

TIDES

ORIGINS OF TIDES

900. Introduction

Tides are the periodic motion of the waters of the sea due to changes in the attractive forces of the Moon and Sun upon the rotating Earth. Tides can either help or hinder a mariner. A high tide may provide enough depth to clear a bar, while a low tide may prevent entering or leaving a harbor. Tidal current may help progress or hinder it, may set the ship toward dangers or away from them. By understanding tides and making intelligent use of predictions published in tide and tidal current tables and descriptions in sailing directions, the navigator can plan an expeditious and safe passage through tidal waters.

901. Tide and Current

The rise and fall of tide is accompanied by horizontal movement of the water called tidal current. It is necessary to distinguish clearly between tide and tidal current, for the relation between them is complex and variable. For the sake of clarity mariners have adopted the following definitions: Tide is the vertical rise and fall of the water, and tidal current is the horizontal flow. The tide rises and falls, the tidal current floods and ebbs. The navigator is concerned with the amount and time of the tide, as it affects access to shallow ports. The navigator is concerned with the time, speed, and direction of the tidal current, as it will affect his ship's position, speed, and course.

Tides are superimposed on nontidal rising and falling water levels, caused by weather, seismic events, or other natural forces. Similarly, tidal currents are

superimposed upon non-tidal currents such as normal river flows, floods, and freshets.

902. Causes of Tides

The principal tidal forces are generated by the Moon and Sun. The Moon is the main tide-generating body. Due to its greater distance, the Sun's effect is only 46 percent of the Moon's. Observed tides will differ considerably from the tides predicted by equilibrium theory since size, depth, and configuration of the basin or waterway, friction, land masses, inertia of water masses, Coriolis acceleration, and other factors are neglected in this theory. Nevertheless, equilibrium theory is sufficient to describe the magnitude and distribution of the main tide-generating forces across the surface of the Earth.

Newton's universal law of gravitation governs both the orbits of celestial bodies and the tide-generating forces which occur on them. The force of gravitational attraction between any two masses, m_1 and m_2 , is given by:

$$F = \frac{Gm_1m_2}{d^2}$$

where d is the distance between the two masses, and G is a constant which depends upon the units employed. This law assumes that m_1 and m_2 are point masses. Newton was able to show that homogeneous spheres could be treated as point masses when determining their orbits.

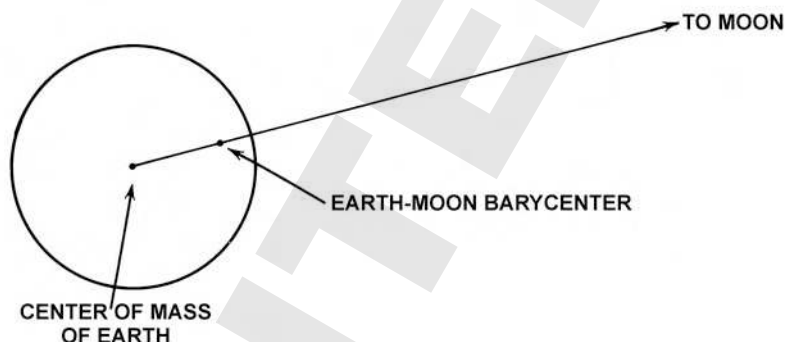


Figure 902a. Earth-Moon barycenter.

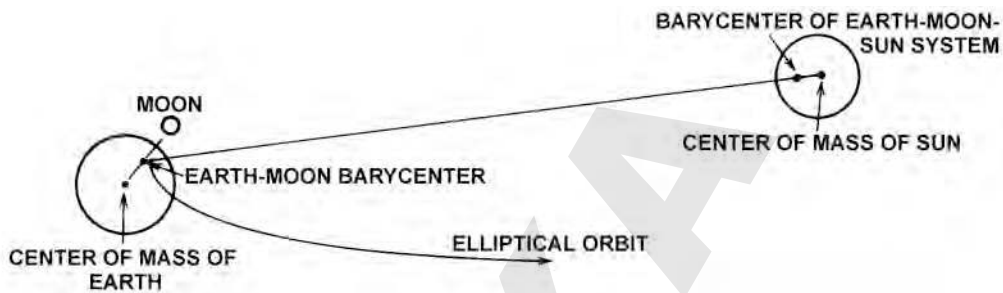


Figure 902b. Orbit of Earth-Moon barycenter (not to scale).

However, when computing differential gravitational forces, the actual dimensions of the masses must be taken into account.

Using the law of gravitation, it is found that the orbits of two point masses are conic sections about the **barycenter** of the two masses. If either one or both of the masses are homogeneous spheres instead of point masses, the orbits are the same as the orbits which would result if all of the mass of the sphere were concentrated at a point at the center of the sphere. In the case of the Earth-Moon system, both the Earth and the Moon describe elliptical orbits about their barycenter if both bodies are assumed to be homogeneous spheres and the gravitational forces of the Sun and other planets are neglected. The Earth-Moon barycenter is located 74/100 of the distance from the center of the Earth to its surface, along the line connecting the Earth's and Moon's centers. See Figure 902a.

Thus the center of mass of the Earth describes a very small ellipse about the Earth-Moon barycenter, while the center of mass of the Moon describes a much larger ellipse about the same barycenter. If the gravitational forces of the other bodies of the solar system are neglected, Newton's law of gravitation also predicts that the Earth-Moon barycenter will describe an orbit which is approximately elliptical about the barycenter of the Sun-Earth-Moon system. This barycentric point lies inside the Sun. See Figure 902b.

