



Impacts of the 2014–2015 Holuhraun eruption on the UK atmosphere

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Received: 29 February 2016 – Published in Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss.: 30 March 2016

Revised: 12 August 2016 – Accepted: 24 August 2016 – Published: 14 September 2016

Abstract. Volcanic emissions, specifically from Iceland, pose a pan-European risk and are on the UK National Risk Register due to potential impacts on aviation, public health, agriculture, the environment and the economy, from both effusive and explosive activity. During the 2014–2015 fissure eruption at Holuhraun in Iceland, the UK atmosphere was significantly perturbed. This study focuses one major incursion in September 2014, affecting the surface concentrations of both aerosols and gases across the UK, with sites in Scotland experiencing the highest sulfur dioxide (SO₂) concentrations. The perturbation event observed was confirmed to originate from the fissure eruption using satellite data from GOME2B and the chemical transport model, EMEP4UK, which was used to establish the spatial distribution of the plume over the UK during the event of interest. At the two UK European Monitoring and Evaluation Program (EMEP) supersite observatories (Auchencorth Moss, SE Scotland, and Harwell, SE England) significant alterations in sulfate (SO₄²⁻) content of PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} during this event, concurrently with evidence of an increase in ultrafine aerosol most likely due to nucleation and growth of aerosol within

the plume, were observed. At Auchencorth Moss, higher hydrochloric acid (HCl) concentrations during the September event (max = 1.21 μg m⁻³, cf. annual average 0.12 μg m⁻³ in 2013), were assessed to be due to acid displacement of chloride (Cl⁻) from sea salt (NaCl) to form HCl gas rather than due to primary emissions of HCl from Holuhraun. The gas and aerosol partitioning at Auchencorth Moss of inorganic species by thermodynamic modelling confirmed the observed partitioning of HCl. Using the data from the chemical thermodynamic model, ISORROPIA-II, there is evidence that the background aerosol, which is typically basic at this site, became acidic with an estimated pH of 3.8 during the peak of the event.

Volcano plume episodes were periodically observed by the majority of the UK air quality monitoring networks during the first 4 months of the eruption (August–December 2014), at both hourly and monthly resolution. In the low-resolution networks, which provide monthly SO₂ averages, concentrations were found to be significantly elevated at remote “clean” sites in NE Scotland and SW England, with record-high SO₂ concentrations for some sites in September 2014.

For sites which are regularly influenced by anthropogenic emissions, taking into account the underlying trends, the eruption led to statistically unremarkable SO_2 concentrations (return probabilities > 0.1 , ~ 10 months). However, for a few sites, SO_2 concentrations were clearly much higher than has been previously observed (return probability < 0.005 , > 3000 months). The Holuhraun Icelandic eruption has resulted in a unique study providing direct evidence of atmospheric chemistry perturbation of both gases and aerosols in the UK background atmosphere. The measurements can be used to both challenge and verify existing atmospheric chemistry of volcano plumes, especially those originating from effusive eruptions, which have been underexplored due to limited observations available in the literature. If all European data sets were collated this would allow improved model verification and risk assessments for future volcanic eruptions of this type.

1 Introduction

Volcanic emissions perturb atmospheric composition in the troposphere (Bobrowski et al., 2007; Horrocks et al., 2003; Martin et al., 2008; Oppenheimer et al., 2010, 2006; von Glasow, 2010) via emissions of ash and/or gases and aerosols to the atmosphere, particularly during active eruptions. These emissions can directly impact humans and ecosystems (Thordarson and Self, 2003) as well as have indirect effects on climate (Gettelman et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2012, 2014). The injection of sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and sulfate (SO_4^{2-}), as well as aerosol in the form of ash, into the stratosphere are large events which can have global effects, as shown by the cases of Mount Pinatubo and El Chichon where atmospheric perturbation and climate forcing were observed (Grainger and Highwood, 2003). Stratospheric perturbation generally only occurs as a result of explosive eruptions, as they have enough force to break through the tropopause to the stratosphere. In these types of eruptions, deposition of atmospheric components to the surface is diffuse and long term.

Atmospheric chemistry in the lower troposphere and in particular the boundary layer with resultant earth surface effects is frequently associated with effusive eruptions. The 1783–1784 fissure eruption of Laki is considered the “type” eruption for a long-lasting effusive eruption on Iceland. The Laki eruption dynamics and emission masses have been characterized in several papers (e.g. Thordarson and Self, 2003). In these eruptions, there is a long-term flow of lava and limited ash generation with the result of a long-term input of gas-phase emissions in the lower parts of the troposphere. This is contrasted with the shorter-term punctuated emissions from an explosive eruption. It is noted that eruptions maybe a mixture of both effusive and explosive, e.g. Stromboli as described by Ripepe et al. (2007). The impact of effusive eruptions on the troposphere at both local and regional scales,

is most frequently studied in responsive mode, post-eruption initiation. As technology and instrumentation has developed and global air quality monitoring effort have increased too, this has resulted in some cases where background conditions and the evolution of distal volcanic plumes can be now be studied.

Volcanic plumes contain elevated quantities of reactive sulfur species, primarily in the form of SO_2 . There is still great debate whether SO_4^{2-} aerosol is directly emitted from volcanos or is a result of rapid formation once it enters the atmosphere, which is already detectable at the crater rim (von Glasow et al., 2009). In distal plumes, it is thought that SO_2 will eventually form SO_4^{2-} through the reaction with the OH radical, though SO_2 will also be removed from the troposphere through wet and dry deposition to the surface too. Quantifying the relative emission abundance of SO_2 and SO_4^{2-} and the oxidative aging of the plume converting SO_2 to SO_4^{2-} has been attempted previously, for example by Satsumabayashi et al. (2004), but there is a very limited number of studies (Hunton et al., 2005; Rose et al., 2006; Mather et al., 2003; Kroll et al., 2015; Boulon et al., 2011; Satsumabayashi et al., 2004) which have quantified gas and aerosol composition beyond sulfur species and provided evidence of tropospheric chemistry of distal plumes including halogen chemistry and particle growth (Boulon et al., 2011).

