

Search for Heavy Neutral Leptons with IceCube DeepCore

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Leander Fischer M. Sc.
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in Heidelberg

Präsidentin der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal

Dekanin der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät
Prof. Dr. Caren Tischendorf

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Colophon

This document was typeset with the help of KOMA-Script and L^AT_EX using the open-source kaobook template class.

The source code of this thesis is available at:

https://github.com/LeanderFischer/phd_thesis

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The IceCube Neutrino Observatory

1

The IceCube Neutrino Observatory [1] is a cubic-kilometer, ice-Cherenkov detector located at the geographic South Pole. IceCube utilizes the Antarctic glacial ice as detector medium to observe neutrinos by measuring the Cherenkov light produced from secondary charged particles with optical modules. It was deployed between 2006 and 2011 and has been taking data since the installation of the first modules. The primary goal of IceCube is the observation of astrophysical neutrinos as a telescope, but it can also be used to study fundamental particle physics properties by measuring atmospheric neutrinos as well as studying cosmic rays.

This chapter first describes the main- and sub-array of the detector and its detection module in Section 1.1, the propagation of particles through ice is explained in Section 1.2, and finally, the signatures that IceCube can observe of the different particles are introduced in Section 1.3.

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[1]: Aartsen et al. (2017), “The IceCube Neutrino Observatory: instrumentation and online systems”

1.1 Detector Components

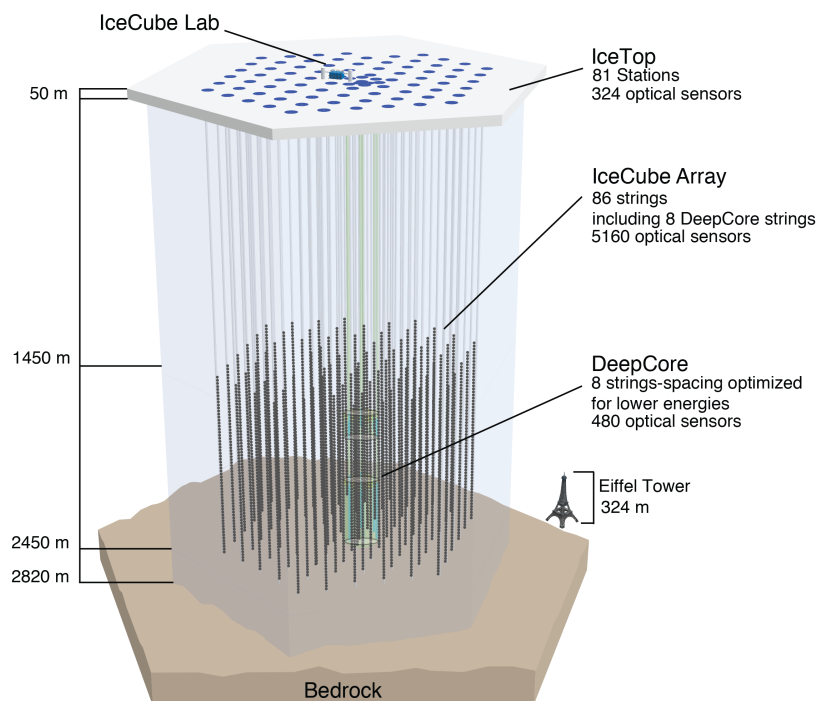


Figure 1.1: Overview of the IceCube detector showing the in-ice main- and sub-array IceCube and DeepCore, IceTop, and the IceCube Lab. From [1].

The full IceCube detector array consists of 86 vertical, in-ice strings and 81 surface stations as shown in Figure 1.1. The in-ice part is composed of 60 optical modules per string deployed at depths of 1450 m–2450 m below the ice, while the surface stations of the comic air-shower array, *IceTop*, are ice-filled tanks. The surface stations and the majority of the strings are arranged in a hexagonal grid with the operations building, the *IceCube Laboratory* (ICL), central to the grid on the surface. A top view

of the hexagonal arrangement is shown in Figure 1.4. The in-ice array is designed to detect neutrinos in the energy range from GeV to PeV.

