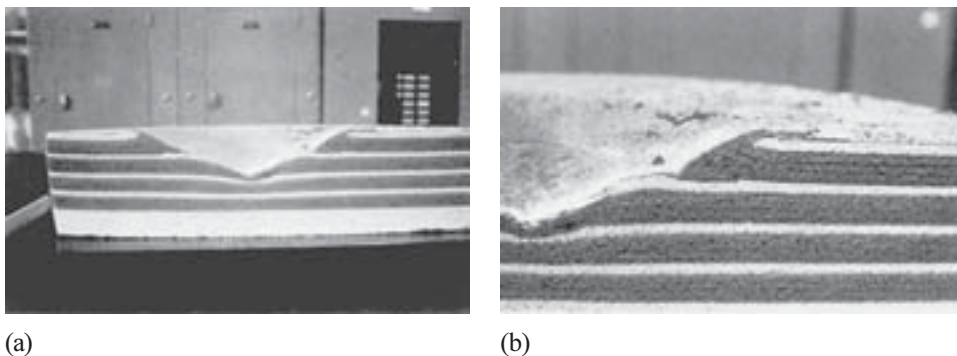
**Figure 4.6** Oblique aerial view of Meteor Crater (or Barringer Crater, as it is sometimes called), Arizona, USA, showing its raised rim and the subdued, surrounding hummocky ejected deposits (foreground). Meteor Crater is 1.2 km in diameter and 200 m deep, with a raised rim 50–60 m high. It was formed about 50 000 years ago.



Of the 170 known impact craters on the Earth, **Meteor Crater**, Arizona (Figure 4.6), was the first to be recognized as being formed from an impact and remains the best-known impact crater to this day. In 1906, D. M. Barringer provided good evidence for impact formation, but Meteor Crater was not universally accepted as an impact crater until the 1960s. Its impact origin was finally demonstrated in papers published in 1960 and 1963 by Shoemaker. Three lines of evidence show that an impact, and not a volcanic eruption, formed Meteor Crater.

- 1 As Barringer had recognized, many large fragments of an iron meteorite have been found on the desert plains surrounding Meteor Crater. Impact structures that are larger than Meteor Crater do not usually preserve fragments of the original projectiles because they vaporize on impact.
- 2 Most volcanic craters are formed by sustained compression of volcanic gases, which blast out large volumes of fragments. Volcanic ejecta form simple aprons around craters, the first-erupted materials at the bottom, and the last at the top. Shoemaker's field studies showed that a completely different situation exists at Meteor Crater, where the ejecta form an inverted 'flap', flung out and overturned in a single blast. Thus, a drill hole through the ejecta on the rim would pass through layers of the same material twice. In Shoemaker's words, the strata appeared to 'have been peeled back from the area of the crater, somewhat like petals of a flower blossoming'. Similar structures are observed in laboratory experiments involving hypervelocity impacts (Figure 4.7).
- 3 The final piece of evidence comes from an investigation of the effects of the intense pressures involved in an impact. At Meteor Crater, shattered target rocks are cemented together by **glass** at depths of 200–400 m. The glass is formed by melting of the target during the impact. Melting occurs principally as a result of the very high pressures involved during an impact, and because the pressure is applied almost instantaneously, it is referred to as **shock pressure**. Unusual high-pressure minerals (see Section 4.4.2) are often found in the rocks affected by impact. These minerals are produced by shock pressure during the impact.

In 1962 Shoemaker applied similar ideas to the Moon, and made a case for the impact formation of Copernicus crater, one of the most prominent craters on the nearside of the Moon. Before the decade was out, most scientists had come round to the view that lunar craters were formed by impact rather than volcanism. The



**Figure 4.7** (a) Impact crater made in a NASA laboratory by firing a projectile with a velocity of about  $1 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  into a target of colour-banded sand. (b) Detail of the crater rim, showing the overturned 'flap' of ejecta. The pale bands are approximately 1 cm thick.

recognition that cratering on Earth is a significant part of our planet's geological history, rather than just a few isolated events, and is an ongoing process, took much longer. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that impact cratering became part of the mainstream of geological science.

Today, work on impact cratering is progressing rapidly in many different areas:

- Analyses of terrestrial-planet surfaces enable the rate at which impacts occur to be constrained.
- Observational astronomy helps in assessing impact hazards by mapping the number and distribution of **Near Earth Objects** (asteroids, and probably some inactive comets, which have orbits that come near to that of the Earth).
- Geological mapping and studies of the target rocks involved in an impact extend our understanding of the forces involved in large impacts, their effects on the environment, and their frequency over geological time.
- Studies of the effects of nuclear tests, and experimental hypervelocity work in which projectiles are accelerated by gas guns to velocities of up to  $8 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ , have helped to shed light on the physics of the impact process.
- Numerical computation (frequently using so-called **hydrocode** analysis, originally developed to simulate nuclear explosions) has enabled workers to investigate the effects of impacts on scales and at velocities that are impossible to reproduce in the laboratory (Figure 4.8).

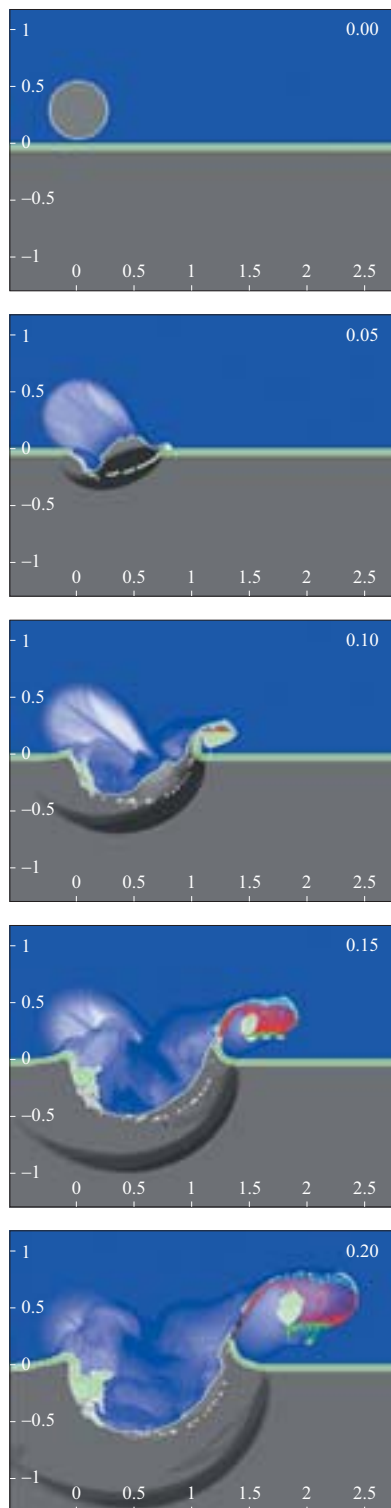
### 4.3 The impact process

When objects less than 10–20 m in size pass through the Earth's atmosphere they lose most of their initial cosmic velocity, and much of their mass by ablation (i.e. loss of surface layers due to melting and vaporization), and hit the surface at a terminal **free-fall velocity** of a few hundred metres per second. If the object is smaller than about 10–20 m then the atmosphere is sufficient to decelerate it significantly, since smaller objects have a higher surface area (and thus present a relatively larger area to the atmosphere) compared to their mass. Impact of these meteorite-sized objects may excavate a small pit (usually 10 mm to < 10 m across, see Figure 4.9), and in exceptional cases reaching a few tens of metres across.

#### QUESTION 4.1

Study the photograph in Figure 4.9 of the pit produced by a relatively recent British impact. What can you say about the likely velocity of the impactor, and the angle of its approach? How do these account for the appearance of the impact site? *Hint:* think about the size of the object, and the likely effects of the atmosphere.

**Figure 4.8** Snapshots at 0.05 second intervals showing the simulated impact of a 0.5 km-diameter body at an angle of  $30^\circ$  to the horizontal at  $10 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ . The vertical distance from the impact point is on the y-axis and horizontal distance on the x-axis. At 0.10, 0.15 and 0.20 seconds after impact you can see the crater opening out and ejecta expanding away from the impact direction. In this simulation, red denotes melted material from the topmost (pale green) layer in the target, evidence that glass may originate from near the surface of the target. Numerical models such as this, frequently using supercomputers and codes originally written to simulate nuclear explosions, have become more widely used to probe different aspects of the impact process.





**Figure 4.9** A suburban setting for one of the smallest terrestrial impact features. This pit was formed by a meteorite that fell at Barwell, Leicestershire, United Kingdom on 24 December 1965.

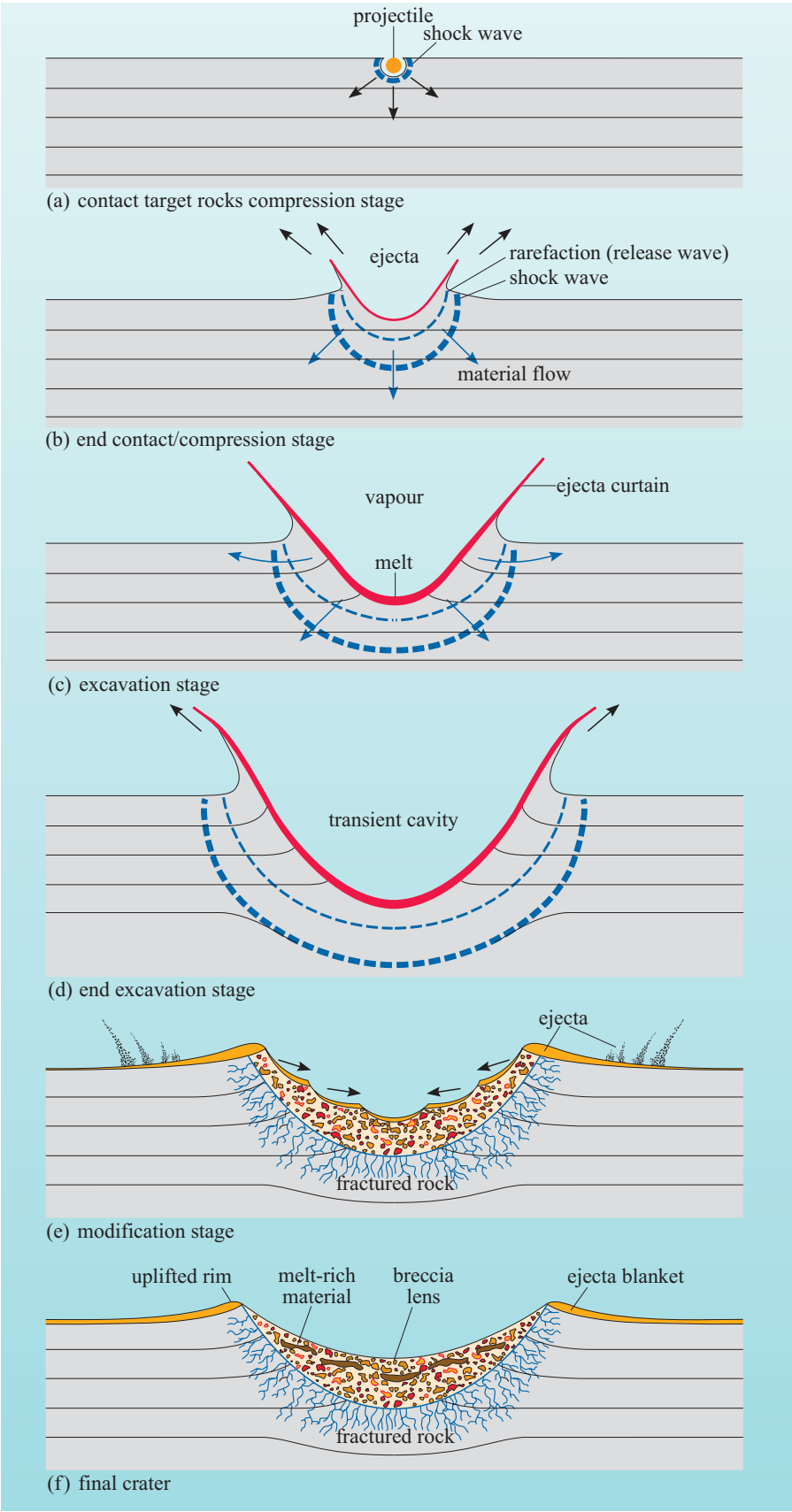
In the case of larger objects, a few tens of metres or more in diameter, the situation is very different. These projectiles retain a large portion of their cosmic velocity despite passage through the Earth's atmosphere, and hit the surface at hypervelocity speeds of several kilometres per second or, in some cases, several tens of kilometres per second. Of course, on planets or moons without an atmosphere all objects, whatever their size, strike the surface at hypervelocity.

After a hypervelocity impact, shock waves radiate out from the point of impact, moving huge volumes of target rocks and creating true impact craters. The pressures involved in impacts are much higher than those involved in normal geological processes. The maximum pressures experienced in normal geological processes are typically around  $5 \times 10^9$  pascals or 5 gigapascals, abbreviated to GPa (Box 2.1).

A complex sequence of events and processes occurs during the formation and immediate modification of a new crater. These may be grouped into three broad stages of impact cratering:

- contact and compression;
- excavation;
- modification.

Figure 4.10 illustrates schematically the stages of the impact process during the formation of a simple crater.



**Figure 4.10** Schematic diagram portraying the development of a simple impact structure, through the stages of contact and compression, excavation, and modification. Black arrows show the directions in which target material moves, blue arrows show the directions in which shock waves move at different stages of crater formation.

### 4.3.1 Contact and compression stage

This first stage of impact cratering begins the moment the projectile makes contact with the ground surface (Figure 4.10a). As the projectile travels into the target, it compresses the target material and accelerates it to high velocities. Simultaneously, the projectile itself decelerates. Shock waves originate at the point where the projectile touches the target surface. Shock pressures during this initial stage may exceed 100 GPa. This pressure represents an extreme environment for rocks at (or near) the surface of the Earth – a rock would have to be buried to >2000 km to experience this pressure within the Earth. Both target and impactor are vaporized or melted when the pressure is released. The projectile's kinetic energy is largely transferred to the target and heats, deforms and accelerates the target rocks. The contact and compression stage ends when the projectile has unloaded from high pressure (Figure 4.10b). After this point, the projectile itself plays no further part in the formation of the final crater. This stage lasts for less than one second in all but the largest impacts.

### 4.3.2 Excavation stage

As the contact and compression stage ends, a roughly hemispherical shock wave surrounds the projectile and propagates into the target – the centre of this hemisphere actually lies well below the original ground surface, since the projectile may have penetrated up to twice its own diameter into the target. This initial shock wave, and the following rarefaction, or release waves (waves that are reflected from the original ground surface, and continue downwards) weaken, fracture, and shatter the target rock. These waves also move material, producing an excavation flow around the centre of the incipient structure.

The movement of material upwards and outwards at upper levels, and downwards and outwards at lower levels, eventually opens out the crater, producing a bowl-shaped **transient cavity** that is many times larger than the diameter of the projectile (Figure 4.10c and d). Excavated material is ejected over the surrounding terrain. A point is reached when the shock and release waves can no longer displace rock. The transient cavity reaches its maximum extent at this point. This marks the end of the excavation stage and the beginning of the modification stage.

The excavation stage would have lasted for approximately 6 seconds during the impact that formed Meteor Crater, and approximately 90 seconds for a crater 200 km in diameter, such as Chicxulub.

- Why is the impact process so different from most other geological processes?
- It occurs over much shorter timescales (seconds and minutes, rather than millions of years) and involves much higher peak pressures (> 100 GPa near the impact point, 10–60 GPa in large volumes of the surrounding rock) than any other geological process that exposes rocks at the surface. Note: eclogites, the most highly pressured rock we see naturally exposed at the Earth's surface, may have experienced only 5 GPa in exceptional circumstances.



### 4.3.3 Modification

Once the expanding shock waves have weakened and moved beyond the crater rim, they play no further part in crater formation. After this point, modification of the transient cavity depends on gravity and the mechanical strength of the target. Small craters, such as Meteor Crater, preserve the approximate original shape of the transient cavity, with only minor modification as debris cascades down the walls to form a layer of fragmented material, called a **breccia** lens, in the base of the crater (Figure 4.10e and f). In larger craters, the transient cavity cannot sustain itself and it frequently collapses under gravity. Slump terraces may form on the walls, as rocks at the edge of the transient cavity collapse inwards along curving, concentric faults. Some craters may contain significant volumes of glassy material, formed from target rock that melted during the impact. Central peaks, or peak rings, form on the floor of the crater as material beneath the impact structure rebounds. This uplift is about one-tenth the final diameter of the crater so, for example, rocks beneath a crater 100 km in diameter will be uplifted vertically by 10 km during the impact event (you can see the central peaks in the crater Plaskett quite clearly in Figure 4.1). In still larger craters, under certain conditions, concentric mountain ranges may appear around the central impact. Over much longer timescales, as the crust of the planet gradually accommodates the impact, the crater may flatten out until it is defined by little more than slight differences in the material's appearance.

Even for large craters, 200–300 km in diameter, the modification stage will be completed 15 minutes after impact.

### 4.3.4 Additional effects

In addition to the physical excavation and modification of an impact crater, a variety of other processes occur during an impact. Large impactors may bore a hole in the atmosphere of the target planet, following their passage through it. Vapour and debris from the impact may be drawn upwards into this partial vacuum to high levels in the atmosphere. In addition, ejecta from the impact – glass, and unmelted rock fragments – may be accelerated at high velocities to form an apron of material around the impact site. Some material may be ejected at sufficient velocity to completely escape a planet's atmosphere. Glass that re-enters the planet's atmosphere may fall thousands of kilometres from the impact site, with samples exhibiting aerodynamic shapes. In large impacts, if enough of this material re-enters at the same time, it can significantly heat the atmosphere. The Chicxulub impact probably led to widespread forest fires, even in areas thousands of kilometres from the impact, as re-entering ejecta overheated the atmosphere, causing forests and other plant matter to combust. On Earth, as most of our planet's surface is water, most impacts are more likely to hit an ocean, causing huge tsunamis. Finally, ejecta from an impact may be accelerated with sufficient velocity to escape a planet's gravity, leading to an exchange of material between planets. On Earth, this may happen during impacts that form craters as small as 10 km, so material may be ejected from our planet as often as every few hundred thousand, or a million, years.

#### QUESTION 4.2

Outline those aspects of the impact process that might have adverse effects on the terrestrial biosphere. In addition, consider the different effects of an impact into continental crust and an impact into an ocean.

## 4.4 Identifying impacts

### 4.4.1 Crater morphology

Perhaps contrary to intuition, experiments show that elliptical craters are formed only at angles of incidence that are nearly tangential to the surface, below about 10 degrees. This apparent anomaly arises because hypervelocity impact craters are formed by essentially instantaneous releases of energy rather than mechanical distortion, creating an explosion structure.

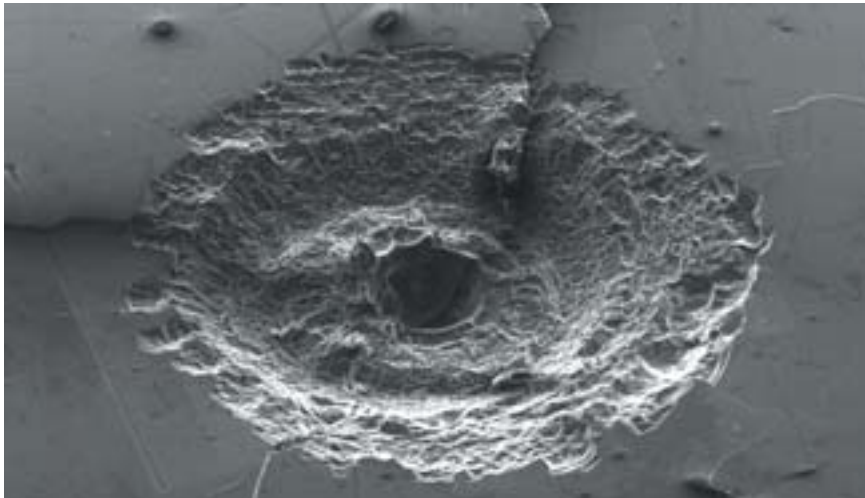
#### QUESTION 4.3

Examine the photograph of the Moon's surface in Figure 4.11. Give a rough estimate of the proportion of the craters that are *obviously* elliptical. You should concentrate on the central part of the photograph – foreshortening will make *all* craters near the edges of the Moon appear elliptical. What inference can you draw from this observation about the process that forms impact craters?

The specific crater morphology that we observe depends on a large number of factors, including the size and velocity of the impactor, composition of impactor and target rock, the strength and porosity of the impactor, angle of impact, and the gravity of the target planet. However, a few broad classes of crater morphology may be recognized.

#### Microcraters

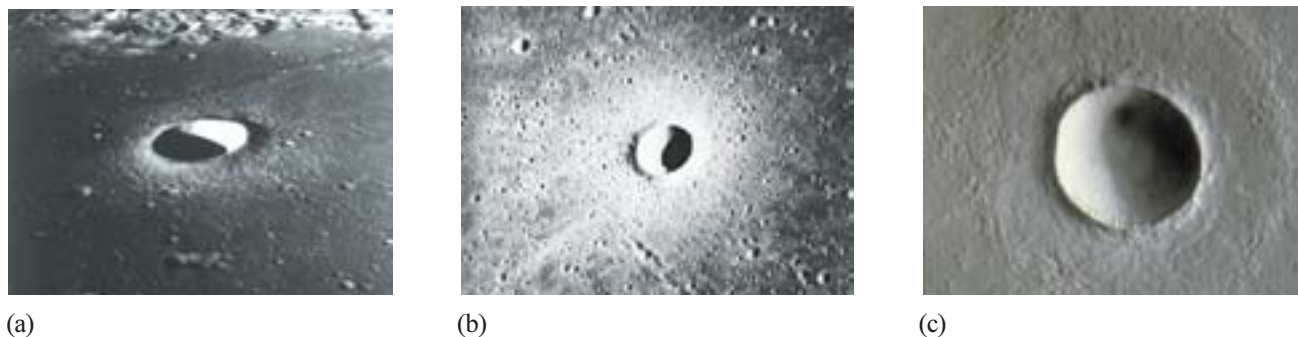
These are found on lunar samples and man-made objects that have been in orbit for extended periods, such as the Long Duration Exposure Facility (LDEF) and the Hubble Space Telescope (Figure 4.12). These craters may be as small as  $10^{-7}$  m (0.1  $\mu$ m) across. They are made by the hypervelocity impact of cosmic dust derived from comets, or fine asteroid debris.



**Figure 4.11** An Apollo photograph of the Moon. Most of the area shown lies on the far side of the Moon, and consists of heavily cratered highland terrain.

LDEF was a NASA satellite designed amongst other things to record the impact of cosmic dust. It remained in orbit for almost 6 years, and was returned to Earth by the Space Shuttle.

**Figure 4.12** Microcrater found on a solar panel recovered from the Hubble Space Telescope (HST) after a servicing mission. The crater is only 0.5 mm across, and was formed when a cosmic dust particle (possibly as small as 0.05 mm in diameter) hit the HST panel at high velocity. Analysis of material in the base of the microcrater suggests that it was made from cosmic dust rather than space debris that originated on Earth.

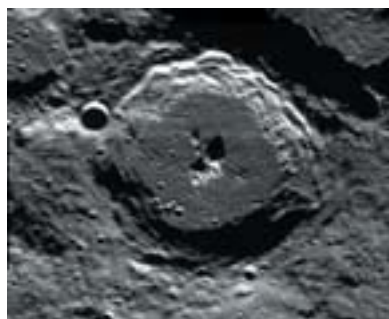


**Figure 4.13** Simple craters: (a) and (b) on the Moon, (c) on Mars. The lunar craters are 7 km and 3 km in diameter, respectively; the Martian crater is 2 km in diameter. Note the similarity with Meteor Crater (Figure 4.6). Apart from debris infilling their bases, these bowl-shaped depressions retain the approximate shape of the transient cavity.

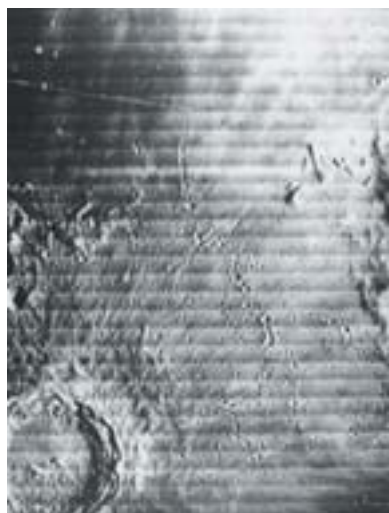
### Simple craters

Meteor Crater is a typical example of a simple crater on Earth. It is similar to others found on all solid surfaces in the Solar System. Simple craters are up to several kilometres in diameter, and are bowl-shaped depressions that lack a central uplift or terracing (Figure 4.13).

The rim-to-floor depth of simple craters is approximately one-fifth of their diameter.



(a)



(b)

### Complex craters

These craters are common in the Solar System. Chicxulub is a terrestrial example. The transition between simple and complex craters depends largely on gravity and the strength of the target material. On Earth the transition point between simple and complex craters may be as low as 2 km in soft sediments (4 km in more competent rock), while on the Moon (Figure 4.14) the transition point occurs in craters between 10 km and 20 km. Mercury shows the transition at about 7 km. So, the transition from simple to complex craters scales approximately inversely with a planet's gravity – Mercury has one-third Earth's gravity and the Moon has one-sixth the gravity of Earth. Complex craters are characterized by terraces of slump blocks, with the terrace width decreasing inwards, and central peaks formed from fluid-like rebound.

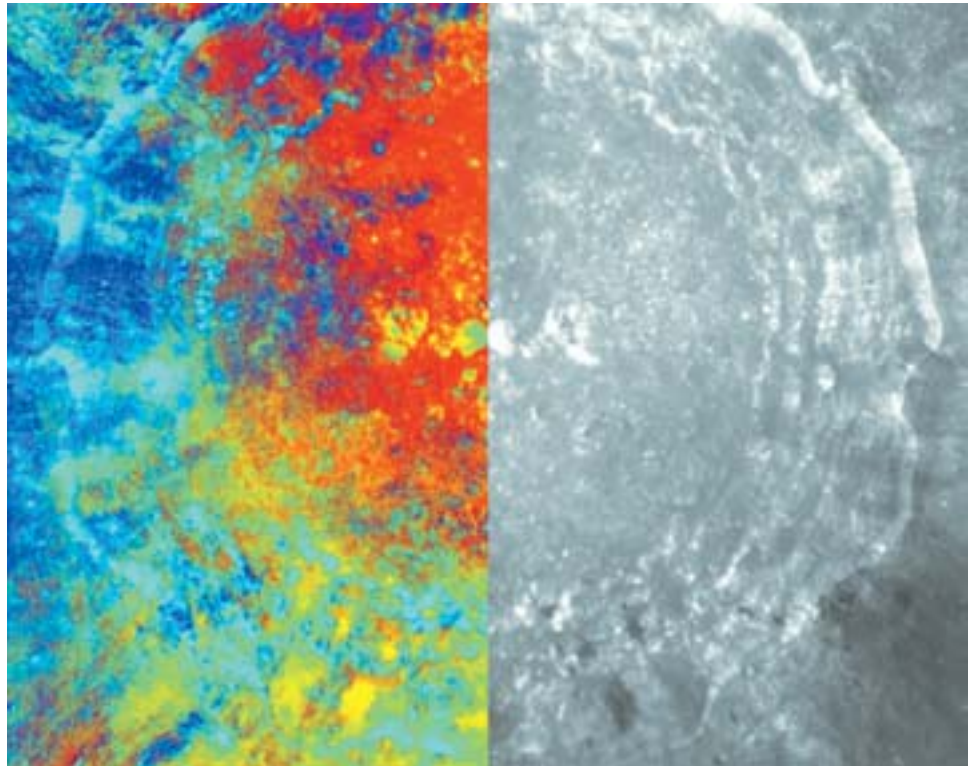
**Figure 4.14** (a) Plaskett crater on the Moon photographed by Apollo 14. This complex crater, 110 km in diameter, shows clearly developed central peaks and slump blocks forming terraces around the rim. (b) A Lunar Orbiter photograph of Copernicus (93 km in diameter), one of the most closely studied lunar craters. Copernicus is located on the south edge of the Mare Imbrium. It is easily visible with binoculars under good lighting conditions. Morphological points to note at increasing distances outwards from the centre are: a cluster of central peaks; the flat crater floor, perhaps filled by impact melt; the multi-terraced crater wall, with terraces formed by inward slumping; a continuous ejecta mantle, extending out to about the same distance as the diameter of the crater – features are diffuse within this zone; a discontinuous ejecta apron, with many secondary craters and crater chains.



## QUESTION 4.4

Look closely at Figure 4.15. The Clementine data, represented as colours, provides information on the composition of materials in and around the crater. It is clear from the variations in colour that there are significant variations in rock-type over the area. Moving out from the centre of the crater to beyond the rim, what are the broad changes that you observe? Based on what you've learned about cratering, why do you think these differences might arise? What types of rocks do you think the individual colours might correlate with?

**Figure 4.15** Copernicus crater, together with data (the different colours on the left) from the Clementine probe on the composition of materials in and around the crater.



### Elongate craters

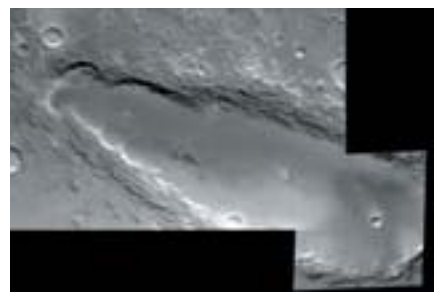
Although almost all craters are circular, if the impact angle falls at an angle below about  $10^\circ$  then elongate craters may be produced (Figure 4.16), such as Messier and Schiller, two elongate lunar craters. The huge Orcus Patera feature on Mars, which is  $380 \text{ km} \times 130 \text{ km}$ , may also be evidence of a low-angle impact.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

**Figure 4.16** Three elongate craters. Messier, shown in (a) and (b), comprises two craters. Material may have ricocheted out of the first, more elongate, crater to form the second one. The larger of the two Messier craters is  $11 \text{ km} \times 9 \text{ km}$ . Schiller (c) is a huge low-angle impact structure,  $179 \text{ km} \times 71 \text{ km}$  in size, visible in the lower centre of the image. Note that many craters in this image appear elongate due to the perspective, but Schiller is clearly different. (d) Orcus Patera on Mars. This crater,  $380 \text{ km}$  in length, may also be a low-angle impact structure.



**Figure 4.17** Apollo photo of the Orientale basin, approximately 900 km in diameter, located on the far side of the Moon. Major concentric ridges are present, but there is no central peak complex. The centre of the basin has been flooded by lavas and there are some small patches of lava in the outer ring.

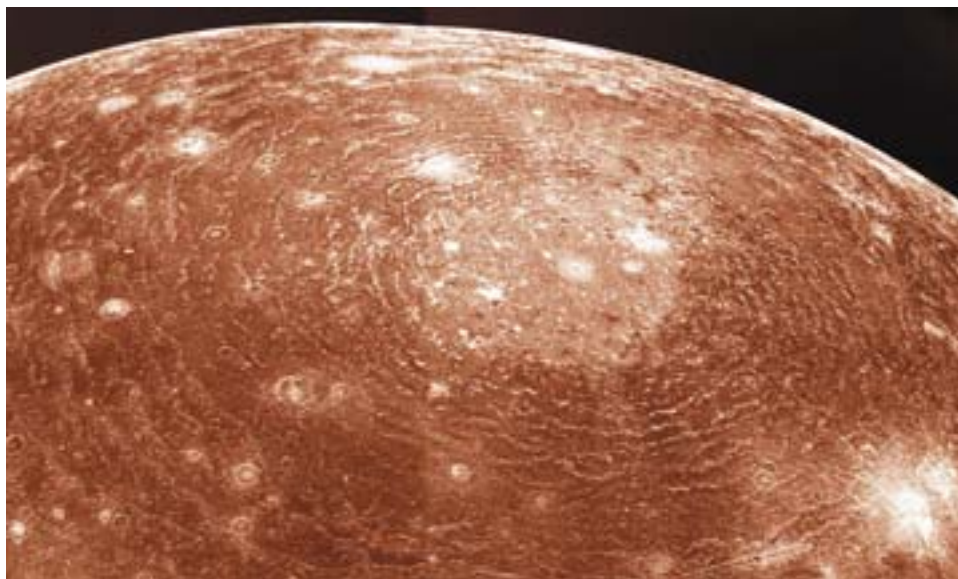
In extreme low-angle impacts, the resulting features cease to be true explosion structures, as the object does not penetrate the target but ricochets away. The scaling laws that apply to elongate craters to get an idea of impactor size based on crater diameter are different from those used for circular craters. If Orcus Patera is a low-angle impact structure, the object that formed it would have been huge, possibly greater than 20 km in diameter.

### Multi-ring basins

These are the largest impact structures that have been observed: none are known on Earth, but the Orientale Basin on the Moon (Figure 4.17) and Valhalla Basin on Callisto (Figure 4.18) are good examples from elsewhere in the Solar System. The complex system of scarps that surrounds the central basin of multi-ring basins makes it difficult to define the diameter of the actual crater, but the overall features are huge:

- the basin at the centre of Orientale is encircled by a scarp that is 900 km in diameter and up to 7 km high,
- Valhalla has scarps encircling the basin that are up to 4000 km in diameter.

Multi-ring basins remain poorly understood, and it may be that these features are not a simple progression from complex craters, but in fact have partially disrupted the entire tectonic framework of the bodies on which they are observed.



**Figure 4.18** Voyager image of the vast Valhalla impact site on Callisto. Valhalla is the largest known impact structure in the Solar System, with a diameter of 4000 km, yet its topography is so subdued that each of the numerous visible ring scarps rises only 1–2 km above its surroundings. The impact that formed Valhalla must have taken place at a time when Callisto's lithosphere was thin, and its mantle was hot and mobile enough to smooth out the surface topography. Valhalla's bright central area is about 300 km across: the site of the (now vanished) transient cavity.



- Are complex craters and multi-ring basins merely scaled-up versions of the smaller structures, or are there systematic differences?
- Large craters are markedly more complex than smaller ones. In particular, the larger impact structures, such as the 900 km-diameter Orientale Basin on the Moon, exhibit a conspicuous ‘bull’s eye’ pattern of concentric rings.
- The Orientale Basin on the Moon shows less evidence of **viscous relaxation** than the Valhalla Basin on Callisto (its rings are far more prominent topographic features). Can you think of a reason for this?
- The likely answer is that, at the time that Valhalla formed, Callisto had a relatively thin or weak lithosphere, which was unable to support substantial topography.

#### 4.4.2 Diagnostic shock features in rocks

Impact craters are usually clearly visible, and even old craters are well preserved on the terrestrial planets, icy satellites, and asteroids. On Earth, however, geological activity has meant that many craters are partially or completely eroded, or buried. In spite of this, impacts are known to have occurred at given times in the geological record. This is because an impact is a highly unusual geological process, involving materials, and pressure and temperature conditions that are not observed elsewhere on Earth. This gives rise to a set of diagnostic indicators of impact, some of which are local to the impact site, and some of which are observed in more distant settings such as an impact layer in an otherwise normal sequence of rocks. Apart from actual fragments of the impactor, which are only found in the case of some small impacts, these diagnostic indicators take several forms:

- High pressures lead to shock effects on rocks and minerals. Fragments showing shock effects may be carried thousands of miles from the impact site.
- Target rocks may be altered by the impact, but without being completely fragmented or melted. This is **shock metamorphism**, which typically occurs in rocks within, or close to, the impact structure.
- Impact melting of the target rock is another common feature, where the impactor material may contaminate glass.
- Impactor material may be included in the **distal ejecta** carried far from the site, providing a geochemical signature of impact.

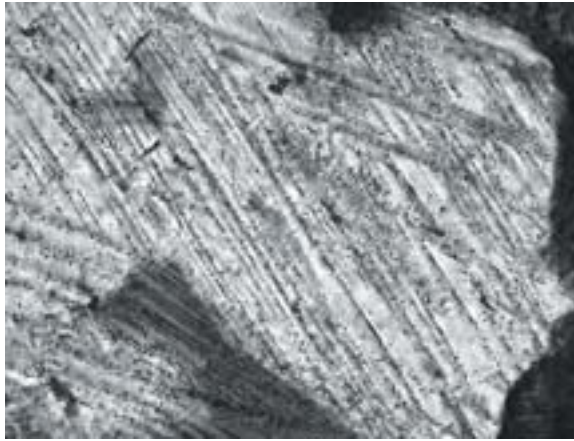
#### Shock effects in minerals

Under the extreme pressures produced during an impact event, various effects are produced in the minerals that make up the target rock. For example, graphite may be converted to diamond; quartz may be converted to stishovite at shock pressures greater than 12 GPa, and coesite at pressures greater than 30 GPa.

Stishovite and coesite are both high-pressure forms of  $\text{SiO}_2$ .

Shock waves also produce a variety of microstructures in minerals. At comparatively low shock pressures (5–8 GPa), planar fractures can be seen in quartz, but at higher pressures **planar deformation features** are observed. These are sets of narrow planar features, where the original crystalline quartz has been transformed into an amorphous phase (Figure 4.19). These features are distinctive of impact, and are *not* produced by any other known geological process.