Previously it was thought that the chemistry of volcanic plumes in the troposphere was dominated by the oxidation of SO_2 , but this changed when Bobrowski et al. (2003) observed in addition a relatively large emission of the bromine oxide (BrO) radical in a plume from Soufrière Hills (von Glasow et al., 2009). It is now known that emissions of hydrochloric acid (HCl), hydrogen fluoride (HF) and hydrogen bromide (HBr) can drive the chemistry within volcanic plumes, though the presence of halogens is determined by the chemical signature of each individual volcanic system. The rates of atmospheric processing driven by halogens in volcanic plumes are of great interest, as it is thought that reaction rates may differ significantly from that observed in the background atmosphere, which is more frequently studied. This is due to higher temperatures and a unique chemical composition volcanic plumes, which is potentially able to generate radicals. It is important to study the atmospheric processing within volcanic plumes as it determines the fate and deposition of acidic compounds contained within the plume (Aiuppa et al., 2007). Studies have shown that the ratios of SO_2 / HCl remain constant in a distal plume but the ratio decreases in the presence of clouds, as the gases dissolve in order of solubility and therefore HCl will dissolve first in the presence of clouds, though the studies mentioned were carried out within tens of kilometres from the source (von Glasow et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2001; Aiuppa et al., 2007).

One aspect which is challenging for scientists is capturing both the physical characteristics and the chemical composition of volcanic plumes after mixing with the background

in the distal plume, particularly at long distances away from eruption source. In the case presented the distal plume was ~ 1000 km from its source in Iceland. The primary chemical components of volcano plumes measured are SO_2 and SO_4^{2-} , but there are many other gases emitted. Other studies have in addition measured the full chemical composition of particulate matter (PM), e.g. Mather et al. (2003) and Martin et al. (2008), and more recently indirect measurements of aerosol properties from satellites have been undertaken (Ebmeier et al., 2014). Aiuppa (2009) and Pyle and Mather (2009) published reviews of the literature in the area of chemical degassing with a focus on emitted halogen chemicals which can occur both in the gas and aerosol phase. In most studies the ratios of HCl and HF to SO_2 are reported rather than the absolute concentration. Similarly the other sulfur gases, H_2S and COS, are studied but less frequently. The Witham et al. (2015) report summarized the halogen acid and H_2S ratios from the literature. It was noted that predominantly measurements are made close to the emission source or at a surface position downwind from the eruption either by remote sensing or direct sampling with offline analysis methods.

Only a few modelling studies (e.g. Witham et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2015) and measurement approaches (Kroll et al., 2015; Businger et al., 2015) have assessed the atmospheric chemistry with an air quality impact focus. Complex perturbation of atmospheric ozone and other oxidants has been studied both in the stratosphere and troposphere but with only a limited number of observation studies. Recent reviews have indicated there is still much to be done (Mather, 2015; von Glasow et al., 2009) to understand the input of volcano emissions and the perturbation to the atmosphere.

To date there is only one study which has demonstrated nucleation and particle growth in a distal volcanic plume. This was measured following the explosive eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010, where at the GAW site Puy de Dôme, France (1465 m above sea level), nucleation and secondary aerosol formation events within the volcanic plume were observed (Boulon et al., 2011). The site, however, was in the free troposphere and occurred in a plume which was ash rich. To date there is very limited evidence of the processes of particle nucleation and secondary aerosol formation in distal plumes from effusive eruptions.

The recent Holuhraun eruption within the Bárðarbunga volcanic system in Iceland (August 2014–February 2015) was the largest Icelandic eruption in terms of erupted magma and gas volume since the 1783–1784 CE Laki event, producing 1.6 km^3 of lava and total SO_2 emissions of $11 \pm 5 \text{ Mt}$ during a period of 6 months (Gíslason et al., 2015). It was almost purely effusive, hence producing negligible amounts of ash, but repeatedly causing severe air pollution events in populated areas of Iceland due to high gas and aerosol concentrations. The ground level concentration of SO_2 exceeded the hourly health limit ($350 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) over much of the country for periods of up to several weeks

(Gíslason et al., 2015) and there were complaints as far as Scandinavia of a foul smell, which has been attributed to sulfurous compounds from the fissure eruption using satellite data (Grahn et al., 2015). Exceedances in the hourly health limits were also observed for SO_2 periodically in Northern Finland at surface observation sites, which were confirmed by satellite observations (Ialongo et al., 2015). In Europe, anthropogenic emissions of sulfur have been declining over the past few decades and hence lower concentrations are observed widely (Fowler et al., 2007). The 28 European Union member countries (EU-28) total annual emissions of sulfur oxides in 2010 and 2011 were $\sim 4.6 \text{ Mt}$ (http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/daviz/emission-trends-of-sulphur-oxides#tab-chart_1) and therefore the Holuhraun volcanic eruption added more than twice the EU-28 annual sulfur emissions to the atmosphere in just 6 months (Schmidt et al., 2015). This eruption provided the unique opportunity in Europe to study the impact of a large point source SO_2 emission.

This paper studies the volcanic impact on the UK atmosphere and focuses on one major incursion in September 2014 during the Holuhraun eruption and provides the first evidence of wide-scale effects, based on the measurements from the UK air quality monitoring networks which deliver data at both high (hourly) and low (monthly) temporal resolution. These observations provide information on the chemical composition of the distal plume, ~ 1000 km downwind of Iceland. Because Icelandic air arrives at the UK on northerly trajectories, the background air is clean and there is little interference from anthropogenic emissions when the air arrives at the northern UK.

In 2014, hourly-resolution measurements of SO_2 were made by the UK Automatic and Rural Monitoring Network (AURN, <http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/networks/network-info?view=aurun>) and by the two UK European Monitoring and Evaluation Program (EMEP) (Tørseth et al., 2012) atmospheric observatories (Harwell, SE England, UK, and Auchincorth Moss, SE Scotland, UK), which also form part of the ACTRIS Infrastructure Network (<http://www.actris.eu/>). Additional high-resolution physical PM mass and size distribution (refer to Sect. 2.2), as well as chemical composition measurements (refer to Sect. 2.1) at the two EMEP observatories are presented. In addition supplementary evidence of long-term perturbations in the UK background at a lower resolution during the volcanic event from the UK Acid Gas and Aerosol Network (AGANet) and Precipitation network (Precip-Net) are highlighted (refer to Sect. 2.3).