903. The Earth-Moon-Sun System

The fundamental tide-generating force on the Earth has two interactive but distinct components. The tide-generating forces are differential forces between the gravitational attraction of the bodies (Earth-Sun and Earth-Moon) and the centrifugal forces on the Earth produced by the Earth's orbit around the Sun and the Moon's orbit around the Earth. Newton's Law of Gravitation and his Second Law of Motion can be combined to develop formulations for the differential force at any point on the Earth, as the direction and magnitude are dependent on where you are on the Earth's surface. As a result of these differential forces, the tide generating forces F_{dm} (Moon) and F_{ds} (Sun) are inversely proportional to the cube of the distance between the bodies, where:

$$F_{dm} = \frac{GM_m R_e}{d_m^3}; \quad F_{ds} = \frac{GM_s R_e}{d_s^3}$$

where M_m is the mass of the Moon and M_s is the mass of the Sun, R_e is the radius of the Earth and d is the distance to the Moon or Sun. This explains why the tide-generating force of the Sun is only 46/100 of the tide-generating force of the Moon. Even though the Sun is much more massive, it is also much farther away.

Using Newton's second law of motion, we can calculate the differential forces generated by the Moon and the Sun affecting any point on the Earth. The easiest calculation is for the point directly below the Moon, known as the **sublunar point**, and the point on the Earth exactly opposite, known as the **antipode**. Similar calculations are done for the Sun.

If we assume that the entire surface of the Earth is covered with a uniform layer of water, the differential forces may be resolved into vectors perpendicular and parallel to the surface of the Earth to determine their effect. See Figure 903a.

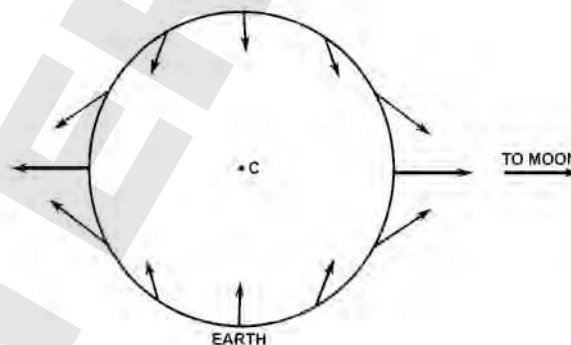


Figure 903a. Differential forces along a great circle connecting the sublunar point and antipode.

The perpendicular components change the mass on which they are acting, but do not contribute to the tidal effect. The horizontal components, parallel to the Earth's surface, have the effect of moving the water in a horizontal

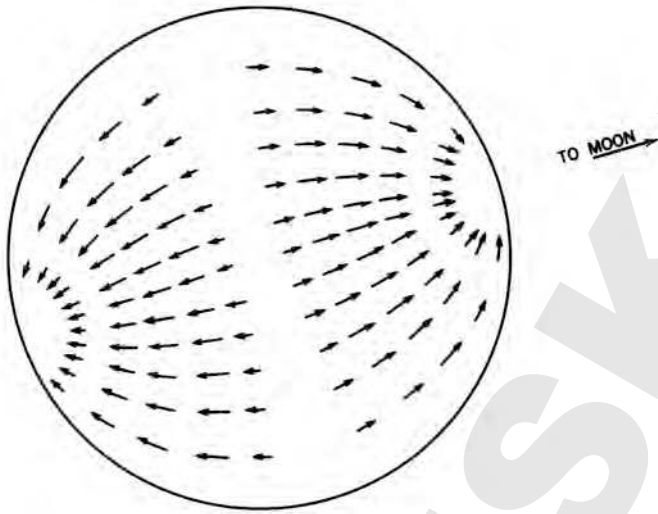


Figure 903b. Tractive forces across the surface of the Earth.

direction toward the sublunar and antipodal points until an equilibrium position is found. The *horizontal* components of the differential forces are the principal tide-generating forces. These are also called **tractive** forces. Tractive forces are zero at the sublunar and antipodal points and along the great circle halfway between these two points. Tractive forces are maximum along the small circles located 45° from the sublunar point and the antipode. Figure 903b shows the tractive forces across the surface of the Earth.

Equilibrium will be reached when a bulge of water has formed at the sublunar and antipodal points such that the tractive forces due to the Moon's differential gravitational forces on the mass of water covering the surface of the Earth are just balanced by the Earth's gravitational attraction (Figure 903c).

Now consider the effect of the rotation of the Earth. If the declination of the Moon is 0° , the bulges will lie on the equator. As the Earth rotates, an observer at the equator will note that the Moon transits approximately every 24 hours and 50 minutes. Since there are two bulges of water on the equator, one at the sublunar point and the other at the antipode, the observer will also see two high tides during this interval with one high tide occurring when the Moon is overhead and another high tide 12 hours 25 minutes later when the observer is at the antipode. He will also experience a low tide between each high tide. The theoretical range of these equilibrium tides at the equator will be less than 1 meter.

In theory, the heights of the two high tides should be equal at the equator. At points north or south of the equator, an observer would still experience two high and two low tides, but the heights of the high tides would not be as great as they are at the equator. The effects of the declination of the Moon are shown in Figure 903d, for three cases, A, B, and C.