**Figure 4.19** Planar deformation features in quartz recovered from a drill core into the Woodleigh impact structure, which is a large buried crater close to the coast of Western Australia. The field of view is 0.4 mm.



### Shock metamorphosed rocks

Several rock types are produced during impact that reflect the various stages of the impact process of contact and compression, excavation, and modification.

**Shatter cones** are a commonly observed feature of many impact rocks. These are distinctive curved, striated fractures that may be present as complete cones. These features can form at quite low shock pressures (2–10 GPa) and have been reproduced in hypervelocity impact experiments in the laboratory.

Breccias, which are rocks composed of angular fragments of pulverized target rock, are found beneath and around the impact site. In some cases this brecciated rock is bound together by melt, and may show flow structures. Such rocks are termed **suevite** (pronounced *sway-vite*) and appear to be characteristic of impacts into crystalline silicate rocks.

Another characteristic impact-produced rock type is **pseudotachylite**. Although not observed in all impact structures, this rock is found extensively at very large impacts. Pseudotachylites typically occur as large veins, sometimes several kilometres long and hundreds of metres wide (Figure 4.20). These veins contain abundant rounded inclusions of target rock, of all grain sizes, set in a black or greenish-black fine-grained material. Its presence provides evidence of local melting.



**Figure 4.20** Extremely large pseudotachylite vein in the rocks of the 2 Ga-old Sudbury impact structure in Canada. The pinkish fragments of target rock are set in a dark-coloured finer grained material.

## Impact glass

During an impact a large volume of rock in the target is heated to well beyond its melting point. When the shock wave has passed through the rock (i.e. the rock has been taken to a very high pressure, and then the pressure released) spontaneous melting occurs throughout this volume. Some of this melt is incorporated into fragmented target rocks, for example suevites, some may remain in the vicinity of the crater as a large melt sheet, and some is expelled from the transient cavity during the early stages of impact at high velocity. This material can travel on ballistic trajectories for thousands of kilometres from the impact site, and will chill rapidly in flight to form a glass. These glasses, termed tektites, often have aerodynamic shapes from their passage through the atmosphere.

## Geochemical signatures of impact

Aside from the physical effects of impact, there may also be a chemical effect as impactor material is incorporated in the melt, or fragmented and added to distal ejecta. Knowledge of meteorite chemistry allows this unusual geochemical signature in otherwise normal rocks to be recognized; the occurrence of the Chicxulub impact was inferred from an iridium anomaly in sediments from the Cretaceous–Tertiary boundary, before the crater was discovered. Iridium is a very rare element in rocks in the Earth’s crust, but much more abundant in meteorites.

### QUESTION 4.5

How could you show that an impact event had occurred where there was no superficial evidence of a crater? Think about things you might analyse in rocks that are distant from the possible impact site and, assuming you have some clue where the buried crater is, what you might do closer to a buried structure.

## 4.5 Impactors and targets

### 4.5.1 Types of impactor

Although the size and velocity of the impactor may be the principal control on the size and morphology of the final crater, the composition and density of the object are also important. Impactors fall into two broad populations: asteroids and comets. Apart from having distinct compositions, they also have substantial differences in relative velocities, source regions, and delivery mechanisms (you will consider this in detail in Chapter 7).

Asteroids are relatively dense, composed of silicate rock and metal, and most originate in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. They are deflected into the inner Solar System following collisions in the asteroid belt and gravitational interactions with Jupiter, and at Earth’s orbit (1 AU) they have average impact velocities of  $17 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ . Comets are low-density objects made of ices and minor amounts of silicates, which originate in the Kuiper Belt near the orbit of Pluto, or the Oort cloud (see Chapter 1). Occasionally a Kuiper Belt body may be disturbed by the interactions of the giant planets so that its orbit crosses that of Neptune. A subsequent close encounter with Neptune will change its orbit again, and may send it into the inner Solar System where it might be visible from Earth as a comet. Bodies residing in the Oort cloud are much too far out to be disturbed by planets,

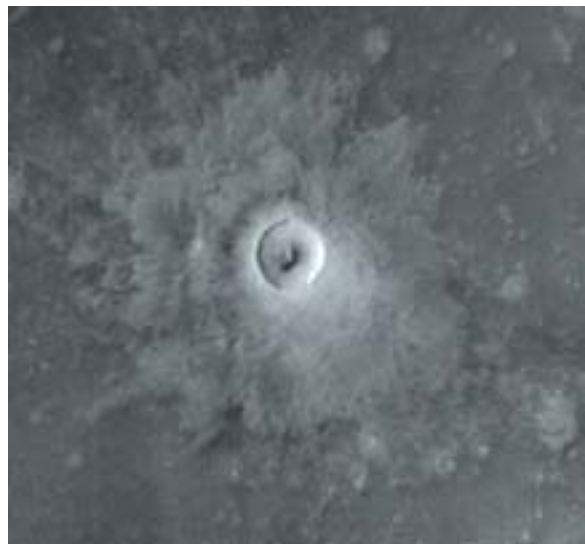
but as the Solar System orbits the galactic centre it can pass close enough to other stars for their gravity to affect Oort cloud objects. Again, some of these may fall towards the inner Solar System and be observed as comets. At Earth's orbit these objects may have collisional velocities of up to  $72 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ . Given the different source regions for these populations, it is clear that the inner Solar System is subject to impacts from both comets and asteroids, whilst the outer planets rarely experience asteroidal impacts. Instead, planets and satellites in the outer Solar System may be subject to a much higher comet flux.

Little is known about the ratio of asteroid to cometary impactors in the inner Solar System. This is because it is difficult to classify the composition of Near Earth Objects and identify the nature of impactors from geological evidence. It is also likely that the ratio has changed significantly over time. Brief periods of intense cometary bombardment may occur when our Solar System passes close to other stars or giant molecular clouds, scattering comets from the Oort cloud into the inner Solar System.

### 4.5.2 Nature of the target

On Earth, the comparatively small number of distinct craters is testimony to our geologically active planet, where renewing and wearing away of the surface occurs on a relatively short timescale when compared to the age of the Solar System. Abundant craters on other planets, satellites and asteroids suggest much less geological activity. In some cases, information on the geology of the target can be derived from the types of craters observed.

Many Martian craters look as though they were formed by objects hitting material that had the consistency of wet cement (Figure 4.21). It is thought that the distinctive ejecta patterns of these **rampart craters** result from the mobilization of trapped ground water, or melting of permafrost ice on impact, yielding ejecta with different properties from those formed on 'dry' planets. The observation of **fluidized ejecta** suggests the presence of abundant volatiles, such as  $\text{CO}_2$  or water ice, in the subsurface.



**Figure 4.21** Fluidized ejecta apron around Arandas, a Martian crater 28 km in diameter. One prominent lobe of 'flow' material extends out from the crater rim to about one crater diameter. Two or three other series of lobes are present, one reaching more than 50 km from the crater rim.

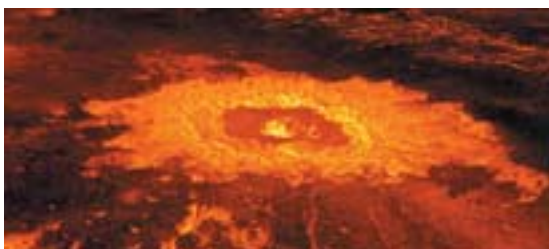
The surfaces of most of the satellites of the outer planets are composed of ice. Intuitively, one might suppose that craters on these bodies should be similar to the 'wet cement' craters on Mars, but this is not so – they resemble ordinary lunar craters. One reason for this may be that surface temperatures on the outer-planet satellites are as much as 200 K lower than on Mars. At these frigid temperatures, ice is mechanically much stronger than at higher temperatures and resembles low-density rock. Early in the history of the Solar System, lithosphere temperatures of icy satellites may have been higher than they are today, permitting some glacier-like flow of surface ice structures to take place. Furthermore, the icy lithospheres of large satellites may have been thinner early in their history, when their interiors were warmer. Thus, surface topographic effects would become subdued as the volume of asthenosphere that was deformed on impact gradually returned to its original position by viscous relaxation, so now only the ghostly imprints of former craters are visible. Examples of these imprints are visible on Jupiter's large icy satellites,



Ganymede and Callisto (Chapter 1). Viscous relaxation also affected rocky bodies such as the Moon, when very large impacts deformed both its rigid lithosphere, and its plastic asthenosphere. On Venus, the process continues to play an important role in the evolution of impact structures due to the high heat flow through that planet's lithosphere (Figure 4.22a). By studying the effects of viscous relaxation on craters, we can place constraints on the thickness of the lithosphere. This technique has been used to derive the minimum thickness for the lithosphere of Venus. On Europa very few craters are visible, suggesting a comparatively young surface. The few large craters that are present often have subdued topography (Figure 4.22b–e), suggesting an interior that is still warm, or even a liquid water layer beneath its surface.

In addition, craters can provide information on the specific target rock type. The observation of impact craters in dunes on Mars presents the most unambiguous evidence that Mars has sedimentary rocks. If the dunes were made from loose sand, the craters would be rapidly eroded. Instead, it appears that the sand in these Martian dunes was cemented prior to impact into a form of aeolian sandstone (Figure 4.23).

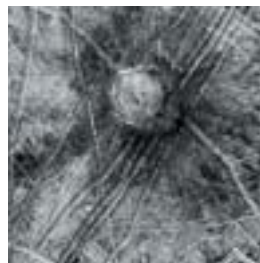
Finally, studying the cratered surfaces of asteroids can help our understanding of the internal structure of these bodies. Several asteroids show craters of a size that one might expect should have led to the destruction of the asteroid. In addition, very small craters appear to be rare. These data seem to be consistent with impacts into highly porous material – it is predicted that small, porous targets should have



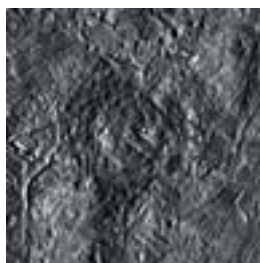
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

**Figure 4.22** (a) Craters on Venus often show low relief due to viscous relaxation of the target following impact (false-colour image). (b–e) Examples of craters with subdued relief on Europa, which suggest the possibility of a layer of liquid water several kilometres beneath its icy surface.



**Figure 4.23** Mars Global Surveyor image of dunes on Mars showing impact cratering. Craters would not be supported in unconsolidated sand, so this image constitutes excellent evidence for the existence of lithified sedimentary rocks on Mars. This image is just over 2 km across.



better survivability than non-porous materials and may absorb impacts that would destroy a more solid object. Similarly, small impacts into highly porous targets tend to produce indistinct craters.

- Would you expect to see *exactly* the same variations in shape and size of craters on other solid bodies? If not, what factors might influence the shapes of craters?
- No. Three factors that influence the shapes of craters of varying size are the surface gravity of the body; the thickness of its lithosphere; and the strength of the materials of which it is made.

## 4.6 Craters as chronometers

In the lead-up to the Apollo Moon landings of the late 1960s and early 1970s, attempts were made to image the surface of the Moon in greater and greater detail. Each refinement in technology revealed more craters, until images from the first spacecraft to land showed that the Moon's surface is cratered down to a scale of millimetres. It became apparent that the longer a surface has been exposed to impacts, the more craters it will exhibit.

The numbers of craters on a surface can be used to estimate its age: older surfaces have been exposed to impacts for longer and show more craters.

If the rate at which bodies impact a surface is known, then the observed density of craters per unit area might be used to estimate the age of the surface (or vice versa – if the age of the surface is known then this could be used to provide information on the rate at which impacts take place). However, although this may sound simple, the technique is far from simple to apply.

### 4.6.1 Complicating factors

The concept of using populations of craters to estimate surface ages is a relatively simple one to grasp, but there are a number of factors that can complicate its application, and which must be constrained in order to get a meaningful surface age. Important factors to bear in mind are:

- The impact rate and the size distribution of impacting bodies.
- Temporal and spatial variations in impactor population.
- Temporal variation in the target.
- Crater degradation.
- Impacts formed by ejecta from a single large impact, i.e. secondary impacts.
- The need for measured surface ages to calibrate crater counting.

We shall consider each of these factors in more detail.

The number of impacting bodies hitting a given area in a given time is termed the **impact flux**. Whether we measure the observed population of impactors, or look at craters on a surface of a given age, we need to scale from the impactor diameter to the diameter of crater that a given impactor would produce. We also need to know

how the size of impactors varies, from the smallest dust to the largest asteroids. Photographs of the Moon show that for every large crater there are many smaller ones. A **size–frequency distribution** can be produced from the measurements of all the crater sizes.

The size–frequency distribution is a statistical term used to describe the relative numbers of objects across a range of sizes.

Estimating flux and size–frequency distribution is difficult, but these estimations are made even more difficult by the fact that both may vary in time, and throughout the Solar System. The impact flux was extremely high during the first few 100 Ma of the Solar System as the planets finished accreting – as well as smaller collisions, impacts between Mars-sized objects may have occurred several times. It is possible that the flux then peaked again at around 3.8–4.0 Ga ago, producing the so-called late heavy bombardment that is recorded in the large lunar impact basins. Since approximately 3.8 Ga ago, the flux has declined – probably exponentially – and is now declining at a low rate, or is stable. Mars has a higher flux per unit area than the Earth due to its proximity to the asteroid belt, while bodies in the outer Solar System have a lower flux of asteroids, but a higher flux of comets (Jupiter shields the inner Solar System from many cometary impacts).

Furthermore, the size–frequency distribution varies spatially and temporally. Variation in the ratio of cometary to asteroidal impactors, at different times and in different parts of the Solar System, may change the size–frequency distribution of craters.

Properties of the target that influence cratering statistics may also change over time. For instance, billions of years ago, Mars probably had a much denser atmosphere than it does today, which may have shielded it from small impactors in the same way that the Earth’s atmosphere shields us today. We might expect a deficit of ancient small craters in this case. In addition, surface processes, which may have been more intense on Mars during its first 1–2 Ga, may have aided crater degradation.

If projectiles are continuously fired at a surface, early-formed craters will eventually be obliterated by younger ones. When a new crater can form only at the expense of an older one, by overprinting it, the surface is **saturated**. Obviously, the pre-saturation history of a saturated surface is irretrievably lost.

#### QUESTION 4.6

Examine Figure 4.24. Does either of the images reveal a saturated surface? What can you say about the relative ages of the two surfaces illustrated?



**Figure 4.24** Images of planetary surfaces, for use with Question 4.6.

Crater-counting statistics become unreliable if the origin of the craters is dubious. Large impacts produce huge numbers of **secondary craters**, so problems can arise if these are included within the population of primary impacts. Statistical techniques have been devised to cope with this issue, such as not counting small craters, many of which may be secondary craters.

Crater counting by itself offers at best only a means of comparing *relative* ages of surfaces. But if we have an absolute age for a surface, and then count the craters on it, we have a calibrated cratering curve (see Box 4.1). Because samples returned from the Moon have been dated by radiometric techniques, as have cratered terrains on Earth, we can use crater statistics in an *absolute* time frame for these bodies. Comparative crater statistics can then be used to estimate reliably the ages of lunar surfaces that have not been dated in the laboratory. But this confidence does not extend far, and so, based on knowledge of the Earth and Moon, and observed impactors, we have to make assumptions about the flux in other parts of the Solar System if we want to use crater numbers to estimate the ages of surfaces.

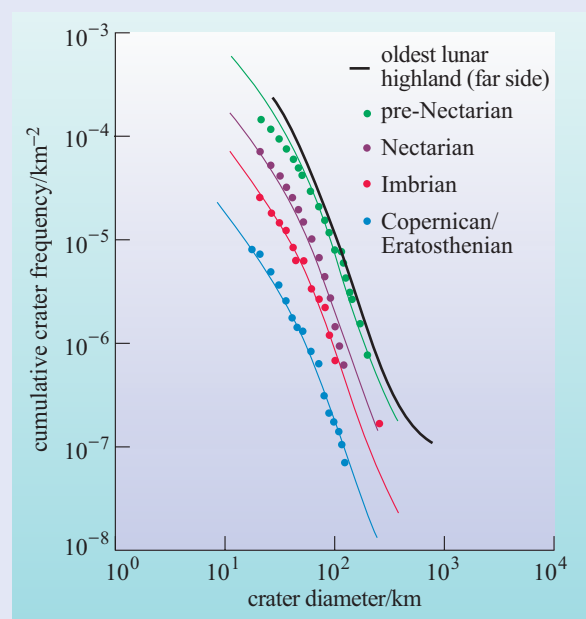
### BOX 4.1 PLOTTING CRATER SIZE–FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION CURVES

Crater statistics are usually displayed on graphs of crater frequency against diameter. These plots use logarithmic axes, so each interval represents a power of ten. The reason that we use logarithmic axes, instead of the more familiar linear axes, is because the range in diameters is so great, from 1 km to >4000 km, that a linear graph would be ridiculously long. Furthermore, whereas an increment of 1 km from 2 km to 3 km represents a major *relative* change, an increment of 1 km from 100 km to 101 km is a much smaller relative change. Another peculiarity of these plots is that the vertical axis of the graph

(‘powers of ten’ logarithmic) is not simply ‘number of craters per square kilometre’, but the number of craters *greater than a given size* per square kilometre of the surface (referred to as the *cumulative* number). Figure 4.25 shows typical crater size–frequency distributions, in this case for different lunar surfaces.

#### A calibrated cratering curve

One of the striking things about Figure 4.25 is that the cratering curves for the lunar highlands and progressively younger surfaces have the same gradient, suggesting that the impacting bodies had similar size–frequency distributions, even though these data span approximately 4 Ga of Solar System history.



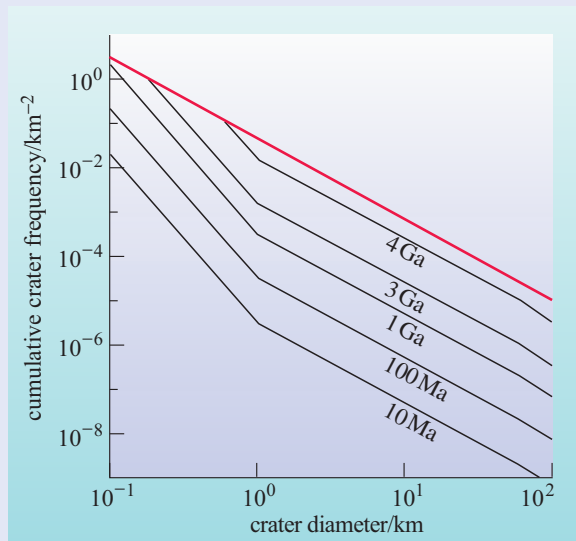
**Figure 4.25** Crater size–frequency distributions of the Moon. The curve on the right shows cratering data from the oldest lunar highlands and approximates a saturated surface. The data to the left of this curve are from progressively younger surfaces: pre-Nectarian is the period when some of the oldest surviving lunar impact basins were formed (~3.92–4.2 Ga); Nectarian is the period during which most of the major mare basins were formed (3.85–3.92 Ga), and the time of the so-called late heavy bombardment; Imbrian is the period of main mare basalt flooding (3–3.85 Ga) after the Imbrium and Orientale basins were formed; Copernican–Eratosthenian covers the period of cratering after 3 Ga.

Sophisticated statistical manipulations reveal some subtle differences between the populations, and that many of the myriads of small craters (less than 4 km in diameter) on the mare surface may be secondaries. Compilation of crater statistics from all radiometrically dated areas of the Moon has enabled plots like Figure 4.25, and the simplified version in Figure 4.26, to be constructed. These graphs are the key to using craters as chronometers in the inner Solar System. Because there are more accurate ages for the lunar mare surfaces, crater densities for other planetary surfaces may be ‘normalized’ to the mare value, which is expressed as fractions of the mare value. Alternatively, calculated curves for surfaces of a specific age may be constructed, as in Figure 4.26.

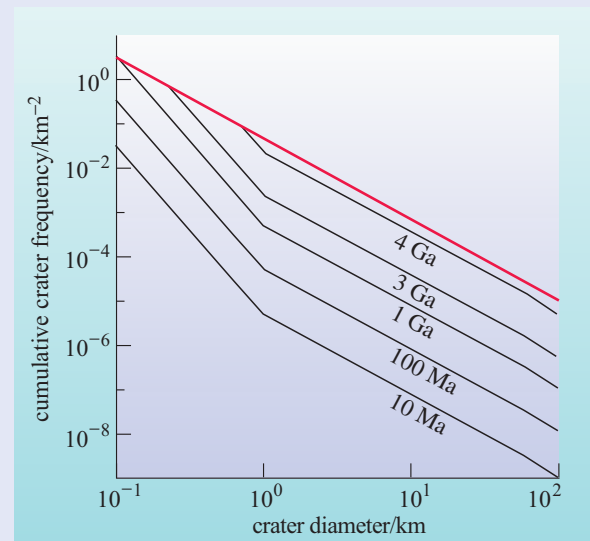
### Comparison with Mars

Because no surfaces of Mars have yet been sampled for radiometric dating, crater statistics have been minutely examined to estimate the age of its surface features. Excellent images of Mars are available, so the crater *numbers* are themselves secure, but before

we can use them as a chronometer for Martian geological processes you need to understand how the cratering process on Mars compares with that on the Moon. Because Mars has a larger mass than the Moon, and therefore higher gravity, it experiences a higher flux. This is known as gravitational focusing. Mars is also much closer to the orbiting ‘scrapyard’ of the asteroid belt, so there are more potential impactors. Both these factors indicate that Mars experienced a larger impact flux than the Moon. Exactly how much larger is controversial, but the current ‘best estimate’ is that it was roughly a factor of 1.6 higher than the Moon. Figure 4.27 is effectively the same plot as Figure 4.26, shifted vertically to take account of the higher overall flux per unit area on Mars. Similar plots can be constructed for the other planets and satellites, but with varying degrees of confidence. For instance, we need to be cautious when applying this method to bodies in the outer Solar System since they experience a very different impactor population (mostly comets) from bodies in the inner Solar System.



**Figure 4.26** ‘Calibrated’ cratering curves for the Moon, based on statistics for surfaces whose ages have been determined radiometrically. The red line shows the crater density on a saturated surface.



**Figure 4.27** Cratering curves for Mars, based on lunar data in Figures 4.25 and 4.26, but adjusted to take account of the slightly higher flux at Mars. Notice it is very similar to Figure 4.26.

## 4.7 Fluvial and aeolian processes

The processes that have most significantly reshaped planetary surfaces are:

- plate tectonics (on Earth), and
- volcanism and cratering (on other bodies in the Solar System).

On Earth, the effects of water and wind – fluvial and aeolian processes, respectively – are also observed, but these are rarely seen elsewhere in the Solar System. Liquid water is not stable on most planetary surfaces, and most objects do not possess appreciable atmospheres. Mars, however, is a notable exception, and on this planet we see abundant fluvial and aeolian landforms.

Since the Viking missions of the mid-1970s, it has been apparent that Mars has experienced volcanic, aeolian and aqueous activity that has substantially modified its surface. However, it was generally believed that this took place several hundred million years, or even billions of years ago. High-resolution pictures from the Mars Global Surveyor mission have changed this view. As we have seen in the earlier chapters, it seems clear that volcanic activity continues on Mars, and there is cratering evidence for the existence of sedimentary rocks and subsurface volatiles. Additional images from the Mars Orbiting Camera (part of the science payload on board Global Surveyor, abbreviated to MOC) have provided a wealth of information on past and current Martian surface processes.

### 4.7.1 Fluvial processes

The Viking missions revealed that Mars has experienced a variety of fluvial processes. There is evidence of:

- massive flash floods, extending over hundreds of kilometres (Figure 4.28a), and
- branching river-beds, similar to natural terrestrial drainage systems, suggesting more mature, long-lived river systems (Figure 4.28b).

However, it is clear from crater-counting evidence that neither type of surface drainage has been active for at least 2 Ga. In an extremely exciting development over recent years, MOC images have revealed a third type of Martian drainage feature – small channels, located on the sides of older major valleys or on crater walls (Figure 4.29). These channels are too small to be visible in Viking images. Although dry (no liquid water has been seen on Mars), they appear to be very recent. Many of these surfaces show no discernible craters, and so fall below the limit of resolution of crater counting for determining surface age. This implies that they were made in the last 1 Ma, which is extremely recent on a geological timescale, suggesting that fluvial processes are still occurring on Mars.



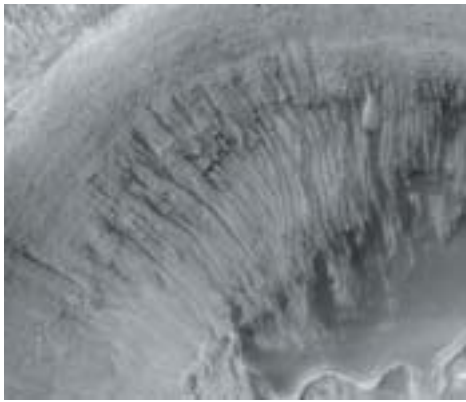
(a)



(b)

**Figure 4.28** Evidence for massive flash floods in Mars's distant past. (a) Viking image showing teardrop-shaped craters, formed as floodwaters flowed around them. The craters are 8–10 km in diameter, lying near the mouth of Ares Vallis in Chryse Planitia. The height of the scarp surrounding the upper island is about 400 m, while the scarp surrounding the southern island is about 600 m above the plain. The region pictured is close to the Mars Pathfinder landing site. Branching drainage systems (b) are evidence for more sustained drainage, similar to terrestrial river systems. This type of feature appears to be confined to older terrains, suggesting that sustained river systems on Mars have not been active for several billion years.





(a)



(b)

**Figure 4.29** MOC images showing evidence of recent drainage. Many craters have small channels in the crater walls (a), which appear to be unaffected by subsequent cratering, and have sharp sides, suggesting very recent formation ages. The image is about 5.5 km across. (b) Dunes showing very fresh channels emerging from close to the dune crest. This dune field in Russell crater near the Martian equator is frost covered in the Martian winter so it is possible that the channels have been active during a recent spring thaw. The field of view is 4 km across.

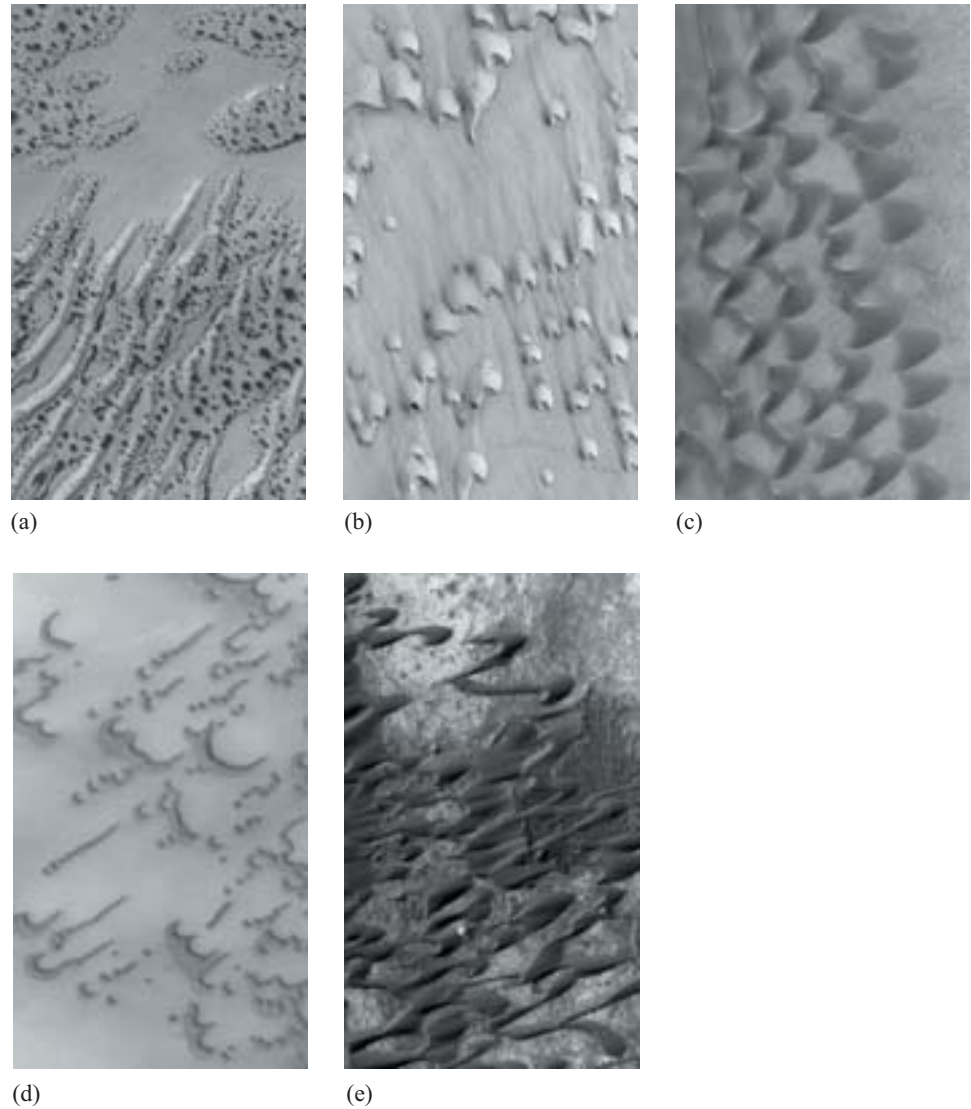
### 4.7.2 Aeolian processes

On Earth a variety of aeolian landforms are recognized in arid and semi-arid environments, with wind-blown material forming dunes of all sizes. A huge variety of dune types may form, depending on the nature and availability of material, and the local wind conditions. Figure 4.30 shows several types of dune that appear to be represented on Mars.

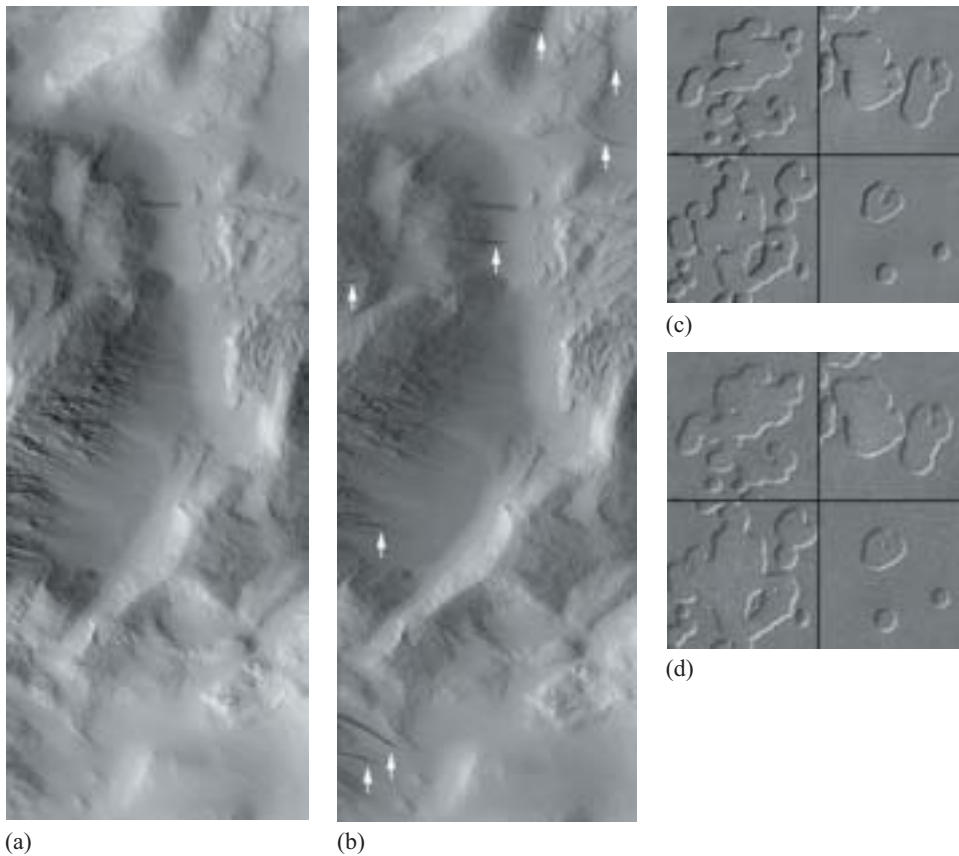
The images provided by Mars Global Surveyor have shown that Mars remains an active planet. There is evidence of recent aeolian activity – new deposition and erosion have taken place in a single Martian year – as well as mobility of volatile phases like CO<sub>2</sub> in the Martian polar regions (Figure 4.31).

### 4.7.3 Sedimentary rocks

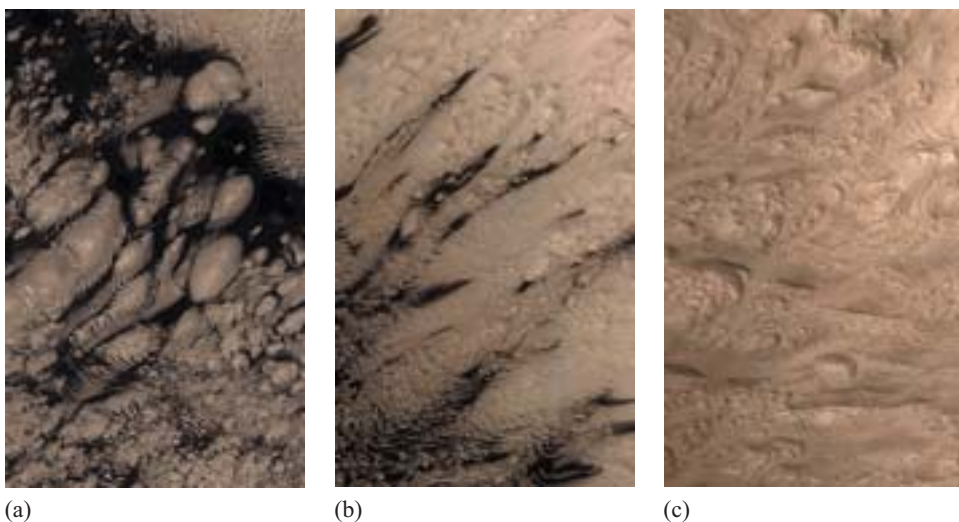
On Earth, fluvial and aeolian processes are fundamental parts of a geological cycle that includes the formation of sedimentary rocks. Eroded material, typically deposited in basins following weathering of upland regions, is cemented by percolating fluids to form a sedimentary rock. As we have seen, cratering of fossilized dunes provides excellent evidence for the presence of sedimentary rocks on Mars. In addition, MOC images provide numerous examples of beautifully layered terrains. Figure 4.32 shows layering in a 64 km-wide impact crater. Horizontal layers have been exposed by erosion, giving the appearance of contour lines inside the crater.



**Figure 4.30** A collection of MOC images showing the huge variety of Martian dune forms. The dunes shown in (a) are in the middle of a spring thaw, with dark patches of ice-free sand just beginning to appear. The dunes in (b) are also frost covered – in summer they appear almost black – and are found in Chasma Boreale, a giant trough that almost cuts the north polar cap of Mars in two. The shapes of the dunes suggest that wind is transporting sand from the top of the image towards the bottom. (c) Dunes and smaller ripples. (d) North polar dunes, the morphologies here suggest a reduced sediment supply. (e) A field of dunes in a volcanic depression in northern Syrtis Major. The images in a, c, d and e are 3 km across, while that in b is 1.5 km across.



**Figure 4.31** Evidence of continuing surface processes on Mars; each image is approximately 250 m across. (a) and (b) The same area of the Martian south polar cap, the image in (a) taken in 1999, and (b) taken in 2001. When you compare the same area in different years it is clear that small hills have vanished and pit walls have expanded between 1999 and 2001. The pits are formed in frozen carbon dioxide, and a little more sublimates away each year. (c) and (d) are the same portion of a ridged terrain north of the Olympus Mons volcano. Dark streaks are thought to result from avalanching of fine dust. Differences between these two images have occurred over the course of a single Martian year.



**Figure 4.32** Different areas (a–c) of a Martian layered terrain in an impact crater in the western Arabia Terra region. Each image is about 3 km across. Hundreds of layers of similar thickness and texture have been revealed by erosion. This impact crater was a site of repeated sedimentary deposition, possibly related to cyclic changes in climate. It is not known whether the sediments were deposited dry or settled out of water that may have occupied the crater as a lake.