Figure 1. Map of SO₂ monitoring sites in the UK used in this study. The AGANet sites provide monthly average concentrations, whilst the other sites report hourly values.

2 Methods

2.1 Basics of the Measurement of Aerosols and Reactive Gases Analyser (MARGA) operation

The MARGA (Metrohm Applikon B.V., NL) provides hourly-resolution measurements of water soluble inorganic aerosol speciation (SO₄²⁻, Cl⁻, NO₃⁻, NH₄⁺, Na⁺, K⁺, Ca²⁺ and Mg²⁺) and gases (SO₂, HCl, HNO₃, HONO and NH₃). At the two field sites Harwell and Auchencorth Moss (Fig. 1), the instruments are configured to have two sample boxes, one for PM₁₀ and one for PM_{2.5}. The instruments use wet rotating denuders (WRDs) (Wyers et al., 1993) and steam jet aerosol collectors (SJACs) (Khlystov et al., 1995) for sampling of gases and aerosols respectively. Analysis is carried out online by ion chromatography (both anion and cation) at an hourly resolution. A detailed description of the instrument and quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) procedures used by both instruments is given in Twigg et

al. (2015). There is one operational difference between the Auchencorth and Harwell instruments, where Auchencorth Moss uses preconcentration columns (Metrosep A PCC 1 HC ion chromatography (IC) preconcentration column (2.29 mL) for anions and a Metrosep C PCC1 HC IC preconcentration column (3.21 mL) for cations) on the IC to achieve a lower detection limit (DL) compared to the Harwell instrument which uses fixed loops (250 µL for anions and 480 µL for cations) and therefore has an order of magnitude higher DL as described by Makkonen et al. (2012). Data from both MARGA instruments are available in the UK-Air (<http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/data/>) and EBAS (<http://ebas.nilu.no/default.aspx>) databases.

2.2 Scanning mobility particle sizer (SMPS)

At both EMEP supersites SMPSs are installed which count the individual aerosol numbers within predefined size bins of aerosols. At Harwell, aerosol number size distributions measured in the range of 16.55 to 604.3 nm by the SMPS (Electrostatic classifier 3080, differential mobility analyser 3081 and condensation particle counter 3775; all TSI Inc.). The system sampled air at 4 m a.g.l. through a PM₁ cyclone before entering the analyser via a drier, which ensured the relative humidity of the sample air was kept below 45%. The aerosol sample flow rate was set to 0.3 L min⁻¹ and the Classifier sheath flow was maintained at 3 L min⁻¹; a detailed description of the method and setup employed at Harwell can be found in Beccaceci et al. (2013) and data are freely available through the UK-Air website.

At Auchencorth Moss aerosol size distributions in the range of 14–673 nm were set to be measured using the SMPS (Electrostatic classifier 3081, differential mobility analyser 3080 and condensation particle counter 3775; all TSI Inc.). Air was sampled at 2 m a.g.l. through a PM₁₀ head and PM_{2.5} cyclone before entering the analyser via a drier which ensured the relative humidity of the sample air was kept below 45%. The aerosol sample flow rate was set to 0.3 L min⁻¹ and the classifier sheath flow was maintained at 3 L min⁻¹ as set out in Wiedensohler et al. (2012). In October 2015, the Auchencorth Moss SMPS took part in an intercomparison organized by the EU Horizon 2020 ACTRIS 2 (aerosol, clouds and trace gases research infrastructure), held at the world aerosol calibration centre (TROPOS, Leipzig, Germany). During this exercise the classifier used at Auchencorth was found to have an offset and was starting a scan at 35 nm instead of 14 nm, though it is unclear whether this may have slowly drifted over the 18 months since installation at the site. Therefore data presented from Auchencorth Moss are a qualitative indicator of an increase in ultrafine particles as the size distribution could not be verified.

2.3 AGANet DENuder for Long-Term Atmospheric sampling (DELTA) and Precip-Net

The DELTA, used in AGANet across the UK, is described by Sutton et al. (2001) are used to measure the spatial concentrations of both inorganic trace gases (NH_3 , HNO_3 , SO_2 and HCl) and counterpart aerosols at a monthly resolution across the UK. The sampling system consists of a series of coated denuders (to capture gases) and filters (to capture the aerosol). Air is sampled at a flow rate of $0.2\text{--}0.4\text{ L min}^{-1}$, with the sampling inlet at a height of 1.5 m. The first pair of denuders (15 cm) after the inlet is coated with K_2CO_3 / glycerol to capture acidic gases. The next pair of denuders is coated with citric acid to capture gaseous NH_3 . A filter pack is situated at the end of the sampling train, containing two cellulose-coated filters. The first is impregnated with K_2CO_3 to capture and retain NO_3^- , SO_4^{2-} , Cl^- and Na^+ , Ca^{2+} and Mg^{2+} aerosol. The second filter is impregnated with citric acid to capture NH_4^+ . Downstream of the sampling train is a gas meter to record the volume of air sampled and an air pump. A DELTA sampling train is exposed for 1 month and samplers are extracted with deionized water. Chemical analysis is performed by ion chromatography and flow injection analysis; further details of both the sampling method and analytical analysis are contained in Tang et al. (2009). The monitoring sites in AGANet are highlighted in Fig. 1. The wet deposition of pollutants in the UK is monitored within Precip-Net. Precip-Net uses bulk precipitation samplers at 39 non-urban sites with fortnightly sample collection. Samples are analysed for cations (Na^+ , Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , K^+ , NH_4^+) and anions (PO_4^{3-} , NO_3^- , SO_4^{2-} , Cl^-) using ion chromatography (further details of both the sample method and analysis can be found in Irwin et al., 2002). Data from both AGANet and Precip-Net are freely available from UK-Air.

2.4 GOME2 volcanic SO_2 detection

The GOME2 instrument on MetOp-B is a nadir-viewing UV/visible spectrometer with a spatial resolution of $40 \times 80\text{ km}^2$. SO_2 column densities are retrieved using a differential optical absorption spectroscopy approach including a nonlinearity correction for SO_2 saturation effects (Richter, 2009). Satellite UV/visible retrievals yield integrated vertical columns of absorbing species and usually do not provide information about the vertical distribution of a trace gas. As the sensitivity of the observations decreases towards the surface, an assumption has to be made in the retrieval on the vertical profile of the target species in order to apply appropriate weights called air mass factors. Here, the standard volcanic product from the University of Bremen is used (http://www.iup.uni-bremen.de/doas/gome2_so2_alert.htm), which assumes a volcanic eruption profile with an SO_2 peak at 10 km height. As no corrections are made for the effects of

deviations from the assumed plume height of 10 km, the data shown should be used as qualitative indicator only.

