

A METHOD FOR THE DETERMINATION OF THE THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY OF THE HEAVY OIL SANDS OF TRINIDAD

L.N.S. Kunar
Department of Chemical Engineering
The University of the West Indies
and
F.I. Campayne
Department of Physics
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Summary

A method for the determination of the thermal conductivity of the heavy oil sands of Trinidad is discussed. The conventional Lees' disc apparatus for the determination of the thermal conductivities of poor conductors has been modified to accommodate unconsolidated and partially to totally saturated samples. Application of the method to heavy oil sands from the Penal areas resulted in a value of 0.507 W/mK or 0.294 Btu/hr. ft.^{°F} for the thermal conductivity, k_d , of dry sand, of 35% porosity, at 70°C. Variation of the thermal conductivity, k , of the sand with oil saturation, S_o , and water saturation, S_w , has also been investigated. The results can be expressed by equations, $\log k = (\log k_d + 0.973 S_o)$ for $S_w = 0\%$ and $\log k = (\log k_d + 0.341 S_o + 0.479)$ for $S_w = 19.5\%$. With the assumption of water wet sands, the ratio of the thermal conductivities of an oil saturated sand to that of an oil saturated sand with 19.5% water is approximately 1.7. An extension of the method for measurements at high steam temperatures is also suggested.

INTRODUCTION

In southern Trinidad there are several heavy oil bearing reservoir sands, 12° – 18° API, which are being produced or will be produced by the steam injection method. These sands lie at depths of 300m to 800m, where the temperatures range from about 40°C to 60°C or 104°F to 140°F.

The overall thermal efficiency of steam injection is to a large extent influenced by the thermal conductivities of the reservoir sand matrix with its fluid filled pore spaces and the strata rocks constituting the overburden and underburden. There is therefore a need to measure the thermal conductivities of these. This is particularly so in the case of Trinidad where the sands are fine-grained and loosely consolidated in nature and where there is a paucity of data for project evaluation.

LITERATURE SURVEY

In 1906 Carslaw contributed significantly to the development of the mathematical theory of heat conduction. (Carslaw 1921, Carslaw and Jaeger 1959). Since then, many laboratory methods have been used to measure the thermal conductivity of rocks. Basically these can be classified as either steady state (e.g. Somerton 1958; Zierfuss and van der Vliet 1956) or unsteady state (e.g. Somerton and Boozer 1960; Parker and Jenkins 1961) methods.

The early work on thermal conductivity of rocks and its dependence on temperature and composition was conducted by Birch and Clark (1940). Subsequent to this study, many investigators (Franci and Kingery 1954; Asaad 1955; Von Herzen and Maxwell 1959; Khan and Fatt 1965; Beck 1965; Luikov 1966; Akhmedova 1966; Tikhomirov 1968; Luikov et al 1968; Huang 1971; Somerton et al 1974) have reported on the thermal conductivity of consolidated and unconsolidated rocks. Some experimental techniques, such as the needle-probe and divided-bar methods, are described in Beck (1957), Mongelli (1969) and Sass et al (1971). A CO₂ laser operating in a pulsed mode and used as a heat source is described by Strack et al (1982) for rapid variable state measurements.

METHOD

The method used in this work is based on the steady state technique. To determine the thermal conductivity, the steady-state heat flow characteristics of the unconsolidated sand samples from the Penal area were compared to those of a glass standard.

Since the samples were of relatively low conductivities when compared to conductors, such as brass, the standard laboratory form of the Lees' Disc apparatus seemed an appropriate measuring device. In order to accommodate unconsolidated and partially to totally saturated samples, the conventional Lees' Disc apparatus was modified. The total modification included the use of a glass disc making all measurements comparative. Figure 1 shows the final configuration of the adapted Lees' Disc apparatus.

A cylindrical slab of brass C_3 is suspended by strings from a heavy stand. On this rests (i) a hollow brass cylinder C_1 with a thick base and through which steam from a steam heater is passed; (ii) a glass disc; (iii) a solid brass disc C_2 ; (iv) cylindrical sample holder, P, and the samples. The outer surfaces exposed to the surroundings, the glass, sample holder, and brass discs were all coated with lacquer to give them the same emissive power. The sample holder, P, was glued to the bottom disc, C_3 , to provide a seal for the fluids contained in Sample, S.

Thermometers were placed in holes in C_1 , C_2 , and C_3 and when steady state conditions prevailed, the temperatures T_1' , T_2' , and T_3' were taken.

All parts in juxtaposition were smeared with glycerine to ensure good thermal contacts.

The calculation of the thermal conductivity of the sample necessitated a calibration of the apparatus.