## 4.8 Summary of Chapter 4

- Impact cratering is the most pervasive process affecting the surfaces of solid bodies in the Solar System.
- Unless decelerated by an atmosphere, impacts between different objects in the Solar System occur at hypervelocity, typically  $> 10 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ .
- Circular craters form even if the impact angle is quite low. Elliptical craters are formed only at angles of incidence below about 10 degrees.
- The energy released in an impact is huge. On Earth, large impacts may dramatically alter the planet's surface environment, causing mass mortality or mass extinctions.
- The formation of an impact crater may be divided into three distinct phases: contact and compression, excavation, and modification. The first two phases only last for a few seconds and the modification phase lasts only for a few minutes. Even in the largest impacts, cratering is the most rapid geological process known.
- Craters are observed at all scales in a wide range of sizes, from microscopic to thousands of kilometres in diameter. Simple craters of a few kilometres across are bowl-shaped depressions, larger complex craters may have central peaks and terraces, and even larger multi-ring basins may partially disrupt a planet's entire tectonic structure.
- Impacts not only produce craters, they also bring about a variety of changes in the target rocks and minerals – thus the presence of an impact crater can sometimes be inferred from observed diagnostic changes, even if the crater itself has been buried or been eroded.
- There is a variety of impactor types. In the inner Solar System, impactors may be either asteroidal debris derived from the asteroid belt or comets from the Kuiper Belt and the Oort cloud.
- Different types of craters can provide information on the nature of the target, for example, indistinct craters with subdued topography on Europa suggest the presence of a layer of liquid water beneath the surface.
- Impact craters provide a means of dating many planetary surfaces.
- There is abundant evidence for the action of water on Mars in the distant past, for example areas that show the effects of flash floods, or the dry beds of braided river systems similar to those found on Earth. Recent data suggests that small channels may still be active.
- Aeolian processes are ongoing. Changes in the surface of Mars have been observed over times as short as a single Martian year.
- Sedimentary rocks, with detailed, repeated layering have been observed on Mars; some of these rocks may have been laid down in water.

## CHAPTER 5

# ATMOSPHERES OF TERRESTRIAL PLANETS

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about the composition and structure of the atmospheres of the terrestrial planets. So far in this book we have concentrated on the surfaces and interiors of planets and other rocky bodies, but if you view Venus, Earth or Mars from space then you will mainly see the clouds in its atmosphere. Figure 5.1 is an ultraviolet image of Venus showing complete cloud cover. Cloud features are discernible in ultraviolet light, but in visible light Venus appears featureless, resembling a sphere of fog.

It has been known for a long time that Mars and Venus have atmospheres. Drawings of telescopic observations from the 17th century onwards suggest the existence of the polar ice-caps on Mars and complete cloud cover on Venus. By the 1960s, when the first spacecraft missions flew by these planets, the presence of carbon dioxide and water had already been detected in both atmospheres. Nevertheless, little was known at that time of the detailed composition of the atmospheres of planets other than the Earth, and even less was known about their physical properties, such as temperature and pressure. Estimates of the atmospheric pressure, for example, greatly overestimated that of Mars and underestimated that of Venus. Since the early 1960s our knowledge of the planets' atmospheres has expanded enormously due to information from spacecraft and more sophisticated Earth and space-based telescopes.

In Section 5.3, we compare the compositions of the atmospheres of the terrestrial planets. First inspection suggests that they have little in common – Earth has a far greater proportion of nitrogen in its atmosphere than Mars and Venus and is unique in containing a high proportion of oxygen upon which we depend to live. Mercury has such a sparse atmosphere that it would be regarded as an almost total vacuum



**Figure 5.1** Ultraviolet image of Venus, taken from the Pioneer Venus Orbiter, showing complete cloud cover.



on Earth. A more careful comparison of the atmospheres of Earth, Venus and Mars hints at a common origin and similar amounts of common volatile materials, which prompts the question: could Mars or Venus support or have supported life?

We then look at how the atmosphere changes with altitude and the processes that cause temperature variations for Venus, Earth and Mars. The Earth and Venus are subject to the ‘greenhouse effect’, which raises the surface temperature. One consequence of this is that water is liquid on much of the Earth’s surface. The effect on Venus is much greater, giving a surface temperature some 450 K higher than that of the Earth. At higher altitude, the ozone layer, which protects us from solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation, causes a unique temperature variation in the Earth’s atmosphere.



**Figure 5.2** Image of Earth taken from Apollo 17 en route for the Moon.

If you look up at the sky you will probably see clouds. These are an obvious feature on most days in many parts of the world – and clouds feature prominently in the view of Earth from space (Figure 5.2). In Section 5.5, we consider the nature of clouds in the atmospheres of the terrestrial planets and the conditions required for their formation.

On Earth we are all familiar with wind and weather. Not surprisingly, winds also occur on other planets. In Section 5.6 we examine the causes of atmospheric motion and compare their effects on different planets.

Beyond what is normally considered as the atmosphere lies a region of charged particles (ions and electrons) that is under the influence of the planet. This region, called the ionosphere, can interact with the Sun’s magnetic field. Further interactions occur if the planet itself has a magnetic field. The region affected by the Sun’s magnetic field is known as the magnetosphere. In Section 5.7 we explore the magnetospheres of the terrestrial planets. Figure 5.3 shows an aurora, which is a spectacular light display produced in the Earth’s atmosphere by the disturbance of the magnetosphere.

This chapter describes the atmospheres of the terrestrial planets in detail – but why do some planetary bodies have atmospheres whilst others do not? There are two parts to this question:

- What are the origins of planetary atmospheres?
- How do planets retain their atmospheres?



**Figure 5.3** Aurora borealis as seen from Sweden. Aurorae are generally only seen at high latitudes.

### 5.1.1 Origins and retention of planetary atmospheres

The origins of the atmospheres include material from the solar nebula (as is the case for the giant planets), outgassing of volatile materials from planetary interiors (the case for Mars, Earth, and Venus) and the solar wind (the case for Mercury).

An important factor dictating whether or not an object in the Solar System can retain an atmosphere is the strength of the gravitational field at its surface – the stronger the field, the stronger the gravitational forces acting on the molecules in the atmosphere. Atmospheric molecules are in perpetual motion in all directions. Without the gravitational field, those moving away from the planet would be lost – and even with the gravitational field, those molecules with particularly high speeds can still escape. This leads to the notion of *escape velocity*, which is defined as: the minimum speed needed before a body has enough *kinetic energy* to escape from the surface of a planet (i.e. overcome its gravitational field). It can be shown that the escape velocity,  $v_{\text{esc}}$ , for a body of mass  $M$  and radius  $R$  is given by:

$$v_{\text{esc}} = \sqrt{\frac{2GM}{R}} \quad (5.1)$$

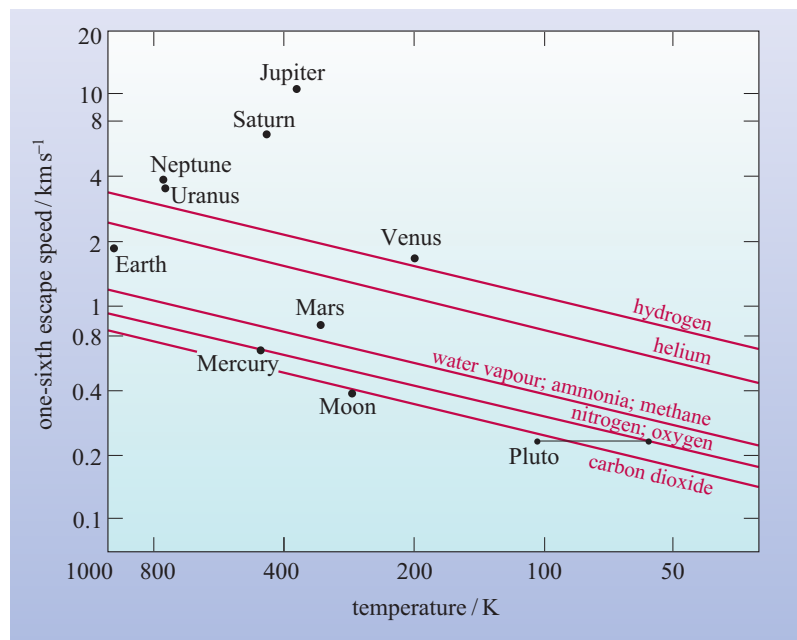
where  $G$  is the gravitational constant.

Whether atmospheric molecules have sufficient speed or not to overcome the gravitational forces depends on the temperature. As the temperature of a gas increases, its molecules move around more quickly, i.e. the average speed of its molecules increases. A fraction of the molecules will always be travelling fast enough to overcome gravitational forces, allowing them to escape to space. At low temperatures, this proportion is negligible, but at higher temperatures the proportion becomes progressively more significant, until most molecules exceed the escape velocity for the planetary body. Escape occurs from a level in the upper atmosphere above which the atmosphere is so thin that a molecule moving outwards has little chance of colliding with another and *will* therefore escape if it has sufficient speed. The relevant temperature is thus the temperature at this level in the atmosphere.

The temperatures where the atmosphere can escape are generally higher than the effective cloud top temperatures (as listed in Appendix A, Table A1).

Different gases have different molecular masses, so their average speeds are different at a given temperature. In order for a planetary body to retain a particular gas in its atmosphere for a period of time of the same order as the age of the Solar System, the average speed of the molecules in the gas should be less than about one-sixth of the escape velocity. (If the average speed exceeds one-sixth of the escape velocity, a significant proportion of molecules will be moving faster than the escape velocity, and will be lost.) This condition is achieved on only a few planets and satellites. Figure 5.4 explores these relationships further. For each of the planets (and the Moon), the temperature is plotted along the horizontal axis and one-sixth of the corresponding escape velocity is plotted on the vertical axis. Note that, in order to cover the range of values needed, the scales are not linear – a particular interval along an axis corresponds to a doubling of the quantity. The sloping lines show the average molecular speeds of each named gas at each temperature. Figure 5.4 thus defines the conditions under which a planet would lose or retain that gas over geological timescales (over several Ga). For example, the giant planets plot well above all the lines and can therefore retain any of the named gases whereas the Moon plots below all the lines and cannot retain any of the gases.

**Figure 5.4** Graph summarizing conditions of temperature and escape velocity for which planetary bodies can retain the common gases hydrogen  $H_2$ , helium  $He$ , water vapour  $H_2O$ , ammonia  $NH_3$ , methane  $CH_4$ , nitrogen  $N_2$ , oxygen  $O_2$ , and carbon dioxide  $CO_2$  in their atmospheres for long periods. For bodies that do not have a substantial atmosphere, approximate surface temperatures are shown.



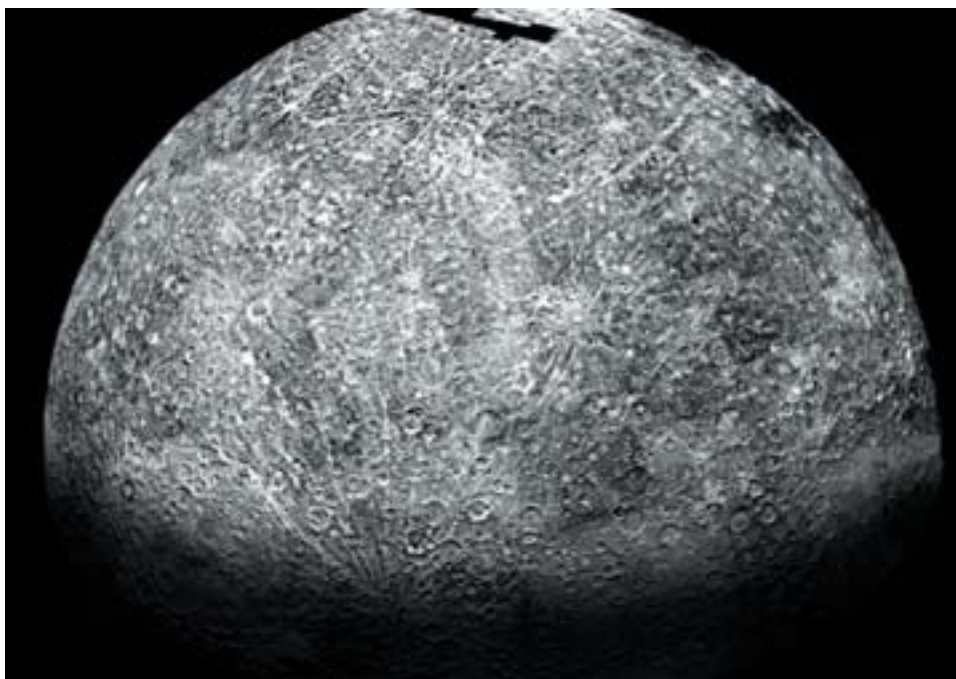
- Which gases should Mars be able to retain?
- Mars plots below the hydrogen and helium lines so cannot retain these gases, but it plots above the lines for water vapour, nitrogen, ammonia, methane, oxygen and carbon dioxide, so these gases could be retained. Water vapour, nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide have indeed been found on Mars. Although Mars plots above the ammonia and methane lines, if these gases were retained they would be converted to nitrogen and carbon dioxide under the conditions found on Mars.

In the image of Mercury in Figure 5.5, there is no discernible atmosphere. The atmosphere of Mercury is an extremely thin layer of gas with a pressure at the surface of  $10^{-15}$  times that of the Earth's atmosphere (see Appendix A, Table A1).

- Using the information in Figure 5.4, would you expect Mercury to have an atmosphere?
- Mercury plots above the  $CO_2$  line so you might have expected it to retain this gas.

Figure 5.4 gives the average surface temperature. The solar-facing side of Mercury is considerably hotter than this (its equatorial temperature can be as high as 740 K). As Mercury rotates relatively slowly, carbon dioxide can escape from the solar-facing side. There are also other mechanisms by which atmospheres can lose gases. Hydrogen and helium may have been present in substantial amounts in early atmospheres but are easily lost through thermal escape, as you have seen. If large amounts of these gases escape rapidly, then other heavier gases can be lost at the same time by being carried along with them. In addition, atmospheric components can be lost through interaction with the solar wind and after impacts.

Retention of gases can be enhanced if the volatile components condense or become incorporated into the planetary surface or deeper layers within the planet. For example carbon dioxide from the Earth's atmosphere has dissolved in the oceans and become incorporated into carbonate rocks.



**Figure 5.5** Mercury, as seen by Mariner 10 as it sped away from the planet.

## 5.2 Exploration

Direct access to an atmosphere, such as the lower layers of the Earth's atmosphere, enables us to separate and identify the various constituents. In the 18th century, the **diatomic molecules** (molecules consisting of two atoms bonded together) oxygen,  $O_2$ , and nitrogen,  $N_2$ , were recognized as separate components of Earth's atmosphere. In the last decade of the 19th century, the **noble gases** (Table 5.1) were discovered, which extended our knowledge of the composition of the Earth's atmosphere. The discovery of these unreactive gases was made using spectroscopy, a technique devised some thirty years earlier, which we shall consider shortly. The identification of the other minor components of the Earth's atmosphere depended on the development of other techniques, which have also proved useful in studying the atmospheres of other planets.

Today, spacecraft can be sent to take direct measurements and obtain samples of the atmospheres of other planets. Such missions usually employ the techniques of gas chromatography and mass spectrometry. For our purposes, it is more important to take note of the information that is obtained by these techniques rather than the details of their application.

In principle, **gas chromatography** is a means of separating a complex mixture of gases into its chemically distinct components. This is achieved by pumping a small sample of the mixture along a tube that is filled with a packing material that has been coated with a liquid. As the mixture of gases travels along the tube, those gases that are soluble in the liquid dissolve and are released later by a fresh influx of gas. This solution process slows down the more soluble gases so that the gases that tend to dissolve in the liquid take longer to emerge from the tube than those that are insoluble. Provided the tube is long enough and the liquid suitably chosen, each gas in a mixture of gases will emerge from the gas chromatograph at a

**Table 5.1** The noble gases.

Element	Symbol
helium	He
neon	Ne
argon	Ar
krypton	Kr
xenon	Xe
radon	Rn

different time. If the instrument has been calibrated with authentic samples of the component gases then their identification is often possible, but without such a calibration it is difficult to identify the components of a mixture. In planetary exploration it is therefore important to anticipate the results of analyses by this technique, or to couple it with a method of identifying the components independently.

One method of identifying the components is by **mass spectrometry**. This provides a way of measuring the masses of molecules (and of fragments of molecules if they break up on ionization, as they often do) and the relative number of molecules of each mass. Each mass is usually expressed as its **relative molecular mass** (RMM).

The RMM is defined as the mass of the molecule relative to the mass of an atom of an isotope of carbon,  $^{12}\text{C}$ , which is given the value of 12 on the RMM scale:

$$\text{RMM (molecule)} = 12 \times \frac{\text{mass of molecule}}{\text{mass of } ^{12}\text{C atom}} \quad (5.2)$$

The use of the RMM scale conveniently avoids the powers of ten involved in the masses of individual molecules. For example, the mass of a molecule of carbon dioxide,  $^{12}\text{C}^{16}\text{O}_2$ , is  $7.31 \times 10^{-26}$  kg, whereas its RMM is 43.99. RMM values can be estimated approximately by summing the mass numbers of the constituent atoms.

- Can you envisage any problems in the application of mass spectrometry in identifying molecules such as CO and N<sub>2</sub> composed of their most abundant isotopes:  $^{12}\text{C}$ ,  $^{14}\text{N}$  and  $^{16}\text{O}$  (masses 12.000, 14.003 and 15.995, respectively)?
- These two molecules have approximately the same RMM of 28, and so will only be distinguishable by mass spectrometry at high resolution.

The mass spectrometers sent on planetary missions so far have been of low resolution and cannot distinguish between molecules with similar RMMs.

Mass spectrometry has, however, a distinct advantage over many other analytical methods. As it measures RMMs, it enables us to distinguish between isotopic variants, for example between  $^{12}\text{C}^{16}\text{O}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}^{16}\text{O}$ , the carbon monoxide molecules containing the isotopes  $^{12}\text{C}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}$ , respectively. These results have been of great value in providing evidence for the origin of planetary atmospheres.

Gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GCMS) can only be used if a sample of atmosphere can be introduced into the instrument. However, as an alternative, if the amount of light or other electromagnetic radiation that is absorbed or emitted by the sample is studied, then information can be obtained from telescopes and fly-by spacecraft. This technique is called spectroscopy. Some of the noble gases in Table 5.1 were first identified as constituents of the Earth's atmosphere through spectroscopic analysis. Box 5.1 describes the basic principles of spectroscopy.

In planetary atmospheres, the most common atmospheric components tend to occur as molecules rather than free atoms and so they are studied through their molecular spectra.



## BOX 5.1 SPECTROSCOPY AND SOURCES OF RADIATION

Sources of radiation may be divided into two broad categories:

- **thermal sources**, which emit light because of their temperature (hot things glow), for example the incandescent filament in a light bulb;
- **non-thermal sources**, which emit light for other reasons, for example the tail of a glow-worm and orange streetlights.

Many natural sources of light are a combination of the two: they are partly thermal and partly non-thermal.

Most light sources, thermal and non-thermal, emit a whole range of wavelengths. (The one common exception to this is the laser, which is a device that produces light of a single wavelength.) Such a range is commonly called a **spectrum** (plural spectra).

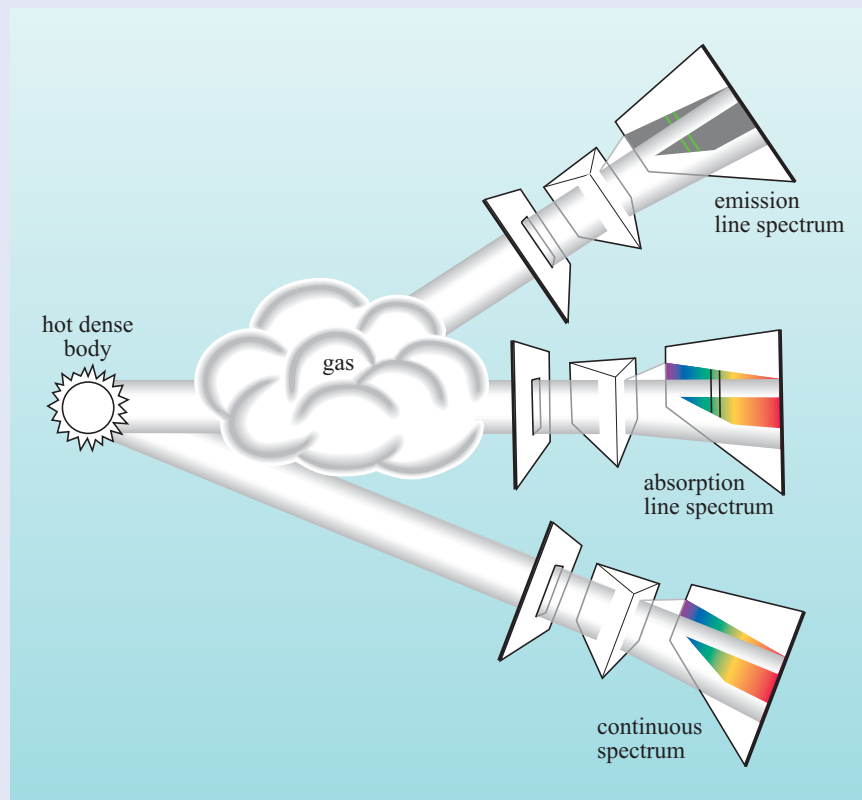
**Spectroscopy** concerns the production and study of spectra.

### Continuous spectra

Light from thermal sources is emitted over an unbroken range of wavelengths. Such sources are therefore said to have **continuous spectra**.

If a narrow beam of light passes through a glass prism, the beam is split up in such a way that different wavelengths travel in different directions, as shown in Figure 5.6. If the original beam contained just a few well-separated wavelengths the result would be a set of quite separate and distinct images, each with its own characteristic colour (wavelength). However, if the beam came from a thermal source it would typically contain all visible wavelengths and the result of passing it through the prism would be a continuous multicoloured band somewhat similar to a rainbow (Figure 5.6).

Spectral information is generally displayed in the form of a graph. When spectra are presented in this way the horizontal axis of the graph usually shows wavelength or frequency (or sometimes photon energy). The vertical axis of the graph normally indicates the intensity of the spectrum at any given wavelength. Such a representation is shown in Figure 5.7a–c.



**Figure 5.6** A narrow beam of light split into different wavelengths by a glass prism.

### Line spectra: absorption and emission

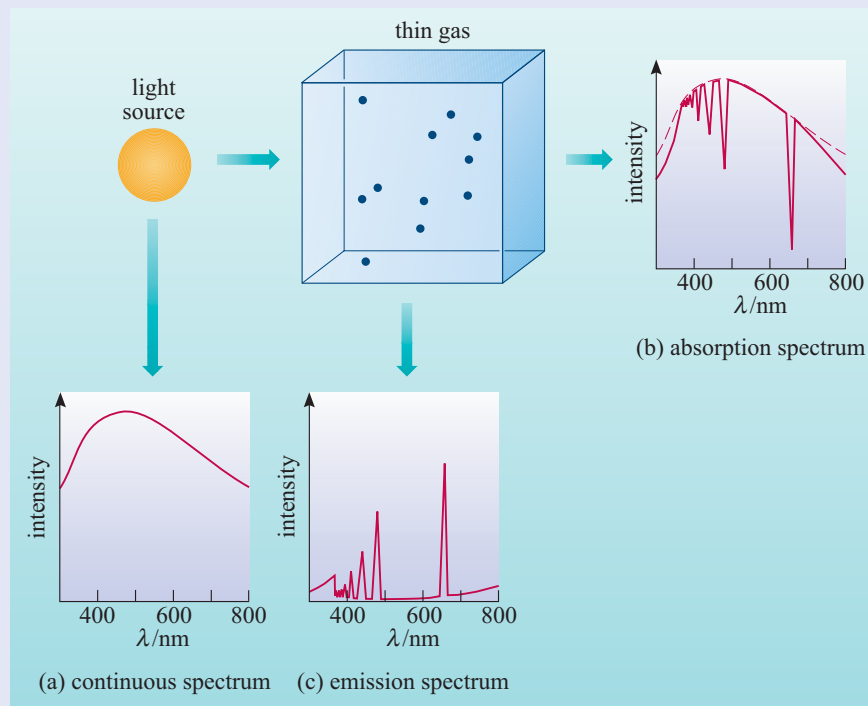
If a beam of light from an ideal thermal source passes through a thin gas of atoms and/or molecules, the spectrum of the emerging beam will generally include a number of narrow *dark* lines. These lines are called absorption lines and correspond to narrow ranges of wavelength that have been wholly or partly absorbed by the gas. This situation is illustrated in Figure 5.7b, which includes a graph of the so-called **absorption spectrum** that arises.

If, instead of the emerging beam, the light emitted by the gas itself is examined, it will be found that its spectrum consists of a number of narrow *bright* lines. These lines are called emission lines, and a spectrum composed of them is called an **emission spectrum** (Figure 5.7c). For many gases, the bright lines emitted cover the same narrow wavelength ranges as the dark lines in the absorption spectrum.

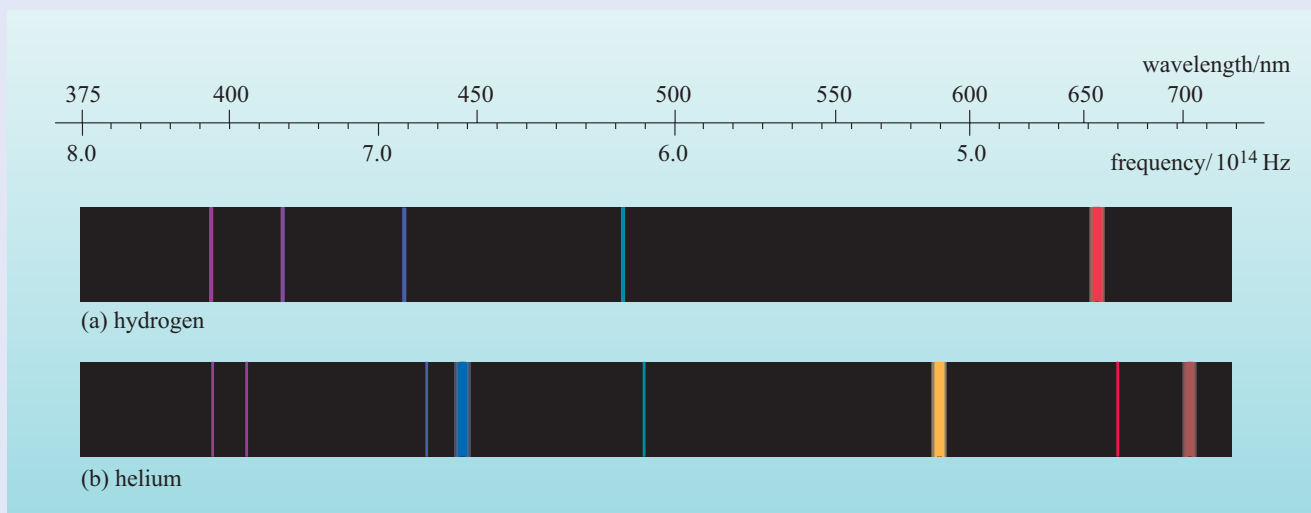
Each type of atom or molecule has its own characteristic set of lines. Figure 5.8a shows the emission spectrum produced by hydrogen atoms; Figure 5.8b shows the emission spectrum produced by helium atoms.

According to quantum theory, each of the electrons belonging to a particular atom or molecule may be in any of a number of allowed states, each of which is associated with some fixed amount of energy. When an electron occupies a particular state in a particular atom or molecule, the atom or molecule has the energy associated with that state. Thus, changes in the pattern of occupied states within an atom or molecule entail changes in the total amount of energy possessed by the atom or molecule. A diagram showing the energy associated with each of the allowed states in a particular kind of atom is called an **energy-level diagram**. The simplest energy-level diagram, that of a hydrogen atom (hydrogen has just one electron), is shown in Figure 5.9.

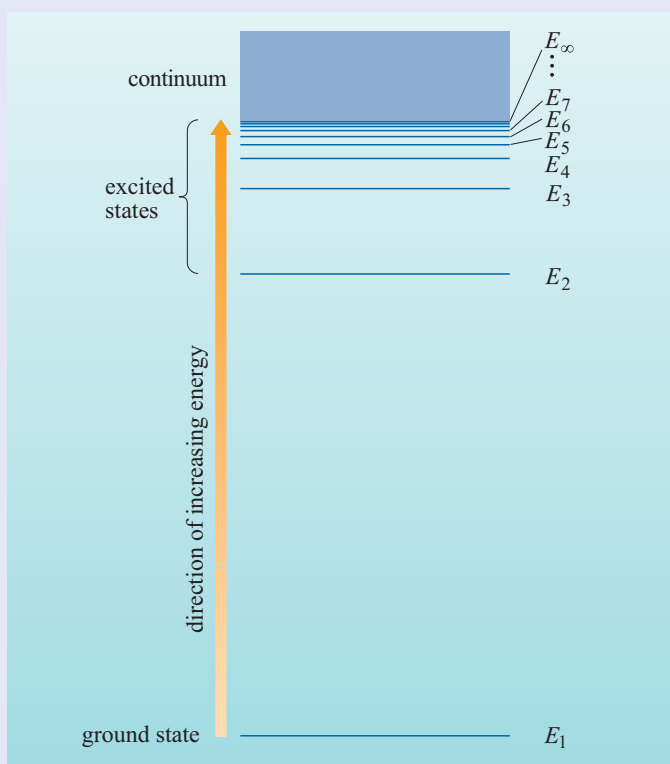
An absorption spectrum arises when the atom or molecule absorbs light and goes to a higher energy state. An emission spectrum occurs when an atom or molecule that is already in a higher energy state drops back down to a lower energy state. The energy of the photon absorbed or emitted matches the difference in energy between the higher and lower states of the atom or molecule.



**Figure 5.7** Three kinds of spectrum: (a) continuous, (b) absorption and (c) emission – seen by observing an ideal thermal source and a thin gas from various directions. The dashed line in the absorption spectrum shows the continuous spectrum that would have been observed in the absence of the gas.

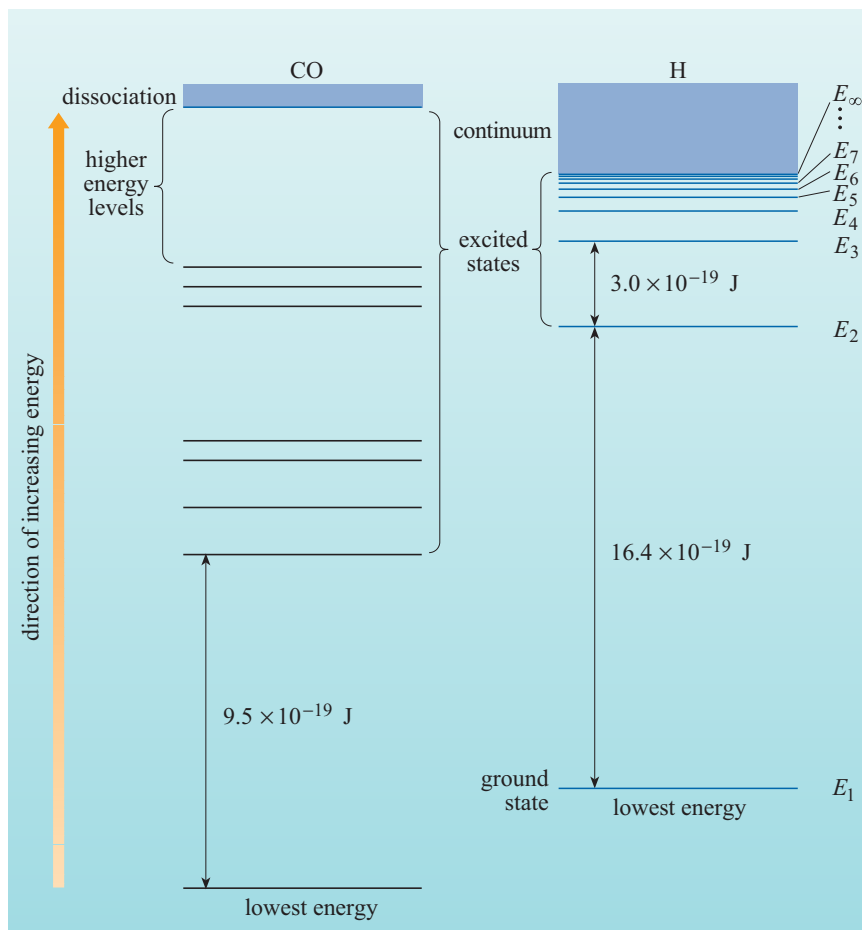


**Figure 5.8** Emission spectra produced by (a) hydrogen atoms and (b) helium atoms.



**Figure 5.9** The energy-level diagram of a hydrogen atom. Note there is an infinite number of energy levels, but those of highest energy are too closely crowded together to be shown separately on a diagram of this kind.

Molecules, like atoms, have a series of energy levels that give rise to characteristic absorption lines. In principle it is possible to determine which molecules are present by identifying dark lines in the spectrum of sunlight passing through the atmosphere. The energy levels of atoms discussed in Box 5.1 are electronic energy levels; they arise from different states of the electrons in the atom. Figure 5.10 shows the *electronic* energy levels of the CO molecule. For comparison, the electronic energy levels for atomic hydrogen are also shown.



**Figure 5.10** Electronic energy levels in the CO molecule and in the H atom.

The emission spectra of H and He in Figure 5.8 show lines in visible light, but spectra are not confined to visible radiation. Other regions of the electromagnetic spectrum are commonly used (see Box 5.2).

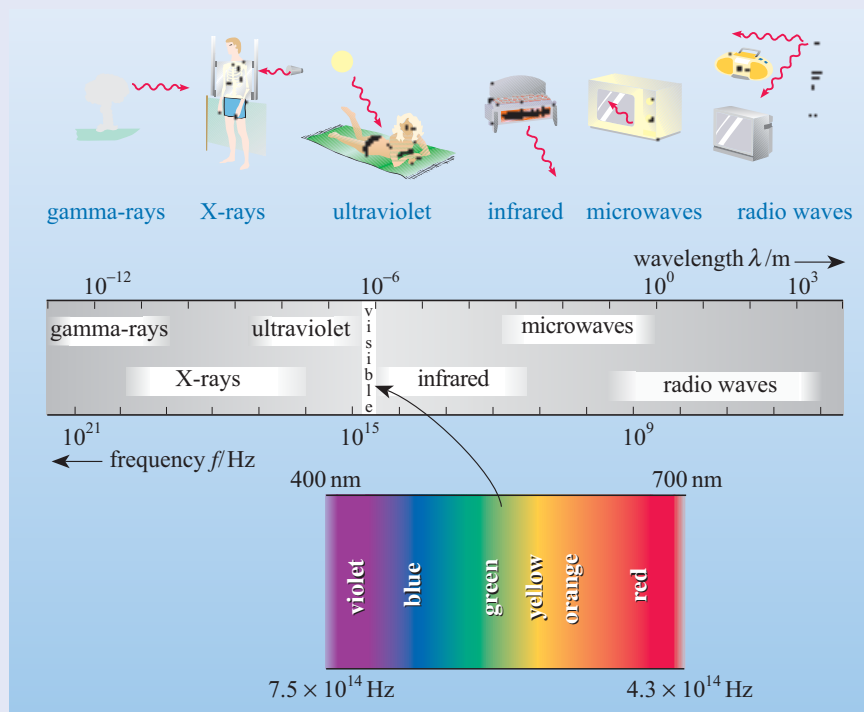
CO remains in its lowest electronic energy level unless it is either exposed to photons that are at least as energetic as those in the near-ultraviolet region, or it is at a temperature of the order  $10^5$  K, or greater. Many other colourless molecules require photons in the UV region to become excited. As you will see later in this chapter, much of the UV radiation from the Sun is absorbed by the Earth's atmosphere so that ground-based telescopes are not of much use in studying the electronic spectra of many molecules.

But as well as electronic transitions, a molecule can also undergo vibrational and rotational transitions. The nuclei in a molecule such as CO are not at a fixed distance apart but act as though joined by a vibrating spring with the bond distance alternately stretching and contracting in a regular manner.

## BOX 5.2 THE ELECTROMAGNETIC SPECTRUM

Visible light spans a range of wavelengths, from approximately 400 nm to 700 nm. Electromagnetic waves with wavelengths outside this range cannot, by definition, represent visible light of any colour. However, such waves do provide a useful model of many well-known phenomena that are more or less similar to light. For example, everyone is familiar with radio waves; we all rely on them to deliver radio and TV programmes. Radio waves are known to have wavelengths of about 3 cm or more; their well-established properties include the ability to be reflected by smooth, metal surfaces and to travel through a vacuum at the same speed as light.

The wide range of phenomena that can be modelled by electromagnetic waves is illustrated in Figure 5.11. As you can see, the full **electromagnetic spectrum**, as it is called, ranges from long wavelength **radio waves**, through **microwaves** and **infrared radiation**, across the various colours of **visible light** and on to short wavelength **ultraviolet (UV) radiation**, **X-rays** and **gamma-rays**. These various kinds of **electromagnetic radiation** arise in a wide range of contexts (as illustrated) but fundamentally they differ from one another *only* in the wavelength (and thus frequency) of the electromagnetic waves used to model them.



**Figure 5.11** The electromagnetic spectrum. Note that the frequency and wavelength scales are logarithmic. Note also that the ultraviolet (meaning ‘beyond the violet’) adjoins the visible violet, and the infrared (meaning ‘below the red’) adjoins the visible red. The boundaries of the various regions are deliberately vague; scientists and technologists often draw the divisions somewhat loosely.