2.5 EMEP4UK chemical transport model

The EMEP4UK model rv4.3 (Vieno et al., 2016) is a chemical transport model which is the regional application of the EMEP MSC-W model (Simpson et al., 2012), used in this study to identify and investigate the spatial distribution of the volcano plume. The meteorological driver used in the EMEP4UK model is the Weather Research and Forecasting model (WRF) version 3.6. More details of the model description and setup of the model can be found in Vieno et al. (2014, 2010). The model domain includes all Europe and part of Russia with a horizontal resolution of $50\text{ km} \times 50\text{ km}$, with anthropogenic and biogenic emissions included based on the emissions the year 2012. The specific Icelandic volcano emissions in the run were set to 680 kg s^{-1} (Gíslason et al., 2015) from 31 August 2014 to the end of 2014, with the period of 19 to 24 September 2014 presented in this study. The emissions are injected into the model vertical column equally from the 1 to 3 km.

2.6 ISORROPIA thermodynamic model

The chemical thermodynamics model, ISORROPIA II (Fountoukis and Nenes, 2007), is used to determine the theoretical chemical composition based on the gas/aerosol equilibrium partitioning of the inorganic species measured by the MARGA instrument at Auchencorth Moss. The model was run using as an input the bulk (i.e. gas + aerosol) concentration of all compounds (ammonium, nitrate, sulfate and chloride) measured by the MARGA (input in $\mu\text{mol m}^{-3}$) with measured temperature and relative humidity and operated in the metastable, forward reaction. The model was used to establish whether the observed gaseous concentrations could be explained solely by the thermodynamic equilibrium of the observed species, as there is very little evidence in the literature of direct acid displacement.

2.7 Statistical analysis of AGANet data

As well as high-temporal-resolution analysis (hourly measurements) of the volcanic plume, the monthly average SO_2 from AGANet measurements (Sect. 2.3) were analysed to assess the impact of the fissure eruption on the background atmosphere across the UK. The plume was clearly observable in this data set. In order to understand the relative magnitude of the perturbation on a national scale for both air quality and sulfur deposition, a statistical treatment was thought to be appropriate against a background of decreasing anthropogenic emissions. Specifically the likelihood of a reoccurrence of the observed concentrations in the UK background was calculated as many AGANet sites show decreasing trends over time for SO_2 and SO_4^{2-} , reflecting decreases in emissions. This is observed for both the annual mean concentration and

the annual maximum concentration. A high concentration superimposed on a downward concentration trend in a measurement series over a period appears to be a less unlikely observation at the end of the time period than at the beginning. Therefore the AGANet measurement data were adjusted to remove any underlying trends before further analysis to assess the unusualness of the September 2014 elevated SO₂ concentrations. Theoretically exceedances over a threshold follow a Pareto distribution and the threshold was chosen by fitting an 85 % quartile regression to this data set using a smoothing spline for each site individually (i.e. there was no assumption of a general trend). This methodology has previously been developed much further for application to case studies with substantially more data (Chavez-Demoulin and Davison, 2005; Northrop and Jonathan, 2011; Reich et al., 2011). The fitted Pareto distribution generates the probabilities of occurrence of the elevated concentrations – which in this case were associated with the volcanic plume. This is expressed in Table 1 as a return probability and return time, which is the statistical likelihood of a similar concentration to be observed again based on the long-term trend of SO₂ over the 1999–2014 period at each site expressed in the resolution of the measurements.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Identification of a volcanic plume in the UK atmosphere

During the Holuhraun eruption, the volcanic plume passed periodically over the UK, with a major event occurring between 21 and 23 September 2014. This plume was first detected at the UK supersite in Scotland at Auchencorth Moss at 12:00 (GMT), followed by Harwell in England at 15:00 (GMT) (Fig. 2). The plume moved across the UK (with the exception of parts of Northern Ireland) and AURN SO₂ observations at selected sites are summarized in Fig. 2. Scotland (Dundee, Croy and Auchencorth) observed higher concentrations of SO₂ compared to the rest of UK. The sites in southern Scotland (Auchencorth Moss and Croy), however, were only exposed to the main plume on 21 September whereas the event affected the rest of the UK intermittently for the next 72 h (Fig. 2). The peak SO₂ concentration measured by the MARGA at Auchencorth was 66.8 µg m⁻³ (Fig. 2) compared with the annual average of SO₂ of 0.14 µg m⁻³ in 2013 at the site. It has to be noted that the SO₂ concentration at Auchencorth Moss was underestimated between 11:00 and 22:00 on 21 September 2014 because the standard instrument configuration was optimized for < 1 µg m⁻³ detection. The maximum reported SO₂ concentration during the event at Harwell reported by the MARGA was lower, peaking at 45.7 µg m⁻³ (annual average concentration in 2013 was 0.46 µg m⁻³) and occurring on 22 September. Although SO₂ concentrations were elevated in many parts of the UK,

they were notably below the 24 h average air quality limit of 125 µg m⁻³ set under the EU Air Quality Framework Directive (Directive 2008/50/EC). The SO₂ plume was also observed across Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium, Finland and Austria (TS-2 in the Supplement of Gíslason et al., 2015, and Ialongo et al., 2015) during different periods of the fissure eruption.