CALIBRATION PROCEDURE

The calibration consisted of two stages:—

- (i) a measurement of the thermal conductivity of the glass, K_G ,
- and (ii) a measurement of the thermal conductivity of the material of the sample holder, K_P .

(i) K_G :

The sample holder and C_3 were disconnected from the system leaving the glass, G, sandwiched by C_1 , and C_2 . Steam was passed through the system until the temperatures T_1' , and T_2' were steady. Cylinder C_2 was now removed and a bunsen flame used to raise its temperature by about 10°C above the steady state temperature T_2' previously recorded. It was then allowed to cool and its temperature was taken at definite time intervals until the temperature fell to about 10°C below T_2' . This is the standard Lees' Disc method. Experimental details were similar to those recommended in Tyler (1969).

From the cooling curve, the rate of fall of temperature with time at T_2' , $\left(\frac{dT}{dt}\right)_{T_2'}$ was evaluated and K_G computed from the heat balance equation:

$$K_G \cdot \pi r^2 \cdot \frac{(T_1' - T_2')}{X_G} = Mc \left(\frac{dT}{dt}\right)_{T_2'}$$

where M and c represent the mass and specific heat of C_2 respectively.

The thermal conductivity of the glass was found to be;

$$K_G = 0.984 \text{ Wm}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$$

(ii) K_P :

The entire apparatus was set up as shown in figure 1 with air taking the place of the sample. Steam was passed

and the final equilibrium temperatures, T_1' , T_2' and T_3' , as well as the ambient temperature, T_a , were noted. Using $K_{\text{air}} = 0.026 \text{ W m}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$ (Bayley et al. 1972) and the theory developed in the next section, the thermal conductivity of the sample holder material was found to be:

$$K_p = 2.263 \text{ W m}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$$

THEORY OF METHOD:

Let $T_1 = (T_1' - T_a)$; $T_2 = (T_2' - T_a)$; $T_3 = (T_3' - T_a) \text{ } ^\circ\text{C}$

(T_a = ambient temperature)

K = thermal conductivity, $\text{W m}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$

h = heat loss per m^2 per $^\circ\text{C}$ excess of temperature of the apparatus over that of the surroundings

H = heat received per sec, W

1, 2, 3, G, P, S = subscripts referring to component parts of apparatus and sample. Under equilibrium conditions heat gained equals heat lost.

Using this principle and referring to figure 1 we have:

$$H_3 = \pi r^2 h \left(1 + \frac{2X_3}{r}\right) T_3$$

(H_3 expresses the heat received by disc C_3 in one second)

$$H_S = 2\pi r X_S h \left(\frac{T_2 + T_3}{2}\right) + H_3$$

Therefore the heat following through the sample, S, can be taken as:

$$\frac{H_3 + H_S}{2} = \pi r^2 h \left[T_3 + \frac{2}{r} \left\{ (X_3 + \frac{X_S}{4}) T_3 + \frac{X_S}{4} T_2 \right\} \right] \quad (1)$$

But also,

$$\frac{H_3 + H_S}{2} = K_S \pi R^2 \frac{(T_2 - T_3)}{X_S} + K_p \pi (r^2 - R^2) \frac{(T_2 - T_3)}{X_S} \quad (2)$$

Equating (1) and (2) and re-arranging gives:

$$K_T \frac{(T_2 - T_3)}{X_S} = h \left[T_3 + \frac{2}{r} \left\{ (X_3 + \frac{X_S}{4}) T_3 + \frac{X_S}{4} T_2 \right\} \right] \quad (3)$$

where:

$$K_T = \frac{R^2}{r^2} \cdot K_S + \left(1 - \frac{R^2}{r^2}\right) K_p \quad (4)$$

Similarly it can be shown that for the thermal equilibrium of the glass disc that:

$$K_G \frac{(T_1 - T_2)}{X_G} = h \left[T_3 + \frac{2}{r} \left\{ (X_3 + \frac{X_S}{2}) T_3 + \left(-\frac{X_S}{2} + X_2 + \frac{X_G}{4}\right) T_2 + \frac{X_G}{4} T_1 \right\} \right] \quad (5)$$

Dividing equation (4) by (5) leads to:

$$\frac{K_T}{K_G} = \frac{[T_1 - T_2] X_S [T_3 + 2/r \{(X_3 + X_S/4) T_3 + X_S/4 T_4\}]}{[T_2 - T_3] X_G [T_3 + 2/r \{(X_3 + X_S/2) T_3 + (X_S/2 + X_2 + X_G/4) T_2 + X_G/4 T_1\}]} \quad (6)$$

All the parameters on the right hand side are experimentally determined quantities and K_G is known. Hence K_T can be calculated after which equation (4) is used to obtain the thermal conductivity of the sample. In this investigation, K_S was determined, after substituting for R , r , and K_p , from:

$$K_S = (K_T - 0.305) / 0.865 \text{ W m}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$$