- A. When the Moon is on the plane of the equator, the forces are equal in magnitude at the two points on the same parallel of latitude and 180° apart in longitude.
- B. When the Moon has north or south declination, the forces are unequal at such points and tend to cause an inequality in the two high waters and the two low waters each day.
- C. Observers at points X, Y, and Z experience one high tide when the Moon is on their meridian, then another high tide 12 hours 25 minutes later when at X', Y', and Z'. The second high tide is the same at X' as at X. High tides at Y' and Z' are lower than high tides at Y and Z.

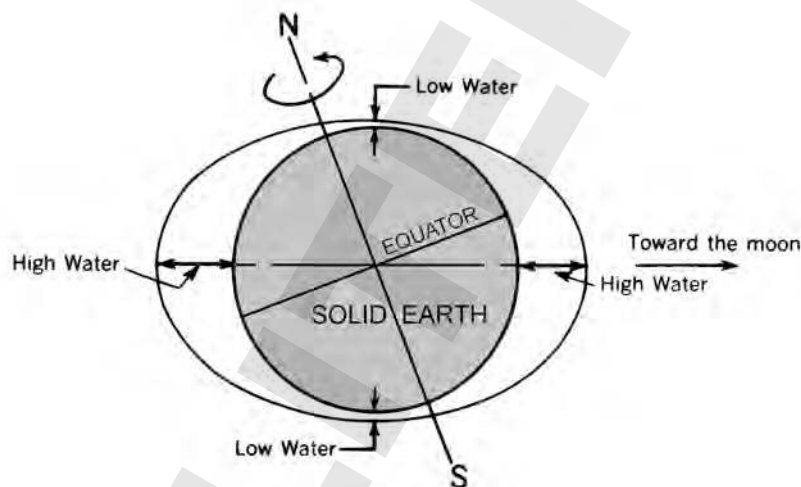


Figure 903c. Theoretical equilibrium configuration due to Moon's differential gravitational forces. One bulge of the water envelope is located at the sublunar point, the other bulge at the antipode.

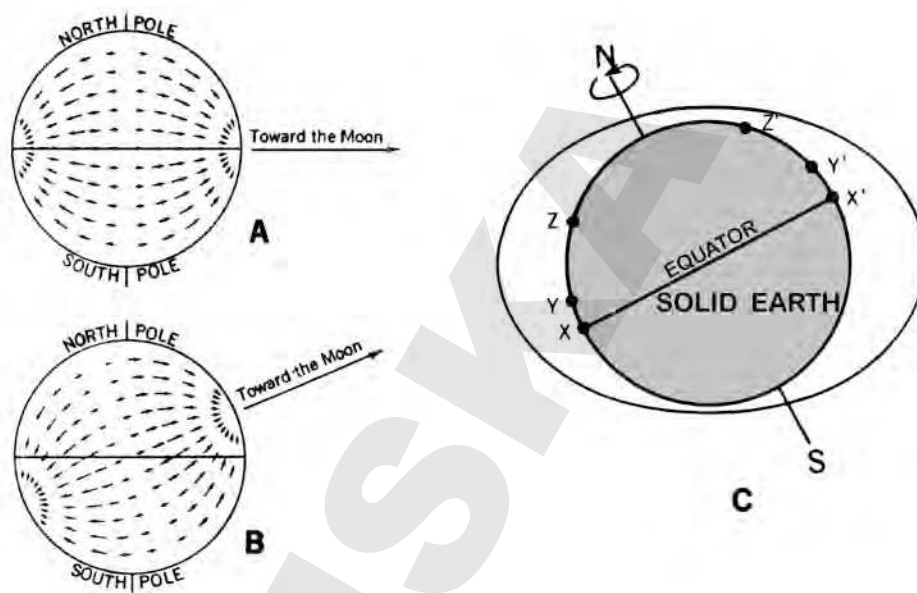


Figure 903d. Effects of the declination of the Moon.

The preceding discussion pertaining to the effects of the Moon is equally valid when discussing the effects of the Sun, taking into account that the magnitude of the solar effect is smaller. Hence, the tides will also vary according to the Sun's declination and its varying distance from the Earth. A second envelope of water representing

the equilibrium tides due to the Sun would resemble the envelope shown in Figure 903c except that the heights of the high tides would be smaller, and the low tides correspondingly not as low. The theoretical tide at any place represents the combination of the effects of both the Moon and Sun.

FEATURES OF TIDES

904. General Features

At most places the tidal change occurs twice daily. The tide rises until it reaches a maximum height, called **high tide** or **high water**, and then falls to a minimum level called **low tide** or **low water**.

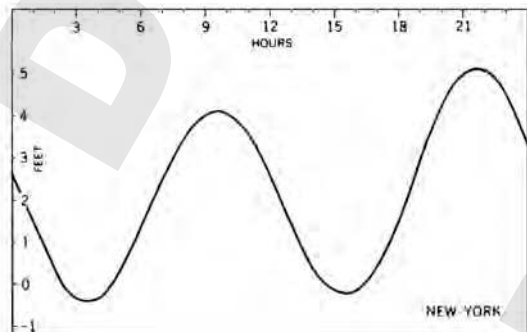


Figure 904. The rise and fall of the tide at New York, shown graphically.

The rate of rise and fall is not uniform. From low water, the tide begins to rise slowly at first, but at an increasing

rate until it is about halfway to high water. The rate of rise then decreases until high water is reached, and the rise ceases.

The falling tide behaves in a similar manner. The period at high or low water during which there is no apparent change of level is called **stand**. The difference in height between consecutive high and low waters is the **range**.