Supporting evidence that the ground-based measurements in September 2014 were picking up a volcanic signal is provided by the GOME2 instrument on the MetOp-B satellite, as it was able to track the SO₂ plume from the Holuhraun eruption site to the UK (Fig. 3) on 20 and 21 September. While satellite observations only provide tropospheric columns of SO₂ and not the concentrations at surface which are reported by the ground-based measurements, they do provide important information on the origin of enhanced SO₂ values. As the sensitivity of satellite retrievals to surface SO₂ is low, sulfur dioxide from surface pollution can rarely be detected over Europe. Volcanic plumes in contrast can readily be observed in the data as they usually extend to higher altitudes and contain much larger vertical columns of SO₂. The fact that several Dobson units of SO₂ are observed in GOME2 data on 20 and 21 September 2014 over the UK and that the SO₂ plume originates from Iceland strongly indicates that the observed SO₂ is of volcanic origin. It is therefore very probable that simultaneous SO₂ enhancements measured at the surface are also linked to the volcanic emissions. Modelling of the plume by EMEP4UK further confirmed the volcanic origin and dispersion of the observed SO₂ plumes both at Harwell and Auchencorth Moss (Fig. 4), as did back trajectories using the HYSPLIT model, which can be found in Figs. S1–S2 in the Supplement. To provide evidence that the EMEP4UK model was able to replicate the spatial distribution of the plume a comparison of the time series of observations to the model at both sites is given in the Supplement (Fig. S3). Though in general the EMEP4UK model does get the spatial distribution of the plume correct, there are a number of explanations why the model does not precisely replicate the plume compared to the measurements at the surface. The reasons include a number of input variables which would have impacted the distribution of the plume including injection height, daily emission rates at source and oxidation rate within the plume; in addition, the model output is 50 km × 50 km resolution.

3.2 Chemistry within the volcanic plume

3.2.1 Formation of sulfate aerosols

Current understanding of volcanic emissions is that the major fraction of observed SO₄²⁻ is not directly emitted from the magma but is formed as secondary aerosol through oxidation of SO₂ in the atmosphere (Mather et al., 2013), though there are some reports suggesting primary emissions are possible (Allen et al., 2002; Zelenski et al., 2015). As shown in

Table 1. Statistical analysis of the UK AGANET sites SO₂ (refer to Sect. 2.7 for the methods), where the return probability is the statistical likelihood of a similar concentration to be observed again based on the long-term trend of SO₂ at each site. (Refer to Fig. 1 for site locations.)

Site	September 2014 average SO ₂ (µg m ⁻³)	Fitted 85 % quartile	residual	Return probability	Return period (months)
Yarner Wood	3.48	0.40	3.08	3.11×10^{-4}	3218.5
Rothamsted	2.98	0.78	2.20	9.00×10^{-3}	111.1
London Cromwell Road	2.37	0.54	1.83	6.90×10^{-3}	144.9
Ladybower	2.29	1.34	0.95	3.22×10^{-2}	31.0
Harwell	2.28	0.82	1.46	6.73×10^{-3}	148.7
Halladale	2.11	1.03	1.08	5.60×10^{-3}	178.6
Strathvaich	2.09	0.28	1.81	2.40×10^{-3}	417.4
Shetland	2.04	1.02	1.02	6.20×10^{-3}	161.2
Auchencorth Moss	2.00	0.37	1.63	8.71×10^{-3}	114.8
Glensaugh	1.95	0.57	1.38	6.17×10^{-3}	162.0
Stoke Ferry	1.84	0.68	1.16	1.70×10^{-2}	58.8
Sutton Bonnington	1.70	1.11	0.59	7.11×10^{-2}	14.1
Barcombe Mills	1.68	0.74	0.94	8.98×10^{-3}	111.3
High Muffles	1.67	1.14	0.53	7.72×10^{-2}	12.9
Lagganlia	1.65	1.14	0.51	7.28×10^{-3}	137.4
Eskdalemuir	1.45	0.42	1.03	5.65×10^{-3}	177.1
Bush Estate	1.38	0.60	0.78	4.55×10^{-2}	22.0
Moorhouse	1.24	0.47	0.77	1.10×10^{-2}	90.6
Narberth	1.20	1.08	0.12	8.69×10^{-2}	11.5
Rosemaund	1.15	0.51	0.64	1.19×10^{-2}	84.0
Cwmystwyth	1.10	0.49	0.61	2.11×10^{-2}	47.3
Plas Y Brenin	1.08	1.08	0.00	1.41×10^{-1}	7.1
Caenby	0.98	0.98	0.00	1.44×10^{-1}	6.9
Edinburgh St Leonards	0.61	1.32	-0.71	4.06×10^{-1}	2.5
Hillsborough	0.61	0.61	0.00	1.37×10^{-1}	7.3
Detling	0.58	1.01	-0.43	6.79×10^{-1}	1.5
Goonhilly	0.47	0.49	-0.02	1.36×10^{-1}	7.4
Lough Navar	0.39	0.39	0.00	1.75×10^{-1}	5.7
Rum	0.07	0.21	-0.14	9.08×10^{-1}	1.1
Carradale	nd				

Fig. 2, both atmospheric observatories in the UK detected an increase in SO₄²⁻ during the volcanic plume event in September 2014. SO₂ oxidation with the hydroxyl radical in the troposphere can be slow, taking up to 2 weeks under some conditions, though if SO₂ is taken up onto particles, oxidation rates are much faster, resulting in a lifetime of days or hours in clouds as SO₂ (von Glasow et al., 2009). In order to understand the oxidation of an SO₂ plume, Satsumabayashi et al. (2004) defined a sulfur conversion ratio (F_s) as $F_s = [\text{PM}_{2.5} \text{SO}_4^{2-}] / ([\text{SO}_2] + [\text{PM}_{2.5} \text{SO}_4^{2-}])$ (all concentrations in µg S m⁻³), where a smaller value suggests a plume which has not undergone considerable atmospheric processing. The UK observatory data sets showed F_s decreasing from ~1 (all S in the form of SO₄²⁻) to $F_s \sim 0.2$, (Fig. 5) during the event, implying that SO₂ oxidation had not had sufficient residence time (and oxidant exposure) to be complete. As the plume passed over the sites, the presence of ultrafine particles also became pronounced compared to the background

atmosphere in the previous 24 h (Fig. 5). The volcano plume event was characterized by the high particle number density at low diameters, increasing in diameter with time (initiating at ~12:00 GMT on the 21st, Fig. 5). The feature of increasing particle numbers, or “banana” shape in Fig. 5, starting with high particle numbers at the detection limit of the SMPS is characteristic of particle nucleation and growth. However, as it is not a Lagrangian measurement and the nucleation does not represent a widespread regional phenomenon (as it probably does, for example, in the nucleation studies conducted in the Boreal environment; Kulmala et al., 1998), the evolution of the size distribution with time needs to be interpreted with caution: only if trajectories and wind speed do not change with time can the temporal change at the fixed site be translated into the temporal change within the plume. It is possible that a population of ultrafine H₂SO₄ particles were emitted or formed at source; however, it is highly unlikely due to the transport time (refer to the HYSPLIT back tra-