1.1.1 Digital Optical Modules and the Antarctic Ice

The IceCube detection medium is the Antarctic glacial ice itself, which was formed over 100 000 years by accumulation of snow that was subsequently compressed by its own weight to form a dense crystal structure [2]. As a result of this formation process, the optical properties, scattering and absorption, primarily change with depth. Within the detector volume the absorption length ranges from 100 m–400 m, while the scattering length lies between 20 m and 100 m. They are correlated, with the absorption length being roughly four times the scattering length [3]. The vertical distribution of scattering and absorption length can be seen in Figure 1.2, where one dominant feature is the *dust layer* between 2000 m and 2100 m depth. This region has a higher concentration of dust particles that were deposited in a period of high volcanic activity, which leads to bad optical properties in form of larger scattering and absorption.

[2]: Price et al. (2000), “Age vs depth of glacial ice at South Pole”

[3]: Abbasi et al. (2022), “In-situ estimation of ice crystal properties at the South Pole using LED calibration data from the IceCube Neutrino Observatory”

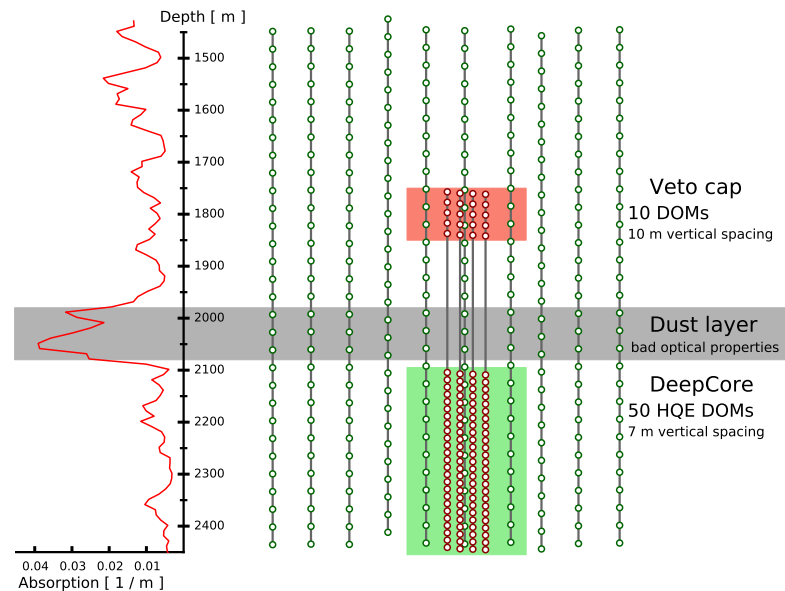


Figure 1.2: Side view of IceCube and DeepCore showing the depth dependent scattering and absorption length (left panel) and the DOM positions around the dust layer.

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[4]: Abbasi et al. (2009), “The IceCube data acquisition system: Signal capture, digitization, and timestamping”

[4]: Abbasi et al. (2009), “The IceCube data acquisition system: Signal capture, digitization, and timestamping”

The ice is instrumented by 5160 optical sensors called Digital Optical Modules (DOMs) [4], which can detect the Cherenkov light produced by charged particles traveling through the ice. Each DOM is made of a spherical glass housing, containing a downward-facing Photomultiplier Tube (PMT), the main-board with control, readout, and processing-electronics, and a LED flasher-board for calibration purposes. The design and the individual components of a DOM can be seen in Figure 1.3.