Figure 904 is a graphical representation of the rise and fall of the tide at New York during a 24-hour period. The curve has the general form of a variable sine curve.

905. Types of Tide

A body of water has a natural period of oscillation, dependent upon its dimensions. None of the oceans is a single oscillating body; rather each one is made up of several separate oscillating basins. As such basins are acted upon by the tide-producing forces, some respond more readily to daily or diurnal forces, others to semidiurnal forces, and others almost equally to both. Hence, tides are classified as one of three types, semidiurnal, diurnal, or mixed, according to the characteristics of the tidal pattern.

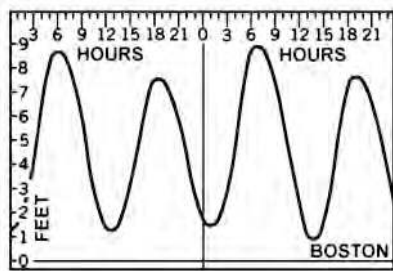


Figure 905a. Semidiurnal type of tide.

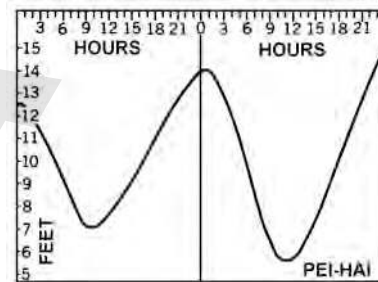


Figure 905b. Diurnal tide.

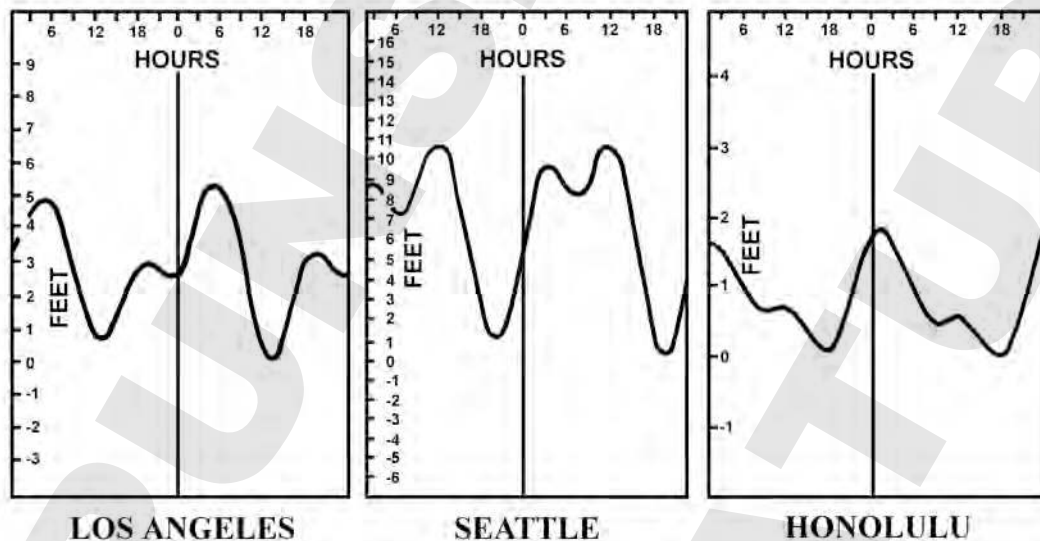


Figure 905c. Mixed tide.

In the **semidiurnal tide**, there are two high and two low waters each tidal day, with relatively small differences in the respective highs and lows. Tides on the Atlantic coast of the United States are of the semidiurnal type, which is illustrated in Figure 905a by the tide curve for Boston Harbor.

In the **diurnal tide**, only a single high and single low water occur each tidal day. Tides of the diurnal type occur along the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico, in the Java Sea, the Gulf of Tonkin, and in a few other localities. The tide curve for Pei-Hai, China, illustrated in Figure 905b, is an example of the diurnal type.

In the **mixed tide**, the diurnal and semidiurnal oscillations are both important factors and the tide is characterized by a large inequality in the high water heights, low water heights, or in both. There are usually two high and two low waters each day, but occasionally the tide may become diurnal. Such tides are prevalent along the Pacific coast of the United States and in many other parts of the world. Examples of mixed types of tide are shown in Figure 905c. At Los Angeles, it is typical that the inequalities in the high

and low waters are about the same. At Seattle the greater inequalities are typically in the low waters, while at Honolulu it is the high waters that have the greater inequalities.

906. Solar Tide

The natural period of oscillation of a body of water may accentuate either the solar or the lunar tidal oscillations. Though as a general rule the tides follow the Moon, the relative importance of the solar effect varies in different areas. There are a few places, primarily in the South Pacific and the Indonesian areas, where the solar oscillation is the more important, and at those places the high and low waters occur at about the same time each day. At Port Adelaide, Australia the solar and lunar semidiurnal oscillations are equal and nullify one another at neaps.

907. Special Tidal Effects

As a wave enters shallow water, its speed is decreased. Since the trough is shallower than the crest, it is retarded

more, resulting in a steepening of the wave front. In a few estuaries, the advance of the low water trough is so much retarded that the crest of the rising tide overtakes the low, and advances upstream as a breaking wave called a **bore**. Bores that are large and dangerous at times of large tidal ranges may be mere ripples at those times of the month when the range is small. Examples occur in the Petitcodiac River in the Bay of Fundy, and at Haining, China, in the Tsientang Kaing. The tide tables indicate where bores occur.