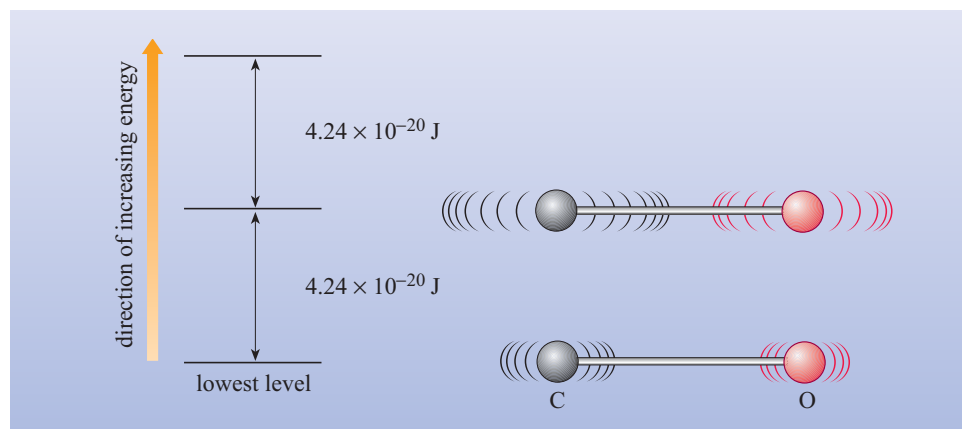


This vibrational motion gives rise to another set of energy levels corresponding to different vibrational energies of the molecule. A **vibrational transition** of CO is illustrated schematically in Figure 5.12, along with the lowest three vibrational energy levels for the case in which the molecule remains in the electronic state corresponding to the lowest electronic energy level. Note how much smaller the gaps are between the energy levels than is the case for the electronic transitions in Figure 5.10. This means that a vibrational transition typically requires absorption of a photon of lower energy – infrared radiation.

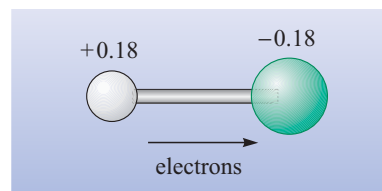
There are also vibrational and rotational energy levels associated with higher energy electronic levels and as a molecule goes to a higher electronic energy level, it can also change its vibrational and/or rotational energy. This leads to the electronic spectra of gaseous molecules being composed of sets of closely spaced lines that are often observed as bands rather than sharp lines.

For vibrational transitions to be recorded as a **vibrational spectrum**, a further condition must be met. In a **heteronuclear** diatomic molecule such as CO where the two atoms are different, the bonding electrons are shared unequally between the two atoms and so the molecule must have an uneven distribution of electric charge, with one end positive and the other negative, as illustrated in Figure 5.13. Here the molecule itself is neutral (it has no overall charge), but one atom retains a small excess of the bonding electrons amounting to 0.18 of an electron and so has a net charge of  $-0.18e$ , where  $-e$  is the charge of an electron. The other atom is slightly deficient in electrons and has a net charge of  $+0.18e$ . We call this slight separation of charge an **electric dipole**.

For a molecule to have a vibrational absorption spectrum, the electric dipole must change during the vibration. This condition is always fulfilled for heteronuclear diatomic molecules but not for **homonuclear** diatomic molecules (those with two identical atoms) such as  $O_2$ . Homonuclear molecules share their electrons equally and so have no electric dipole. They still share the electrons equally when they stretch and compress, and so still have no electric dipole; there is no change in the electric dipole when they vibrate. For molecules with more than two atoms (**polyatomic** molecules, for example carbon dioxide and water) there is always a vibration that leads to a change in electric dipole and so all polyatomic molecules have vibrational spectra.



**Figure 5.12** Vibrational transitions and vibrational energy levels in CO. To the right are the vibrational states corresponding to the lowest two energy levels.



**Figure 5.13** Uneven distribution of charge between atoms in a heteronuclear diatomic molecule, giving rise to an electric dipole.

Homonuclear diatomic molecules, such as  $\text{H}_2$  and  $\text{N}_2$ , will not interact with electromagnetic radiation during their vibration and so will not have a vibrational spectrum. All other molecules do have vibrational spectra.

Infrared radiation emitted by the surface of a planet, which acts as a thermal source of radiation, is used to identify molecules in atmospheres through their vibrational spectra. However, using Earth-based instruments is not easy because the surface of the Earth emits infrared radiation and the atmosphere absorbs it. The use of fly-by spacecraft and space telescopes is preferable.

The application of the techniques described above in fly-by and lander missions to Mars and Venus has provided increasingly detailed descriptions of these planets since the first Mariner fly-by of Venus in 1962. The Soviet Venera and Vega missions to Venus that took place between 1965 and 1986 have provided a lot of information about the physical and chemical properties of the atmosphere of Venus, augmented by the American Pioneer missions of 1978. A series of American missions to Mars, dating from the 1965 Mariner spacecraft to the Viking landers of 1976, the Mars Pathfinder mission of 1997 and the Mars Global Surveyor of 1999–2002, have provided a detailed description of the Martian atmosphere.

The picture that emerges of the three terrestrial planets Mars, Venus and Earth suggests they are bodies with atmospheres that vary considerably in their mass, composition and, as shown in Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.14, cloud cover. Earth has an atmosphere of complex structure with much seasonal activity. Clouds of water droplets and ice ( $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) crystals are extremely variable and cover typically about half of the planet. Venus has an atmosphere that is about 100 times as massive as that of the Earth. It shows no seasonal change and contains an unbroken layer of dense cloud that obscures the planet's surface. The atmosphere of Mars is tenuous and undergoes extreme diurnal (day–night) and seasonal variations, with occasional massive dust storms.

#### QUESTION 5.1

Comment on the use of mass spectrometry and of gas chromatography in analysing a mixture of  $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $\text{O}_2$ ,  $\text{N}_2$ ,  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  and  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_4$ . Assume that these molecules are composed of the most abundant isotopes ( $^{12}\text{C}$ ,  $^{16}\text{O}$ ,  $^{14}\text{N}$  and  $^1\text{H}$ ).

#### QUESTION 5.2

Which of the following substances could be detected remotely by infrared spectroscopy:  $\text{CO}$ ,  $\text{H}_2$  and  $\text{HCl}$ ?



**Figure 5.14** Mars as seen by the Hubble telescope in 2001 when it was the closest it had been to Earth in eight years ( $8.7 \times 10^7 \text{ km}$ ).

### 5.3 Composition of the atmospheres

Although we group Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars together as terrestrial planets, their atmospheres appear, at least on first inspection, to display more differences than similarities. The major constituents of these atmospheres are listed in Table 5.2 and those of Venus, Earth and Mars are compared in Figure 5.15. Table 5.2 includes the composition of the atmosphere of Mercury although, as we have said, this is very sparse. The compositions given here are those at the surface, where the atmospheres are most dense. The interaction of solar radiation with an atmosphere at higher altitudes leads to the production of reactive species, which undergo chemical reactions that convert some of the molecules found at the surface to different species. For example part of the oxygen component, O<sub>2</sub>, of the Earth's atmosphere is converted at higher altitudes to **ozone**, O<sub>3</sub>. Consequently, the composition of the atmospheres changes with altitude.

**Table 5.2** The major components of the atmospheres at the surfaces of the terrestrial planets.

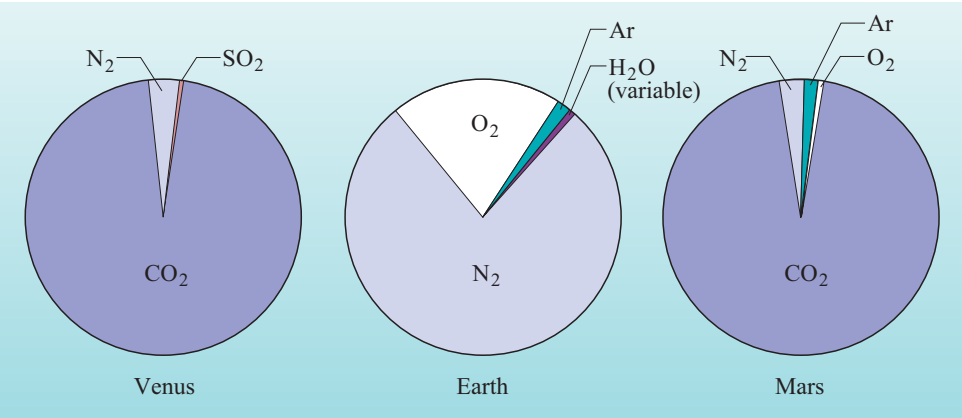
Mercury		Venus <sup>a</sup>		Earth		Mars	
Gas	Volume ratio <sup>b</sup>	Gas	Volume ratio <sup>b</sup>	Gas	Volume ratio <sup>b</sup>	Gas	Volume ratio <sup>b</sup>
O <sub>2</sub>	0.42	CO <sub>2</sub>	0.965	N <sub>2</sub>	0.781	CO <sub>2</sub>	0.953
Na	0.29	N <sub>2</sub>	3.5 × 10 <sup>-2</sup>	O <sub>2</sub>	0.209	N <sub>2</sub>	2.7 × 10 <sup>-2</sup>
H <sub>2</sub>	0.22	SO <sub>2</sub>	1.5 × 10 <sup>-4</sup>	H <sub>2</sub> O <sup>c</sup>	<0.04	Ar	1.6 × 10 <sup>-2</sup>
He	0.06	H <sub>2</sub> O	1 × 10 <sup>-4</sup>	Ar	9.3 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	O <sub>2</sub>	1.3 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>
K	5 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	Ar	7 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>	CO <sub>2</sub>	3.4 × 10 <sup>-4</sup>	CO	7 × 10 <sup>-4</sup>
		H <sub>2</sub>	<2.5 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>	Ne	1.8 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>	H <sub>2</sub> O	3 × 10 <sup>-4</sup>
		CO	2 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>				

<sup>a</sup> Some of these values are measured at an altitude of 22 km because surface data are unreliable.

<sup>b</sup> The volume ratio is the fraction by *number* of the atoms or molecules present. Chemists often refer to this as the mole fraction. It is also called the volume-mixing ratio by some atmospheric scientists. When multiplied by the atmospheric pressure, it gives a quantity called the partial pressure (Section 5.5), which may be envisaged as the contribution of a component to the total pressure.

<sup>c</sup> The H<sub>2</sub>O in the Earth's atmosphere is highly variable!

**Figure 5.15** The major components of the atmospheres of Venus, Earth and Mars, as measured at the surfaces of the planets. The area of each slice of the pie chart is proportional to the volume ratio of the substance shown.

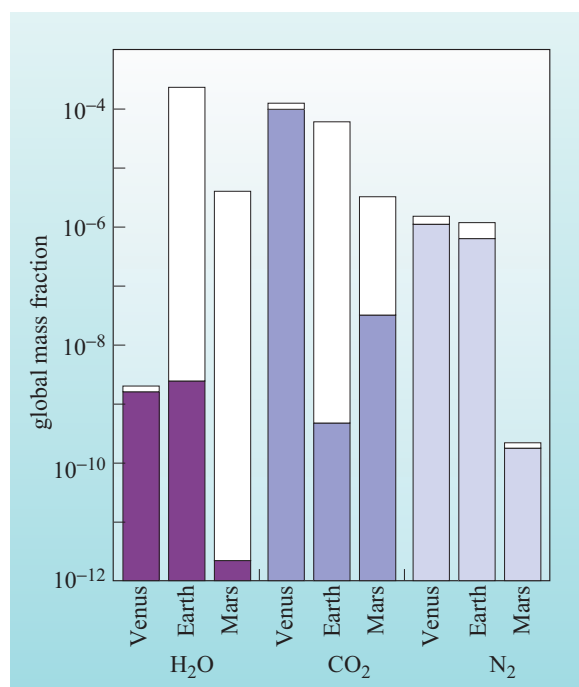


One major reason for the observed differences in composition of the atmosphere of the Earth compared to those of Mars and Venus is that water exists on Earth in liquid form. The physical conditions on Earth ensure that most of the surface water and atmospheric water exist in the oceans, which act as a reservoir, whereas on Venus water cannot exist in liquid form because of the high surface temperature. The Earth's polar ice-caps form another part of the  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  reservoir. The ice-caps observed on Mars (Figure 5.14) are composed of both  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{CO}_2$  and there is evidence of ice in the surface rocks. On Earth,  $\text{CO}_2$  is largely combined with other elements in carbonate deposits, especially as  $\text{CaCO}_3$  in sedimentary rocks, whereas on Venus it is the main atmospheric constituent. We can estimate amounts of atmospheric gases transferred to surfaces, such as carbon dioxide lost from the Earth's atmosphere as carbonate deposits; the amount of surface water in the Earth's oceans, seas and lakes; frozen water on Earth and Mars, and frozen carbon dioxide in the polar ice-caps of Mars and use this to compile a **volatile inventory**. The volatile inventory is the total amount of volatile substances in the atmosphere and at or close to the surface of the planet. Figure 5.16 shows estimated lower limits for the inventories of water, carbon dioxide and nitrogen on Venus, Earth and Mars. To enable a direct comparison of the relative amounts of volatiles in each planet, the amount of each volatile is shown as a fraction of the total mass of the planet. The total length of the bars is the lower limit for the volatile inventory. The dark part of each bar represents the amount of that volatile in the atmosphere. The total inventory is still subject to uncertainty as is implied by quoting only the lower limit. Measurements of hydrogen taken in 2002 by the gamma-ray spectrometer on Mars Odyssey indicate that there is more water ice at Mars's poles than previously thought. Thus the lower limit for water on Mars should be raised if this is confirmed and the actual amount estimated.

As you can see in Figure 5.16, the amounts of carbon dioxide are now more evenly balanced for the three planets. You can also see that the predominance of nitrogen in the Earth's atmosphere is not due to it having more  $\text{N}_2$  than the other planets but that a larger proportion of the  $\text{CO}_2$  has been lost from the atmosphere as carbonate deposits. It does appear, however, that there is a lack of water on Venus and of nitrogen on Mars. This is something that theories of the origin and evolution of planetary atmospheres will need to account for.

Such theories will also need to explain the type of molecules found. If you look at the molecules listed in Table 5.2, you will see that many elements are found as oxides. Atmospheres such as those of Mars and Venus, in which carbon, for example, exists predominantly combined with oxygen as  $\text{CO}_2$  rather than combined with hydrogen as  $\text{CH}_4$ , are called **oxidized atmospheres**. The concepts of **oxidation** and **reduction** are discussed in Box 5.3.

In the atmospheres of the giant planets, which you will study in Chapter 6, the major gas is hydrogen,  $\text{H}_2$ . Carbon is mainly present combined with hydrogen, as methane for example, and these atmospheres are called **reducing atmospheres**. The atmosphere of the Earth is unusual in that it contains substantial amounts of oxygen,  $\text{O}_2$ , and is capable of oxidizing surface rocks and other objects on the surface. You are probably aware of the tendency of



**Figure 5.16** Estimated volatile inventories of Venus, Earth and Mars. Amounts of volatiles are shown as a fraction of the total mass of the planets. The total length of the bars is the lower limit for the volatile inventory. The dark part of each bar represents the amount of that volatile in the atmosphere.

iron objects to rust if left out. The Earth's atmosphere is called an **oxidizing atmosphere**. The high proportion of oxygen evolved as a result of photosynthesis by early life on Earth.

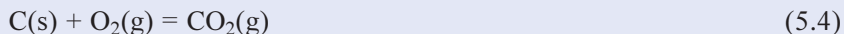
The extremely tenuous atmosphere of Mercury is very different in nature and is largely captured from the solar wind. The dissimilarity of this atmosphere from the others suggests a different origin. An important topic for theories of planetary evolution is the origin of the atmospheres of Mars, Earth and Venus.

It is not only the relative amounts of different compounds on these planets that differ greatly but also the total amounts of atmosphere. To compare these amounts we use a quantity called column mass. The pressure at the surface of a planet is not a good measure of the amount of atmosphere because this pressure depends on the gravitational field of the planet. **Column mass**, which is given the symbol  $m_c$ , is the mass of atmosphere that sits above  $1 \text{ m}^2$  of a planet's surface. It may be estimated from measurements of the atmospheric pressure at the surface,  $P_s$ , and the gravitational acceleration,  $g$ , at the surface, using the expression:

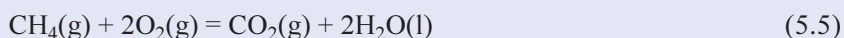
$$m_c = \frac{P_s}{g} \quad (5.3)$$

### BOX 5.3 OXIDATION AND REDUCTION

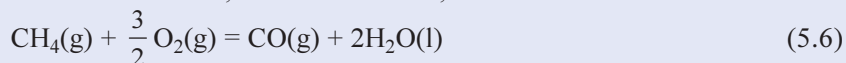
Oxidation was originally defined as the addition of oxygen to a substance. When carbon (as coal or charcoal for example) is burned, it is oxidized to carbon dioxide.



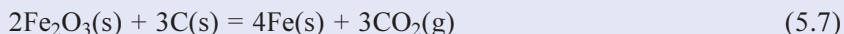
where (s) represents the solid phase and (g) represents the gaseous phase. As an extension to this, oxidation can also be defined as the removal of hydrogen. For example when methane,  $\text{CH}_4$ , is burned in air it is oxidized to carbon dioxide. In the process each carbon atom loses hydrogen and gains oxygen.



where (l) represents the liquid phase. If the supply of oxygen is limited, a less oxidized form of carbon, carbon monoxide, is formed.



Reduction is the removal of oxygen or the addition of hydrogen. For example in the extraction of iron from its ores using carbon, the iron is reduced because it loses oxygen.



With the discovery of electrolysis it was found that similar processes in which elements changed their valence state could occur without the involvement of hydrogen or oxygen. The definition of oxidation was extended to include the removal of electrons. Reduction was similarly extended to include the addition of electrons. Thus adding an electron to an  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ion to form an  $\text{Fe}^{2+}$  ion would be a reduction. Most of the examples in this book can be understood in terms of the addition/removal of hydrogen or oxygen.



For the Earth the value of  $m_c$  is about  $10^4 \text{ kg m}^{-2}$ . The following question asks you to work out the values for Venus and Mars.

### QUESTION 5.3

Estimate the values of the column mass for Venus and Mars, then compare the column masses of the three terrestrial planets, Earth, Venus and Mars.

Venus:  $P_s = 92 \text{ bar}$ ;  $g = 8.90 \text{ m s}^{-2}$

Mars:  $P_s = 6.3 \times 10^{-3} \text{ bar}$ ;  $g = 3.72 \text{ m s}^{-2}$

Remember that  $1 \text{ bar} = 10^5 \text{ Pa}$  (where Pa is the SI unit for pressure), and that  $1 \text{ Pa} = 1 \text{ N m}^{-2} = 1 \text{ kg m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}$ .

From the answer to Question 5.3, you can see that the column mass for Venus is about 100 times that for Earth and the column mass for Mars is about one-sixtieth of that for Earth.

Table 5.3 gives the pressures and average temperatures at the surfaces of the terrestrial planets, which also differ markedly.

**Table 5.3** The surface temperature  $T_s$ , pressure  $P_s$  and column mass  $m_c$  of the atmospheres of Venus, Earth, Mars and Mercury.

Planet	$T_s/\text{K}$	$P_s/\text{bar}$	$m_c/\text{kg m}^{-2}$
Venus	733	92	$1.1 \times 10^6$
Earth	288	1.0	$1.0 \times 10^4$
Mars	223	$6 \times 10^{-3}$	$1.7 \times 10^2$
Mercury	443	$10^{-15}$	$10^{-11}$

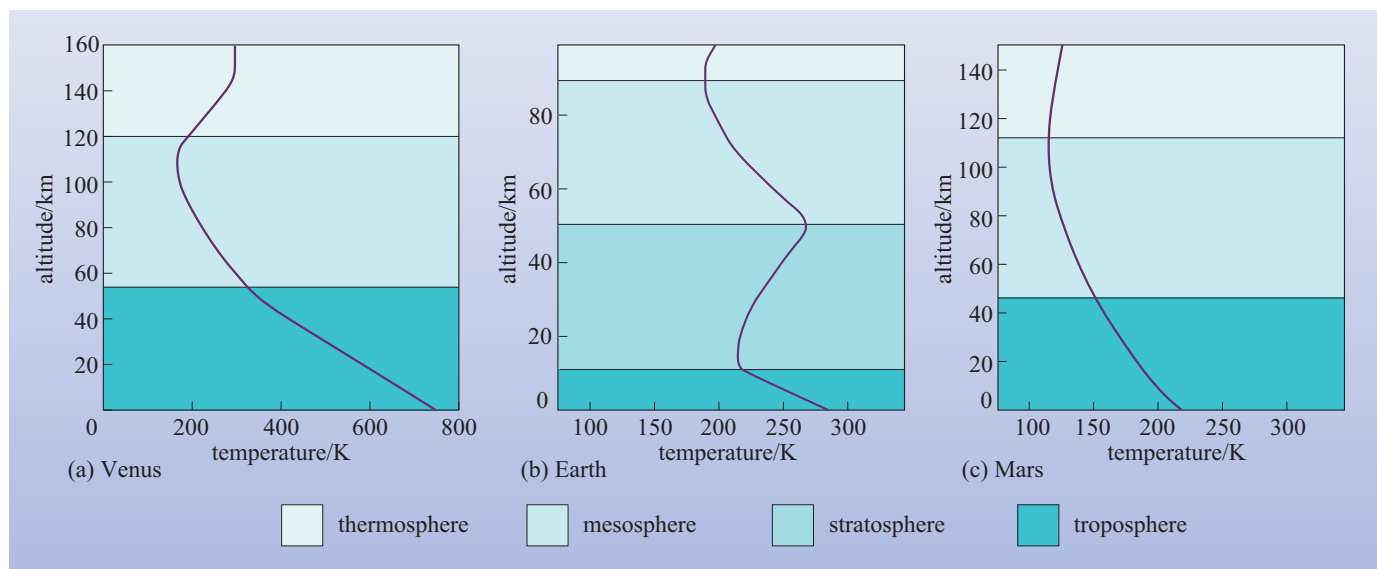
## 5.4 Atmospheric structure

On Earth, the temperature usually decreases with altitude, at least to the tops of the highest mountains. This variation of temperature with altitude is an aspect of **atmospheric structure**, and is determined largely by the absorption of solar radiation by a planet's atmosphere and surface. Together with pressure, which also decreases with altitude, temperature determines the formation of clouds in the atmosphere. The heating of the atmosphere and surface of a planet by solar radiation is also the cause of atmospheric motion.

### 5.4.1 Temperature profile

Temperatures at the surfaces and at altitudes in the atmospheres have been recorded for Venus, Earth and Mars. Of course, these temperatures also vary with latitude, time of day and the season. To single out the variation with altitude, the temperatures are averaged over time and latitude. These variations of average temperature  $T$  with altitude are shown in Figure 5.17.

This figure indicates that several similarities exist between the three planets. In the lowest region of each atmosphere, the temperature drops with increasing altitude.



**Figure 5.17** Atmospheric structure: the variation of temperature with altitude for (a) Venus, (b) Earth and (c) Mars.

This region is called the **troposphere**, meaning the region of mixing. The rapid decrease of temperature with altitude, which is due to heating of the surface, causes convection (Box 5.4), which leads to vertical mixing. The uppermost region of each atmosphere, called the **thermosphere**, is characterized by an increase of temperature with altitude; this increase shows a large diurnal variation. Between these regions is the **mesosphere** in which the temperature decreases with altitude but more slowly than in the troposphere. The **stratosphere**, which is a region between the troposphere and the mesosphere in which the temperature increases with altitude, is unique to the Earth.

We have said that the rapid drop in temperature with altitude leads to convection in the troposphere, but how rapid does that drop need to be for convection to occur?

**Convection** in the atmospheres of the terrestrial planets occurs when the atmosphere is heated by the surface of the planet, the surface itself being heated by radiation from the Sun. Consider a small parcel of atmosphere close to the surface. This will be heated by the surface and rise. It will now be surrounded by gas at lower pressure since atmospheric pressure decreases with altitude. The parcel of atmosphere expands to equalize its pressure with the surroundings. The temperature of the parcel will drop as a consequence of this expansion even if no heat is transferred to the surrounding gas. If the temperature after expansion is still higher than that of

### BOX 5.4 CONVECTION

Convection involves the transfer of energy by the movement of bulk matter. If we take a pan of water and heat the bottom of the pan, a temperature gradient is set up. Some energy is transferred through the water by **conduction**, that is through molecules transferring energy to their neighbours via their motion. However, most energy is transferred by bulk parcels of heated water rising up through the liquid due to their lower density and transferring energy to the adjacent water. These parcels then fall to the bottom of the pan and are reheated so that they rise again and the process is repeated. This cycle of rise and fall of bulk parcels of water produces **convection currents**.

the surrounding gas then the parcel will rise to a higher altitude and expand again. This process will continue until the temperature of the parcel is below that of the surroundings. At this point the parcel will sink back towards the surface.

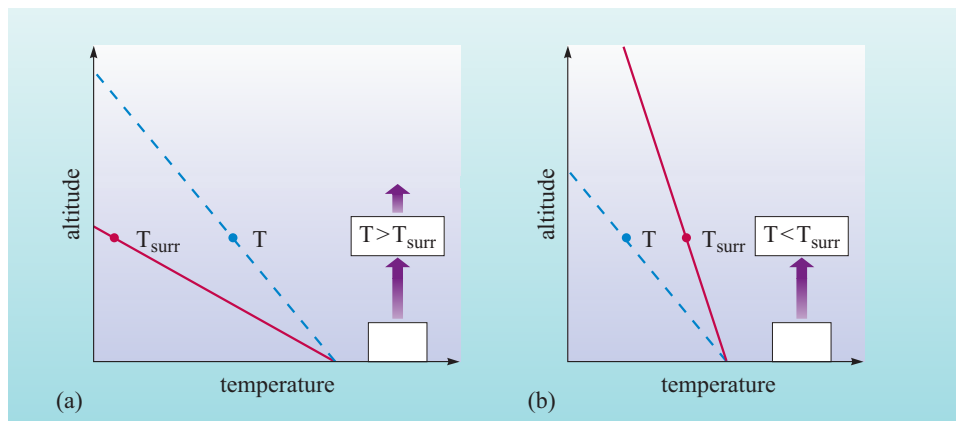
- How will the volume and temperature of the parcel change as it sinks?
- The pressure of the surrounding atmosphere will increase as the parcel sinks and so the parcel will contract. As a result of this contraction, the temperature will rise.

Convection will take place if the fall in temperature with altitude of the bulk atmosphere is such that a rising parcel of atmosphere is always hotter than the surroundings.

The slowest rate at which the temperature of the rising parcel decreases is that which results solely from the expansion of the gas with no heat lost to the surroundings. This rate is called the **adiabatic lapse rate**. For Earth, the adiabatic lapse rate, assuming a dry atmosphere, is  $9.8 \text{ K km}^{-1}$ . If the decrease in temperature with altitude of the general atmosphere is greater than the adiabatic lapse rate, then the surrounding atmosphere must be cooler than the rising parcel and the parcel continues to rise (Figure 5.18a). If the decrease in temperature with altitude of the general atmosphere is less than the adiabatic lapse rate then the surrounding atmosphere must be hotter than the rising parcel and the parcel does not continue to rise (Figure 5.18b). Under these circumstances, convection does not occur.

In practice, the parcel of atmosphere will lose some heat to the surroundings so that the temperature of the general atmosphere will have to fall faster than the adiabatic lapse rate for convection to occur.

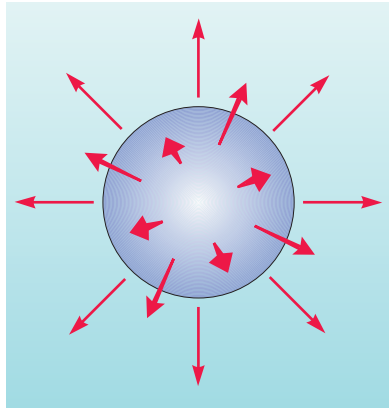
- On Venus the adiabatic lapse rate is higher than on the Earth (the temperature drops more quickly with altitude). For a dry atmosphere the rate is  $10.5 \text{ K km}^{-1}$ . Account for this in terms of the faster rate of pressure decrease with altitude on Venus.
- If the pressure drop is greater for the same increase in altitude, then the rising parcel of atmosphere will expand more and its temperature will consequently drop by more.



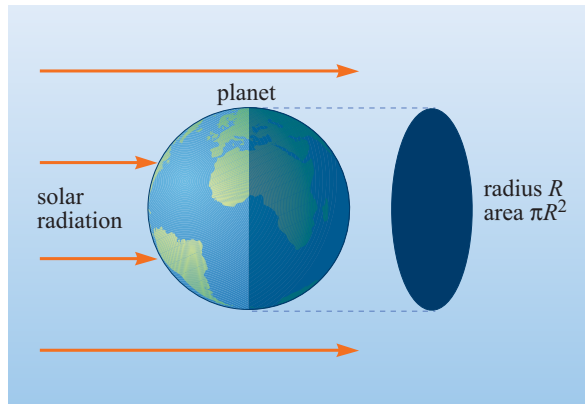
**Figure 5.18** A rising parcel of gas. In (a) the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere decreases *faster* than the adiabatic lapse rate (dashed line). In (b) the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere decreases *slower* than the adiabatic lapse rate.

Note that Figure 5.17 shows altitude versus temperature, rather than temperature versus altitude. So a *larger* value of the temperature gradient ( $\text{K km}^{-1}$ ) produces a *less steep* curve on the diagram (as in the Earth's troposphere).

The amount of energy coming from the Sun is usually given as the solar flux density, which is the amount of energy arriving per unit time on unit area.



**Figure 5.19** The emission of radiation occurs from the whole surface of a planet, which is an area of  $4\pi R^2$  for a planet of radius  $R$ .



In the troposphere, the temperature gradient is close to, but higher than, the adiabatic lapse rate so that convection takes place and bulk mixing of the atmosphere occurs. The lower temperature gradient in the mesosphere rules out convection as a major source of energy transfer. In the stratosphere and thermosphere, the temperature actually increases with altitude so that again we need to look at alternative mechanisms for energy transfer.

In the following subsection we look at how atmospheres are heated and how they cool.

## 5.4.2 Heating and cooling

### Effective temperature

The temperature of the surface and atmosphere of a planet is determined by the balance between the energy that is absorbed and the energy that is emitted.

For the terrestrial planets, the source of most of the energy reaching the atmosphere and the surface is the Sun; relatively little energy comes from the planet's interior. The solar flux density at the top of the Earth's atmosphere is about  $1.38 \times 10^3 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ . Some of this is reflected back to space, the atmosphere absorbs some, and the rest reaches the surface, where it is either reflected or absorbed. The absorbed radiation heats the surface, which then re-radiates this energy, mainly in the infrared region of the spectrum.

On the assumption that a planet undergoes no net heating or cooling in the short term, it is possible to estimate the temperature necessary for a planet to re-radiate all of the energy absorbed by the atmosphere and the surface. This temperature, called the *effective temperature*,  $T_e$  in kelvin, is defined as follows:

$$T_e^4 = \frac{L}{4\pi R^2 \times 5.67 \times 10^{-8}} \quad (5.8)$$

where  $L$  is the total power radiated by the planet in watts,  $R$  is the radius of the planet in metres (its surface area is  $4\pi R^2$  and radiation is emitted from the whole surface, Figure 5.19) and  $5.67 \times 10^{-8}$  is a constant which has the units  $\text{W m}^{-2} \text{K}^{-4}$ .

This formula was originally derived for thermal sources or black bodies (see Box 5.5), but now serves to define effective temperature, regardless of the form of the spectrum of the emitted radiation.

It is instructive to estimate  $T_e$  for the terrestrial planets and to compare these temperatures with those at the planets' surfaces. The temperature of the surface and the temperature of the atmosphere of a planet are determined by the balance between the radiation absorbed and that emitted by the planet. In order to estimate  $T_e$ , the power lost by radiation must be equated with that absorbed from solar radiation. The Sun's radiation arrives from one direction, and so a planet is heated over only half of its surface at any time. The cross-section of the planet is a disc of area  $\pi R^2$ , where  $R$  is the radius of the planet (Figure 5.20). The power absorbed depends on this area, and also on the solar flux density at the distance of the planet from the Sun.

**Figure 5.20** The planet presents a disc of area  $\pi R^2$  to the Sun's radiation and casts a shadow of this area.

## BOX 5.5 BLACK-BODY RADIATION

A thermal source emits radiation as a result of its temperature. An ideal thermal source, called a black body, displays a characteristic emission spectrum. This is shown in Figure 5.21.

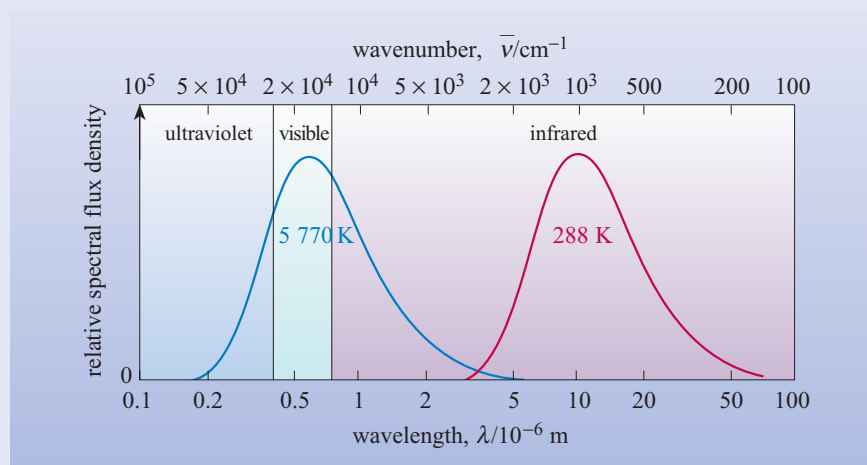
In any graph that shows how the relative spectral flux density varies with wavelength for an ideal thermal source, the height of the graph will depend on factors such as the size and distance of the source. However, in all such graphs the overall *shape* of the curve is solely determined by the temperature of the source. This means, in particular, that the peak of each curve occurs at a wavelength,  $\lambda_{\text{peak}}$ , that characterizes the source's temperature, irrespective of the height of the peak. In fact, there is a simple law, called Wien's displacement law, that relates the value of  $\lambda_{\text{peak}}$  (in metres) to the temperature,  $T$  (in kelvin), of the source:

$$\lambda_{\text{peak}} = \frac{2.90 \times 10^{-3}}{T} \quad (5.9)$$

where  $2.90 \times 10^{-3}$  is a constant which has the units m K. With the aid of Wien's displacement law it is a simple matter to determine the temperature of any source of light, provided it is an ideal thermal source. Such sources are not common, but many real sources, including the Sun, are reasonable approximations to ideal thermal sources, so their temperatures may be estimated by this spectral technique.

- If you were to heat a metal ball so that its temperature steadily increased, you would find that above a certain temperature the ball would start to emit a dull red glow. As the temperature increased further the ball would become brighter and the colour would change from red to orange-white to yellowish-white to white. How would you explain these changes in appearance?
- Assuming that the heated ball can be treated as an ideal thermal source, it is to be expected that, as the temperature increases, the ball would emit relatively more light with wavelengths towards the blue end of the spectrum rather than the red end (Figure 5.21). At relatively low temperatures red light will predominate and the ball will glow 'red-hot'. As the temperature rises, the proportion of shorter wavelengths will gradually increase making the colours progress from red to orange-white to yellowish-white to white.

The shapes of the curves that describe the spectra of ideal thermal sources are of great importance in science. Such curves are usually referred to as thermal radiation curves, Planck curves or black-body radiation curves. Non-ideal thermal sources and non-thermal sources may also produce continuous spectra, but, from the graphical point of view, those spectra will generally have a different shape from those of ideal thermal sources.



**Figure 5.21** Spectra of black-body sources at the temperatures of the Sun's photosphere (5770 K) and the Earth's surface (288 K). The vertical scales for the two spectra are not the same; the Sun's radiation is much more intense than that of the Earth. (Note that the spectra extend well beyond those wavelengths that correspond to the various colours of visible light.)



**Table 5.4** The albedos of Venus, Earth, Mars, Mercury and the Moon.

Object	Albedo
Venus	0.77
Earth	0.30
Mars	0.25
Mercury	0.10
Moon	0.07

A third factor determines the power absorbed by a planet. Not all the solar radiation reaching the planet is absorbed, some is reflected. On Venus, for example, the clouds reflect a large fraction of the solar radiation, and this strongly affects the heating of the planet. The total fraction of solar radiation that is reflected by a planet is called the **albedo**,  $a$ , (where the value of  $a$  can be between 0 and 1). Thus the total fraction absorbed is simply  $(1 - a)$ . Surface reflection also plays a part in determining the overall planetary albedo and this will be the dominant contribution for Mercury. The influence of cloud cover can be seen by a comparison of the albedos for Venus, Earth and Mars in Table 5.4.

A planet that has a light-coloured surface or extensive cloud cover reflects much of the Sun’s radiation, whereas a dark surface absorbs most radiation. A planet with a high albedo thus absorbs little of the Sun’s radiation. With an average cloud cover of about 50%, the Earth has an overall albedo of 0.30.

- From its albedo, does Mercury have a light- or dark-coloured surface?
- The albedo is very low, so Mercury absorbs a high proportion of the incident solar radiation and is thus dark.

By equating the power,  $L$ , radiated by the Earth with the solar power absorbed, which can be readily estimated independently, an effective temperature of 255 K can be estimated from Equation 5.8.