The majority of PMTs are the 10” Hamamatsu R7081-02, which have a bialkali photocathode and are sensitive to wavelengths in the range of 300 nm to 650 nm, with a peak quantum efficiency of 25% at 390 nm. In the central part of the IceCube array the peak efficiency reaches 34%. The dark count rate in the temperature range of -40°C to -20°C is ~ 300 Hz. The DOM electronics measure the PMT voltage and control the gain. At a voltage crossing of the equivalent to 0.25 PE the waveform readout is activated [4]. Only when either one of the nearest or next to nearest

DOMs above or below also saw a voltage crossing within a $1\ \mu\text{s}$ time window¹, the voltages are digitized and send to the ICL. Through the application of a waveform unfolding algorithm, called *WaveDeform* [5], the waveforms are compressed and the results are the reconstructed times and charges of the photo-electrons. This is the basis for all further IceCube data processing.

The PMT is covered with a mu-metal grid (made from wire mesh), shielding the photocathode from Earth's magnetic field and it is optically coupled to the glass sphere by RTV silicone gel. The glass sphere is a pressure vessel, designed to withstand both the constant ice pressure and the temporary pressure during the refreezing process of the water in the drill hole during deployment (peaking at around 690 bar). The sphere is held by a harness that connects the DOMs along a string and also guides the cable beside them.

The flasher-board controls 12 LEDs that produce optical pulses in bright UV. The LEDs can be pulsed separately or in combination with variable output levels and pulse lengths. Using the known information of the light source positions and times this can be used for in-situ calibration of the detector by measuring absorption and scattering properties of the ice. Calibrating the optical efficiency of the DOMs itself is more accurately done using minimum ionizing muons [6], since the total amplitude of the LED light is not well known.

1.1.2 IceCube

The 78 strings that are arranged in a hexagonal pattern from the main part of the in-ice array, which is called *IceCube*. With a $\sim 125\ \text{m}$ horizontal spacing between the strings and a $\sim 17\ \text{m}$ vertical spacing between DOMs, IceCube has a lower energy threshold of around 100 GeV. IceCube was designed to detect astrophysical neutrinos with energies above 1 TeV.

The coordinate system that is used in IceCube is centered at 46500'E, 52200'N at an elevation of 883.9 m [1]. Per definition, it's a right-handed coordinate system where the y-axis points along the Prime Meridian (Grid North) towards Greenwich, UK, and the x-axis points 90° clockwise from the y-axis (Grid East). The z-axis is normal to the ice surface, pointing upwards. For IceCube analyses depth is defined as the distance along the z axis from the ice surface, assumed to be at an elevation of 2832 m.

1.1.3 DeepCore

The additional 8 strings form a denser sub-array of IceCube called *DeepCore* [7]. It's located at the bottom-center of the in-ice array and its *fiducial volume* also includes the 7 surrounding IceCube strings as shown in Figure 1.4. The strings in this region have a closer average horizontal distance of about 70 m. The lower 50 DeepCore DOMs on each string are placed in the region of clear ice below the dust layer between 2100 m to 2450 m depth, where their vertical spacing is $\sim 7\ \text{m}$. The remaining 10 modules on each string are placed above the dust layer to be used as veto against atmospheric muons as can be seen in Figure 1.2. Additionally, the

1: This is referred to as a *hard local coincidence (HLC)*.

[5]: Aartsen et al. (2014), "Energy Reconstruction Methods in the IceCube Neutrino Telescope"

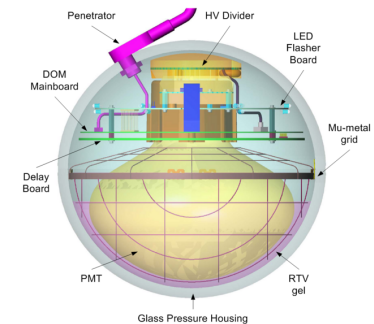


Figure 1.3: Design and components of a Digital Optical Module (DOM) [4]

[6]: Kulacz (2019), "In Situ Measurement of the IceCube DOM Efficiency Factor Using Atmospheric Minimum Ionizing Muons"