Other special features are the **double low water** (as at Hoek Van Holland) and the **double high water** (as at Southampton, England). At such places there is often a slight fall or rise in the middle of the high or low water period. The practical effect is to create a longer period of stand at high or low tide. The tide tables list these and other peculiarities where they occur.

908. Variations in Range

Though the tide at a particular place can be classified as to type, it exhibits many variations during the month (Figure 908a). The range of the tide varies according to the intensity of the tide-producing forces, though there may be a lag of a day or two between a particular astronomic cause and the tidal effect.

The combined lunar-solar effect is obtained by adding the Moon's tractive forces vectorially to the Sun's tractive forces. The resultant tidal bulge will be predominantly lunar with modifying solar effects upon both the height of the tide and the direction of the tidal bulge. Special cases of interest occur during the times of new and full Moon (Figure 908b). With the Earth, Moon, and Sun lying approximately on the same line, the tractive forces of the Sun are acting in the same direction as the Moon's tractive forces (modified by declination effects). The resultant tides are called **spring tides**, whose ranges are greater than average.

Between the spring tides, the Moon is at first and third quarters. At those times, the tractive forces of the Sun are acting at approximately right angles to the Moon's tractive forces. The results are tides called **neap tides**, whose ranges are less than average.

With the Moon in positions between quadrature and new or full, the effect of the Sun is to cause the tidal bulge to either lag or precede the Moon (Figure 908c). These effects are called **priming** and **lagging** the tides.

Thus, when the Moon is at the point in its orbit nearest the Earth (at perigee), the lunar semidiurnal range is increased and **perigean tides** occur. When the Moon is farthest from the Earth (at apogee), the smaller **apogean tides** occur. When the Moon and Sun are in line and pulling together, as at new and full Moon, **spring tides** occur (the term spring has nothing to do with the season of year); when the Moon and Sun oppose each other, as at the quadratures, the smaller **neap tides** occur. When certain of

these phenomena coincide, **perigean spring tides** and **apogean neap tides** occur.

These are variations in the semidiurnal portion of the tide. Variations in the diurnal portion occur as the Moon and Sun change declination. When the Moon is at its maximum semi-monthly declination (either north or south), **tropic tides** occur in which the diurnal effect is at a maximum. When it crosses the equator, the diurnal effect is a minimum and **equatorial tides** occur.

When the range of tide is increased, as at spring tides, there is more water available only at high tide; at low tide there is less, for the high waters rise higher and the low waters fall lower at these times. There is more water at neap low water than at spring low water. With tropic tides, there is usually more depth at one low water during the day than at the other. While it is desirable to know the meanings of these terms, the best way of determining the height of the tide at any place and time is to examine the tide predictions for the place as given in the tide tables, which take all these effects into account.

909. Tidal Cycles

Tidal oscillations go through a number of cycles. The shortest cycle, completed in about 12 hours and 25 minutes for a semidiurnal tide, extends from any phase of the tide to the next recurrence of the same phase. During a lunar day (averaging 24 hours and 50 minutes) there are two highs and two lows (two of the shorter cycles) for a semidiurnal tide. The Moon revolves around the Earth with respect to the Sun in a **synodical month** of about 29 1/2 days, commonly called the **lunar month**. The effect of the phase variation is completed in one-half of a synodical month or about 2 weeks as the Moon varies from new to full or full to new.

The effect of the Moon's declination is also repeated in one-half of a **tropical month** of 27 1/3 days, or about every 2 weeks. The cycle involving the Moon's distance requires an **anomalistic month** of about 27 1/2 days. The Sun's declination and distance cycles are respectively a half year and a year in length.

An important lunar cycle, called the **nodal period** or Metonic cycle (after Greek philosopher Meton, fifth century BC, who discovered the phenomenon) is 18.6 years (usually expressed in round figures as 19 years). For a tidal value, particularly a range, to be considered a true mean, it must be either based upon observations extended over this period of time, or adjusted to take account of variations known to occur during the nodal period.

The nodal period is the result of axis of the Moon's rotation being tilted 5 degrees with respect to the axis of the Earth's rotation. Since the Earth's axis is tilted 23.5 degrees with respect to the plane of its revolution around the sun, the combined effect is that the Moon's declination varies from 28.5 degrees to 18.5 degrees in a cycle lasting 18.6 years. For practical purposes, the nodal period can be con-