The effective temperatures of Venus and Mars are 227 K and 217 K, respectively.

- How do the effective temperatures of Venus and Mars compare with the value of  $T_e$  for the Earth?
- Both are significantly lower.
- Why are they lower?
- Mars is farther from the Sun. Venus, although nearer to the Sun, has a much higher albedo (Table 5.4) because of its total cloud cover.

Notice that this estimate of effective temperature is based entirely on the Sun as a source of energy and ignores a planet’s internal heat sources. So, how much higher would the effective temperature be if heat from the planetary interior were taken into account?

**QUESTION 5.4**

The solar flux density (amount of energy coming from the Sun) at the radius of the Earth’s orbit is  $1.38 \times 10^3 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ . A major internal heat source for Earth today is radiogenic heating and this, as you may recall from Chapter 2, provides a flux of  $5 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ . Calculate the total power from the Sun and from radiogenic heating for the Earth and compare the two values. Use the values given in Appendix A, Table A1 for the mass and radius of the Earth.

Radiogenic heating thus accounts for only 0.02% of the power input to the Earth's surface and atmosphere. Similar conclusions are reached for Venus and Mars. So it is valid to compare effective temperatures on these planets as a measure of the power re-radiated by the atmospheres after absorption of solar radiation.

If we compare the mean surface temperatures of the planets with their effective temperatures we find:

- the mean surface temperature of Mars is almost exactly equal to its effective temperature;
- the mean surface temperature of Mercury and its effective temperature are identical.

■ How do the surface temperature and  $T_e$  compare for Earth and for Venus?

- For Earth, the mean surface temperature is 288 K, which is 33 K higher than  $T_e$ , whereas the mean surface temperature of Venus is 733 K, which is about 500 K higher than  $T_e$ .

It is lucky for us that the surface temperature is higher than the effective temperature because at the higher temperature water is a liquid and the presence of liquid water is thought to be necessary for the evolution of life as we know it. But what is the cause of these high surface temperatures? The moderate increase for Earth's surface temperature and dramatic increase for Venus are the result of the so-called greenhouse effect, the origin of which we shall now discuss.

### The greenhouse effect

The **greenhouse effect** is the name given to the trapping of heat energy by planetary atmospheres. It gets its name from the higher temperatures observed in an unheated greenhouse than in the air outside. (It was later found that protection from wind also plays a major role in keeping greenhouses warm.)

The greenhouse effect in planetary atmospheres arises in the following way. The surface of a planet is heated by solar radiation, which has a spectrum in which the energy is concentrated in the visible region. This spectrum is approximately that of a black body emitting at a temperature of 5770 K, the Sun's surface temperature. The hot surface of the planet loses heat mainly by radiation from the surface.

#### QUESTION 5.5

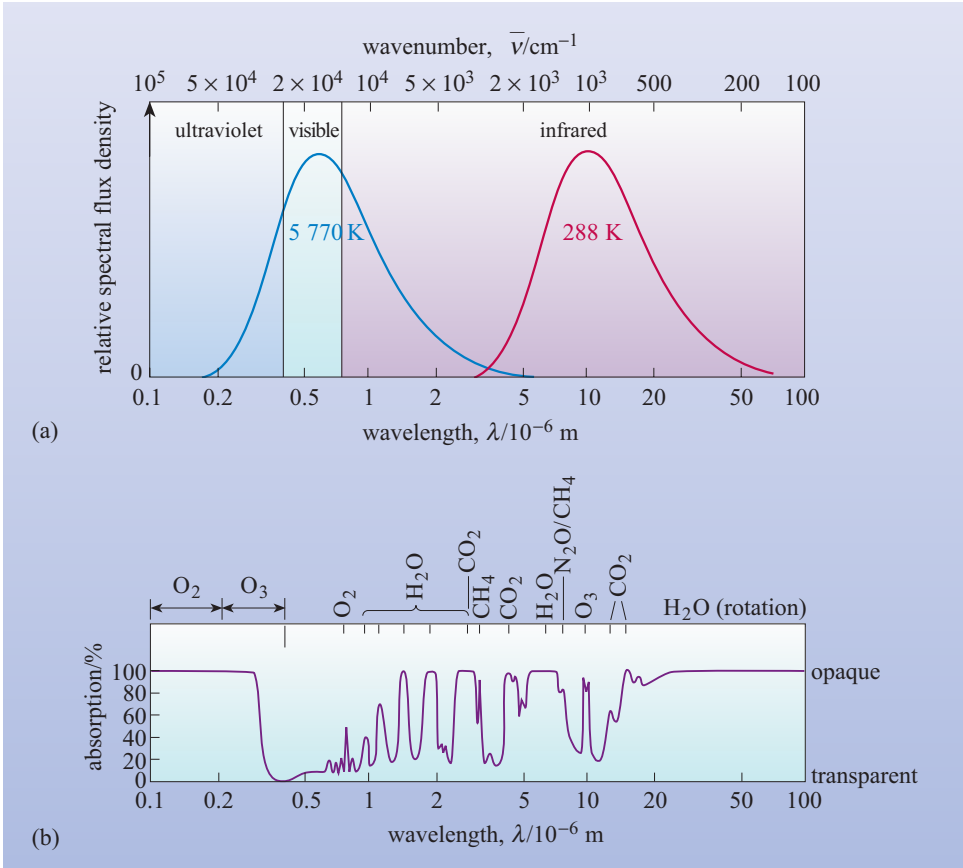
If the Earth, with a surface temperature of 288 K, radiates as a black body, at what wavelength will the maximum energy of the emission spectrum be, using Wien's displacement law (Equation 5.9)? In which region of the spectrum is this radiation most intense?

Because the planets emit radiation mostly in the infrared region and scarcely at all in the visible region, they do not glow like stars or the iron ball in our example of a black body.

The black-body spectra at the Earth's surface temperature and the Sun's surface temperature, 288 K and 5770 K, respectively, are shown in Figure 5.22a. Figure 5.22b shows the absorption spectrum of the Earth's atmosphere. The atmosphere is quite transparent in the visible region, so that if not scattered by clouds, most of the visible radiation reaches the surface where it is absorbed. However, in the infrared region, electromagnetic radiation is absorbed by molecules that, as a result, increase their vibrational energy. During subsequent collisions between molecules, this internal vibrational energy is converted, through chemical reactions and by energy transfer in collisions, into kinetic energy of the molecules (so raising its temperature). So solar (visible) radiation is transmitted by the atmosphere and heats the surface of the planet. The surface radiates at infrared wavelengths, and this energy is trapped by absorption in the atmosphere, thereby raising its temperature. This heating of the lower atmosphere of the planet (and heating of the surface through contact with the atmosphere) is the greenhouse effect.

Notice that most of the absorption at the most intense region of the 288 K spectrum is caused by  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , two minor components by volume of the Earth's atmosphere.

- Why do the major components of the Earth's atmosphere,  $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{O}_2$ , not contribute to the greenhouse effect?
- $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{O}_2$  are homonuclear diatomic molecules and so do not possess an electric dipole. They therefore do not absorb infrared radiation strongly through changes in their vibrational energy (Section 5.2).



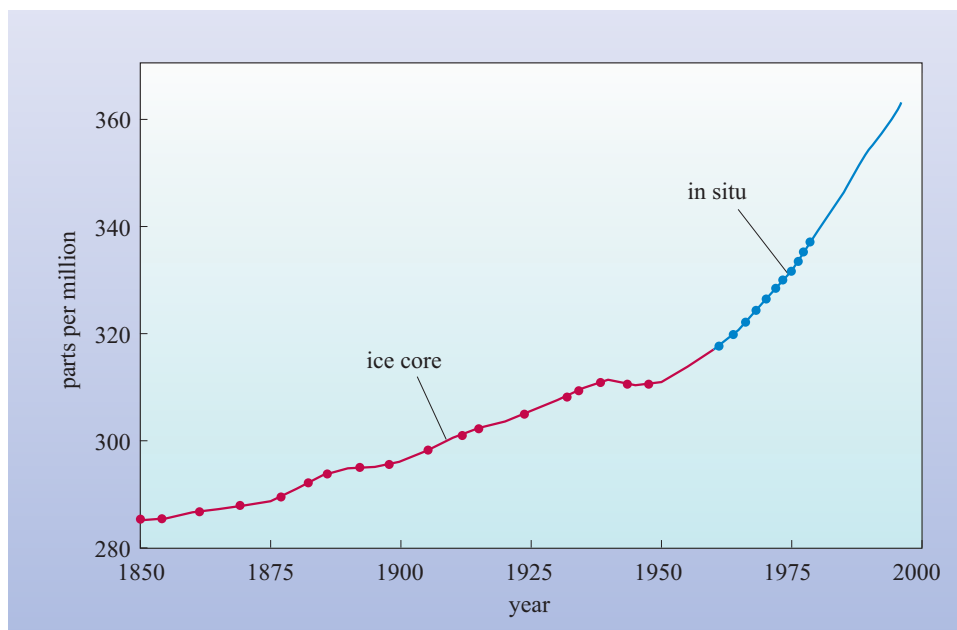
**Figure 5.22** (a) Spectra of black-body sources at the temperatures of the Sun's surface (5770 K) and the Earth's surface (288 K). The vertical scales for the two spectra are not the same; the Sun's radiation is much more intense than that of the Earth. (b) The absorption spectrum of the Earth's atmosphere: the wavelengths at which some atmospheric gases absorb energy are indicated.

The high surface temperature of Venus can be attributed to the absorption of radiation emitted by the surface by  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  molecules in the atmosphere and clouds. Although much visible radiation is scattered and reflected by the cloud layers, enough reaches the surface to heat it and, with a much more dense atmosphere than that of Earth, more of the heat emitted by the surface is trapped by the atmosphere. Thus Venus has a large greenhouse effect, causing its surface temperature, as you have seen, to be about 500 K greater than  $T_e$ .

Currently there is much concern about the environmental effect of raising the level of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the Earth's atmosphere, and the effect of this on global warming. Human activities have been changing the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution. In particular, the level of  $\text{CO}_2$  is rising steadily, as measurements in several locations over many years have shown. For example, Figure 5.23 gives the variation of atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  since 1850 as measured by direct sampling of the atmosphere and from air bubbles trapped in polar ice-sheets.

- What effect will increased  $\text{CO}_2$  have on the temperature of the Earth's surface?
- $\text{CO}_2$  contributes to the greenhouse effect and so will tend to raise the temperature.

In agreement with this prediction, global mean temperatures over the last 150 years have increased by between 0.3 K and 0.6 K, although studies covering the last few thousand years show that atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  is not the only influence. Other gases arising from industry and agriculture are also greenhouse gases and contribute to the greenhouse effect. These include the chlorofluorocarbons and their replacements (which are designed to have less effect on the ozone layer), as well as methane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ), which is generated by agriculture, particularly paddy fields. A warmer Earth would affect the  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  reservoirs, resulting in some melting of polar ice-caps, with release of trapped gases, as well as increased evaporation from the oceans, thereby raising the  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  level in the atmosphere. Water is itself a greenhouse



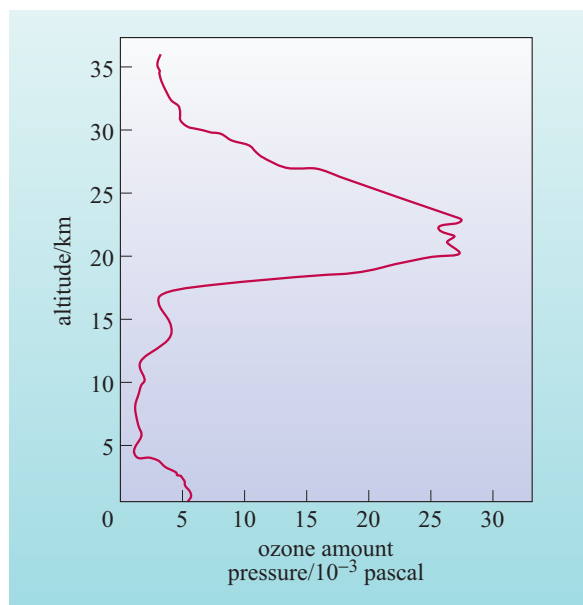
**Figure 5.23** The variation of  $\text{CO}_2$  content in the atmosphere between 1850 and 2000.

gas and will contribute further to the rise in temperature. The possibility exists that such a positive feedback could result in a runaway greenhouse effect as is believed to have occurred on Venus, although current modelling predicts that this is unlikely.

The high surface temperature of Venus at present is due largely to the greenhouse effect, which might have been operative for most of the lifetime of Venus. Even if the surface temperature of Venus had initially favoured the condensation of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , its closeness to the Sun means that the evaporation of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  into the atmosphere would have been sufficiently high for  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  to make its own contribution to the greenhouse effect. In fact,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  absorbs radiation in different parts of the spectrum from  $\text{CO}_2$  (Figure 5.22b), so its contribution is important in these circumstances. Any rise in surface temperature resulting from this greenhouse effect would ensure the evaporation of more liquid  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . The increased partial pressure of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  in the atmosphere would then further contribute to the greenhouse effect.

### The stratosphere and the ozone layer

Between the Earth's troposphere (that extends from the Earth's surface up to 10–16 km in altitude depending on latitude) and the thermosphere (which begins at an altitude of approximately 90 km), there is a region in which the temperature first rises and then falls. The lower part of this region (between 10–16 km and 50 km) is called the stratosphere. The stratosphere is unique to Earth – some mechanism must exist for absorbing energy that does not exist on Mars or Venus and is responsible for the temperature rise in the stratosphere. The mechanism responsible for this absorption involves the substance ozone,  $\text{O}_3$ . Although ozone occurs throughout the atmosphere, it reaches its highest concentration in the stratosphere, as Figure 5.24 shows. It is this peak in concentration of  $\text{O}_3$  that is called the *ozone layer*. In fact, the concentration of  $\text{O}_3$  is highest in a band between 15 km and 30 km altitude, although it is only a minor atmospheric component. If it were all collected and compressed to 1 atmosphere pressure at the Earth's surface, it would form a layer only 3 mm thick.

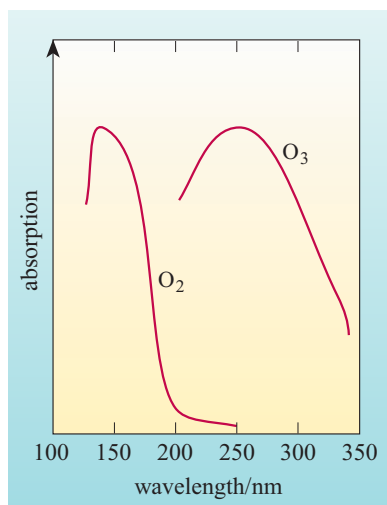


**Figure 5.24** The variation of ozone concentration with altitude in the Earth's atmosphere. There is some variation with latitude, but, over the whole of the Earth, ozone occurs mainly between 10 km and 50 km altitude.

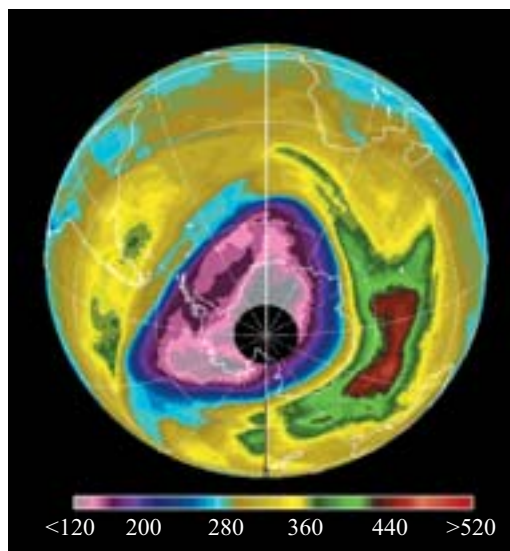
As solar radiation enters the Earth's atmosphere, it is absorbed selectively by various components of the atmosphere (Figure 5.22). Ionization of molecules in the thermosphere is responsible for the removal of radiation of wavelength ( $\lambda$ ) shorter than about 100 nm. Molecular oxygen ( $\text{O}_2$ ) absorbs radiation of  $\lambda < 230$  nm (Figure 5.25), and is split into oxygen atoms by radiation of  $\lambda < 140$  nm. Ozone absorbs radiation in the wavelength range from 200 nm to 350 nm. Thus this radiation is transmitted by the thermosphere and largely absorbed in the stratosphere. At wavelengths longer than 230 nm, ozone is the only component of the atmosphere that significantly absorbs solar UV radiation. In spite of its low concentration, it is highly effective at absorbing solar radiation of  $\lambda < 350$  nm (Figure 5.25).

Thus, ozone prevents this part of the solar spectrum (230–350 nm) from reaching the Earth's surface. This region of the spectrum is highly damaging to life, causing genetic damage when absorbed by DNA. So life is protected by the ozone layer. The recently observed thinning of the ozone layer (Figure 5.26) is therefore a matter of concern and much research has gone into the mechanisms of formation and destruction of the ozone layer.





**Figure 5.25** The absorption spectra of oxygen ( $O_2$ ) and ozone ( $O_3$ ) in the ultraviolet region of the electromagnetic spectrum.



**Figure 5.26** Ozone 'hole' over the Antarctic. The contours show the concentration of ozone in Dobson units.

One Dobson unit (DU) corresponds to 0.01 mm thickness of ozone under conditions of standard temperature and pressure. So the 'ozone layer' is about 300 DU.

The energy absorbed by ozone is eventually transferred to kinetic energy and this is responsible for the heating of the stratosphere.

Within the stratosphere, ozone is produced from the interaction of solar radiation with molecular oxygen,  $O_2$ . The chemistry of the stratosphere consists of a complex series of reactions involving  $O$ ,  $O_2$  and  $O_3$  as well as a number of other atoms and molecules. One set of reactions involved in this chemistry is called the **Chapman scheme** after the English geophysicist Sydney Chapman (1888–1970), who first proposed it.

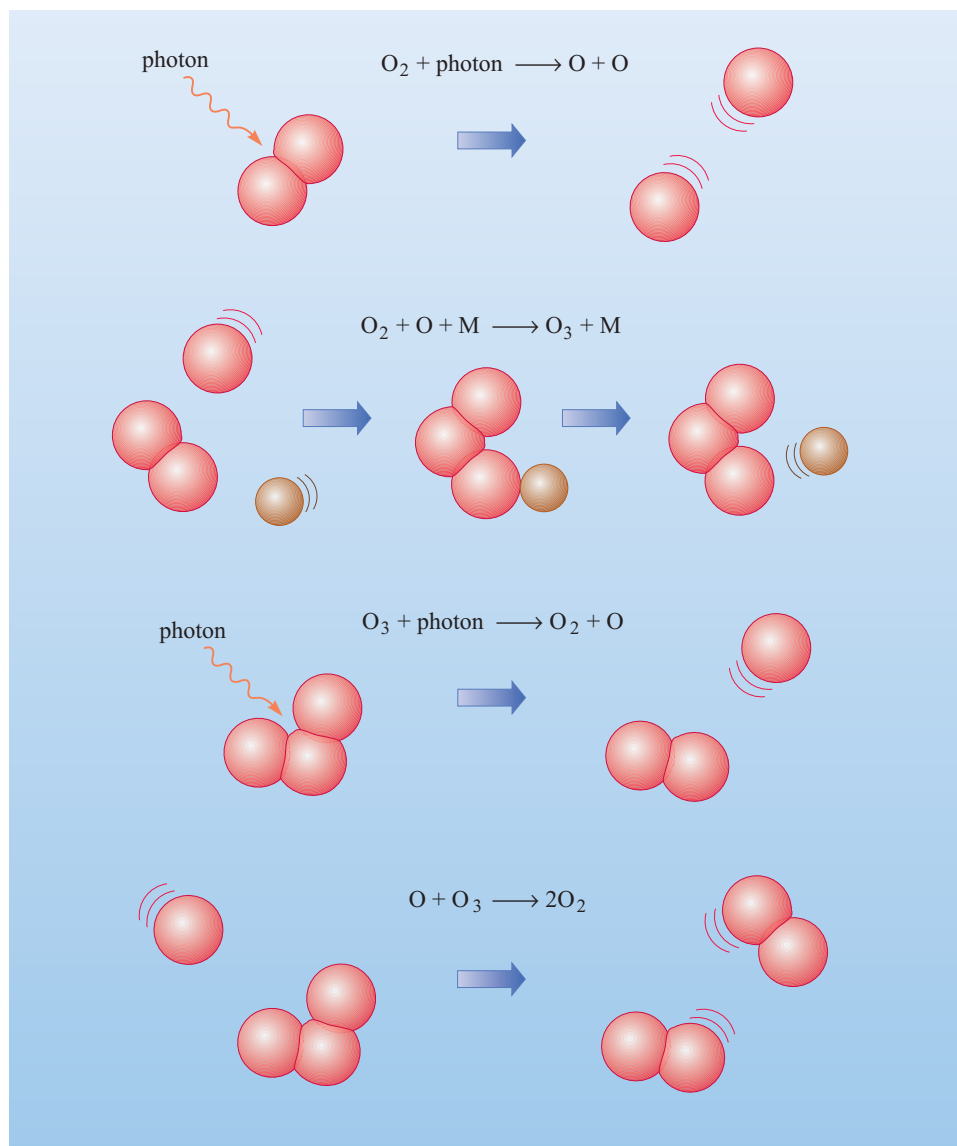
The reactions in this scheme are shown schematically in Figure 5.27, and written as:



In Equation 5.11 the symbol  $M$  represents any atom or molecule involved in this collision simultaneously with  $O$  and  $O_2$ . The presence of  $M$  is necessary because a chemical bond is formed in this reaction and the formation of a bond releases energy. This released energy must be transferred to  $M$  or it will simply be absorbed by the  $O_3$ , which will then dissociate again:

- Equations 5.10 and 5.11 lead to the formation of ozone;
- Equations 5.12 and 5.13 lead to its destruction.

The concentration of ozone at any altitude is dependent on the relative rates of these two pairs of reactions. At higher altitudes than the stratosphere, the atmosphere is too tenuous for Equation 5.11 to lead to a substantial formation of ozone. At lower altitudes, Equation 5.10 is prevented because the required UV radiation has been absorbed and does not reach these layers.



**Figure 5.27** A schematic depiction of the four reactions of the Chapman scheme of ozone chemistry in the stratosphere. The body M (shaded brown) can be any atom or molecule in the three-body collision.

### Heating and cooling of the mesosphere and thermosphere

In the mesospheres of the planets the temperature falls with altitude, but less steeply than the adiabatic lapse rate. In some cases the temperature is almost constant in this region. Convection does not occur to any major extent and heat transfer is through the absorption and emission of infrared radiation.

Heating of the thermosphere results from the absorption of high frequency (UV) solar radiation, which causes ionization of gases – mainly  $\text{O}_2$  for the Earth and  $\text{CO}_2$  for Mars and Venus. In the outer reaches of the thermosphere, a substantial fraction of the atmosphere is ionized forming a plasma (separate ions and electrons) that has appreciable electrical conductivity. This region is known as the **ionosphere** and on Earth starts at an altitude of approximately 60 km. Radio waves used for long-range communication, e.g. ship-to-shore, amateur radio and over-the-horizon radar, travel in straight lines, but the Earth is spherical, so in order to cover long distances they

have to be sent up into the atmosphere and then reflected back to the receiver. The plasma of the ionosphere makes a suitable reflector. Other effects of the ionosphere will be discussed further in Section 5.7.

Eventually, much of this thermal energy is converted via recombination of ions and electrons, and by chemical reactions, into vibrational and kinetic energy of the constituents of the thermosphere. For this energy to be radiated, the vibrationally excited molecules must relax to a low energy state with the emission of a photon of infrared radiation – the reverse of the absorption process described in Section 5.2. For the components of the Earth's thermosphere, such as the homonuclear molecule  $O_2$ , this emission process is very inefficient. So although very little of the solar radiation is absorbed in the thermosphere, it is sufficient to generate a high temperature because the loss of this energy is highly inefficient. By contrast, the thermospheres of Venus and Mars, which consist mainly of  $CO$  and  $CO_2$ , are able to radiate efficiently, and so we do not observe temperatures as high as those in the Earth's thermosphere, as shown in Figure 5.17.

#### QUESTION 5.6

Triton, the largest satellite of Neptune, has a high albedo. What does this indicate about its surface? Given that it is a long way from the Sun, is its low surface temperature of 38 K surprising?

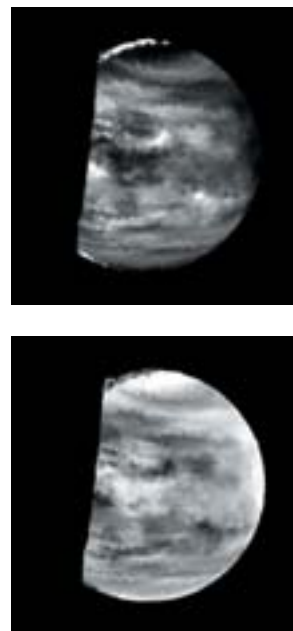
#### QUESTION 5.7

The release into the Earth's atmosphere of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which were once commonly used as aerosol propellants, introduces substances that absorb infrared radiation in a different part of the spectrum from that absorbed by  $CO_2$ . What effect would you predict this to have on the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere?

## 5.5 Cloud formation

A cloud is a region of the atmosphere in which a component has condensed to form small liquid droplets or solid particles. These droplets or particles are so small that they are held suspended by updraughts in the cloud until they grow large enough to fall as rain or snow.

On Venus, the cloud layer is thick and extensive, extending from about 45 km to 65 km above the surface. It covers the entire planet (Figures 5.1 and 5.28). The clouds consist largely of particles, about  $2\ \mu\text{m}$  in diameter, the properties of which closely match those of droplets containing a solution of 75%  $H_2SO_4$  (sulfuric acid) and 25%  $H_2O$ . Additionally, the clouds contain larger solid crystals of chlorine-containing substances, thought to be  $FeCl_2$  and  $Al_2Cl_6$ , as well as phosphorus compounds, such as  $H_3PO_4$ .



**Figure 5.28** Near infrared image of clouds on Venus (Galileo mission, 10 February 1990). These clouds lie 50 km above the surface and about 10 km below the visible cloud tops. The lower image, a modified negative, represents what scientists believe would be the visual appearance of this mid-level cloud deck in daylight.



**Figure 5.29** Clouds on Mars imaged by the Mars Global Surveyor.

On Earth, we are familiar with clouds of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , which may exist as liquid droplets or as particles of snow or ice. These clouds occur up to altitudes of about 10 km. Very thin clouds occur up to altitudes of 50 km.

On Mars, the most extensive clouds are composed of dust (mostly silicate particles) raised by wind. We shall deal with these clouds later as they are not the result of condensation. In addition, clouds of solid particles of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{CO}_2$  occur, as shown in Figure 5.29, although the total average cloud cover is small.

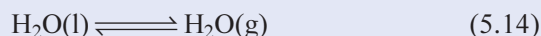
But how and why do these clouds form? Although it is difficult to forecast when it will rain, it is possible to predict in a model system the conditions when water will exist as vapour, liquid, ice or any combination of these. The two factors that determine the phase in which water will exist are temperature and pressure. To be more precise, it is the temperature and the **partial pressure** that determine the phase rather than pressure; the partial pressure of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is equal to the total pressure of the atmosphere multiplied by that fraction of the molecules in the gas that are  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  molecules.

The basis of the prediction of the phase in which a substance will exist is the **saturation vapour pressure diagram** (see Box 5.6), which can be constructed from laboratory studies of the substance in question.

### BOX 5.6 SATURATION VAPOUR PRESSURE DIAGRAMS

As an example of a saturation vapour pressure diagram we shall consider how rain forms in an atmosphere that contains water vapour. Because the atmosphere of the Earth or any other planet is complicated by the presence of various zones and by atmospheric motion, we shall develop the diagram for a much simplified model system. Our model consists of a closed box that contains water and a gas (for example dry air) that does not interact with the water (Figure 5.30). Because the box is closed, nothing leaves or enters it. However, the lid of the box can move up or down to change the pressure in the box. This movement simulates the effect of changing the total pressure in the Earth's atmosphere. We can also raise or lower the temperature.

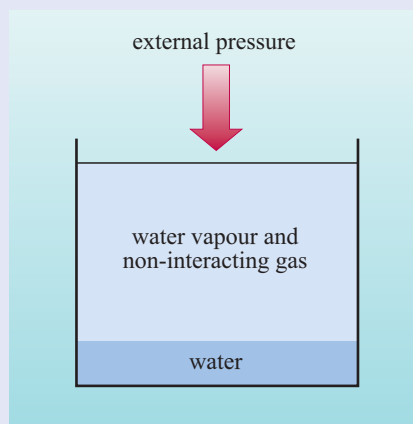
Within the box, water is present as a liquid and also as a vapour, these two phases being in equilibrium, a situation represented by Equation 5.14



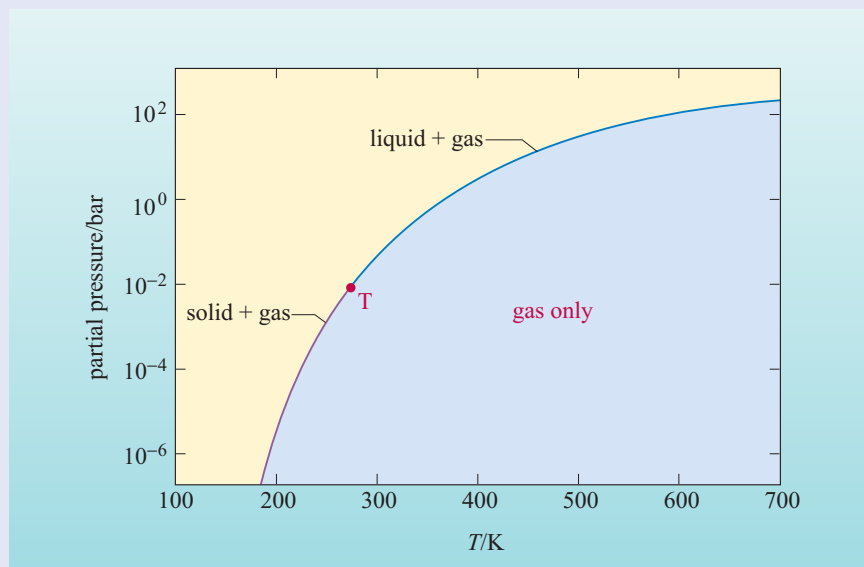
At equilibrium, there is no change and so the ratio of the number densities,  $n(\text{H}_2\text{O}, \text{g})/n(\text{H}_2\text{O}, \text{l})$ , of the two

phases is constant. As you might expect, this ratio depends on the temperature and to a lesser extent upon the pressure, and it is this dependence that concerns us.

The number of molecules per unit volume of liquid water is approximately constant. The number density of gaseous  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is proportional to the partial pressure and so it is convenient to represent the equilibrium ratio in Equation 5.14 by the partial pressure of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{g})$  that is in equilibrium with  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{l})$ . A plot of the variation of the equilibrium partial pressure with temperature is called a saturation vapour pressure diagram, and that for  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is shown in Figure 5.31.



**Figure 5.30** A model of an atmosphere above a pool of liquid water. In this model it is possible to vary the pressure and the temperature, factors that determine the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere.



**Figure 5.31** The saturation vapour pressure diagram for water. The pressure scale is logarithmic. Note that 1 bar =  $10^5$  Pa, close to atmospheric pressure at the Earth's surface.

The upper part of the curve (above the point T) represents  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{g})$  in equilibrium with  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{l})$ . Below the point T, the curve represents  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{g})$  in equilibrium with solid water, ice,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{s})$ .

So the curve in Figure 5.31 gives the value of the partial pressure of water vapour that is in equilibrium with liquid water or ice in the range of temperatures shown. If the box in Figure 5.30 and its contents are cooled, the partial pressure of water in the gas at equilibrium with liquid water will be lowered, as Figure 5.31 shows. At this lower temperature, the gas will therefore contain initially *more* water than the equilibrium concentration, that is the partial pressure of water in the gas will exceed that at equilibrium.

The result is that some of this water vapour will condense to liquid until the partial pressure of water vapour in the gas reaches the equilibrium value (the value on the saturation vapour pressure curve at the lower temperature).

If the equilibrium partial pressure and temperature are to the *right* of the saturation vapour pressure curve, then the substance is present as a gas only (Figure 5.31). If the pressure or temperature is then changed to lie on this curve, some liquid or solid will form. This condensation of water vapour to liquid or solid in the gas is the same process by which clouds form in the Earth's atmosphere.

From Figure 5.31 we can predict whether water vapour will condense in the atmosphere.

- Suppose that on a warm, humid day the partial pressure of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{g})$  at ground level rises to  $10^{-2}$  bar, and then the temperature falls abruptly at night to  $-10^\circ\text{C}$  (263 K). Will water vapour condense in the atmosphere and, if so, in what phase?
- As the temperature falls, the point representing the gas moves horizontally across the 'gas only' region of Figure 5.31, until it meets the curve. At a pressure of  $10^{-2}$  bar, this is at a temperature of about 275 K. Thus, condensation will begin at this temperature, and the partial pressure will fall until the point on the curve at 263 K is reached. The point on the curve corresponding to 263 K is below the point T, so water will condense as ice. (*Note:* These are the conditions under which freezing fog forms at ground level on Earth.)



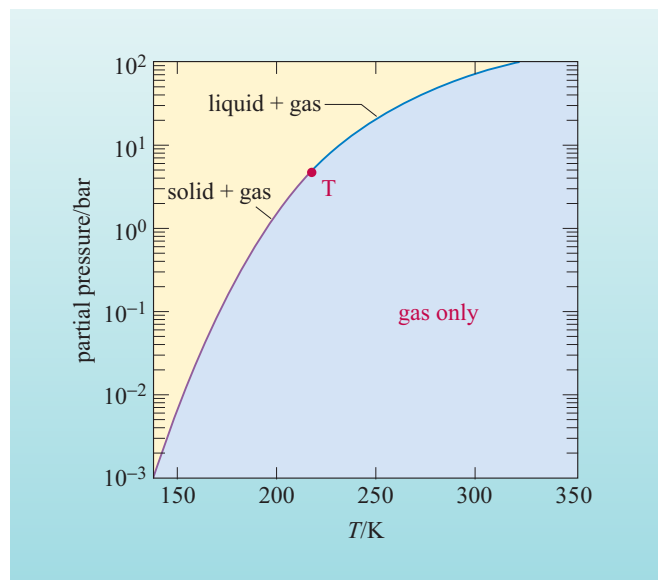
Saturation vapour pressure diagrams, such as Figure 5.31, enable us to predict the equilibrium conditions when clouds will form, but such predictions give only an approximate estimate as they ignore some important effects.

The most important factor that affects cloud formation is the shape of the droplets. Figure 5.31 applies to a flat liquid surface, as in Figure 5.30. At any particular temperature, the partial pressure of vapour in equilibrium with the curved surfaces of small spherical droplets is higher than that for a flat water surface, and it increases as the drop size decreases (as curvature increases). So at the initial formation of very small droplets, a *higher* partial pressure is needed than that predicted by saturation vapour pressure diagrams. However, atmospheres are not simply gaseous mixtures. They contain particles of dust, on which water molecules may condense to begin the process of drop formation. If the surface of these particles is easily wetted, and especially if the particle is soluble in water, the drop will form and grow even at partial vapour pressures *lower* than those predicted by saturation vapour pressure diagrams. This principle is the basis of seeding experiments where particles are introduced into clouds to try and bring about rain. Such experiments have not so far been very successful. Like many aspects of atmospheric science, cloud formation is not highly predictable.

Dust clouds on Mars are raised by wind and occur locally and (occasionally) on a planet-wide scale. Local dust clouds are also seen on Earth. The formation of dust clouds is linked to the motion of the atmosphere, which is the subject of the next section.

#### QUESTION 5.8

Using Figure 5.32, determine whether  $\text{CO}_2$  would condense as a solid or a liquid on Mars at its average surface temperature.



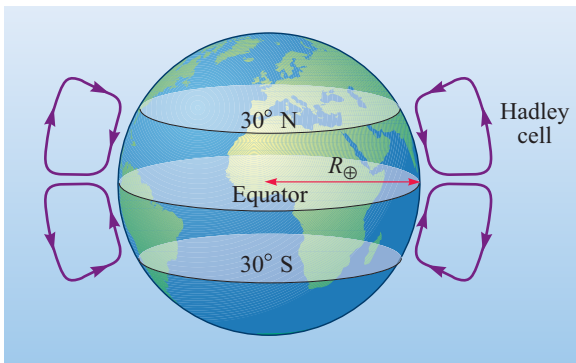
**Figure 5.32** The saturation vapour pressure curve for carbon dioxide,  $\text{CO}_2$ .

## 5.6 Atmospheric motion

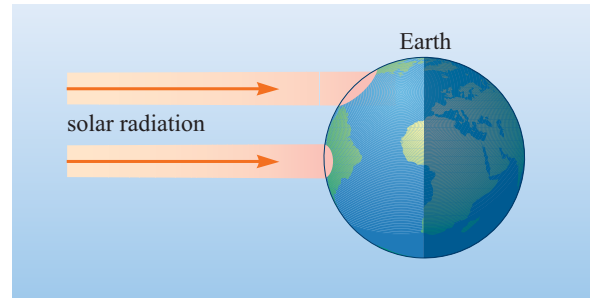
In this section, we concentrate on the major processes that produce a general rather than a local circulation of atmospheres. On the global scale, we recognize several different kinds of major process for transport in the atmosphere. On Earth, Mars and Venus for example, the factors responsible are the heating of the planet by the Sun and the rotation of the planet.