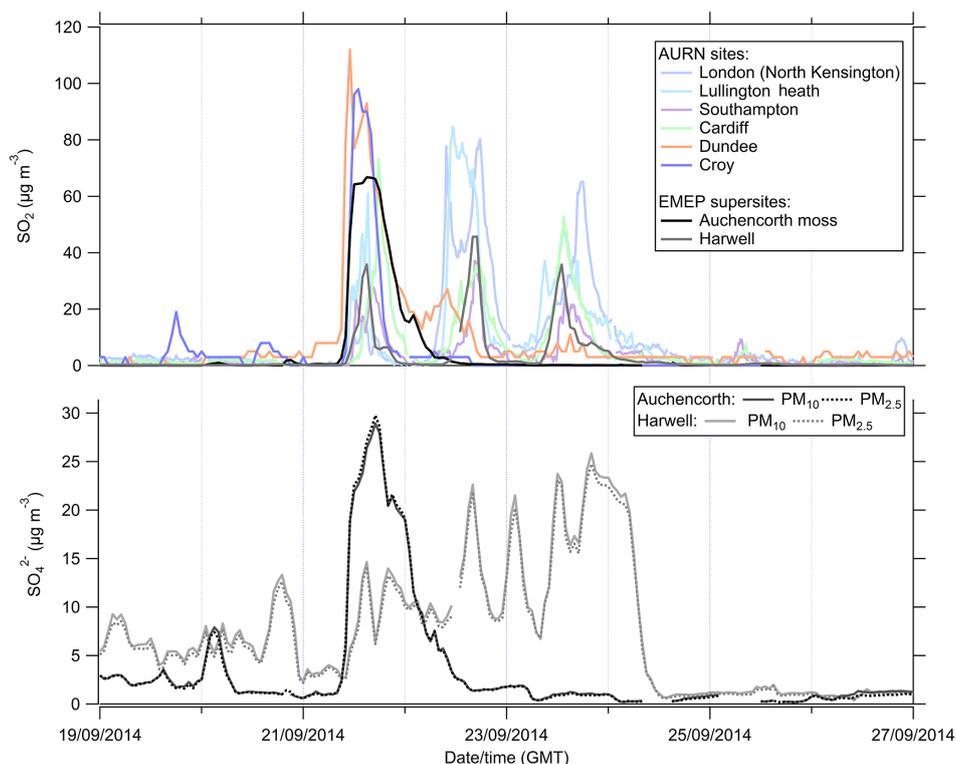


Figure 2. Time series of SO_2 hourly measurements made at six AURN sites in the UK and the two UK EMEP supersite measurements of SO_2 and $\text{PM}_{10/2.5}$ SO_4^{2-} . (Note: SO_2 at Auchencorth Moss is underestimated between 11:00 and 22:00 (GMT) on 21 September 2014.)

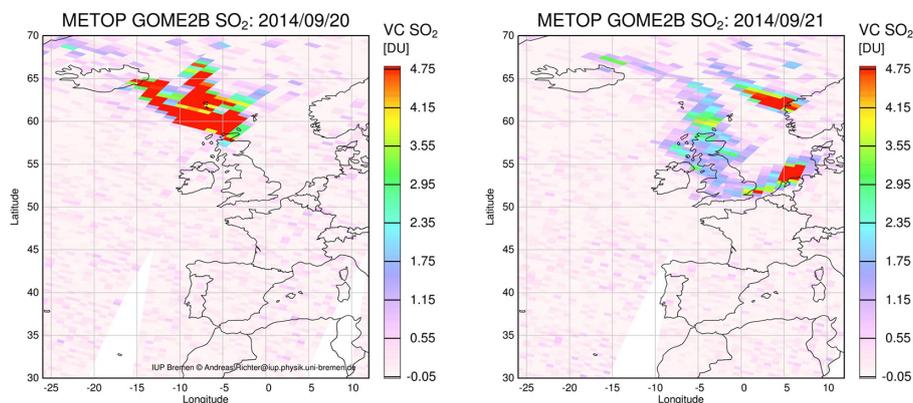


Figure 3. Observation of the volcanic plume from Iceland to and across the UK by the GOME2B satellite instrument, taken at the satellite overpass around 09:30 local time. GOME2B measures SO_2 column density, where VC is the vertical column, which is the SO_2 concentration integrated vertically to provide a column density per unit surface area. SO_2 columns are given in Dobson units (DU); the thickness the SO_2 layer would have at standard temperature and pressure is in units of hundredths of a millimetre.

jectories found in Fig. S1) that aerosol would have remained in the ultrafine fraction observed as they would have undergone further growth by coagulation and further condensation of condensable vapours. It is much more likely that sulfuric acid was formed during transport through oxidation of the high concentrations of SO_2 by the OH radical, the production of which is linked to solar radiation. It is hypothesized

that with increasing time after sunrise, the measurements at Auchencorth reflect particles whose nucleation was initiated further and further away from Auchencorth and had increasing time to grow during transport. The SMPS at Harwell also recorded similar events as the plume passed over. This is the first evidence of boundary layer surface-level particle growth observations in a distal volcanic plume for the UK