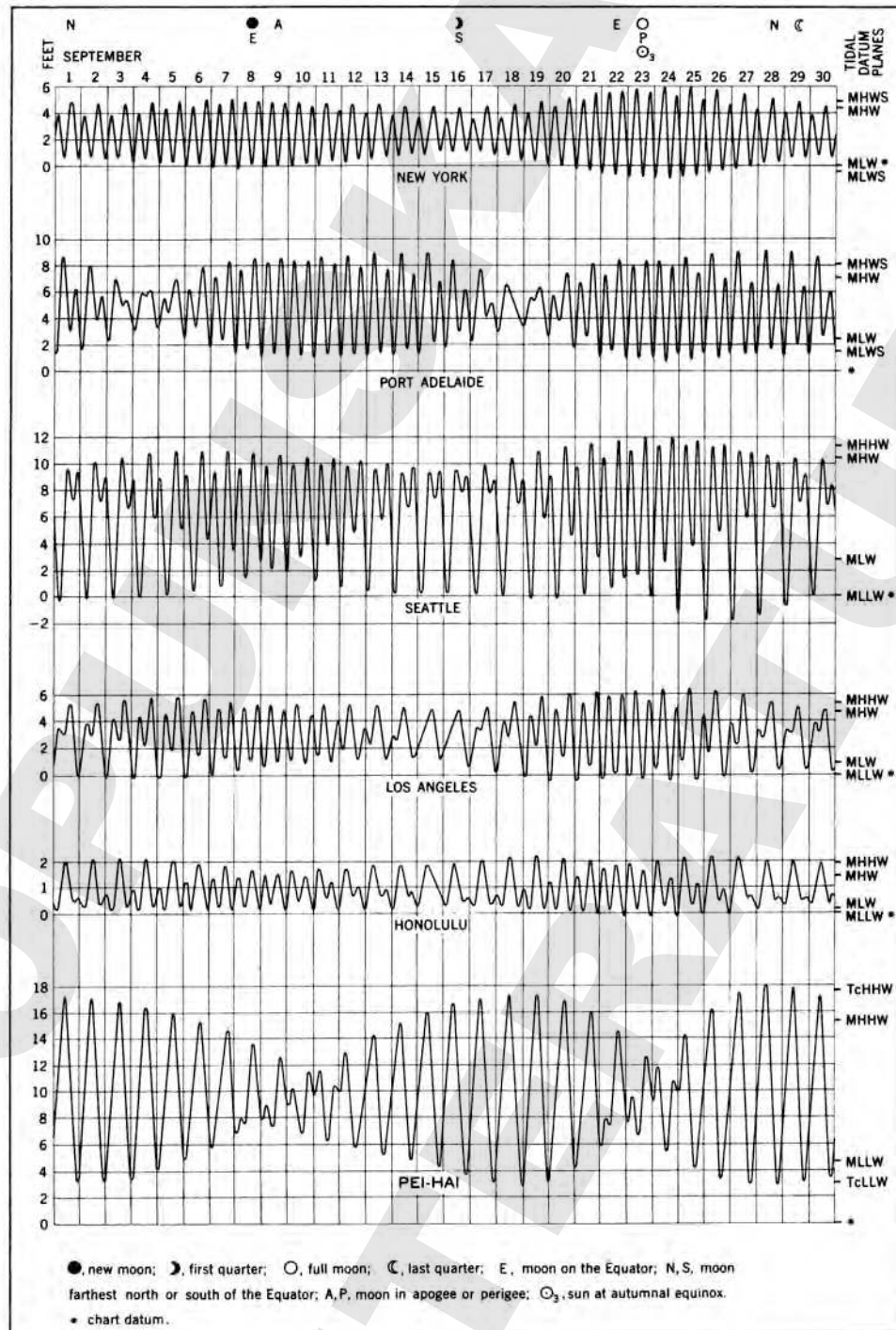


Figure 908a. Monthly tidal variations at various places.

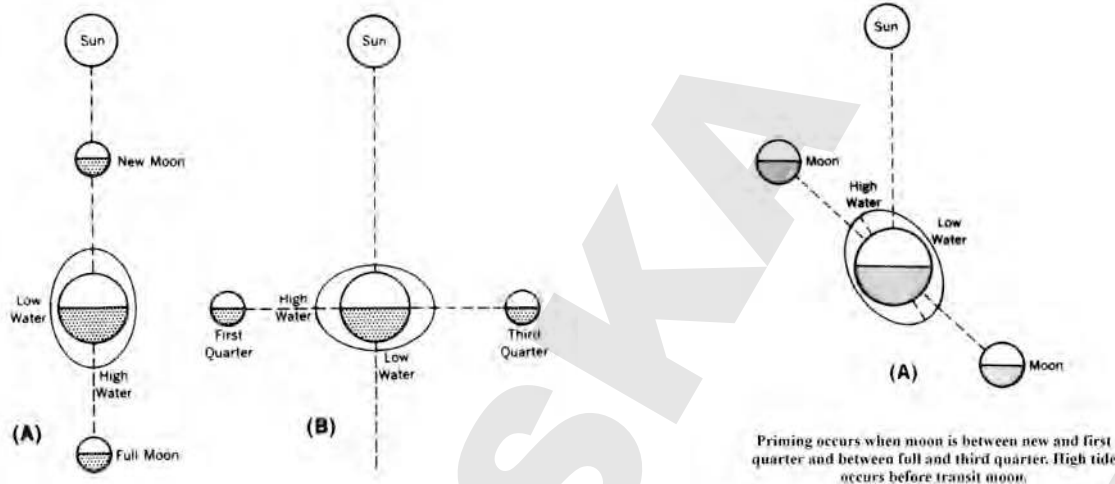


Figure 908b. (A) Spring tides occur at times of new and full Moon. Range of tide is greater than average since solar and lunar tractive forces act in same direction. (B) Neap tides occur at times of first and third quarters. Range of tide is less than average since solar and lunar tractive forces act at right angles.

sidered as the time between the Sun and Moon appearing in precisely the same relative positions in the sky.