On Earth, the most important atmospheric circulation arises from the differential heating by the Sun due to the spherical shape of the planet. Near the Equator, the Earth's surface receives more energy per unit area than it does near the poles (Figure 5.33). This is because a beam of solar radiation is spread over a larger area near the poles than at the Equator. The higher temperature of the Earth's surface at the Equator causes warm air to rise vertically in the troposphere. It cools as it rises and the cooler air then travels towards the poles. As it moves polewards, this air radiates heat and so cools further, until it eventually sinks back to the surface where it returns to the Equator, completing a cycle that defines what is known as a **Hadley cell**, named after the British scientist, George Hadley (1685–1768). These cells extend to about  $30^\circ\text{N}$  and  $30^\circ\text{S}$ , as shown in Figure 5.34. The mass transport of heated air tends to even out temperature differences at the surface so that the range of temperatures on Earth is less extreme than that on planets with a thinner atmosphere or no atmosphere at all.

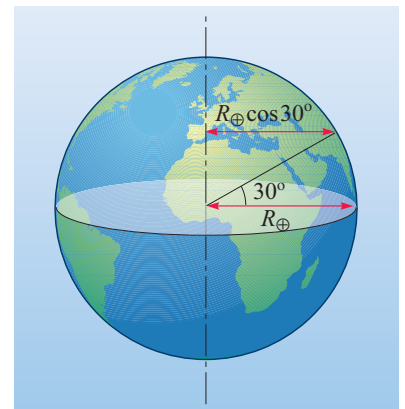
The fast rotation of the Earth (rotation period of one day) has an additional effect on the atmospheric circulation through the interaction of the rotation with Hadley cell motion. We can understand this effect by following the motion of a piece of atmosphere around a Hadley cell as it circulates on the rotating Earth. Suppose that this piece of atmosphere begins on the surface of the Earth at the Equator, with no initial motion relative to the surface. It is rotating with the planet, with some west-to-east speed,  $v$ , relative to a non-rotating observer in space moving at the same speed as the Earth in its orbit. This piece of atmosphere rises without significant change in  $v$  (the height of the Hadley cell in Figure 5.34 is exaggerated for clarity). As it moves northwards, the piece of atmosphere at the top of the cell, of mass  $m$ , does not change height, but its distance,  $r$ , from the Earth's spin axis decreases. At  $30^\circ\text{N}$ , its distance from the spin axis is now  $R_\oplus \cos 30^\circ$  (Figure 5.35), where  $R_\oplus$  is the Earth's radius. During this motion the quantity **angular momentum** must be conserved. Angular momentum is the product of the mass and the **angular speed** (see Box 5.7).



**Figure 5.34** Hadley cells in the Earth's tropics extend to about  $30^\circ\text{N}$  and  $30^\circ\text{S}$  (not to scale).



**Figure 5.33** The Earth's surface receives more solar energy per unit area of the surface, near the Equator than it receives near the poles.



**Figure 5.35** The air in a Hadley cell moves closer to the Earth's spin axis as it travels towards the pole. At  $30^\circ\text{N}$  the distance has decreased from  $R_\oplus$  to  $R_\oplus \cos 30^\circ$ .

### BOX 5.7 ANGULAR MOMENTUM

If you have ever watched a high diver you may have noticed that, when tight-tucked, the diver somersaults rapidly during the dive, but when stretched out she tumbles more slowly and makes fewer, graceful turns before entering the water. This is an illustration of the conservation of angular momentum.

A pirouetting skater is another example. With the arms outstretched the skater spins slowly; if he pulls them in the rotation speeds up.

Angular momentum is to do with how fast a body is rotating, the angular speed, and how compact or how spread out the mass of the body is around the rotation axis. Conservation of angular momentum means that, unless the body is impeded (for example it hits something), its angular momentum will not change. For an isolated body, left on its own, the angular momentum at the end of a manoeuvre is the same as at the beginning.

In the case of the atmosphere within our Hadley cell, the angular momentum has magnitude  $mvr$ , where  $r$  is the distance of the mass from the spin axis. We assume the parcel does not lose or gain mass. It follows that in order for the angular momentum to remain constant, the product  $vr$  must also stay constant. In the process of moving northwards, the distance,  $r$ , decreases. In order to conserve the angular momentum, therefore, the speed,  $v$ , must increase.

At the Equator, the west-to-east speed of the atmosphere at the top of the cell, which we assume is equal to the speed of the surface, is  $2\pi R_{\oplus}/T$ , where  $T$  is the rotation period of the Earth,  $R_{\oplus}$  (at the Equator) is 6378 km and  $T$  is  $8.617 \times 10^4$  s. So this speed relative to an observer in space is  $465 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ .

- What will the west-to-east speed of the atmosphere at the top of the Hadley cell be at  $30^\circ \text{ N}$  relative to the observer?
- The distance of the cell from the Earth's axis decreases to  $r \cos 30^\circ$ ,  $m$  remains constant and so for the angular momentum,  $mvr$ , to remain constant,  $v$  must increase to  $v/\cos 30^\circ$ . So at  $30^\circ \text{ N}$ , the speed is increased to  $(465/\cos 30^\circ) \text{ m s}^{-1} = 537 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ .

Because the Earth is a solid body, at  $30^\circ \text{ N}$  the angular speed of the surface is the same as at the Equator. At this latitude, the west-to-east surface speed is therefore  $2\pi R_{\oplus} \cos 30^\circ / T = 403 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . The top of the Hadley cell thus acquires a west-to-east motion *relative to the surface*, as shown in Figure 5.36.

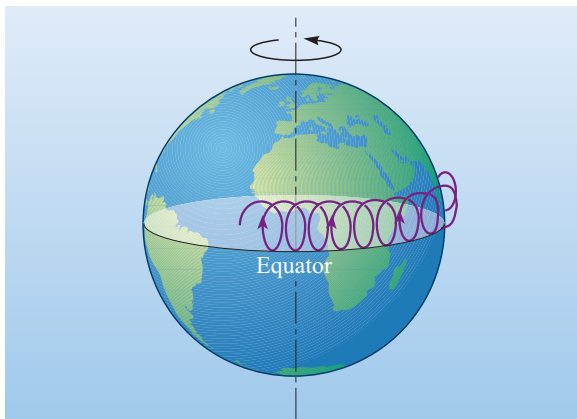
So we conclude that, at  $30^\circ \text{ N}$ , the top of the Hadley cell has acquired a west-to-east speed relative to the surface of  $(537 - 403) \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , which is  $134 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . If, again, no significant change in  $v$  occurs as this piece of atmosphere returns to the surface at the northern extremity of the Hadley cell, the calculation predicts a west-to-east wind speed of  $134 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , which is very high. The calculation ignores the effects of friction and small eddy currents, which reduces this wind speed, although the prevailing wind direction is accounted for. This wind is an example of the **Coriolis effect** – a displacement arising as matter moves in a rotating system.

Each of the two tropical Hadley cells forms a spiral of ascending and descending air that extends around the Earth (see Figure 5.37).

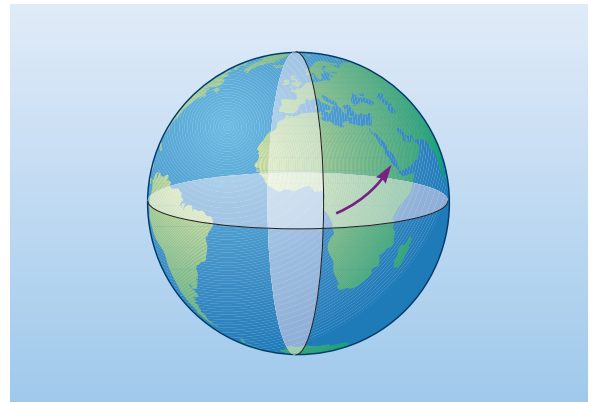
At higher latitudes, the Hadley circulation becomes unstable, with the result that the tropical cells extend only to  $30^{\circ}$  N and  $30^{\circ}$  S. At mid-latitudes ( $30$ – $60^{\circ}$  N and  $30$ – $60^{\circ}$  S) the north–south transport of energy is dominated by atmospheric waves that give rise to cyclones and anticyclones. These are the areas of high and low pressure familiar from weather maps. The position of these varies from day to day, but if we average the circulation over about a decade, we obtain a pattern that resembles a Hadley cell but in the *reverse* direction, known as a Ferrell cell. In the polar regions, Hadley cells, known as polar cells, once more occur but are less prominent than those in the tropics. Figure 5.38 shows the three cells in each hemisphere forming the general pattern of circulation.

The wind patterns established by Hadley cells have been known to travellers for centuries. At the Earth's surface the northern equatorial Hadley cell results in a general northeast to southwest motion of the atmosphere (Figure 5.38) giving the trade winds. Near the Equator, where the two tropical Hadley cells abut, an almost windless region exists. This is known as the doldrums. The top of the most northerly Hadley cell has a strong west-to-east motion known as the jet stream. At high altitudes of over 10 km, at which transatlantic jet aircraft fly, the jet stream ensures that aircraft make the eastbound journey faster than the westbound journey.

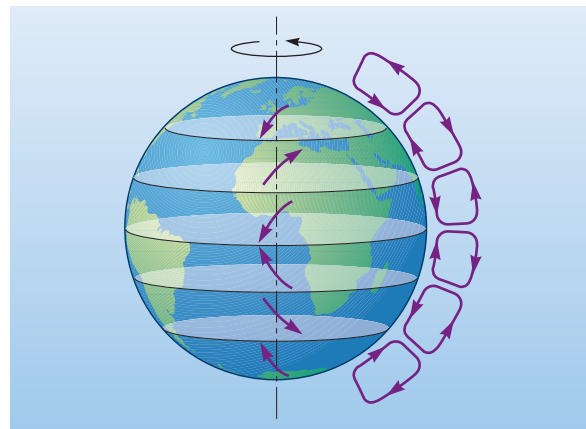
The Earth's rate of rotation causes a large Coriolis effect that limits the extent of Hadley cells. We can compare atmospheric motion on Earth with that on Venus and Mars. Venus rotates very slowly, once every 243 days, in a retrograde direction, i.e. in the opposite sense to most Solar System bodies.



**Figure 5.37** The Earth's rotation causes the Hadley cell to spiral. A piece of atmosphere that remains in the Hadley cell follows this flattened and tilted spiral path. This figure shows part of the tropical cell in the Northern Hemisphere; the vertical component is exaggerated.



**Figure 5.36** As it moves northwards, the top layer of the Hadley cell acquires an easterly motion relative to the surface of the Earth.



**Figure 5.38** On Earth, three atmospheric circulation cells occur in each hemisphere. The tropical cells are the most persistent. The intermediate cells are driven by neighbouring cells in a direction contrary to that expected for a Hadley cell. Arrows indicate the directions of surface winds, i.e. the motion at the bottom of the cell.

- In which direction, west to east or east to west, would you predict the atmosphere at the top of the Hadley cells on Venus to move?
- As the rotation of Venus is retrograde, this is also the predicted direction of the atmospheric motion (i.e. east to west).
- How would you expect this slow rotation of Venus to affect the east-to-west movement of Hadley cell circulation?
- The small Coriolis effect should contribute little to this movement, and so east-to-west motion might be expected to be slow.

At visible wavelengths, the cloud tops of Venus are almost featureless, but imaged in UV or infrared radiation (Figures 5.1, 5.28) they show cloud patterns that indicate that Hadley cells extend from the equator to the poles. As might be expected on a slowly rotating planet, wind speeds at the surface are low, only about  $1 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , as measured by entry probes and landers. However, at the cloud tops (altitude 65 km) the wind speed is typically  $120 \text{ m s}^{-1}$  in the retrograde direction of the rotation of the planet. This phenomenon is called **super-rotation** and its cause is not well understood, but is probably related to the fact that most of the solar radiation is absorbed at high altitude in the atmosphere of Venus, with only about 4% reaching the surface. This is in contrast to what happens on Earth and Mars, where most of the solar radiation reaches the surface.

The rotation period of Mars is similar to that of the Earth, so it is not surprising to find a similar pattern of atmospheric circulation. Hadley cells occur near the equator but, owing to the thin atmosphere, the transport of heat from the tropics to the poles is less effective. Surface temperatures of more than 240 K were recorded by the Viking 1 lander at  $22^\circ \text{ N}$ , with a diurnal variation of up to 50 K. The temperature at the poles drops to less than 150 K, sufficient for  $\text{CO}_2$ , the major atmospheric component, to solidify. The condensation of  $\text{CO}_2$  on Mars, together with the inclination of its spin axis, leads to a further type of atmospheric circulation. Let's consider the inclination first. The angle of inclination of the spin axis, which is about  $24^\circ$ , is similar to that of the Earth. Seasons occur, each hemisphere alternating between summer and winter (see Box 5.8).

With the arrival of summer in the Martian northern hemisphere, the rise in temperature causes the polar  $\text{CO}_2$  ice-cap to evaporate. In fact,  $\text{CO}_2$  passes directly from solid to gas by *sublimation*. At the same time, the temperature at the south pole decreases and  $\text{CO}_2$  solidifies from the atmosphere, increasing the size of the polar ice-cap. This phenomenon causes a flow of atmosphere from one pole to the other and is called the **condensation flow** (Figure 5.41).

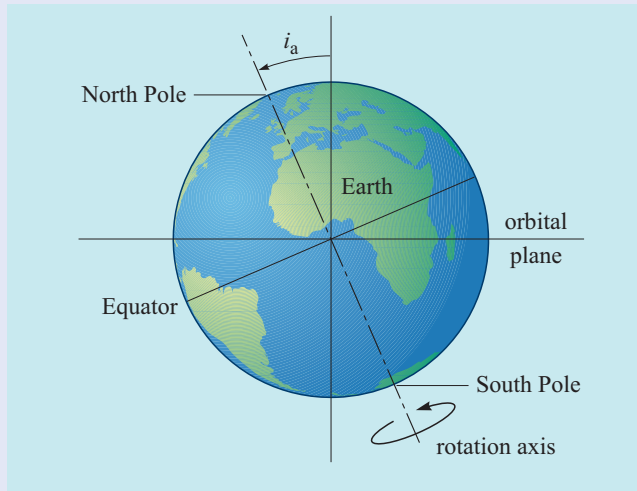
A further type of atmospheric motion that is important on Mars can be attributed to the thinness of the Martian atmosphere. On the hemisphere facing the Sun, the surface heats up rapidly because very little solar radiation is absorbed by the overlying atmosphere. When this hemisphere has turned to face away from the Sun, radiation from the surface readily escapes from the planet, again because the atmosphere is so thin. The result is a large difference in temperature between day (220 K) and night (170 K). This temperature difference causes a flow of atmosphere around the planet, referred to as a **thermal tide**, although it is not really a tidal process. Thermal tides also occur on Venus and Earth, especially at higher altitudes, although they are a less significant component of the circulation than on Mars.



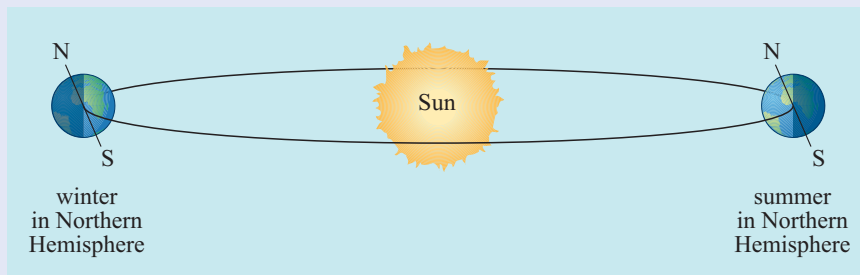
## BOX 5.8 SEASONS

On Earth, we are familiar with alternating **seasons** of summer and winter. Seasons are caused by the angle that the spin axis makes with the normal to the orbital plane (i.e. a line drawn perpendicular to the orbital plane). This angle is called the axial inclination,  $i_a$  (Figure 5.39). It is about  $24^\circ$  for both Earth and Mars.

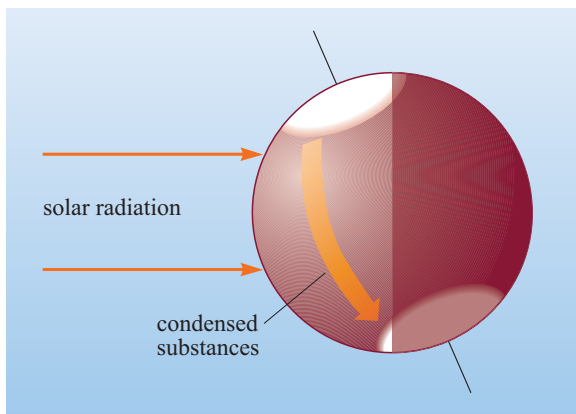
In the Northern Hemisphere summer, that hemisphere is tilted towards the Sun (Figure 5.40) with the result that day is longer than night and the Sun is high in the sky. At this time it is winter in the Southern Hemisphere and the opposite conditions prevail. When the Earth has completed a further half-orbit about the Sun, the seasons are reversed.



**Figure 5.39** The axial inclination,  $i_a$ , of a planet.



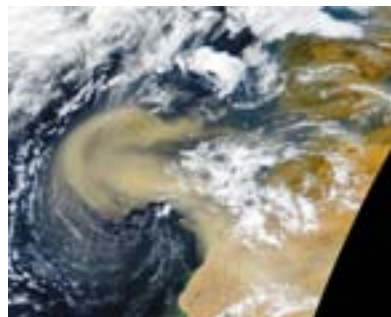
**Figure 5.40** The seasons alternate as the Earth orbits the Sun (not to scale).



**Figure 5.41** During summer in the Martian northern hemisphere, condensed substances (mostly  $\text{CO}_2$  with some  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) evaporate and migrate to the southern pole, where they condense as ices.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 5.42** (a) Martian north polar dust storm observed by Mars Orbiter on 29 August 2000, compared with a storm on Earth (b).

Although other processes are more significant for the general circulation, the large mass of atmosphere redistributed by this process on Venus leads to tidal interaction with the Sun. There is speculation that this has affected the rotation speed of the planet.

The effects you have been studying in this section determine the general circulation of the planetary atmospheres, that is an average over time and longitude. Localized wind motion also occurs and can be caused, for example, by the need to get around topographical features such as mountains or on Earth by temperature differences between sea and land. The latter leads to offshore breezes on warm days that change to onshore breezes as the Sun sets.

The combination of various atmospheric motions and local eddy currents on Mars can lead to local surface wind speeds as high as  $50 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . These winds raise dust from the surface, creating local dust storms (Figure 5.42a). Within these storms the dust absorbs solar radiation, setting up large temperature differences and hence pressure differences. These lead to further turbulence causing more dust to be raised, which in turn heats up and leads to even more turbulence. In spring these dust storms are promoted by the higher pressure as the  $\text{CO}_2$  sublimates, enabling more dust to be suspended for a longer time. Over a Martian year many local dust storms occur on Mars, and once or twice a year the whole planet becomes enveloped in a storm. In 2001, Mars Global Surveyor and the Hubble Space Telescope tracked a storm that resulted in a cloud of dust engulfing the entire planet for about three months. This storm started as several localized dust storms that then spread. The temperature of the upper atmosphere was raised by about 45 K but the surface cooled due to the dust blocking the solar radiation. As the surface cooled, the winds died down and the dust settled.

### QUESTION 5.9

What speed, relative to the surface, will a piece of atmosphere gain by the Coriolis effect in travelling on Venus from the equator to  $30^\circ \text{ N}$ ? In which direction will the wind produced by this effect at the top of the Hadley cell be? (Take the surface speed of the rotating planet at its equator to be  $0.997/243$  that of the Earth, as the two planets are of similar size and Venus rotates once every 243 Earth days in the retrograde direction, east to west.) The Earth's sidereal (with respect to the stars rather than the Sun) rotation period is 0.997 days.

## 5.7 Ionospheres and magnetospheres

You have seen that solar radiation affects the atmospheres of the terrestrial planets. It provides the energy to heat it and drive the winds. High-energy solar radiation is also responsible for the formation of the charged layer, the ionosphere. The Sun also interacts with the atmospheres via its magnetic field. We can think of the Sun as being like a large bar magnet (Figure 5.43) where the magnetic field lines loop round between the poles. This structure of magnetic field lines is called a magnetosphere (although that does not necessarily mean that the structure is spherical, but implies a sphere of influence).

At large distances from the Sun, the field lines extend so far that they appear to be unconnected, travelling away from the Sun. These field lines are often referred to

as the **interplanetary magnetic field** or IMF. The IMF also guides and influences the flow of the *solar wind* away from the Sun. The **solar wind** consists mainly of protons and electrons, along with some heavier ions that have been lost from the outer atmosphere of the Sun, the corona. The charged particles of the solar wind interact with the IMF, so the flow of the solar wind is coupled to the IMF.

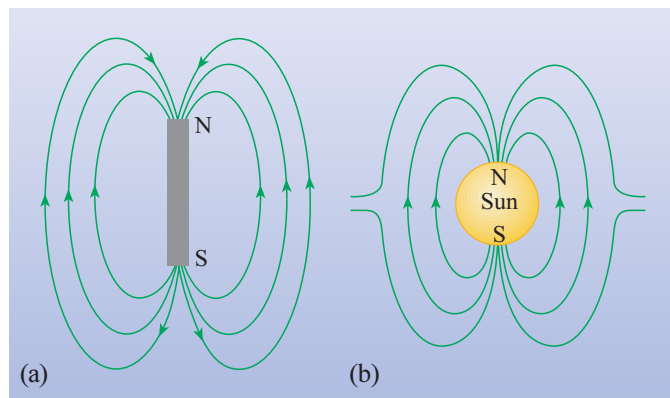
As the Sun rotates (it rotates once every 25 days or so) the field lines are carried with it and form a spiral shape rather like the jets of water from a garden sprinkler (Figure 5.44). Charged particles in the solar wind travel along the magnetic field lines.

Now what happens when the interplanetary magnetic field and its entwined solar wind meet a planet? We start with the Moon since it has no atmosphere and no planetary magnetic field.

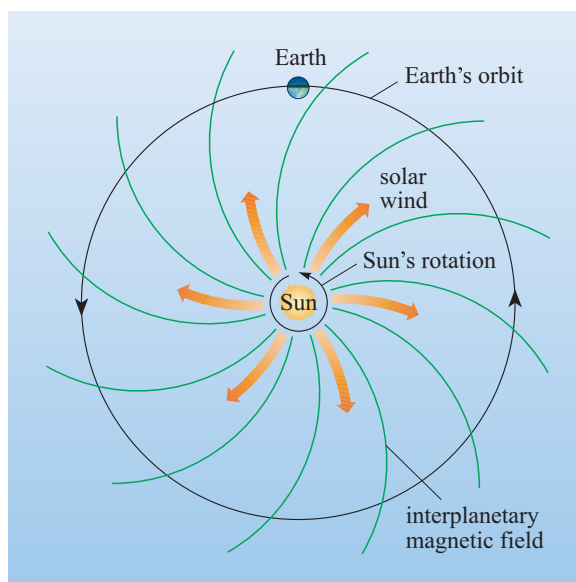
The Moon is, for some of the time, shielded by the Earth's magnetosphere but when it is not, it is exposed to the solar wind which deposits atoms on its surface. On the side away from the Sun there is a shadow region where there is no solar wind (Figure 5.45).

High-energy particles in the solar wind are potentially lethal to human life. An astronaut standing on the Moon when it is unshielded by the Earth's magnetosphere and when the Sun is particularly active would be in great danger.

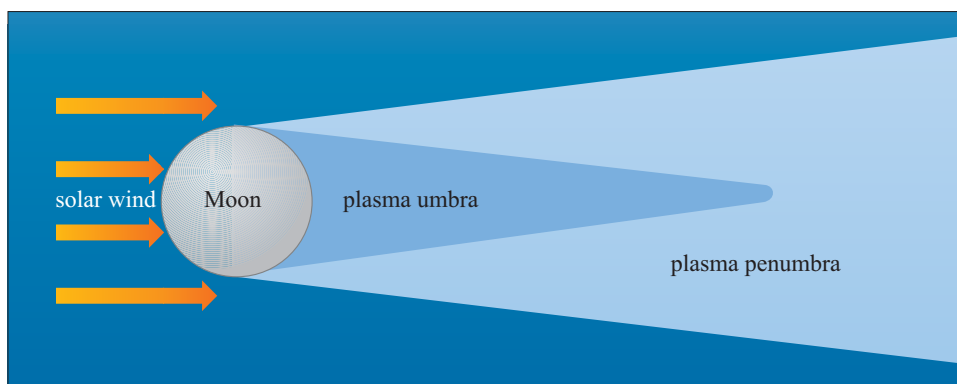
Venus has no magnetic field but it does have a substantial atmosphere. The solar wind is prevented from reaching the surface of Venus by its ionosphere. Because the ionosphere consists of charged particles it can exclude the IMF and deflect the solar wind. We find that the IMF field lines tend to wrap around the ionosphere, producing a **bow shock**. This is similar in shape to the shock wave produced by supersonic aircraft or the bow wave of a boat (hence the name). The solar wind then flows



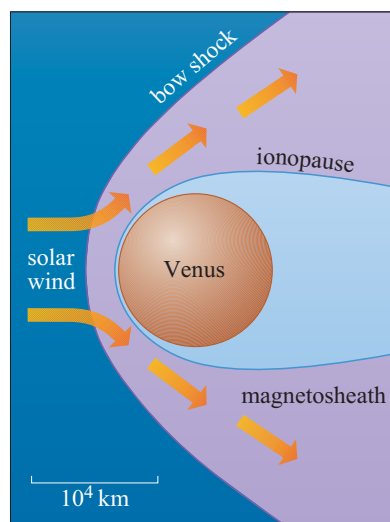
**Figure 5.43** The Sun's magnetic field (a) is rather like that of a bar magnet, where magnetic field lines loop round from pole to pole as shown in (b).



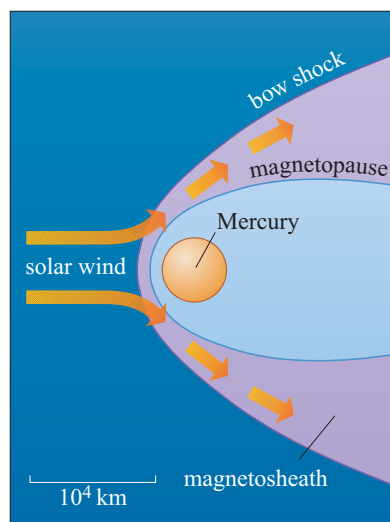
**Figure 5.44** The interplanetary magnetic field (IMF) extends away from the Sun. As the Sun rotates, the field lines form a spiral shape, rather like a garden sprinkler.



**Figure 5.45** Interaction of the IMF and solar wind with the Moon or other body with no atmosphere and little or no magnetic field.



**Figure 5.46** As the interplanetary magnetic field (IMF) and solar wind flow over a planetary body with an ionosphere, a bow shock is produced, which decelerates solar wind particles, which then flow around the ionopause. This is the scenario found at Venus.



**Figure 5.47** Magnetosphere of Mercury. The solar wind is deflected around the planet by the magnetic field.

around the planet leaving a region where few ions from the solar wind enter. The boundary of this region is the **ionopause**. This interaction with the ionosphere gives Venus a modest magnetosphere (Figure 5.46).

The magnetosphere of Mars is less well known but is probably similar to that of Venus.

Mercury has very little atmosphere and thus no ionosphere. It does however have its own magnetic field.

- How might Mercury be affected by the IMF?
- Its magnetic field could interact with the IMF.

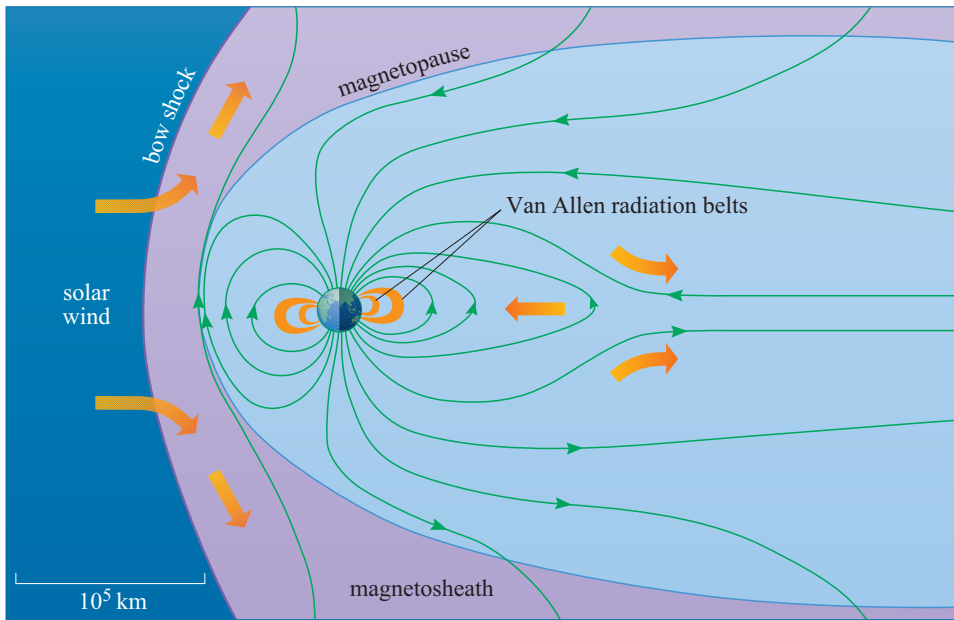
In this case a bow shock is produced when the IMF and the solar wind are resisted by the planetary magnetic field. This boundary between a planet's magnetosphere and the external magnetic field or solar wind is known as the **magnetopause** (Figure 5.47).

The Earth has its own strong magnetic field (as you may remember from Chapter 2) and an ionosphere. The magnetic field lines extend further out than the ionosphere, so as the IMF and solar wind flow past the Earth, a bow shock is produced by the Earth's magnetic field lines as on Mercury. The structure of Earth's magnetosphere is more complicated and interesting than those of the other terrestrial planets.

Within the magnetosphere but beyond what is generally thought of as the atmosphere, matter is present in the form of plasma, that is electrons and highly ionized atoms. Because it consists of charged particles, it is affected by the magnetic field and is not uniform throughout the magnetosphere. In 1958 an American physicist James Van Allen (Figure 5.48) and his research students were using simple radiation detectors on the satellites Explorer 1 and Explorer 3 to survey cosmic ray intensities above the atmosphere. They discovered a large population of energetic charged particles that were trapped by the Earth's magnetic field. These formed two distinctive toroidal (doughnut-shaped) regions, the Van Allen radiation belts (Figure 5.49).



**Figure 5.48** James Alfred Van Allen, born in 1914 in Iowa. He was a pioneer of space physics starting with high-altitude rockets in 1945. He and his research students discovered the Van Allen belts using instruments on Explorer 1 during International Geophysical Year, 1958. He has since done much more work on planetary magnetospheres. He is emeritus professor at the University of Iowa.



**Figure 5.49** The Earth's magnetosphere. The main characteristics are defined by the Earth's magnetic field lines that are contained within the magnetopause, which is separated from the bow shock by the magnetosheath region (into which the solar wind particles can flow). The Van Allen radiation belts form toroids around the Earth inside the magnetosphere. Note the much larger extent of Earth's magnetosphere compared to those of Venus and Mercury.

The inner belt consists largely of protons (hydrogen ions) and electrons and originates from the solar wind and the ionosphere. The outer belt is populated from the solar wind. The high-energy fraction of particles in these belts is a hazard to space travellers. The charged particles also affect electronic instruments.

Because the magnetic field of the Sun (and hence the IMF and the solar wind) varies with time, the magnetosphere also changes and these changes can affect us. Visually, the most dramatic effect is the production of aurorae (aurora borealis in the Northern Hemisphere (Figure 5.3) and aurora australis in the Southern Hemisphere). The colours of the aurorae are due to emission by atoms and ions in the upper atmosphere:

- oxygen atoms produce green and red emissions;
- nitrogen, as  $N_2$  or  $N_2^+$ , produces purple or red emissions.

■ If the atoms or ions are emitting light, what effect must the varying magnetosphere have had on them?

□ They must have been excited to a higher energy level (Box 5.1).

The changes in the magnetic field of the magnetosphere cause particles from the tail of the magnetosphere to move along the magnetic field lines into the atmosphere where they collide with atoms, raising them to higher energy states or even ionizing them. The particles from the tail are channelled into the polar regions forming ovals around the magnetic poles. The display we view from the ground is just a part of the full auroral oval that can be imaged by satellites (Figure 5.50).

Large variations in the solar magnetic field and solar wind, such as occur during solar flares, lead to extraordinary variations in the magnetic field on the Earth's surface. These are called geomagnetic storms. These storms interrupt long-range communications by causing the ionosphere to vary in height and density.



**Figure 5.50** The POLAR satellite launched by NASA in 1996 is being used to study the Earth's magnetosphere. In September 2001 it captured a view of auroral ovals at both poles.



- Why does variation in the ionosphere affect long-range communications?
- The radio waves used are bounced off the ionosphere in order to cover long distances (Section 5.4).

During a geomagnetic storm some radio frequencies are absorbed rather than reflected and others follow unusual paths. Such storms can also interact with conductors such as power cables. A huge geomagnetic storm on 13 March 1989 left 6 million people in the Montreal region without electrical power for 9 hours.

#### QUESTION 5.10

Venus has a core containing molten material but only a very small or no magnetic dipole field. This is thought to be because of the slow rotation of the planet. Some astronomers have speculated that the planet has been slowed down by its atmosphere. This implies that rotation was faster in the past. If this is correct how would the early magnetosphere of Venus differ from the present one?

#### QUESTION 5.11

In the early 20th century, it was assumed that the detected  $\text{CO}_2$  on Mars was a small fraction of the atmosphere, the bulk being nitrogen as on Earth. Why was it possible to take this point of view even though  $\text{N}_2$  had not been detected?

#### QUESTION 5.12

It has been suggested that the transport to Mars of sufficient greenhouse gases would eventually make the planet able to support life. How would you expect the greenhouse gases to transform the atmosphere?

#### QUESTION 5.13

The temperature in the polar regions of the Earth can be very low. Would carbon dioxide freeze out if the temperature dropped to  $-80^\circ\text{C}$  (193 K)? (The partial pressure of carbon dioxide on Earth is  $3.6 \times 10^{-4}$  bar.)

#### QUESTION 5.14

How do (a) the ozone layer and (b) the magnetic field aid the continued existence of life on Earth?

## 5.8 Summary of Chapter 5

- Remote sensing of planetary atmospheres provides information about their composition. Infrared (vibrational) spectroscopy is applicable to all atmospheric gases except for those diatomic molecules that possess no electric dipole (i.e. homonuclear diatomic molecules).
- Analysis by direct access of planetary atmospheres has successfully employed two major techniques, gas chromatography and mass spectrometry. Gas chromatography is used to separate complex gaseous mixtures. Mass spectrometry provides the relative molecular mass of a substance, and can also give information about isotopic composition.
- The atmospheres of Venus and Mars are oxidized atmospheres whose major component is carbon dioxide,  $\text{CO}_2$ . The atmosphere of Earth is an oxidizing atmosphere. The main components are nitrogen,  $\text{N}_2$ , and oxygen,  $\text{O}_2$ . The volatile inventory for a planet includes estimates of volatile materials in surface water, polar ice-caps and rocks near the surface as well as those in the atmosphere. The volatile inventories of Venus, Earth and Mars have comparable fractions of  $\text{CO}_2$ . Venus is lacking in water when compared to Earth and Mars, and Mars is lacking in nitrogen when compared to Earth and Venus. Mercury has a very tenuous atmosphere that is mainly derived from the solar wind.
- The atmospheres of Venus, Earth and Mars show vertical variations of temperature, density and pressure. On this basis, the following regions of the atmosphere can be distinguished:

The troposphere is the lowest region, in which surface heating causes convection to occur. The decrease of temperature with altitude is close to the adiabatic lapse rate.

The stratosphere, unique to Earth, is the middle region heated by the absorption of solar UV radiation by ozone,  $\text{O}_3$ . The temperature increases with altitude in this region.

The thermosphere is the highest region and is heated by direct absorption of solar UV radiation, mainly by  $\text{O}_2$  (Earth) and  $\text{CO}_2$  (Venus and Mars); the temperature increases with altitude.

In the higher reaches of the thermosphere, the UV radiation causes a substantial fraction of the gases to be ionized, forming a plasma; this region is the ionosphere.