[1]: Aartsen et al. (2017), "The IceCube Neutrino Observatory: instrumentation and online systems"

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[7]: Abbasi et al. (2012), "The design and performance of IceCube DeepCore"

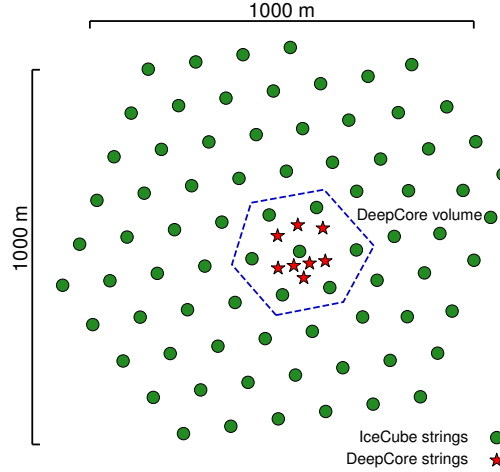


Figure 1.4: Top view of the IceCube array.

DeepCore DOMs are equipped with higher quantum efficiency PMTs. The combination of the denser spacing and the high quantum efficiency modules, leads to a lower energy detection threshold of around 5 GeV, allowing the observation of atmospheric neutrinos, which are mostly in the energy range of 10 GeV to 100 GeV. The main analysis performed with DeepCore is an atmospheric neutrino oscillation measurement, but the large flux of atmospheric neutrinos allows for many other Beyond Standard Model searches, such as searches for dark matter, non-standard interactions, or sterile neutrinos.

1.2 Particles Propagation in Ice

Neutrinos interacting in the ice via DIS produce muons, electromagnetic showers, and hadronic showers, depending on their flavor and the interaction type. The particles produced in those processes mainly lose their energy through *ionization*, *bremsstrahlung*, *pair production*, and the *photo-nuclear interaction*. Electrically charged particles also emit Cherenkov light when traveling through the ice, which is the main observable in IceCube, but only contributes a small amount to the total energy loss. The Cherenkov effect and the energy losses of the particles are described in the following sections, followed by an overview of the different particle signatures in IceCube.

1.2.1 Cherenkov Effect

When a charged particle moves through a medium with a velocity that is greater than the speed of light in that medium, it emits Cherenkov radiation, losing a very small amount of energy ($\mathcal{O}(10^{-4})$ of the total energy loss). The detection principle of IceCube and DeepCore however, is based fundamentally on the observation of resulting Cherenkov photons that are emitted by the charged secondary particles produced in the neutrino interactions that were introduced in Section ???. The Cherenkov effect was first observed by Pavel Cherenkov in 1934 [8] and occurs when the charged particle travels faster than the phase velocity of light, therefore polarizing the medium. Upon de-excitation the molecules emit the received energy

[8]: Cherenkov (1937), “Visible Radiation Produced by Electrons Moving in a Medium with Velocities Exceeding that of Light”

as photons in a spherical wavefront. Since the particle moves past this wavefront, the superposition of the spherical light emissions form a cone which is shown in blue in the bottom of Figure 1.5.

Using trigonometry, the angle θ_c at which the Cherenkov light is emitted can be calculated as

$$\theta_c = \arccos\left(\frac{1}{\beta n}\right), \quad (1.1)$$

where β is the velocity of the particle in units of the speed of light and n is the refractive index of the medium. When the particle velocity is close to the speed of light, the equation holds and the angle is only dependent on the refractive index of the medium. For the Antarctic ice, the refractive index is $n \approx 1.3$ and as a result $\theta_c \approx 41^\circ$ [9].