910. Time of Tide

Since the lunar tide-producing force has the greatest effect in producing tides at most places, the tides “follow the Moon.” Because the Earth rotates, high water lags behind both upper and lower meridian passage of the Moon. The **tidal day**, which is also the lunar day, is the time between consecutive transits of the Moon, or 24 hours and 50 minutes on the average. Where the tide is largely semidiurnal in type, the **lunitidal interval** (the interval between the Moon’s meridian transit and a particular phase of tide) is fairly constant throughout the month, varying somewhat with the tidal cycles. There are many places, however, where solar or diurnal oscillations are effective in upsetting this relationship. The interval generally given is the average elapsed time from the meridian transit (upper or lower) of the Moon until the next high tide. This may be called **mean high water lunitidal interval** or **corrected** (or **mean**) **establishment**. The **common establishment** is

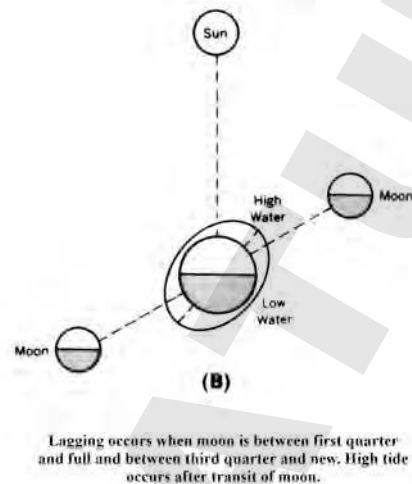


Figure 908c. Priming and lagging the tides.

the average interval on days of full or new Moon, and approximates the mean high water lunitidal interval.

In the ocean, the tide may be in the nature of a progressive wave with the crest moving forward, a stationary or standing wave which oscillates in a seesaw fashion, or a combination of the two. Consequently, caution should be used in inferring the time of tide at a place from tidal data for nearby places. In a river or estuary, the tide enters from the sea and is usually sent upstream as a progressive wave so that the tide occurs progressively later at various places upstream.

TIDAL DATUMS

911. Low Water Datums

A tidal datum is a given average tide level from which heights of tides and overhead clearances are measured. It is a vertical datum, but is not the same as vertical geodetic datum, which is a mathematical quantity developed as part of a geodetic system used for horizontal positioning. There are

a number of tidal levels of reference that are important to the mariner. See Figure 911.

The most important level of reference is the **sounding datum** shown on charts. The sounding datum is sometimes referred to as the reference plane to distinguish it from vertical geodetic datum. Since the tide rises and falls continually while soundings are being taken during a hy-

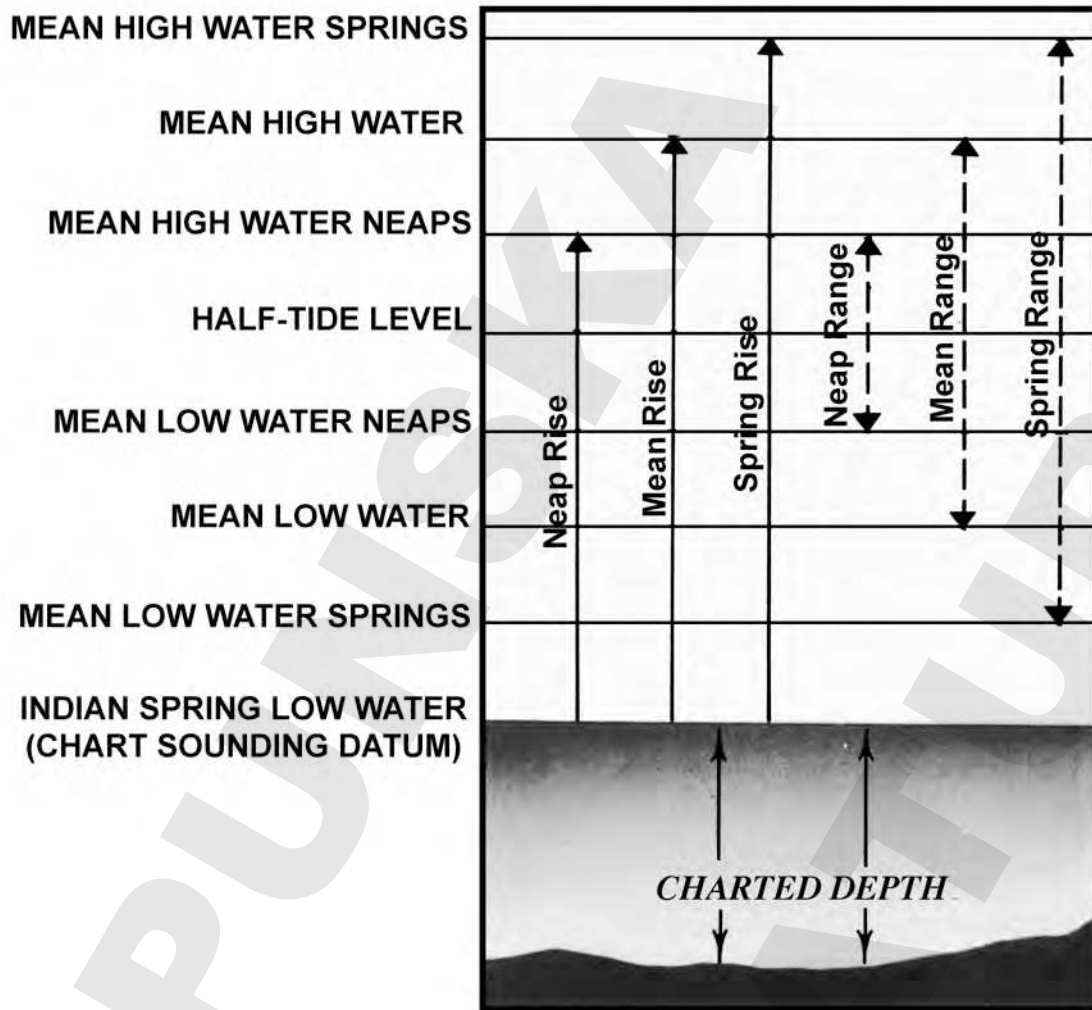


Figure 911. Variations in the ranges and heights of tide where the chart sounding datum is Indian Spring Low Water.

drographic survey, the tide is recorded during the survey so that soundings taken at all stages of the tide can be reduced to a common sounding datum. Soundings on charts show depths below a selected low water datum (occasionally mean sea level), and tide predictions in tide tables show heights above and below the same level. The depth of water available at any time is obtained by adding algebraically the height of the tide at the time in question to the charted depth.