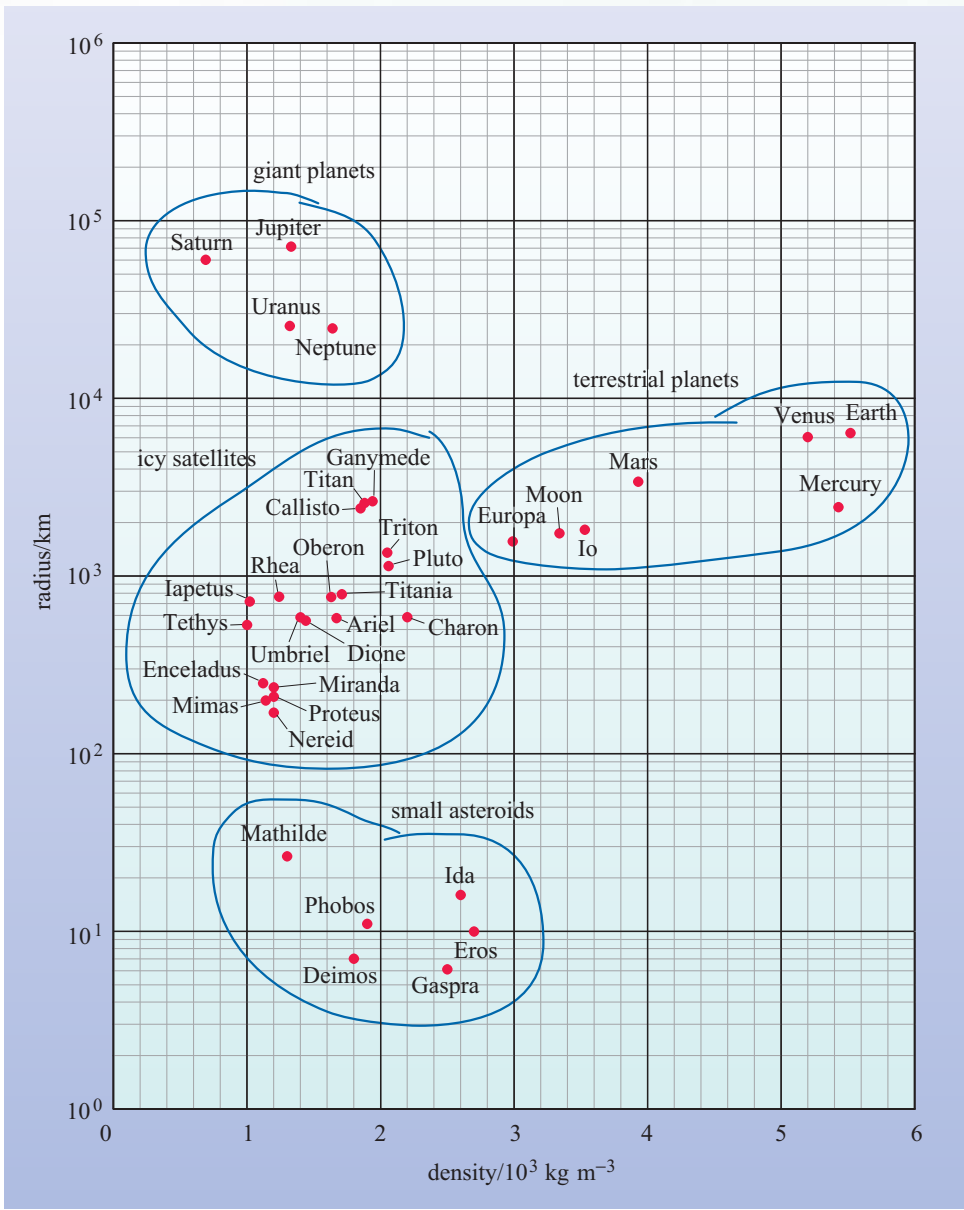
The mesosphere lies below the thermosphere and is heated and cooled through emission and absorption of infrared radiation; the temperature decreases more slowly than the adiabatic lapse rate.

- The balance between incoming solar radiation and the thermal emission by a terrestrial planet determines the mean temperature of its atmosphere and surface.
- The greenhouse effect causes mean surface temperatures to be higher than effective temperatures. It arises from the absorption of infrared radiation emitted from the surface by the atmosphere.
- Cloud formation occurs on Venus mainly as  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$  droplets, on Earth as water droplets and ice particles ( $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), and on Mars as ice ( $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{CO}_2$ ) particles. Saturation vapour pressure diagrams allow us to predict the equilibrium conditions in which clouds will form.

- Differential heating of planetary surfaces by the Sun gives rise to convective cells in the troposphere. These are known as Hadley cells. Through the Coriolis effect, the rotation of the planet imposes a west-to-east motion on these cells. Venus rotates slowly, yet its single Hadley cell structure shows high east-to-west wind speeds at high altitudes (super-rotation). On Mars, the atmosphere further circulates by condensation flow (pole to pole) and by a thermal tide (flow from day-side to night-side).
- The interplanetary magnetic field (IMF) and associated solar wind interact with the terrestrial planets to form magnetospheres. For planets without a magnetic dipole field of their own, the IMF interacts with the ionosphere; for those with a magnetic dipole field, the IMF interacts with this field. In both cases the solar wind is deflected around the planet protecting the surface.
- The Earth, which has both a magnetic dipole field and an ionosphere, has a larger and more complex magnetosphere than the other planets, including two radiation belts encircling the Earth. Variations in the IMF and solar wind give rise to aurorae and can disrupt long-range communications and power transmission.

# ANSWERS AND COMMENTS

## QUESTION 1.1



**Figure 1.52** Graph of radii of planetary bodies against their densities.

**QUESTION 1.2**

From the information in Figure 1.52, it appears that planetary objects fall into several groups. The giant planets lie together and have radii greater than 10 000 km and low densities. Another group is apparent, clustered towards the left-hand side of the graph. These are the (icy) satellites. The terrestrial planets (and terrestrial-like bodies) form another group which straggles off towards the high-density area at the right-hand side of the graph. The small asteroids that you plotted form another group.

**QUESTION 2.1**

(a) Volume of a sphere is  $\frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$  where  $r$  is the radius. Density =  $\frac{\text{mass}}{\text{volume}}$

Hence, bulk density of Earth:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \frac{5.9737 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}}{\frac{4}{3}\pi(6.371 \times 10^6)^3 \text{ m}^3} \\
 &= \frac{5.9737 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}}{1.0832 \times 10^{21} \text{ m}^3} \\
 &= 5.51 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3} \text{ (or } 5.51 \text{ g cm}^{-3}\text{)}
 \end{aligned}$$

(b) The rocks sampled in the continental areas and from the ocean floors have only about half the density of that of the bulk Earth value. To account for this discrepancy, the Earth must become denser deeper down, and contain materials more dense than the average value to balance the less dense materials near the surface. Even the dense xenoliths, which provide the deepest material that can be examined, are only about two-thirds the bulk Earth density. This means that Earth's densest material must lie at depths much greater than 100 km.

**QUESTION 2.2**

Using the density of ocean floor crustal rocks ( $3.0 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ), and the density of rocks found within the mantle at 100 km ( $3.5 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ), the linear increase in density per km depth can be calculated at  $0.005 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3} \text{ km}^{-1}$  (i.e. an increase of  $0.005 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  for every kilometre increase in depth). If this increase is extended down to 2900 km as a progressive increase, then the density of material in the outer core should be about  $17.5 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  (i.e.  $3.0 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3} + (2900 \text{ km} \times 0.005 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3} \text{ km}^{-1})$ ). In fact, calculations based on seismic studies (Section 2.2.2) indicate that the density of materials in the outer part of Earth's core is actually about  $13 \times 10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ . The discrepancy between the two values arises because this simple calculation assumes that density increases are proportional to increases in pressure. This is unlikely to be true because changes in chemical and mineralogical compositions are also known to occur.



## QUESTION 2.3

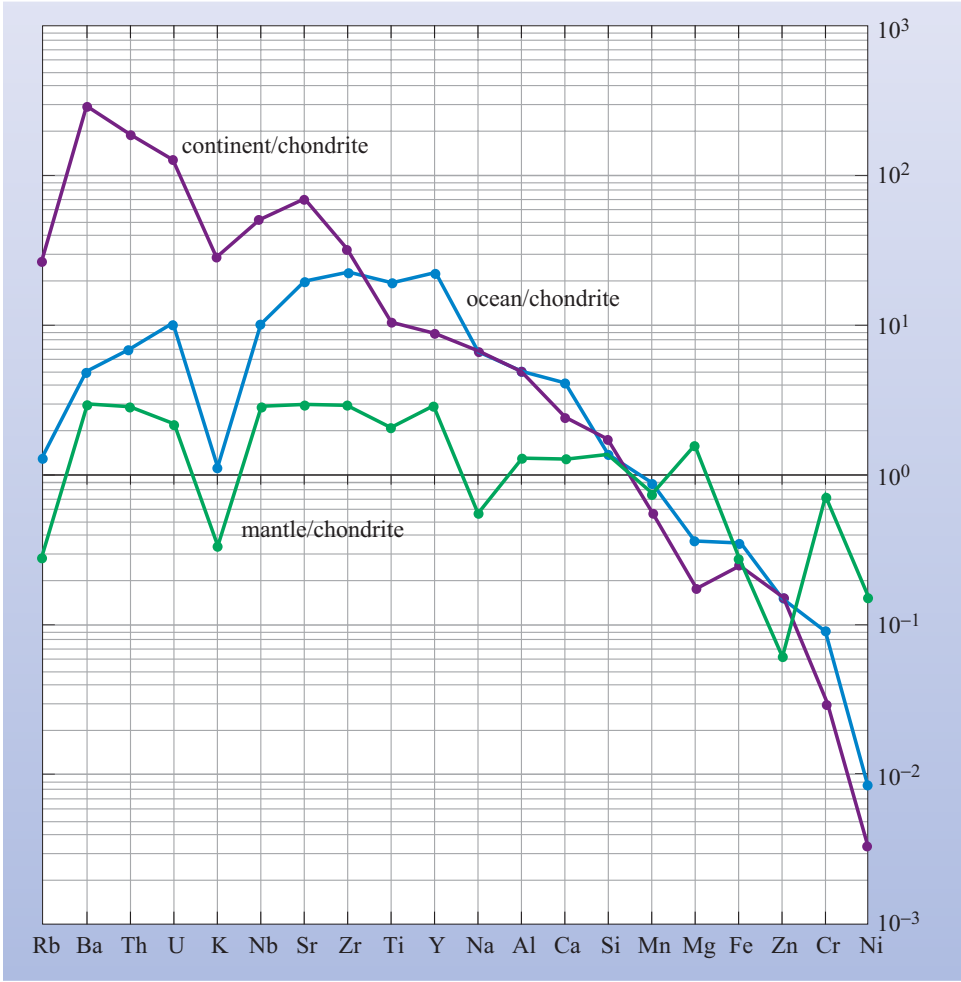
(a)

**Table 2.10** Chondrite normalized values of oceanic and continental crust and mantle materials (completed).

	mantle/chondrite		oceanic crust/chondrite		continental crust/chondrite	
SiO <sub>2</sub>	1.31	enriched	1.39	enriched	1.72	enriched
TiO <sub>2</sub> *	2.29	enriched	20.00	enriched	11.14	enriched
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	1.30	enriched	4.70	enriched	4.86	enriched
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	0.27	depleted	0.35	depleted	0.25	depleted
MnO	0.74	depleted	0.89	depleted	0.58	depleted
MgO	1.52	enriched	0.38	depleted	0.18	depleted
CaO	1.27	enriched	4.14	enriched	2.41	enriched
Na <sub>2</sub> O	0.58	depleted	6.72	enriched	6.42	enriched
K <sub>2</sub> O*	0.60	depleted	1.40	enriched	38.20	enriched
Ba	2.90	enriched	4.98	enriched	293.36	enriched
Cr*	0.75	depleted	0.093	depleted	0.030	depleted
K*	0.33	depleted	1.10	enriched	28.94	enriched
Nb	2.85	enriched	10.00	enriched	52.00	enriched
Ni*	0.15	depleted	0.008	depleted	0.003	depleted
Rb	0.28	depleted	1.29	enriched	26.29	enriched
Sr	2.91	enriched	18.73	enriched	69.28	enriched
Th	2.80	enriched	6.67	enriched	190.00	enriched
Ti*	2.16	enriched	18.88	enriched	10.51	enriched
U	2.10	enriched	10.00	enriched	130.00	enriched
Y	2.90	enriched	22.29	enriched	8.92	enriched
Zn	0.06	depleted	0.15	depleted	0.16	depleted
Zr	2.89	enriched	22.74	enriched	32.04	enriched

\* Elements that behave as a major element in one group of rocks, and as trace elements in others.

(b)



**Figure 2.28** Spidergram showing chondrite normalized peridotite, oceanic and continental crustal rocks (completed).

(c) Assuming that primitive meteorites, planetesimals and planetary embryos all condensed from similar nebula materials prior to assembling to form the Earth, then both meteoritic and Earth materials should display similar bulk compositions. However, if terrestrial rocks did have a chondritic composition, then the chondrite normalized value of every element should be 1. Clearly this is not the case, since the three rock types you have plotted show different patterns of enrichment and depletion when chondrite normalized. For instance, elements Rb to Si are enriched in crustal rocks, whilst Mn to Ni are depleted. Moreover, Rb to Zr are much more enriched in continental crust than they are in oceanic crust (remember the vertical axis is a log scale). By contrast mantle (peridotite) rocks are much more similar to chondrite composition (i.e. nearer to  $\text{conc}_{\text{rel}} = 1$ ), but nevertheless display depletion in Rb, K, Na, Mn, Fe, Zn, Cr and Ni. To summarize, the compositional data in Table 2.2 indicates that there must have been a segregation of elements at a later stage into different layers of the Earth, or else some of the original elements have been ‘lost’ in another manner (Section 2.3.3).

**QUESTION 2.4**

From Table A1:

Mass of Mercury =  $0.330 \times 10^{24}$  kg; mass of Earth  $5.97 \times 10^{24}$  kg.

Number of planetary embryos required to assemble Mercury:

$$\frac{\text{mass of Mercury}}{\text{mass of planetary embryo}} = \frac{0.33 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}}{5 \times 10^{22} \text{ kg}} = 6.6 \text{ (i.e. 6–7 planetary embryos).}$$

Number of planetary embryos required to assemble Earth:

$$\frac{5.97 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}}{5 \times 10^{22} \text{ kg}} = 119.4 \text{ (i.e. 119–120 planetary embryos).}$$

**QUESTION 2.5**

Collision of planetary embryos during the assembly of Earth would have led to the development of a largely molten body. The nickel–iron component of the original chondritic composition (from which the planetesimals, and hence the planetary embryos formed) would have been much denser and have a higher melting point than the silicates. In this molten state, these denser components would have sunk towards the centre of the newly formed planet, eventually coalescing to form the nickel–iron-rich core. In effect, this segregation process would remove both iron and nickel from the outer layers (i.e. mantle) of the Earth so producing the relative depletions of Fe and Ni shown on the spidergram. Later on, after the last embryo–embryo collision, segregation of the mantle material itself to form oceanic or continental crust would have led to even greater relative depletion of iron and nickel in crustal materials because these elements were preferentially retained in mantle minerals.

**QUESTION 2.6**

The number of seconds in a year ( $\text{s yr}^{-1}$ ) is about  $3.2 \times 10^7$  so the rate of heating is:

$$\frac{3 \times 10^{19} \text{ J yr}^{-1}}{3.2 \times 10^7 \text{ s yr}^{-1}} = 9.4 \times 10^{11} \text{ J s}^{-1} = 9.4 \times 10^{11} \text{ W.}$$

The rate of tidal heating generated within the Earth =  $\frac{9.4 \times 10^{11} \text{ W}}{6 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}} = 1.6 \times 10^{-13} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ .

## QUESTION 2.7

(a) The age of the Earth is  $4.6 \times 10^9$  yr. To calculate the proportion of the original radiogenic isotope remaining today, you first need to determine how many half-lives have occurred since the Earth was formed:

$$\text{Number of half-lives} = \frac{\text{age of Earth}}{\text{isotopic half-life}}$$

The proportion remaining after one half-life is  $\left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^1 = 0.5$ , after 2 half-lives is

$$\left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^2 = 0.25, \text{ and after three half-lives is } \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^3 = 0.125.$$

$$\text{For } ^{40}\text{K} \text{ the number of half-lives} = \frac{4.6 \times 10^9 \text{ yr}}{1.3 \times 10^9 \text{ yr}} = 3.54 \text{ half-lives.}$$

$$\text{So the proportion remaining today is } \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^{3.54} = 0.086$$

Note: on many calculators this function can be performed by the key labelled  $x^y$ , which is often operated by the **SHIFT** key. Your calculator may differ in detail, but for many common calculators this calculation would be performed by keying:

$$0.5 \text{ [SHIFT] [x}^y\text{] } 3.54 \text{ [=]}$$

$$\text{For } ^{232}\text{Th} \text{ the number of half-lives} = \frac{4.6 \times 10^9 \text{ yr}}{13.9 \times 10^9 \text{ yr}} = 0.33 \text{ half-lives.}$$

$$\text{So the proportion remaining today is } \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^{0.33} = 0.80.$$

(b) The amount of radiogenic heating is determined by utilizing the proportion of the different radiogenic isotopes remaining today (you need to calculate the values for  $^{235}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{U}$  as above) to calculate the original heat budget.

If only 0.086 of the original  $^{40}\text{K}$  remains today and its present rate of heat generation is  $2.8 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  (from Table 2.6), its original heat budget

$$= \frac{2.8 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}}{0.086} = 3.26 \times 10^{-11} \text{ W kg}^{-1} \text{ (or } 32.6 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}\text{).}$$

Likewise:

$$\text{Initial heating by } ^{232}\text{Th} \text{ decay} = \frac{1.04 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}}{0.80} = 1.30 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}.$$

$$\text{Initial heating by } ^{235}\text{U} \text{ decay} = \frac{0.04 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}}{0.011} = 3.64 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}.$$

$$\text{Initial heating by } ^{238}\text{U} \text{ decay} = \frac{0.96 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}}{0.49} = 1.96 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}.$$

By adding the four answers, the total initial heating was therefore about  $4 \times 10^{-11} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ , compared with modern total of about  $5 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$  (obtained by adding the four present-day heating rates given in Table 2.6), in other words at least eight times greater (we have not accounted for other short-lived isotopes such as  $^{26}\text{Al}$  and the heat from their decay). This initial decay would have originally provided a major source of internal heating even in relatively small planetary bodies, and so would have contributed significantly to early planetary differentiation.

#### QUESTION 2.8

(a)

**Table 2.11** How layers within Earth are defined (completed).

Layer	How layer is defined
lithosphere	on the basis of its strength and the nature of heat transfer
asthenosphere	on the basis of its strength and the nature of heat transfer
crust	Seismically (note also that the Moho corresponds to a <i>compositional</i> change)
mantle	Seismically (note also that the Moho corresponds to a <i>compositional</i> change)
core	seismically

(b) Earth's core, mantle and crust are all defined on the basis of changes in seismic speed, which reflect differences in composition and mineralogy. The core is iron-rich, whereas the mantle and crust are silicate-rich. The crust is less dense and more silicate-rich than the underlying mantle. Interfaces between all three of these layers are marked by sharp changes in the speed at which seismic waves are transmitted. By contrast, the lithosphere is distinguished from the asthenosphere on the basis of strength and the differences by which they each transfer heat. The lithosphere comprises Earth's crust and the rigid, non-convecting uppermost part of the mantle. Heat passes through this zone by conduction and advection, and about two-thirds of the global surfaceward heat transfer through the lithosphere is accomplished by plate recycling, involving the creation and destruction of lithospheric plates. The asthenosphere is effectively all of the mantle below the lithosphere, and it loses its heat through solid-state convection.

#### QUESTION 2.9

(a) The lithosphere must thicken over time since the rate of radiogenic heating will decline.

(b) A similar argument regarding lithospheric thickening will not apply to tidally heated bodies because tidal heating does not decline in the same manner. Whilst a satellite remains in the same type of orbit, the tidal heating effects will remain. (Note: in systems involving several satellites, a satellite can experience several interludes of orbital resonance, each resulting in a heating episode. In such a situation, the lithosphere would continually thicken and thin until such a time when the nature of the orbital interactions changed.) In general, orbital distances between satellites and planets are likely to increase over time (Section 2.3.3), and so the effects of tidal heating will decline. However, this decline is likely to occur over a different time-scale to that of the common radioactive decay systems.



## QUESTION 3.1

(a)

(i) Since this planet has a stabilized crust, it must have already passed through the period of intense bombardment, but it will still retain heat from accretion and these large impact events and also from self-compression and segregation of the core. Another major source of heat will come from radiogenic decay. This would be greater in a young planet due to the initial concentrations of radiogenic isotopes. Furthermore the passage of only a relatively short period of geological time since formation would mean few half-lives would have elapsed.

(ii) For an ancient planet, the planet-forming heating processes (i.e. those created by impacts and the core-forming event) would have dissipated significantly, leaving radiogenic heating as the major source of heat. Given this is an ancient planet, only half the size of Earth, it would have contained considerably smaller volumes of radiogenic mantle and crust compared with Earth. Moreover, its antiquity will mean much of the radiogenic material will have already decayed (i.e. many half-lives will have elapsed). Therefore, the planet will produce only a fraction of the radiogenic heating currently occurring within the Earth. A greatly thickened lithosphere would suggest that any heat loss is largely by conduction, rather than convection or associated plate tectonic movement. In summary, the diminished radiogenic decay would be the only significant source of internal heating.

(iii) Since this satellite contains only a very small rocky core, the amount of heating generated by radioactive decay would be small despite its relatively young age. Primordial heat remaining from accretion, self-compression, and internal differentiation may still be present.

The dominant heating would be due to the massive tidal effects resulting from its close elliptical orbit and the enormous gravitational attraction of the nearby giant planet. However, the relatively large size of this satellite (its 3000 km diameter is similar to that of Europa) means it would also retain heat better than a smaller body because it has a smaller surface area to volume ratio (Box 2.8). It would therefore have the potential to heat up internally to such a point where melting of the icy mantle could begin. This melting seems to have occurred since the extensive recent resurfacing and is likely to be the result of cryovolcanism.

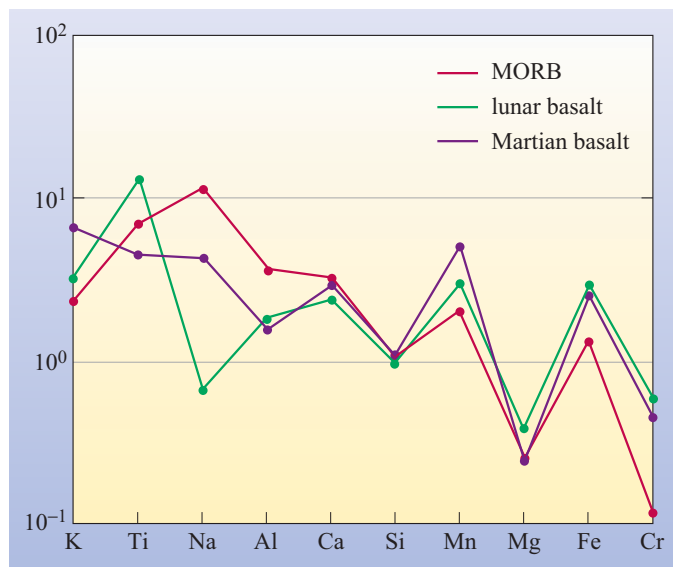
(b) The most volcanically active bodies are likely to be (i) and (iii) despite their very different heating processes. However, we don't have enough information to determine which of these is the more volcanically active, except to say that the young Earth-like planet will exhibit silicate volcanism and lava eruptions which are likely to be more frequent and intense than those of present-day Earth. The young icy satellite moon will be characterized by active cryovolcanism and associated resurfacing. By contrast, the old, small rocky planet will certainly be the least volcanically active. Its thick lithosphere and much reduced radiogenic decay means it may have been volcanically and tectonically dead for a considerable part of its later history.

**QUESTION 3.2**

(a) The major element compositions of lunar and Martian basalts differ, but comparison with peridotite using the tabulated data reveals that both exhibit similar degrees of relative enrichment in Al, Ca, Mn and Fe, and depletion in Mg and Cr (Table 3.4). This is similar to the pattern of element enrichment and depletion observed between mantle peridotite and ocean basalt (MORB) on Earth (see also the answer to Question 2.3b for spidergrams of peridotite compared with oceanic basaltic crust). Since partial melting of mantle peridotite is thought to be the source of basaltic lavas on Earth, the similarity in the pattern of element enrichment and depletion in both lunar and Martian lavas compared with mantle compositions probably indicates that they were also originally derived from a peridotite-like source. These data are shown graphically in Figure 3.43 (a spidergram normalizing the basalt types against peridotite composition, i.e. ‘mantle normalized’), from which it can be seen that the Martian basalt and MORB patterns are remarkably similar. Lunar basalt differs slightly in that it is relatively depleted in Na and enriched in Ti compared with MORB and Martian basalt, probably because it is derived from mantle material that had previously experienced loss of volatiles and retention of refractory elements during the Moon’s formation (Section 2.3.3).

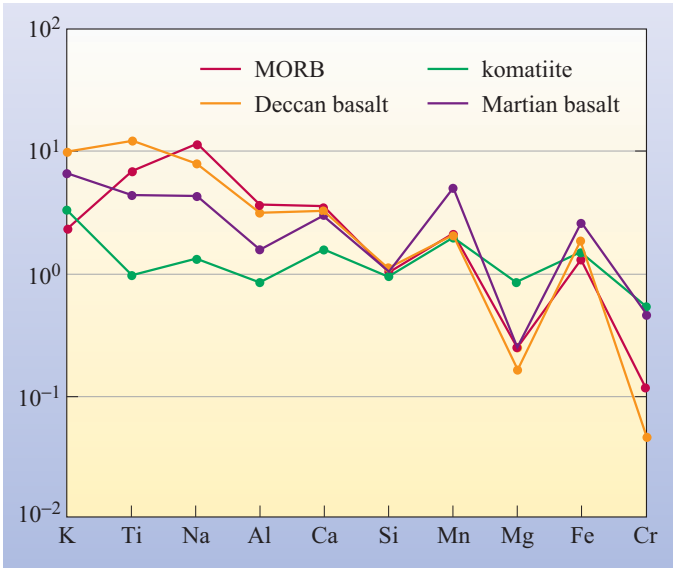
**Table 3.4** Element enrichment and depletion of basalt types compared to mantle peridotite.

	MORB/mantle		Deccan basalt/mantle		Komatiite/mantle		Lunar basalt/mantle		Martian basalt/mantle	
SiO <sub>2</sub>	1.06	enriched	1.07	enriched	1.00	—	0.94	depleted	1.10	enriched
TiO <sub>2</sub>	7.00	enriched	12.50	enriched	1.00	—	13.00	enriched	4.50	enriched
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	3.58	enriched	3.19	enriched	0.86	depleted	1.79	enriched	1.56	enriched
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	1.32	enriched	1.80	enriched	1.49	enriched	2.88	enriched	2.54	enriched
MnO	2.00	enriched	2.00	enriched	2.00	enriched	3.00	enriched	5.00	enriched
MgO	0.25	depleted	0.16	depleted	0.84	depleted	0.38	depleted	0.25	depleted
CaO	3.26	enriched	3.12	enriched	1.56	enriched	2.38	enriched	2.94	enriched
Na <sub>2</sub> O	11.33	enriched	8.00	enriched	1.33	enriched	0.67	depleted	4.33	enriched
K <sub>2</sub> O	2.33	enriched	10.00	enriched	3.33	enriched	3.33	enriched	6.67	enriched
Cr <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	0.12	depleted	0.05	depleted	0.51	depleted	0.58	depleted	0.47	depleted



**Figure 3.43** Spidergram normalizing basalt types against peridotite mantle composition.

(b) According to the data in Table 3.1, mantle peridotite is characterized by relatively low  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{CaO}$ ,  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$ , and relatively high  $\text{MgO}$ . The example that most closely matches this compositional pattern is komatiite lava (Figure 3.44). This probably represents large degrees of partial melting of a peridotite-like parent, with relatively little modification during magma migration from melt source to surface eruption (i.e. they are ‘primitive’ compositions). By contrast, the Deccan continental flood basalt provinces and the Martian lava contain much less  $\text{MgO}$ , and higher  $\text{CaO}$ ,  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$ ,  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{SiO}_2$ . These data are also shown graphically in Figure 3.44. Smaller degrees of partial melting lead to significant increases of incompatible elements in the melt (e.g.  $\text{CaO}$ ,  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$ ), whilst  $\text{MgO}$  remains behind in the mantle residue. Thus, smaller degrees of partial melting, together with other modification processes (e.g. crystallization and separation of mineral fractions) acting upon the magma during its migration from source to eruption, will produce more MORB-like compositions. This suggests processes similar to those producing MORB-like magmas on Earth apparently also operated on Mars (and by analogy, may have operated in other terrestrial-like bodies).



**Figure 3.44** Spidergram normalizing basalt types against peridotite mantle composition.

QUESTION 3.3

Mars is a small, silicate planet, lacking major satellites. Its only present-day source of heat must be from the decay of long-lived radioactive isotopes, plus whatever remains of its primordial heat. Since it is small (its mass is only about one-tenth that of Earth), its active volcanic lifetime is likely to have been relatively short, but not as short as that of the Moon. Like the Earth and Moon, abundant evidence of lava eruptions might be expected, particularly in the early history of the planet. Moreover, because Mars is rich in volatiles, there should be evidence of pyroclastic eruptions and, because Mars has an atmosphere (albeit a relatively low density one), convecting eruption columns would also have been possible.

**QUESTION 4.1**

Because the pit is so tiny, the meteorite was clearly a very small one. Its small size means that its speed must have been severely limited by atmospheric drag. Thus, it more nearly resembles a pebble thrown into mud rather than an explosive hypervelocity impact. The asymmetrical distribution of ejecta suggests that the meteorite was travelling from right to left, and it probably struck the road at an oblique angle.

**QUESTION 4.2**

Aside from the actual crater, a heat pulse and shock wave will affect the immediate environment. Large impacts will have regional, or even global effects that may kill off many organisms, or even cause mass extinctions of species. Re-entering ejecta overheat the atmosphere causing forest fires, ozone depletion, possibly greenhouse warming depending on the composition of the target, followed by ‘nuclear winter’ cooling caused by material lofted into the stratosphere. Impacts into ocean present an additional danger. Impact-generated tsunamis could devastate huge areas, and since oceans are large targets, this may represent the most substantial impact-related hazard to human populations.

**QUESTION 4.3**

The proportion of elliptical craters is negligible. Given the wide range of possible impact angles, this shows that the process of cratering favours the production of circular craters over elliptical ones.

**QUESTION 4.4**

Starting in the centre of the image, a small cluster of yellow/green can be seen. Moving out from there, most of the base of the crater is red, with blue dominating in the terraces and beyond the rim, and more yellow in the bottom part of the image. In this case, blue is probably relatively fresh ejecta, or fresh material exposed in the terraces. Bright red is associated with deposits of impact melt in the base of the crater, and the yellow tones in the middle may be iron-rich rocks brought up from depth during the formation of the central peaks.

**QUESTION 4.5**

Truly diagnostic impact signatures in layers of rock that might be distant from the impact site, are shocked quartz containing planar deformation features, and tektites. Chemical analyses of the suspected impact layer may reveal unusual abundances of certain elements, such as iridium, which are relatively much more abundant in meteorites than in the Earth’s crust.

Impact structures may be buried, in which case more local shock features will be absent or eroded (although deep coring can reveal rocks from the structure itself). If the structure is eroded, and the original target rocks are accessible, we might see breccias, shatter cones and pseudotachylites within and around the structure. In some cases we can employ techniques used in geophysical exploration, such as gravity meters and magnetometers, to infer the presence of a buried structure, as illustrated in Figure 4.3.

**QUESTION 4.6**

Figure 4.24 right (an image of the heavily cratered terrain on the Moon) shows a nearly saturated surface. It would be impossible to fit a large crater on it without overprinting older ones. Figure 4.24 (left) shows an area of the lunar mare. It is clearly not saturated, and must be younger than that shown in the image on the right.

**QUESTION 5.1**

Mass spectrometry identifies molecules on the basis of their masses, so this method would not distinguish between  $^{14}\text{N}_2$  (RMM = 28) and  $^{12}\text{C}_2^{1}\text{H}_4$  (RMM = 28). (Instruments with very high resolution could differentiate between the molecules but have not, as yet, been sent on planetary missions.)

Each of these chemically distinct molecules could be identified by gas chromatography, provided that the instrument had been calibrated for each substance.

**QUESTION 5.2**

Only diatomic molecules with a dipole moment, i.e. heteronuclear diatomic molecules, can be detected by infrared spectroscopy, so  $\text{H}_2$  would not be detected but CO and HCl would.

**QUESTION 5.3**

Venus:

$$P_s = 92 \text{ bar} = 9.2 \times 10^6 \text{ Pa} = 9.2 \times 10^6 \text{ kg m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}$$

Using Equation 5.3:

$$m_c = \frac{9.2 \times 10^6 \text{ kg m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}}{8.90 \text{ m s}^{-2}}$$

$$m_c = 1.03 \times 10^6 \text{ kg m}^{-2}$$

Mars:

$$P_s = 6.3 \times 10^{-3} \text{ bar} = 6.3 \times 10^2 \text{ Pa} = 6.3 \times 10^2 \text{ kg m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}$$

Using Equation 5.3:

$$m_c = \frac{6.3 \times 10^2 \text{ kg m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}}{3.72 \text{ m s}^{-2}}$$

$$m_c = 1.69 \times 10^2 \text{ kg m}^{-2}$$

The column mass for Venus is about 100 times that for Earth and the column mass for Mars is about one-sixtieth of that for Earth.



**QUESTION 5.4**

The flux due to radiogenic heating is  $5 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}$ . The mass of the Earth is  $5.97 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}$ . The total power from radiogenic heating is thus  $(5 \times 10^{-12} \text{ W kg}^{-1}) \times (5.97 \times 10^{24} \text{ kg}) = 2.99 \times 10^{13} \text{ W}$ .

The total solar power absorbed is  $\pi R^2$  times the solar flux density multiplied by  $(1 - a)$ , which is the fraction absorbed. The albedo for the Earth is 0.30 (see Table 5.4). The radius of Earth is  $6.371 \times 10^3 \text{ km}$ , which is  $6.371 \times 10^6 \text{ m}$ .

Total solar power absorbed =  $\pi R^2 \times \text{solar flux density} \times (1 - a)$   
 $= \pi (6.371 \times 10^6 \text{ m})^2 \times (1.38 \times 10^3 \text{ W m}^{-2}) \times (1 - 0.3) = 1.23 \times 10^{17} \text{ W}$ .

The ratio of these powers is:

$$\frac{1.23 \times 10^{17} \text{ W}}{2.99 \times 10^{13} \text{ W}} = 4.1 \times 10^3$$

Therefore the Sun delivers about 4000 times as much power to the Earth as does radiogenic heating.

Percentage of energy from radiogenic heating =  $\frac{2.99 \times 10^{13} \text{ W}}{1.23 \times 10^{17} \text{ W}} \times 100\% = 0.02\%$

**QUESTION 5.5**

From Wien's displacement law, at a temperature of 288 K

$$\lambda_{\text{peak}} = \frac{2.90 \times 10^{-3} \text{ m K}}{288 \text{ K}} = 10^{-5} \text{ m}$$

Thus the peak wavelength is  $10^{-5} \text{ m}$  or  $10 \mu\text{m}$ . Electromagnetic radiation of this wavelength is in the infrared, and so the Earth's radiation is most intense in the infrared region.

**QUESTION 5.6**

A high albedo indicates a highly reflecting surface. This suggests either extensive cloud cover or a nearly white surface. A high albedo and large distance from the Sun are consistent with a low temperature.

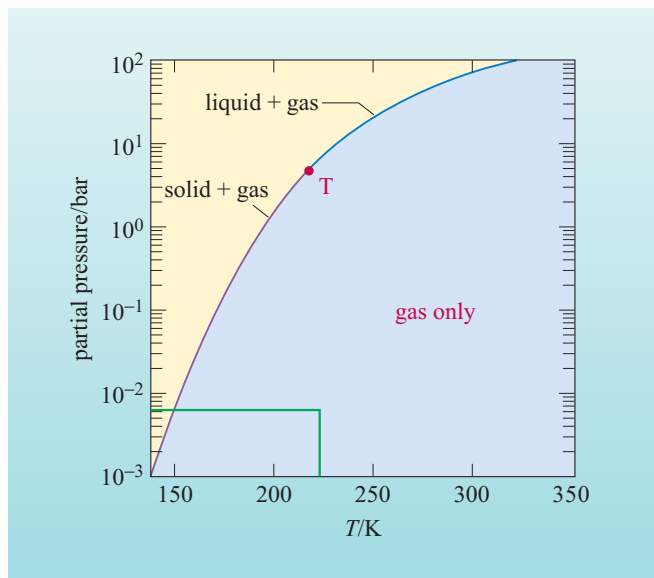
The atmosphere of Triton is extremely thin and cloud-free; the surface is composed of highly reflective icy material.

**QUESTION 5.7**

By absorbing infrared radiation that is not otherwise absorbed by the Earth's atmosphere, the chlorofluorocarbons add to the greenhouse effect. The temperature of the Earth's troposphere will therefore be increased by their presence. This role as a greenhouse gas is different and quite separate from the role of chlorofluorocarbons in depleting the ozone layer.