The frequency of the emission depends on the charge z and the wavelength-dependent index of refraction $n(\omega)$ and is given by the Frank-Tamm formula [10, 11]

$$\frac{d^2N}{dx d\lambda} = \frac{2\pi\alpha z^2}{\lambda^2} \left(1 - \frac{1}{\beta^2 n(\omega)^2}\right), \quad (1.2)$$

with $\alpha \approx 1/137$ the fine structure constant, λ the wavelength of the emitted light, and x the path length traversed by the particle. Relativistic particles in ice produce roughly 250 photons per cm in the wavelength range of 300 nm-500 nm [12].

1.2.2 Energy Losses

Even though relativistic, charged particles traveling through matter produce Cherenkov radiation, their energy is mainly lost through other processes that are dependent on the particle type and energy. The exact principles of energy loss for the different types can broadly be categorized into the three groups: quasi-continuous energy loss by muons, electromagnetic cascades, and hadronic cascades.

Muons

Muons lose their energy by ionization, bremsstrahlung, pair production, and the photo-nuclear effect. The energy loss by ionization is the dominant process for muons above 1 GeV and has a weak energy dependence given by

$$\left\langle -\frac{dE}{dx} \right\rangle = a_I(E) + b_R(E) \cdot E, \quad (1.3)$$

where E is the energy and $a_I(E)$ and $b_R(E) \cdot E$ are the energy loss by ionization and the combined radiative losses, respectively. In the energy range relevant for this work (10 GeV-100 GeV), the parameters a_I and b_R only depend on energy very weakly and can be approximated by constants. The energy loss is then given by

$$\left\langle -\frac{dE}{dx} \right\rangle = a + b \cdot E. \quad (1.4)$$

Based on this description, there is a critical energy which divides the regimes where ionization and radiative losses dominate. The critical

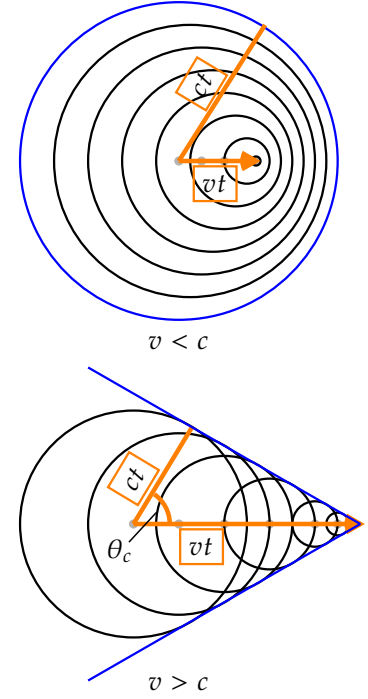


Figure 1.5: Schematic depiction of the spherical light front produced by a particle traveling slower than the speed of light in the medium (top) and the formation of the Cherenkov light front produced by a charged particle traveling faster than the speed of light in the medium (bottom). Blue is the resulting wavefront, while the black circles are spherically emitted light at each position and the orange arrows show the direction of the particle.

[9]: Euler (2014), "Observation of oscillations of atmospheric neutrinos with the IceCube Neutrino Observatory"

[10]: Frank et al. (1937), "Coherent visible radiation from fast electrons passing through matter"

[11]: Tamm (1991), "Radiation Emitted by Uniformly Moving Electrons"

[12]: Rädcl et al. (2012), "Calculation of the Cherenkov light yield from low energetic secondary particles accompanying high-energy muons in ice and water with Geant4 simulations"

[13]: Chirkin et al. (2004), “Propagating leptons through matter with Muon Monte Carlo (MMC)”

energy is given by $E_{crit} = a/b$ and for muons in ice it is ~ 713 GeV (using $a \approx 2.59$ MeV and $b \approx 3.63 \times 10^{-6} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ [13]). Since the energy range of interest is well below this critical energy the range of a muon can easily related to its energy by

$$\langle L \rangle = \frac{E_0}{a} , \quad (1.5)$$

Measuring the length of a muon track therefore allows for an estimation of its energy if the full track is contained in IceCube. Using the given numbers a 30 GeV muon travels ~ 116 m. This approximate treatment does not take into account the stochastic nature of some energy losses. Bremsstrahlung and photo-nuclear interactions for example occur rarely, but when they do, they deposit a large chunk of energy. A thorough investigation of the energy losses of muons in ice can be found in [14].