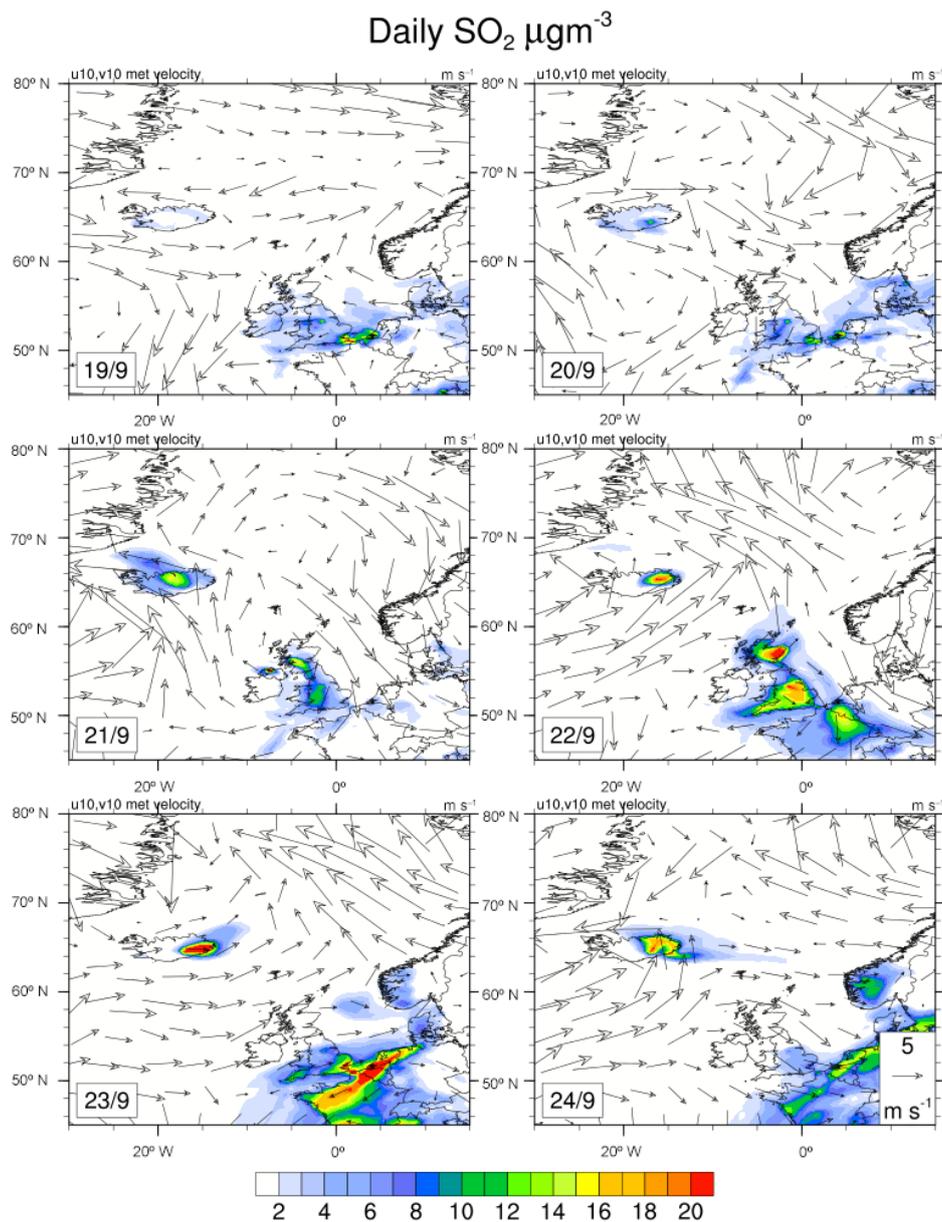


Figure 4. Daily average surface concentration ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) of SO₂ from 19 to 24 September 2014, calculated by the EMEP4UK model and the 12:00 GMT of each day's wind vector.

and complements observations from the 2010, which is the only previous report of nucleation and secondary aerosol formation event reported for a distal plume during the explosive, ash-rich plume (Eyjafjallajökull in 2010) at an elevated free-tropospheric atmospheric station in Europe (Puy de Dôme observatory, France) (Boulon et al., 2011). At that station, the free-tropospheric conditions and size range of measurements allowed the clear interpretation of particle nucleation. Though nucleation is thought to occur in the free troposphere where there is a low particle surface area there is increasing evidence in the literature of nucleation events measured at the surface in polluted environments: Hamed et al. (2007)

observed nucleation events in the Po Valley, Italy, and Kulmala et al. (2005) in New Delhi. In addition, we cannot rule out that other compounds are taking part in the nucleation process and aerosol growth observed. Furthermore, in addition to the particle population changes observed, the measurement indicates that there was an air quality impact from particulates during the 2014 eruption in addition to the SO₂ air quality impacts discussed in the recent study of Schmidt et al. (2015).

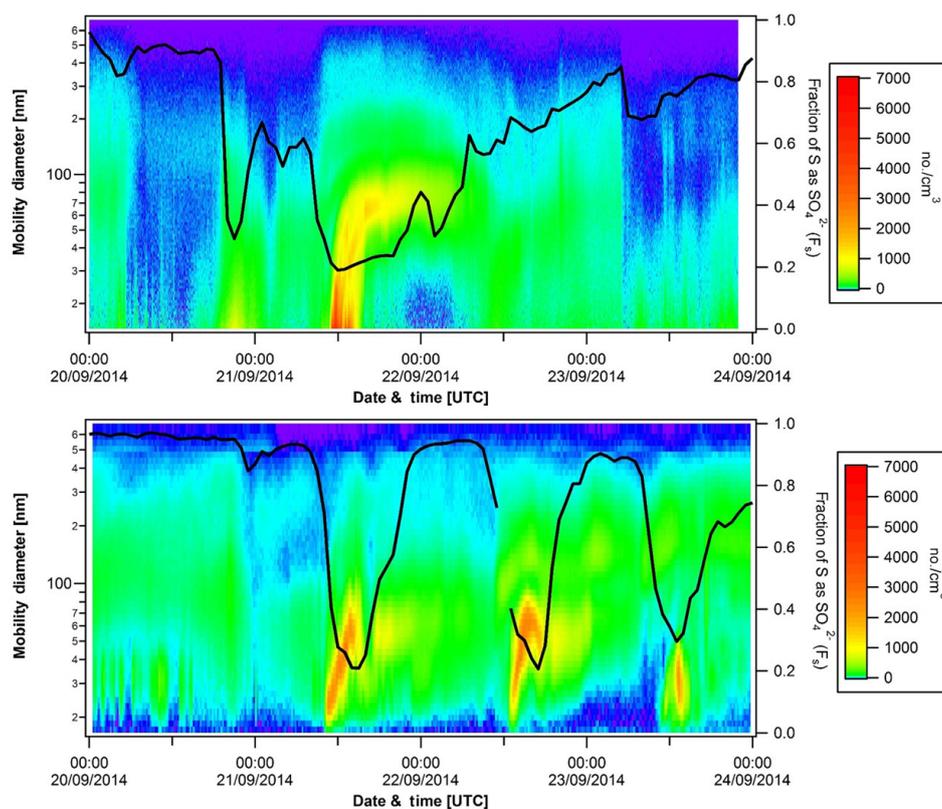


Figure 5. Particle number concentration at Auchencorth Moss (top panel) and Harwell (bottom panel) (refer to Fig. 1 for map) during the September 2014 volcanic plume event. Right-hand y axis is the F_s ratio (black line) measured by the MARGA for the same period, where lower F_s indicates “younger” SO_4^{2-} . (Note: there are uncertainties regarding the size calibration of the instrument (see text), but the CPC was working correctly. The panel should therefore be regarded a qualitative indicator of an increase in the ultrafine particulate matter during the volcanic plume.)