## QUESTION 5.8

The partial pressure of  $\text{CO}_2$  at the surface of Mars will be close to the total surface pressure,  $6.3 \times 10^{-3}$  bar. A horizontal line representing this pressure on Figure 5.32 would intersect a vertical line at the surface temperature of 223 K, in the area labelled ‘gas only’ (see Figure 5.51). Condensation of  $\text{CO}_2$  will not occur on Mars at this temperature.



**Figure 5.51** Saturation vapour pressure diagram for  $\text{CO}_2$  showing the state of  $\text{CO}_2$  at 223 K and  $6.3 \times 10^{-3}$  bar.

This question only considered the average temperature, 223 K, but at the poles during winter the temperature can be much lower, below 150 K. At these temperatures,  $\text{CO}_2$  will condense as a solid according to Figure 5.51.

## QUESTION 5.9

The initial speed of this piece of atmosphere at the equator will be the planet's surface rotation speed, which is  $0.997/243$  of that of the Earth. The speed of the piece of atmosphere at  $30^\circ \text{N}$  will be  $0.997/243$  of the speed of a piece at the same latitude on Earth. So the gain in speed relative to the surface will also be  $0.997/243$  of that of the gain on the Earth which we calculated (Section 5.6) to be  $134 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . This is

$$\frac{0.997 \times 134 \text{ m s}^{-1}}{243} = 0.55 \text{ m s}^{-1}$$

As Venus rotates in a retrograde direction, the direction will be east to west.

## QUESTION 5.10

If the rotation of Venus were sufficiently fast, then it would generate a magnetic dipole field (see Chapter 2). The magnetosphere of Venus would then more closely resemble that of the Earth, with the IMF interacting with the planetary magnetic field.

**QUESTION 5.11**

The atmosphere had only been probed remotely and detection of atmospheric gases would have been through infrared spectroscopy. As  $\text{N}_2$  is a homonuclear molecule, it would not be detected in this way and so it would not be possible to say whether it were present or not. It was assumed to be nitrogen because the bulk of the Earth's atmosphere is nitrogen.

**QUESTION 5.12**

The initial effect of the greenhouse gases is to raise the atmospheric temperature. This would cause evaporation of some carbon dioxide and water ice from the polar ice-caps and from the permafrost. With the added contribution of these gases, further evaporation would occur. If the temperature and pressure rose sufficiently, water could exist in the liquid state, the basis for the far-fetched suggestion in the question.

**QUESTION 5.13**

No. From Figure 5.32, even at this low temperature the partial pressure is too low for carbon dioxide to condense. The point corresponding to 193 K and  $3.6 \times 10^{-4}$  bar falls below the region shown in Figure 5.32 but, assuming the curve continues smoothly, would be in the gas only region.

**QUESTION 5.14**

(a) Absorption of UV radiation from the Sun by ozone prevents it reaching ground level (Section 5.4.2). (b) The magnetic field deflects high-energy solar wind particles around the Earth so that few of them reach the surface.

Both short wavelength UV radiation and high-energy solar wind particles are harmful to life.

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APPENDIX A USEFUL PLANETARY DATA

Table A1 Basic data on the planets (including the Moon).

	Mercury	Venus	Earth	Moon	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn	Uranus	Neptune	Pluto
Mass										
/10 <sup>24</sup> kg	0.330	4.87	5.97	0.074	0.642	1900	569	86.8	102	0.013
/Earth masses	0.055	0.815	1.00	0.012	0.107	318	95.2	14.4	17.1	0.002
Orbital semi-major axis <sup>a</sup>										
/10 <sup>6</sup> km	57.91	108.2	149.6	149.6	227.9	778.4	1427	2871	4498	5906
/AU	0.39	0.72	1.00	1.00	1.52	5.20	9.54	19.19	30.07	39.48
Orbital eccentricity	0.206	0.007	0.017	0.055	0.093	0.048	0.054	0.047	0.009	0.249
Orbital inclination /degrees	7.0	3.4	0.0	5.2	1.9	1.3	2.5	0.8	1.8	17.1
Orbital period <sup>b</sup>	88.0	224.7	365.0	27.3	686.5	11.86	29.42	83.75	163.7	248.0
days	days	days	days	days	days	yr	yr	yr	yr	yr
Axial rotation period <sup>b</sup> /days	58.6	243	0.997	27.3	1.03	0.412	0.444	0.718	0.671	6.39
Axial inclination /degrees	0.1	177.3	23.5	6.7	25.2	3.1	26.7	97.9	29.6	119.6
Polar radius/km	2440	6052	6357	1738	3375	66 850	54 360	24 970	24 340	1137
Equatorial radius/km	2440	6052	6378	1738	3397	71 490	60 270	25 560	24 770	1137
Mean radius <sup>c</sup> /km	2440	6052	6371	1738	3390	69 910	58 230	25 360	24 620	1137
Density/10 <sup>3</sup> kg m <sup>-3</sup>	5.43	5.20	5.51	3.34	3.93	1.33	0.69	1.32	1.64	2.1
Surface gravity/m s <sup>-2</sup>	3.7	8.9	9.8	1.6	3.7	23.1	9.0	8.7	11.1	0.7
Mean surface temperature/K	443	733	288	250	223					≥40
Effective cloud-top temperature/K						120	89	53	54	
Temperature at 1 bar pressure/K						165	135	75	70	
Rings	0	0	0	0	0	few	many	several	few	0
Satellites	0	0	1		2	≥39	≥30	≥21	≥8	1
Atmospheric surface pressure/bar <sup>d</sup>	≈10 <sup>-15</sup>	92.1	1.01	≈10 <sup>-14</sup>	6.3 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>					≈10 <sup>-5</sup>
Atmospheric surface density/kg m <sup>-3</sup>	≈10 <sup>-13</sup>	67	1.293	≈10 <sup>-13</sup>	0.018					≈10 <sup>-4</sup>
Atmospheric column mass <sup>e</sup> /kg m <sup>-2</sup>	≈10 <sup>-11</sup>	1.03 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	1.03 × 10 <sup>4</sup>	≈10 <sup>-11</sup>	1.69 × 10 <sup>2</sup>					≈1
Atmospheric main components	O Na	CO <sub>2</sub> (N <sub>2</sub> )	N <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	Ar H <sub>2</sub>	CO <sub>2</sub> (N <sub>2</sub> )	H <sub>2</sub> He	H <sub>2</sub> He	H <sub>2</sub> He	H <sub>2</sub> He	N <sub>2</sub> (CH <sub>4</sub> )
(relatively minor components in parentheses)	H <sub>2</sub> (He)		(H <sub>2</sub> O) (Ar)	He Na	(Ar) (O <sub>2</sub> )	(CH <sub>4</sub> )	(CH <sub>4</sub> )	(CH <sub>4</sub> )	(CH <sub>4</sub> )	(CO <sub>2</sub> )

<sup>a</sup> Semi-major axis also represents the *mean* distance from the Sun.

<sup>b</sup> These are sidereal periods (i.e. referenced to the stars rather than to the Sun) quoted in Earth days or years.

<sup>c</sup> The mean radius is defined as the *volumetric* radius (i.e. the radius the body would have if it were a sphere of the same mass), and is calculated by  $(R_c^2 R_p)^{1/3}$ . The values quoted here for the gas giants are for the atmospheric layer where the pressure is equal to 1 bar (this also applies to the values for surface gravity).

<sup>d</sup> Although the SI unit for pressure is the pascal, we use bar here for simplicity and easy comparison, as the Earth's surface atmospheric pressure ≈1 bar. Note 1 bar = 10<sup>5</sup> Pa.

<sup>e</sup> Column mass is the mass of atmosphere situated above each unit area (1 m<sup>2</sup>) of the planet's surface.

**Table A2** Planetary satellites.

Planet	Satellite	Mean distance from planet/ $10^3$ km	Orbital period/days	Mean radius <sup>a</sup> /km	Mass/ $10^{20}$ kg	Density/ $10^3 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$
Earth	Moon	384	27.3	1738	735	3.34
Mars	Phobos	9.4	0.32	11.1	0.00011	1.90
	Deimos	23.5	1.26	6.2	0.000018	1.76
Jupiter	Io	422	1.77	1821	893	3.53
	Europa	671	3.55	1565	480	2.99
	Ganymede	1070	7.15	2634	1482	1.94
	Callisto	1883	16.7	2403	1076	1.85
	≥35 others					
Saturn	Mimas	186	0.94	199	0.38	1.14
	Enceladus	238	1.37	249	0.73	1.21
	Tethys	295	1.89	530	6.2	1.00
	Dione	377	2.74	560	10.5	1.44
	Rhea	527	4.52	764	23.1	1.24
	Titan	1222	15.95	2575	1346	1.88
	Iapetus	3561	79.3	718	15.9	1.02
	≥23 others					
Uranus	Miranda	130	1.42	236	0.66	1.20
	Ariel	191	2.52	579	13.5	1.7
	Umbriel	266	4.14	585	11.7	1.4
	Titania	436	8.71	789	35.3	1.71
	Oberon	583	13.46	761	30.1	1.63
	≥16 others					
Neptune	Proteus	118	1.12	209	≈0.5?	≈1.2?
	Triton	355	5.88	1353	21.5	2.05
	Nereid	5513	360	170	≈0.3?	≈1.2?
	≥5 others					
Pluto	Charon	19.4	6.39	586	19.0	2.2

<sup>a</sup> The mean radius is defined as the *volumetric* radius (i.e. the radius the body would have if it were a sphere of the same mass).

**Table A3** Asteroids that have been targets of spacecraft fly-bys or encounters.

Asteroid <sup>a</sup>	Spacecraft	Encounter date	Asteroid size/km	Mean radius <sup>b</sup> /km	Density/ $\text{kg m}^{-3}$	Semi-major axis/AU
(951) Gaspra	Galileo	29 Oct 1991	$19 \times 12$	6.1	$2500 \pm 1000?$	2.21
(243) Ida	Galileo	28 Aug 1993	$58 \times 23$	15.8	$2600 \pm 500$	2.86
(253) Mathilde	NEAR	27 Jun 1997	$59 \times 47$	26.4	$1300 \pm 200$	2.65
(9969) Braille	Deep Space 1	29 Jul 1999	$2 \times 1$	0.7	not known	2.34
(433) Eros	NEAR	14 Feb 2000 <sup>c</sup>	$33 \times 13$	9.69	$2670 \pm 30$	1.46
(5535) Annefrank	Stardust	2 Nov 2002	$8 \times 4$	2.5	not known	2.21

<sup>a</sup> Asteroids are initially numbered, and are then usually named also. We refer to them by (*number*) *name*.

<sup>b</sup> The mean radius is defined as the *volumetric* radius (i.e. the radius the body would have if it were a sphere of the same mass).

<sup>c</sup> NEAR went into orbit around Eros on this date. It remained there for a year and then landed on the surface of Eros on 12 Feb 2001.



**Table A4** The largest known minor bodies in the Solar System.

Object	Semi-major axis/AU	Orbital period/yr	Orbital inclination	Orbital eccentricity	Mean radius <sup>a</sup> /km
Largest bodies in the asteroid belt:					
(1) Ceres	2.77	4.61	10.6°	0.079	457
(2) Pallas	2.77	4.61	34.8°	0.230	261
(4) Vesta	2.36	3.63	7.1°	0.090	250
(10) Hygiea	3.14	5.59	3.8°	0.121	215
(511) Davida	3.17	5.65	15.9°	0.180	163
Largest <i>known</i> (as of mid-2002) bodies in the Kuiper Belt (excluding Pluto):					
2002 LM <sub>60</sub> ('Quaoar')	43.2	284	8.0°	0.036	650
2002 AW <sub>197</sub>	47.5	327	24.3°	0.128	400–650?
(28978) Ixion	39.3	246	19.7°	0.245	400–650?
2002 TX <sub>300</sub>	43.3	284	25.9°	0.121	350–600?
(20000) Varuna	43.3	285	17.1°	0.054	450

<sup>a</sup> The mean radius is defined as the *volumetric* radius (i.e. the radius the body would have if it were a sphere of the same mass).

**Table A5** Some selected comets.

Comet <sup>a</sup>	Perihelion distance/AU	Semi-major axis/AU	Orbital period/yr	Eccentricity	Inclination	Velocity at perihelion/km s <sup>−1</sup>
2P/Enke	0.338	2.22	3.30	0.847	11.8°	69.6
46P/Wirtanen	1.059	3.09	5.44	0.658	11.7°	37.3
81P/Wild 2	1.590	3.44	6.40	0.539	3.2°	29.3
26P/Grigg–Skjellerup	1.118	3.04	5.31	0.663	22.3°	36.0
55P/Tempel–Tuttle	0.977	10.3	33.2	0.906	162.5°	41.6
1P/Halley	0.587	17.9	76.0	0.967	162.2°	54.5
109P/Swift–Tuttle	0.958	26.3	135	0.964	113.4°	42.6
153P/Ikeya–Zhang	0.507	51.0	367	0.990	28.1°	59.0
Hale–Bopp	0.925	184	≈2500	0.995	89.4°	43.8
Hyakutake	0.230	1490	≈58000	0.9998	124.9°	87.8

<sup>a</sup> Well observed periodic comets (i.e. short-period comets) are numbered, somewhat like asteroids, and this is indicated by the designation *number* P/, for example 2P/Enke.

**Table A6** Major annual meteor showers.

Date of maximum rate	Name of shower	Hourly meteor rate	Parent comet
3 Jan	Quadrantids	130	unknown
12 Aug	Perseids	80	Swift–Tuttle
21 Oct	Orionids	25	Halley
17 Nov	Leonids	25 <sup>a</sup>	Tempel–Tuttle
13 Dec	Geminids	90	(3200) Phaethon <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> This rate is usually what is observed, but every 33 years or so, this shower can display much higher rates.

<sup>b</sup> When discovered, Phaethon was assumed to be an asteroid as no cometary coma was observed. However it is likely that some activity has been present in the past.

**Table A7** Some notable Solar System exploration missions.

Mission	Launch	Description
Sputnik 1 (USSR)	4 Oct 1957	First Earth-orbiting satellite. Remained in orbit for 92 days.
Pioneer 4 (USA)	3 Mar 1959	4 Mar 1959: first lunar fly-by (within 60 000 km of Moon's surface).
Luna 2 (USSR)	12 Sep 1959	14 Sep 1959: first spacecraft to land (impact) on the Moon.
Venera 1 (USSR)	12 Feb 1961	19 May 1961: first Venus fly-by. (Contact lost before fly-by.)
Mars 1 (USSR)	1 Nov 1962	19 Jun 1963: first Mars fly-by. (Contact lost before fly-by.)
Venera 3 (USSR)	16 Nov 1965	1 Mar 1966: first spacecraft to land on Venus. (Contact lost before landing.)
Luna 9 (USSR)	31 Jan 1966	3 Feb 1966: First soft landing on the Moon. TV pictures returned to Earth.
Zond 5 (USSR)	14 Sep 1968	First spacecraft to orbit the Moon (18 Sep 1968) and return a payload safely to Earth (21 Sep 1968). Payload included turtles, flies, worms and plants.
Apollo 8 (USA)	21 Dec 1968	First manned mission to orbit the Moon (24 Dec 1968). Returned 27 Dec 1968.
Apollo 11 (USA)	16 July 1969	First manned landing on the Moon (20 July 1969). Crew: Neil Armstrong, Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin, Michael Collins (orbiter). Returned 24 July 1969.
Apollo 12 (USA)	14 Nov 1969	Second manned landing on the Moon (19 Nov 1969). Crew: Charles Conrad, Alan Bean, Richard Gordon (orbiter). Returned 24 Nov 1969.
Apollo 13 (USA)	11 Apr 1970	Moon mission aborted after onboard explosion on 14 Apr 1970. Crew: James Lovell, Fred Haise, John Swigert (orbiter). Returned 17 Apr 1970.
Luna 16 (USSR)	12 Sep 1970	First robotic sample-return from the Moon. Returned approximately 100 g of lunar material.
Apollo 14 (USA)	31 Jan 1971	Third manned landing on the Moon (5 Feb 1971). Crew: Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell, Stuart Roosa (orbiter). Returned 9 Feb 1971.
Mars 3 (USSR)	28 May 1971	2 Dec 1971: first spacecraft to land on Mars. Soft landing. Images returned.
Apollo 15 (USA)	26 Jul 1971	Fourth manned landing on the Moon (30 Jul 1971). Crew: David Scott, James Irwin, Alfred Worden (orbiter). Returned 7 Aug 1971. First lunar rover used.
Pioneer 10 (USA)	3 Mar 1972	First outer Solar System mission. 3 Dec 1973: fly-by of Jupiter. Currently $\approx 80$ AU from the Sun. Will reach the star Aldebaran in 2 million years!
Apollo 16 (USA)	16 Apr 1972	Fifth manned landing on the Moon (21 Apr 1972). Crew: John Young, Charles Duke, Thomas Mattingly (orbiter). Returned 27 Apr 1972.
Apollo 17 (USA)	7 Dec 1972	Sixth (and final) manned landing on the Moon (11 Dec 1972). Crew: Eugene Cernan, Harrison Schmitt, Ronald Evans (orbiter). Returned 19 Dec 1972.
Pioneer 11 (USA)	6 Apr 1973	4 Dec 1974: Jupiter fly-by. 1 Sep 1979: Saturn fly-by.
Skylab (USA)	14 May 1973	First manned orbiting 'space station'. Manned until 8 Feb 1974. Final usage of the Apollo Saturn V rocket.
Mariner 10 (USA)	3 Nov 1973	First (and only) spacecraft to go to Mercury. 5 Feb 1974: Venus fly-by. Mercury fly-bys on 29 Mar 1974, 21 Sep 1974 and 16 Mar 1975.
Viking 1 (USA)	20 Aug 1975	Mars orbiter and lander. 19 June 1976: reached Mars. 20 Jul 1976: lander touched down.

**Table A7** continued.

Mission	Launch	Description
Viking 2 (USA)	4 Sept 1975	Mars orbiter and lander. 7 Aug 1976: reached Mars. 3 Sep 1976: lander touched down.
Voyager 2 (USA)	20 Aug 1977	First (only) spacecraft to undertake a tour of all the giant planets. 9 Jul 1979: Jupiter fly-by. 26 Aug 1981: Saturn fly-by. 24 Jan 1986: Uranus fly-by. 25 Aug 1989: Neptune fly-by.
Voyager 1 (USA)	5 Sep 1977	5 Mar 1979: Jupiter fly-by. 12 Nov 1980: Saturn fly-by.
ISEE-3/ICE (USA)	12 Aug 1978	11 Sep 1985: first spacecraft to ‘distant fly-by’ a comet (Giacobini–Zinner).
Venera 13 (USSR)	30 Oct 1981	1 Mar 1982: Venus landing. Returned colour images from the surface.
Giotto (ESA)	2 Jul 1985	13 Mar 1986: first close (600 km) fly-by of a cometary nucleus (comet Halley).
Magellan (USA)	4 May 1989	Venus orbit insertion 10 Aug 1990. Mapped Venus surface with radar (1990–1994).
Galileo (USA)	18 Oct 1989	First spacecraft to orbit one of the giant planets. 29 Oct 1991: fly-by of asteroid (951) Gaspra. 28 Aug 1993: fly-by of asteroid (243) Ida. 7 Dec 1995: Galileo reaches Jupiter and deployed probe enters the atmosphere of Jupiter. 21 Sept 2003: Galileo impacts Jupiter.
Ulysses (ESA)	6 Oct 1990	First spacecraft to leave the ecliptic plane and orbit around the Sun, passing over the north and south poles. 8 Feb 1992: Jupiter fly-by.
Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) Mission (USA)	17 Feb 1996	First spacecraft to orbit and land on an asteroid. 27 Jun 1997: fly-by of asteroid (253) Mathilde. 14 Feb 2000: started orbiting near Earth asteroid, (433) Eros. 12 Feb 2001: spacecraft landed on Eros.
Mars Global Surveyor (USA)	7 Nov 1996	Highly successful Mars remote sensing mission. 12 Sep 1997: reached Mars. Mar 1999: began mapping planet.
Mars Pathfinder (USA)	4 Dec 1996	4 Jul 1997: landed on Mars. 6 Jul 1997: deployed the Sojourner rover.
Cassini–Huygens (USA + Europe)	15 Oct 1997	Mission to Saturn and Titan. 30 Dec 2000: Jupiter fly-by. 1 Jul 2004: Saturn orbit insertion. 14 Jan 2005: Huygens probe lands on Titan.
Deep Space 1 (USA)	24 Oct 1998	22 Sep 2001: close fly-by of comet Borrelly’s nucleus. Images returned. 29 Jul 1999: fly-by of (9969) Braille.
Stardust (USA)	7 Feb 1999	Fly-by and cometary dust sample return mission to comet Wild 2. 2 Nov 2002: fly-by of asteroid (5535) Annefrank. 2 Jan 2004: fly-by of comet Wild 2. 15 Jan 2006: capsule carrying cometary dust lands on Earth for analysis.
2001 Mars Odyssey (USA)	7 Apr 2001	11 Jan 2002: entered Mars orbit. Acts as relay for 2003 rover missions.
Genesis (USA)	8 Aug 2001	Solar wind particle sample return mission. 3 Dec 2001: capture experiment deployed. Sep 2004: samples returned to Earth.
Rosetta (ESA)	2003	Comet orbiter and lander. Nominal mission plan: 10 Jul 2006: fly-by of asteroid (4979) Otawara. 24 Jul 2008: fly-by of asteroid (140) Siwa. 29 Nov 2011: orbit entry around comet Wirtanen. Sep 2012: lander deployed. (Note: exact mission plan may change.)
Mars Express (ESA) + Beagle 2	≈1 Jun 2003	Mars orbiter and lander. 26 Dec 2003: Mars Express enters Mars orbit, and the Beagle 2 spacecraft lands on the surface to look for isotope ratios indicative of life.

## APPENDIX B SELECTED PHYSICAL CONSTANTS AND UNIT CONVERSIONS

**Table B1** SI fundamental and derived units.

Quantity	Unit	Abbreviation	Equivalent units
mass	kilogram	kg	
length	metre	m	
time	second	s	
temperature	kelvin	K	
angle	radian	rad	
area	square metre	m <sup>2</sup>	
volume	cubic metre	m <sup>3</sup>	
speed, velocity	metre per second	m s <sup>-1</sup>	
acceleration	metre per second squared	m s <sup>-2</sup>	
density	kilogram per cubic metre	kg m <sup>-3</sup>	
frequency	hertz	Hz	(cycles) s <sup>-1</sup>
force	newton	N	kg m s <sup>-2</sup>
pressure	pascal	Pa	N m <sup>-2</sup> , kg m <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-2</sup>
energy	joule	J	kg m <sup>2</sup> s <sup>-2</sup>
power	watt	W	J s <sup>-1</sup> , kg m <sup>2</sup> s <sup>-3</sup>
specific heat capacity	joule per kilogram kelvin	J kg <sup>-1</sup> K <sup>-1</sup>	m <sup>2</sup> s <sup>-2</sup> K <sup>-1</sup>
thermal conductivity	watt per metre kelvin	W m <sup>-1</sup> K <sup>-1</sup>	m kg s <sup>-3</sup> K <sup>-1</sup>

**Table B2** Selected physical constants and preferred values.

Quantity	Symbol	Value
speed of light in a vacuum	$c$	$3.00 \times 10^8 \text{ m s}^{-1}$
Planck constant	$h$	$6.63 \times 10^{-34} \text{ J s}$
Boltzmann constant	$k$	$1.38 \times 10^{-23} \text{ J K}^{-1}$
gravitational constant	$G$	$6.67 \times 10^{-11} \text{ N m}^2 \text{ kg}^{-2}$
Stefan–Boltzmann constant	$\sigma$	$5.67 \times 10^{-8} \text{ W m}^2 \text{ K}^{-4}$
Avogadro constant	$N_{\text{A}}$	$6.02 \times 10^{23} \text{ mol}^{-1}$
molar gas constant	$R$	$8.31 \text{ J K}^{-1} \text{ mol}^{-1}$
charge of electron	$e$	$1.60 \times 10^{-19} \text{ C}$ (negative charge)
mass of proton	$m_{\text{p}}$	$1.67 \times 10^{-27} \text{ kg}$
mass of electron	$m_{\text{e}}$	$9.11 \times 10^{-31} \text{ kg}$
Astronomical quantities:		
mass of the Sun	$M_{\odot}$	$1.99 \times 10^{30} \text{ kg}$
radius of the Sun	$R_{\odot}$	$6.96 \times 10^8 \text{ m}$
photospheric temperature of the Sun	$T_{\odot}$	$5770 \text{ K}$
luminosity of the Sun	$L_{\odot}$	$3.84 \times 10^{26} \text{ W}$
astronomical unit	AU	$1.50 \times 10^{11} \text{ m}$

**Table B3** Some useful conversions from alternative unit systems to SI units.

Quantity	Unit	SI equivalent
angle	1 degree	$(\pi/180)$ rad
pressure	1 bar	$10^5$ Pa
temperature	1 °C	1 K
energy	1 erg	$10^{-7}$ J
	1 electron volt	$1.60 \times 10^{-19}$ J
	1 ton of TNT	$4.18 \times 10^9$ J
length	1 foot	0.305 m
	1 mile	$1.61 \times 10^3$ m
area	1 square inch	$6.45 \times 10^{-4}$ m <sup>2</sup>
	1 square mile	$2.59 \times 10^6$ m <sup>2</sup>
mass	1 pound	0.454 kg
speed, velocity	1 mile per hour	$0.447 \text{ m s}^{-1}$

**Table B4** The Greek alphabet.

Name	Lower case	Upper case
Alpha	$\alpha$	A
Beta (bee-ta)	$\beta$	B
Gamma	$\gamma$	$\Gamma$
Delta	$\delta$	$\Delta$
Epsilon	$\epsilon$	E
Zeta (zee-ta)	$\zeta$	Z
Eta (ee-ta)	$\eta$	H
Theta (thee-ta – ‘th’ as in theatre)	$\theta$	$\Theta$
Iota (eye-owe-ta)	$\iota$	I
Kappa	$\kappa$	K
Lambda (lam-da)	$\lambda$	$\Lambda$
Mu (mew)	$\mu$	M
Nu (new)	$\nu$	N
Xi (cs-eye)	$\xi$	$\Xi$
Omicron	$\omicron$	O
Pi (pie)	$\pi$	$\Pi$
Rho (roe)	$\rho$	P
Sigma	$\sigma$	$\Sigma$
Tau	$\tau$	T
Upsilon	$\upsilon$	Y
Phi (fie)	$\phi$	$\Phi$
Chi (kie)	$\chi$	X
Psi (ps-eye)	$\psi$	$\Psi$
Omega (owe-me-ga)	$\omega$	$\Omega$



## APPENDIX C THE ELEMENTS

**Table C1** The elements and their abundances.

The relative atomic mass,  $A_r$ , is the average mass of the atoms of the element as it occurs on Earth. It is thus an average over all the isotopes of the element. The scale is fixed by giving the carbon isotope  $^{12}_6\text{C}$  a relative atomic mass of 12.0. By convention, the Solar System abundance is normalized to  $10^{12}$  atoms of hydrogen, whereas the CI chondrite abundance is normalized to  $10^6$  atoms of silicon. To directly compare chondrite abundance to Solar System abundance (by number), you would multiply chondrite abundance by 35.8.

Atomic number, $Z$	Name	Chemical symbol	Relative atomic mass, $A_r$	Solar System abundance		CI chondrite abundance by number
				by number	by mass	
1	hydrogen	H	1.01	$1.0 \times 10^{12}$	$1.0 \times 10^{12}$	$2.79 \times 10^{10}$
2	helium	He	4.00	$9.8 \times 10^{10}$	$3.9 \times 10^{11}$	$2.72 \times 10^9$
3	lithium	Li	6.94	$2.0 \times 10^3$	$1.4 \times 10^4$	57.1
4	beryllium	Be	9.01	26	$2.4 \times 10^2$	0.73
5	boron	B	10.81	$6.3 \times 10^2$	$6.8 \times 10^3$	21.2
6	carbon	C	12.01	$3.6 \times 10^8$	$4.4 \times 10^9$	$1.01 \times 10^7$
7	nitrogen	N	14.01	$1.1 \times 10^8$	$1.6 \times 10^9$	$3.13 \times 10^6$
8	oxygen	O	16.00	$8.5 \times 10^8$	$1.4 \times 10^{10}$	$2.38 \times 10^7$
9	fluorine	F	19.00	$3.0 \times 10^4$	$5.7 \times 10^5$	843
10	neon	Ne	20.18	$1.2 \times 10^8$	$2.5 \times 10^9$	$3.44 \times 10^6$
11	sodium	Na	22.99	$2.0 \times 10^6$	$4.7 \times 10^7$	$5.74 \times 10^4$
12	magnesium	Mg	24.31	$3.8 \times 10^7$	$9.2 \times 10^8$	$1.074 \times 10^6$
13	aluminium	Al	26.98	$3.0 \times 10^6$	$8.1 \times 10^7$	$8.49 \times 10^4$
14	silicon	Si	28.09	$3.5 \times 10^7$	$1.0 \times 10^9$	$1.00 \times 10^6$
15	phosphorus	P	30.97	$3.7 \times 10^5$	$1.2 \times 10^7$	$1.04 \times 10^4$
16	sulfur	S	32.07	$1.9 \times 10^7$	$6.0 \times 10^8$	$5.15 \times 10^5$
17	chlorine	Cl	35.45	$1.9 \times 10^5$	$6.6 \times 10^6$	5240
18	argon	Ar	39.95	$3.6 \times 10^6$	$1.5 \times 10^8$	$1.01 \times 10^5$
19	potassium	K	39.10	$1.3 \times 10^5$	$5.2 \times 10^6$	3770
20	calcium	Ca	40.08	$2.2 \times 10^6$	$8.8 \times 10^7$	$6.11 \times 10^4$
21	scandium	Sc	44.96	$1.2 \times 10^3$	$5.5 \times 10^4$	34.2
22	titanium	Ti	47.88	$8.5 \times 10^4$	$4.1 \times 10^6$	2400
23	vanadium	V	50.94	$1.0 \times 10^4$	$5.3 \times 10^5$	293
24	chromium	Cr	52.00	$4.8 \times 10^5$	$2.5 \times 10^7$	$1.35 \times 10^4$
25	manganese	Mn	54.94	$3.4 \times 10^5$	$1.9 \times 10^7$	9550
26	iron	Fe	55.85	$3.2 \times 10^7$	$1.8 \times 10^9$	$9.00 \times 10^5$
27	cobalt	Co	58.93	$8.1 \times 10^4$	$4.8 \times 10^6$	2250
28	nickel	Ni	58.69	$1.8 \times 10^6$	$1.0 \times 10^8$	$4.93 \times 10^4$
29	copper	Cu	63.55	$1.9 \times 10^4$	$1.2 \times 10^6$	522
30	zinc	Zn	65.39	$4.5 \times 10^4$	$2.9 \times 10^6$	1260
31	gallium	Ga	69.72	$1.3 \times 10^3$	$9.4 \times 10^4$	37.8
32	germanium	Ge	72.61	$4.3 \times 10^3$	$3.1 \times 10^5$	119

Atomic number, $Z$	Name	Chemical symbol	Relative atomic mass, $A_r$	Solar System abundance		CI chondrite abundance by number
				by number	by mass	
33	arsenic	As	74.92	$2.3 \times 10^2$	$1.8 \times 10^4$	6.56
34	selenium	Se	78.96	$2.2 \times 10^3$	$1.8 \times 10^5$	62.1
35	bromine	Br	79.90	$4.3 \times 10^2$	$3.4 \times 10^4$	11.8
36	krypton	Kr	83.80	$1.7 \times 10^3$	$1.4 \times 10^5$	45
37	rubidium	Rb	85.47	$2.5 \times 10^2$	$2.1 \times 10^4$	7.09
38	strontium	Sr	87.62	$8.5 \times 10^2$	$7.5 \times 10^4$	23.5
39	yttrium	Y	88.91	$1.7 \times 10^2$	$1.5 \times 10^4$	4.64
40	zirconium	Zr	91.22	$4.1 \times 10^2$	$3.7 \times 10^4$	11.4
41	niobium	Nb	92.91	25	$2.3 \times 10^3$	0.698
42	molybdenum	Mo	95.94	91	$8.7 \times 10^3$	2.55
43	technetium	Tc <sup>a</sup>	98.91	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>
44	ruthenium	Ru	101.07	66	$6.8 \times 10^3$	1.86
45	rhodium	Rh	102.91	12	$1.3 \times 10^3$	0.344
46	palladium	Pd	106.42	50	$5.3 \times 10^3$	1.39
47	silver	Ag	107.87	17	$1.9 \times 10^3$	0.486
48	cadmium	Cd	112.41	58	$6.5 \times 10^3$	1.61
49	indium	In	114.82	6.6	$7.6 \times 10^2$	0.184
50	tin	Sn	118.71	140	$1.6 \times 10^4$	3.82
51	antimony	Sb	121.76	11	$1.3 \times 10^3$	0.309
52	tellurium	Te	127.60	170	$2.2 \times 10^4$	4.81
53	iodine	I	126.90	32	$4.1 \times 10^3$	0.90
54	xenon	Xe	131.29	170	$2.2 \times 10^4$	4.7
55	caesium	Cs	132.91	13	$1.8 \times 10^3$	0.372
56	barium	Ba	137.33	160	$2.2 \times 10^4$	4.49
57	lanthanum	La	138.91	16	$2.2 \times 10^3$	0.4460
58	cerium	Ce	140.12	41	$5.7 \times 10^3$	1.136
59	praseodymium	Pr	140.91	6.0	$8.5 \times 10^2$	0.1669
60	neodymium	Nd	144.24	30	$4.3 \times 10^3$	0.8279
61	promethium	Pm <sup>a</sup>	146.92	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
62	samarium	Sm	150.36	9.3	$1.4 \times 10^3$	0.2582
63	europium	Eu	151.96	3.5	$5.3 \times 10^2$	0.0973
64	gadolinium	Gd	157.25	12	$1.8 \times 10^3$	0.3300
65	terbium	Tb	158.93	2.1	$3.4 \times 10^2$	0.0603
66	dysprosium	Dy	162.50	14	$2.3 \times 10^3$	0.3942
67	holmium	Ho	164.93	3.2	$5.2 \times 10^2$	0.0889
68	erbium	Er	167.26	8.9	$1.5 \times 10^3$	0.2508
69	thulium	Tm	168.93	1.3	$2.3 \times 10^2$	0.0378
70	ytterbium	Yb	170.04	8.9	$1.5 \times 10^3$	0.2479
71	lutetium	Lu	174.97	1.3	$2.3 \times 10^2$	0.0367

Atomic number, $Z$	Name	Chemical symbol	Relative atomic mass, $A_r$	Solar System abundance		CI chondrite abundance by number
				by number	by mass	
72	hafnium	Hf	178.49	5.3	$9.6 \times 10^2$	0.154
73	tantalum	Ta	180.95	1.3	$2.4 \times 10^2$	0.0207
74	tungsten	W	183.85	4.8	$8.8 \times 10^2$	0.133
75	rhenium	Re	186.21	1.9	$3.5 \times 10^2$	0.0517
76	osmium	Os	190.2	24	$4.6 \times 10^3$	0.675
77	iridium	Ir	192.22	23	$4.5 \times 10^3$	0.661
78	platinum	Pt	195.08	48	$9.3 \times 10^3$	1.34
79	gold	Au	196.97	6.8	$1.3 \times 10^3$	0.187
80	mercury	Hg	200.59	12	$2.5 \times 10^3$	0.34
81	thallium	Tl	204.38	6.6	$1.4 \times 10^3$	0.184
82	lead	Pb	207.2	110	$2.3 \times 10^4$	3.15
83	bismuth	Bi	208.98	5.1	$1.1 \times 10^3$	0.144
84	polonium	Po <sup>a</sup>	209.98	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
85	astatine	At <sup>a</sup>	209.99	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
86	radon	Rn <sup>a</sup>	222.02	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
87	francium	Fr <sup>a</sup>	223.02	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
88	radium	Ra <sup>a</sup>	226.03	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
89	actinium	Ac <sup>a</sup>	227.03	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
90	thorium	Th <sup>a</sup>	232.04	1.2	$2.8 \times 10^2$	0.0335
91	protoactinium	Pa <sup>a</sup>	231.04	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
92	uranium	U <sup>a</sup>	238.03	0.32	$7.7 \times 10^1$	0.0090
93	neptunium	Np <sup>a</sup>	237.05	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
94	plutonium	Pu <sup>a</sup>	239.05	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
95	americium	Am <sup>a</sup>	241.06	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
96	curium	Cm <sup>a</sup>	244.06	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
97	berkelium	Bk <sup>a</sup>	249.08	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
98	californium	Cf <sup>a</sup>	252.08	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
99	einsteinium	Es <sup>a</sup>	252.08	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
100	fermium	Fm <sup>a</sup>	257.10	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
101	mendelevium	Md <sup>a</sup>	258.10	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
102	nobelium	No <sup>a</sup>	259.10	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>
103	lawrencium	Lr <sup>a</sup>	262.11	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> No stable isotopes.

<sup>b</sup> Detected in spectra of some rare evolved stars.

<sup>c</sup> Too scarce to have been detected beyond the Earth (i.e. abundance value not well known).

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