

2 Quarks and Leptons

2.1 The Particle Zoo

Cosmic rays are high-energy particles that travel through space from the stars. Short-lived particles and antiparticles, and photons are created when cosmic rays enter the Earth's atmosphere.

They were thought to be from terrestrial radioactive substances, but it was disproved when found the ionising effect of the rays was significantly greater at 5000m than at ground level.

Most cosmic rays were **fast-moving protons** or **small nuclei**. They collide with gas atoms in the atmosphere, creating showers of particles and antiparticles that can be detected at ground level with **cloud chambers** or other detectors.

- The **muon** μ (heavy electron)
 - Negatively charged particle.
 - With rest mass over 200 times the rest mass of the electron.
- The **pion** π (pi meson)
 - Can be positively (π^+), negatively (π^-) charged, or neutral (π^0).
 - With rest mass greater than a muon but less than a proton.
- The **kaon** K (K meson)
 - Can be positively (K^+), negatively (K^-) or neutral (K^0).
 - With rest mass greater than a pion but less than a proton.

The existence of the **exchange particle** for the strong nuclear force between nucleons were predicted, with a range no more than 1fm. The predicted mass is between the electron and proton mass, they are called **mesons** for being in the middle of the two masses.

The π mesons were discovered from microscopic tracks found in photographic emulsion exposed to cosmic rays at high altitude, proving the prediction correct.

The **muon** was discovered from an unusually long track, indicating it lasted much longer than a strongly interacting particle should. Further investigation showed it to be a **heavy electron** that **decays through the weak interaction**.

Strange Particles

Further cloud chamber photographs showed the existence of short-lived particles known as **kaons**.

- Produced in twos through the **strong interaction** - similar to pions.
- When protons crash into nuclei at high speed, they travel far beyond the nucleus in which they originate before they decay.
- The decay of kaons took longer than expected and include **pions** as the product - this means kaons must decay via the **weak interaction**.

These properties led to them being called **strange particles**.

Decay Pathways

Exotic particles can be created using **accelerators** in which protons **collide head-on** with other protons at high speed. The kinetic energy of the protons is converted into mass in the creation of new particles.

These created particles could be studied in **controlled conditions**, their **rest mass**, **charge** and **lifetimes** were measured. Their decay modes were worked out.

- A **kaon** can decay into
 - Pions
 - A muon and an antineutrino
 - An antimuon and a neutrino
- A **charged pion** can decay into
 - A muon and an antineutrino
 - An antimuon and a neutrino
- A π^0 **meson** can decay into **high-energy photons**.

Decays always obey the conservation rules for energy, momentum, and charge.