For air in place of the sample, K_p was determined from:

$$K_p = \frac{K_T - (R^2/r^2) K_{\text{air}}}{(1 - R^2/r^2)} \quad (7)$$

The value of K_S determined by this method is quoted at a sample temperature

$$(T_1^1 + T_2^1) / 2^\circ \text{C. or } T_a + (T_1 + T_2) / 2^\circ \text{C.}$$

SAMPLE PREPARATION:

The 14^o API oil contained in a heavy oil sand from the Penal area was extracted using gasoline and toluene. The sand was then washed in water and dried at a temperature of 100^oC. Known volumes of the fluids (oil/water) were added to the dry sand and thoroughly mixed with it to provide an even saturation. From preliminary measurement of the bulk density of the sand, the densities of oil and water, and appropriate masses and volumes, the porosity (35%) and the oil/water saturations were determined for each sample. The sample was placed in the PVC holder, P (Fig. 1) after which the apparatus was assembled and the experiment started.

RESULTS:

Using the steady state temperatures (T_1^1, T_2^1, T_3^1) and the theory developed previously, the thermal conductivities ($\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}$) of dry and partially to fully saturated sand samples were calculated. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The conductivity of the 35% porosity dry sand, k_d , was found to be 0.507 W/mK or 0.294 Btu/hr. ft. ^oF, a value which is in general agreement with that reported in the literature for unconsolidated sands (Somerton et al 1974; Somerton, 1958). Using the correlations of Tikhomirov (1968), we estimated that:

$$K_d = 1.387 \times 10^{-3} \theta + 0.0409 \text{ W/mK} \quad (8)$$

where θ is in degrees Celsius. Equation (8) indicates a small rise in conductivity with increase in temperature. This seems to be the case for unconsolidated sands (Tikhomirov 1968; Somerton et al. 1974). Regression analyses of the results in Tables 1 and 2 yielded the following equations:

$$\log K = (\log K_d + 0.973 S_o) \pm 10\% \quad (9)$$

for $S_w = 0\%$ and,

$$\log K = (\log K_d + 0.341 S_o + 0.479) \pm 5\% \quad (10)$$

for $S_w = 19.5\%$. K is measured in W/mK.

It is clearly seen from these tables and extrapolated values using equations (9) and (10) that a liquid saturant markedly increases the thermal conductivity of an unconsolidated rock. For example, K increases by a factor of 10 when the saturant is 14^o API oil. Using Asaad's (1955) empirical correlation, a cementation factor $m = 1.3$, and a

thermal conductivity of the rock solids (quartz) of 5 Btu/hr.ft. °F (8.65 Wm⁻¹K⁻¹) (Somerton, 1958), the thermal conductivity of the API oil at 70°C was estimated to be in the range 2–3 W/mK. This latter value is much greater than the conductivity of the water (0.669 Wm⁻¹K⁻¹) used. From the results, wettability of a sand, as reported by other workers (Somerton et al, 1974), seems to play a significant role in determining the overall thermal conductivity of a rock. Assuming that the sands used were water wet, the ratio of thermal conductivities for an oil saturated sand to that for an oil saturated sand with 19.5% water is approximately 1.7. This ratio indicates that “wetting” water substantially reduces the sand conductivity even when the conductivity of the oil is much higher. This conclusion was also made by Somerton et al.

DISCUSSION

The modified Lees' Disc apparatus for the measurement of the thermal conductivities of oil sands seems viable as is demonstrated by preliminary results and their general comparisons with the results of other investigators. It now remains for the apparatus to be modified further for measurements under reservoir conditions. Since pressure has little effect on thermal conductivity (Anand et al, 1973; Somerton et al 1974), the apparatus can easily be modified for measurements at high steam temperatures (≈600°F). Figure 2 shows the proposed arrangement. The entire apparatus is housed in an air enclosure whose temperature can be varied to ≈600°F (≈316°C) and heat is supplied by a heating coil. The entire sample is sealed in a vermiculite sample holder to prevent distilled products from leaving the sample. Thermocouples replace the mercury in glass thermometers. Knowing the current flowing into the coil, the voltage applied to it, and the steady state temperatures, the thermal conductivity can be calculated for any temperature. The theory of this method has already been developed by the authors. It indicates a result similar to the one described in this paper except that a correction factor is now necessary. Also the heat losses (h) are evaluated directly from the power given to the heating coil so that the method becomes non-comparative.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, measurement of the thermal conductivity of a heavy oil sand from the Penal area, by a modified form of the conventional Lees' disc method, has been shown to be feasible.