[14]: Raedel (2012), “Simulation Studies of the Cherenkov Light Yield from Relativistic Particles in High-Energy Neutrino Telescopes with Geant4”

Electromagnetic Showers

Photons as well as electrons and positrons are produced either directly in neutrino interactions or in secondary particle interactions. Above a critical energy E_c , they lose their energy through pair production and bremsstrahlung, respectively, where the resulting photons and the electron/positron pairs can both produce further particles through repeated pair production and bremsstrahlung emission forming an expanding, electromagnetic shower profile. The particles’ energy reduces with every interaction and their number increases until they fall below the critical energy where ionization and excitation of surrounding atoms become the dominant energy loss processes for electrons and positrons. For photons the remaining energy is lost through the Compton effect and the photoelectric effect. Below the critical energy no new shower particles are produced. Electromagnetic cascades can be characterized by the radiation length, X_0 , after which electrons/positrons reduced their energy to $1/e$ of their initial energy. For photons, it’s equivalent to $7/9$ of the mean free path of pair production. The critical energy for ice is $E_c \approx 78$ MeV, with a radiation length of $X_0 \approx 39.3$ cm [15].

Add reference for these processes.

[15]: Tanabashi et al. (2018), “Review of Particle Physics”

cite em shower distribution

The radiation length governs the longitudinal shower profile and using $t = x/X_0$, the shower intensity can be described by

$$\frac{dE}{dt} = E_0 b \frac{(bt)^{a-1} e^{-bt}}{\Gamma(a)} , \quad (1.6)$$

[14]: Raedel (2012), “Simulation Studies of the Cherenkov Light Yield from Relativistic Particles in High-Energy Neutrino Telescopes with Geant4”

[16]: Agostinelli et al. (2003), “Geant4—a simulation toolkit”

where a and b are parameters that have to be estimated from experiment. Based on the work from [14], performed with Geant4 [16], the parameters for electromagnetic showers in ice are

$$e^- : a \approx 2.01 + 1.45 \log_{10}(E_0/\text{GeV}), b \approx 0.63 , \quad (1.7a)$$

$$e^+ : a \approx 2.00 + 1.46 \log_{10}(E_0/\text{GeV}), b \approx 0.63 , \quad (1.7b)$$

$$\gamma : a \approx 2.84 + 1.34 \log_{10}(E_0/\text{GeV}), b \approx 0.65 . \quad (1.7c)$$

The maximum of the shower is at $t_{max} = (a - 1)/b$ and the Cherenkov emission of the charged particles produced in the shower is peaked around the Cherenkov angle, since they are produced in the forward direction.

add angular profile plot?
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Hadronic Showers

The breaking nucleus or any hadronic decay products from the neutrino DIS interactions always create a hadronic cascade. It is a result of secondary particles produced in strong interactions between the hadrons and the traversed matter. The charged particles produced in the shower will emit Cherenkov radiation, while neutral particles will be invisible to the detector. There is also an electromagnetic component of the shower, due to for example the decay of neutral pions into photons. Hadronic showers of the same energy as electromagnetic showers have larger fluctuations in energy deposition and shape, since they depend on the produced particle types. Hadrons also have a higher energy threshold for Cherenkov light production, because of their higher mass. Based on [14, 17], the visible electromagnetic fraction of hadronic showers can be parameterized as

$$F(E_0) = \frac{T_{\text{hadron}}}{T_{\text{EM}}} = 1 - (1 - f_0) \left(\frac{E_0}{E_s} \right)^{-m}, \quad (1.8)$$

where $T_{\text{hadron/EM}}$ is the total track length of a hadronic/electromagnetic shower with the same energy, f_0 is the ratio of hadronic and electromagnetic light yield, E_0 is the initial energy, and E_s is an energy scale. The parameter m is an arbitrary parameter. The ration $F(E_0)$ increases with energy, but is always smaller than 1. The variance of this distribution is given by

$$\sigma_F(E_0) = \sigma_0 \log(E_0)^{-\gamma}. \quad (1.9)$$

The parameters m , E_s , and f_0 are fit from simulation. Cherenkov light from hadronic showers also peaks around the Cherenkov angle, but the angular distribution is more smeared out, due to the variations in particle type and their energy depositions.

