

New Elemental Maps of the Nearside Lunar Highlands

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Abstract

A set of elemental maps obtained by the Chandrayaan-1 X-ray Spectrometer (C1XS) and covering the Southern Nearside Lunar Highland region will be presented. The elements mapped will include magnesium, silicon and aluminium, as well as relevant elemental ratios. These will be compared to other datasets including Lunar Prospector, Clementine and M³ mineral maps.

1. Introduction

In recent years there have been several X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy instruments flown on lunar missions, and in the near future there will be more, both on missions to the Moon and beyond, for instance to Mercury. An X-ray spectrometer instrument can remotely detect the mineralogy of the surface of atmosphere-less terrestrial bodies by recording the X-ray fluorescence caused when the surface is bombarded by solar X-ray events. The Chandrayaan-1 X-ray Spectrometer (C1XS), which flew on ISRO's Chandrayaan-1 mission in 2008, was one such instrument [1].

C1XS had the potential to improve our knowledge of the lunar surface by returning elemental abundances for lighter, rock-forming elements (such as Mg, Al, and Si) at much greater resolutions than previous instrument. At the 100km orbit that Chandrayaan-1 began at, the FWHM spatial resolution was 25 km². This was decreased to 50 km² when Chandrayaan-1's orbital distance climbed to 200km due to thermal issues mid-way through the mission. These resolutions represent a significant increase on previous maps for these elements.

Chandrayaan-1 flew at a time coinciding with a predicted increase in solar activity. For an X-ray

fluorescence instrument, which relies on incident solar X-rays to illuminate the surface, this increase in activity would be enough to guarantee ~100% surface coverage in Mg, Al and Si, and significant areas in Fe, Ti, and Ca. However, the solar cycle was delayed, and instead C1XS launched into the quietest solar conditions seen in 100 years. Regardless, the excellent stability and low noise level of the instrument meant that small flares (A and B class) were able to generate statistically significant findings – these are detailed in the first light paper [2].

A single solar active region generated a (relatively) large quantity of flares during 2009. The coincidental similarity in rotation periods between the Sun and our Moon meant that these flares were largely incident on a single area of the lunar surface – the southern nearside highlands. Figure 1 shows the area in question overlaid with the flare tracks that C1XS recorded.

2. Southern Nearside Highlands

This region broadly covers the area below 10 S latitude and between -10 to +30 E longitude. It has never been the subject of a sample return mission; the nearest ground truth measurements are Apollo 16 at 8.56 S, 15.3 E and Surveyor 7 at 41 S, -11 E – this is mainly due to the uneven, mountainous terrain which makes spacecraft landings hazardous. The region has very high relief, with large slopes and rough surface features – these characteristics complicate the analysis of X-ray fluorescence analysis. It is also covered, for large parts of the area, by rays of Tycho. These rays have been found [3] to be similar in composition to the underlying terrain in both Fe and Ti (from Clementine maps), but they may show more pronounced changes in the lighter elements, and the difference in surface roughness that causes the large albedo differences will also affect X-ray fluorescence to some degree.

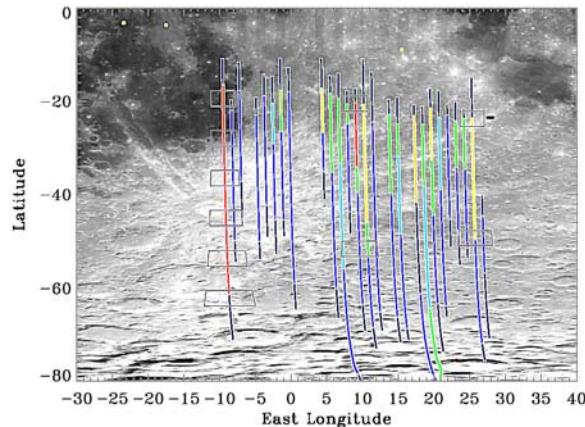


Figure 1: This figure shows the flare tracks that C1XS was able to resolve in the mission lifetime. For analysis of the A-Class flares over the Apollo 14 landing site (in the top left of this figure) see the first light paper [2]. Image Credit: Barry Kellett

Remote sensing has produced maps of some elements for this region. The set of Clementine maps for iron and titanium produced by Lucey [4], and later updated by others (including Gillis [5]) show low %wt with little variation over this area. The best resolution maps of Mg, Al and Si published so far are the mineralogical maps of their oxides presented in Prettyman 2006 [6] which were derived from Lunar Prospector data: these maps cover the region in question with only a few pixels; the C1XS results are better resolved.

New and upcoming datasets, such as those from the M³ instrument on C1XS, [7] will also produce results in this area, including elemental and mineralogical values. It will be crucial to compare C1XS data to these results to ensure consistency and context for our methodology.

One flare track was studied in this region by (Narendranath S., et al.) [8] – this study will expand on their work and generate a map of the entire area (see fig. 1).

3. Results

Maps of the area described above will be presented. These will include elemental maps of Mg, Al and Si, and ratio maps of MgO/SiO₂ Al₂O₃/SiO₂.

References

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