The results indicate a value of 0.507 W/mK or 0.294 Btu/hr. ft. °F for the thermal conductivity, K_d , of unconsolidated dry sand, of 35% porosity, at 70°C. This value is in general agreement with that reported in the literature for unconsolidated sands.

Variation of the thermal conductivity of dry sand with temperature has been estimated to be

$$K_d = 1.387 \times 10^{-3} \theta + 0.409 \text{ W/mK.}$$

Variation of the thermal conductivity of sand with the oil saturation S_o and with water saturation S_w can be summarized by:

$$\log K = (\log K_d + 0.973 S_o) \pm 10\%, \text{ for } S_w = 0\%$$

$$\text{and } \log K = (\log K_d + 0.341 S_o + 0.479) \pm 5\% \text{ for } S_w = 19.5\%.$$

The results show that a liquid saturant increases significantly the thermal conductivity of an unconsolidated rock. In addition, the effect of water “wetting” oil saturated sands is to reduce the thermal conductivity, even when that of the oil is much higher than that of water.

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TABLE 1
 THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY, K, AS A FUNCTION OF OIL
 SATURATION, S_o , AT 70°C (158°F)

S_o (%)	K (W/mK)	K (Btu/hr-ft-°F)
0.0	0.507	0.293
19.3	0.805	0.465
36.0	1.095	0.633
44.4	1.400	0.809
63.6	1.908	1.103
83.0	3.045	1.760
99.1	5.073	2.932

TABLE 2
 THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY, K, AS A FUNCTION OF OIL AND
 WATER SATURATIONS, $S_o + S_w$, AT 70°C (158°F)

$S_w = 19.5\%$

S_o (%)	K(W/mK)	K(Btu/hr-ft-°F)
17.9	1.814	1.049
43.7	2.034	1.176
59.1	2.419	1.398
76.6	2.861	1.654

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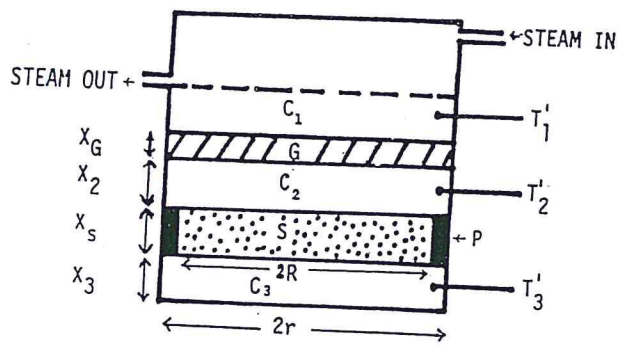


FIGURE 1: MODIFIED LEES' DISC APPARATUS

LEGEND:

- C_1, C_2, C_3 = Nickel plated brass discs
- S = Sand sample
- G = Glass Disc
- P = PVC holder
- r = Radius of C_1, C_2, C_3 , and G
- R = Radius of Sample, S
- X_G, X_2, X_S, X_3 = Thicknesses of G, C_2 , S, and C_3 respectively
- T_1', T_2', T_3' = Steady state temperatures of C_1, C_2, C_3 resp.

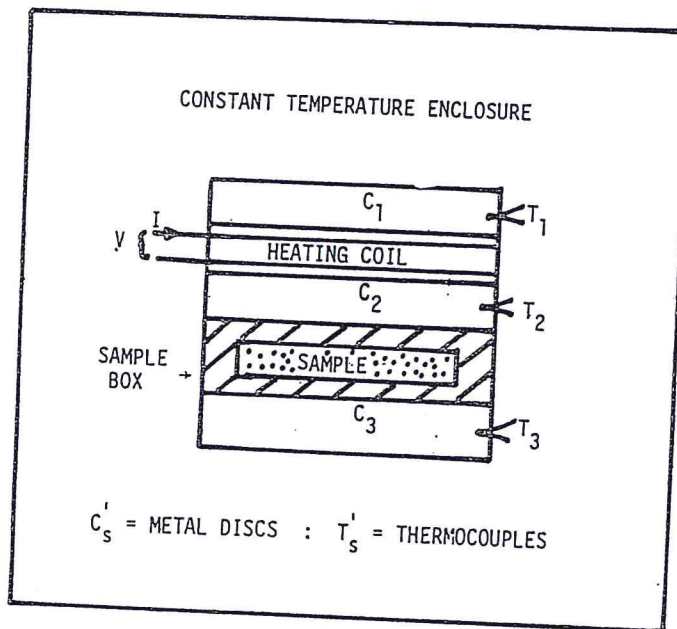


FIGURE 2: PROPOSED ARRANGEMENT FOR HIGH TEMPERATURES

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