[14]: Raedel (2012), “Simulation Studies of the Cherenkov Light Yield from Relativistic Particles in High-Energy Neutrino Telescopes with Geant4”

[17]: Gabriel et al. (1994), “Energy dependence of hadronic activity”

1.3 Event Morphologies


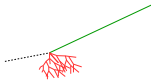

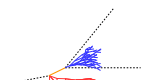
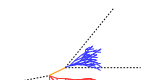

The event morphologies produced by particles detected in IceCube are combinations of the three energy loss types described in Section 1.2.2, e.g. *cascades* from electromagnetic and hadronic showers and elongated *tracks* from muons traveling through the detector. Table 1.1 gives an overview of the possible event signatures.

Neutrino interactions are observed as cascades, tracks, or a combination of both, depending on the initial flavor and the interaction type for the specific event.

In ν_μ - CC interactions, a muon is produced in addition to a hadronic shower from the breaking nucleus. If the interaction happens outside the detector, but the muon passes through the detector, this will create a track-like signature. Same happens if the interaction happens inside, but the energy transfer to the nucleus is small ($y \approx 0$). At energies relevant for this work, tracks have length at the same order of the distance between DOMs, so they can be observed as such.

If the interaction happens inside the detector and the energy transfer to the hadronic part of the shower is larger, it will create a cascade with

Table 1.1: IceCube event signatures, their underlying interaction type, and the particles that produce them. Also shown are the secondary particles produced in the interactions. Black dashed lines represent neutrinos, green lines muons, orange line leptons, and blue and red lines are particles in electromagnetic and hadronic cascades, respectively. Adapted from [18].

Interaction	Secondary particles	Signature
$\text{CC } \nu_{\mu}^{(-)}$	 μ^{\pm} track	Track-only
	 μ^{\pm} track and hadrons	Track with cascade
$\text{CC } \nu_{\tau}^{(-)}$	 τ^{\pm} decaying into μ^{\pm} ($\sim 17\%$ BR), hadrons	Cascade with track
	 τ^{\pm} decaying into e^{\pm} or hadrons ($\sim 83\%$ BR)	
$\text{CC } \nu_e^{(-)}$	 e^{\pm} , hadrons	Cascade-only
$\text{NC } \nu_{\ell}^{(-)}$	 hadrons	

a track leaving it. A similar signature occurs if a ν_{τ} - CC interaction happens, creating a tau that decays into a muon (happening with a branching ratio of 17%). In those cases the muon usually has a lower energy and the track will be fainter and harder to observe.

The other 83 % of ν_{τ} - CC interactions produce a tau that decays into an electron or hadrons, leaving a cascade-only signature through the electromagnetic or hadronic shower. All ν_e - CC interactions also produce pure cascades, since the electron quickly loses its energy in an electromagnetic shower. In all ν - NC interactions, the produced neutrino escapes and only the hadronic shower is observable. Since the size of the cascades at the energy range of interest is smaller than the spacing of the DOMs, they are approximately observed as point-like, spherical light sources. Considering the short effective scattering length (20 m-50 m), the light is almost isotopically emitted.

Atmospheric muons also produce pure track like signatures, similar to ν_{μ} - CC interactions happening outside the detector. They are one of the main backgrounds for analyses using atmospheric neutrinos and are therefore the target of many filter steps described in.

cite selection/filtering section

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