By international agreement, the level used as chart datum should be low enough so that low waters do not fall very far below it. At most places, the level used is one determined from a mean of a number of low waters (usually over a 19 year period); therefore, some low waters can be expected to fall below it. The following are some of the datums in general use.

Mean low water (MLW) is the average height of all low waters at a given place. About half of the low waters fall below it, and half above.

Mean low water springs (MLWS), usually shortened

to low water springs, is the average level of the low waters that occur at the times of spring tides.

Mean lower low water (MLLW) is the average height of the lower low waters of each tidal day.

Tropic lower low water (TcLLW) is the average height of the lower low waters (or of the single daily low waters if the tide becomes diurnal) that occur when the Moon is near maximum declination and the diurnal effect is most pronounced. This datum is not in common use as a tidal reference.

Indian spring low water (ISLW), sometimes called **Indian tide plane** or **harmonic tide plane**, is a low water datum that includes the spring effect of the semi-diurnal portion of the tide and the tropic effect of the diurnal portion. It is about the level of lower low water of mixed tides at the time that the Moon's maximum declination coincides with the time of new or full Moon.

Mean lower low water springs (MLLWS) is the average level of the lower of the two low waters on the days of spring tides.

Some lower datums used on charts are determined from tide observations and some are determined arbitrarily and later referred to the tide. Most of them fall close to one or the other of the following two datums.

Lowest normal low water is a datum that approximates the average height of monthly lowest low waters, discarding any tides disturbed by storms.

Lowest low water is an extremely low datum. It conforms generally to the lowest tide observed, or even somewhat lower. Once a tidal datum is established, it is sometimes retained for an indefinite period, even though it might differ slightly from a better determination from later observations. When this occurs, the established datum may be called **low water datum**, **lower low water datum**, etc. These datums are used in a limited area and primarily for river and harbor engineering purposes. Examples are Boston Harbor Low Water Datum and Columbia River Lower Low Water Datum.

Some sounding datums are based on the predicted tide rather than an average of observations. A British sounding datum that may be adopted internationally is the Lowest Astronomical Tide (LAT). LAT is the elevation of the lowest water level predicted in a 19-year period. Canadian coastal charts use a datum of Lower Low Water, Large Tide (LLWLT) which is the average of the lowest low waters, one from each of the 19 years of predictions.

Figure 911 illustrates variations in the ranges and heights of tides in a locality such as the Indian Ocean, where predicted and observed water levels are referenced to a chart sounding datum that will always cause them to be additive relative to the charted depth.

In areas where there is little or no tide, various other datums are used. For the Black Sea for instance, Mean Sea Level (MSL, sometimes referred to as Mean Water Level or MWL) is used, and is the average of the hourly heights observed over a period of time and adjusted to a 19-year period. In the United States, a Low Water Datum (LWD) is used in those coastal areas that have transitioned from tidal to non-tidal (e.g. Laguna Madre, Texas and Pamlico Sound, North Carolina) and is simply 0.5 foot below a computed MLW. For the Great Lakes, the United States and Canada use a separate LWD for each lake, which is designed to ensure that the actual water level is above the datum most

of the time during the navigation season. Lake levels vary by several feet over a period of years.

Inconsistencies of terminology are found among charts of different countries and between charts issued at different times.

Large-scale charts usually specify the datum of soundings and may contain a tide note giving mean heights of the tide at one or more places on the chart. These heights are intended merely as a rough guide to the change in depth to be expected under the specified conditions. They should not be used for the prediction of heights on any particular day, which should be obtained from tide tables.

912. High Water Datums

Heights of terrestrial features are usually referred on nautical charts to a high water datum. This gives the mariner a margin of error when passing under bridges, overhead cables, and other obstructions. The one used on charts of the United States, its territories and possessions, and widely used elsewhere, is **mean high water (MHW)**, which is the average height of all high waters over a 19 year period. Any other high water datum in use on charts is likely to be higher than this. Other high water datums are **mean high water springs (MHWS)**, which is the average level of the high waters that occur at the time of spring tides; **mean higher high water (MHHW)**, which is the average height of the higher high waters of each tidal day; and **tropic higher high water (TcHHW)**, which is the average height of the higher high waters (or the single daily high waters if the tide becomes diurnal) that occur when the Moon is near maximum declination and the diurnal effect is most pronounced. A reference merely to “high water” leaves some doubt as to the specific level referred to, for the height of high water varies from day to day. Where the range is large, the variation during a 2 week period may be considerable.

Because there are periodic and apparent secular trends in sea level, a specific 19 year cycle (the **National Tidal Datum Epoch**) is issued for all United States datums. The National Tidal Datum Epoch officially adopted by the National Ocean Service is presently 1960 through 1978. The Epoch is reviewed for revision every 25 years.