3.2.2 Modification of the chemical composition within a volcanic plume

The chemical composition of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and the gas concentrations observed during the event at Auchencorth are summarized in Fig. 6. It is clear that the aerosol was dominated by SO_4^{2-} . Whilst the aerosol at this site is normally basic, with free ammonia (NH_3) available based on ion balance studies (Twigg et al., 2015), during the plume event there is evidence that the aerosol turned acidic. The aerosol pH was confirmed using the results of $[\text{H}^+]$ calculated from ISORROPIA-II model to calculate pH. During the plume event it was found that the pH dropped from pH 7.97 at 09:00 GMT on 21 September 2014 to pH 3.80 at 15:00 on 21 September 2014.

During the event the measurements at the background site clearly showed that there was an increase not only in the sulfur species but also in HCl gas and a variety of other chemical species in both gas and aerosol phase (Fig. 6). HCl peaked at $1.21 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ during the event compared with an annual average of $0.12 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ in 2013. As discussed in Aiuppa (2009), Pyle and Mather (2009) and summarized in Witham

et al. (2015) and the literature cited therein, primary emissions of HCl from volcanoes can vary enormously depending on the magma type and the particular eruption characteristics. The near-source measurements of the gas composition from the Holuhraun eruption indicated that the gas phase in the plume was proportionally very low in halogen content, with a molar HCl/ SO_2 ratio of $< 1\%$ (Burton et al., 2015). It is unlikely that HCl would persist longer in a plume than SO_2 given the high solubility of HCl and comparably low reactivity of SO_2 . However, given that the SO_4^{2-} aerosol is highly acidic, the HCl would need to be scavenged onto other non-sulfate aerosol or into cloud droplets. Hence the elevated HCl observed in the plume event is due to either transport of primary HCl or displacement of HCl from background sea salt aerosol or a combination of the two. It is hypothesized that the most likely explanation for the observation of HCl coinciding with the plume is the oxidation of SO_2 to sulfuric acid which then displaced Cl^- in pre-existing sea salt aerosol (NaCl) in the air mass. The thermodynamic model ISORROPIA-II (Fountoukis and Nenes, 2007) was used to calculate the theoretical partitioning between the gas and aerosol phase. The model clearly reproduces the HCl peak,

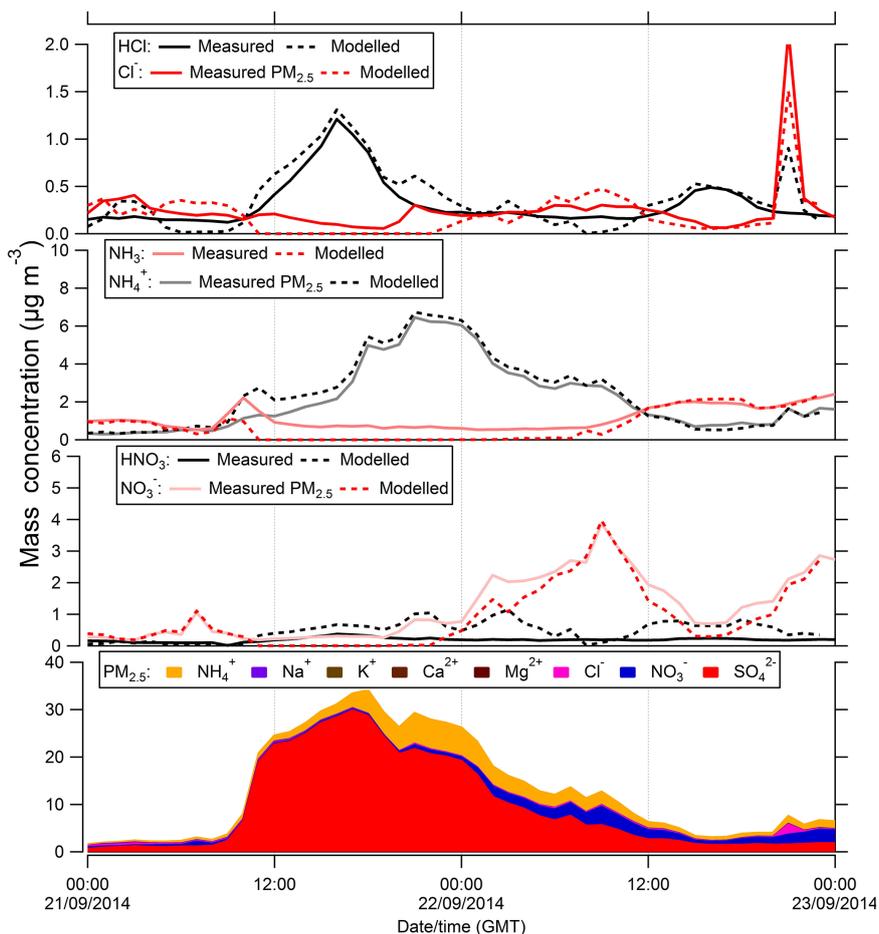


Figure 6. Top three panels: thermodynamic partitioning of gas and aerosol modelled by ISORROPIA-II compared with the measured concentrations at Auchencorth Moss. The bottom panel shows a stacked representation of the chemical composition of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ at Auchencorth Moss as resolved by the MARGA instrument.

which is attributed to the displacement of Cl^- from sea salt (Fig. 6). Further evidence of acid displacement was found at Auchencorth Moss when the ratio of Na^+ and Cl^- was compared to the known ratio of sea water, where a large relative depletion of aerosol Cl^- was found during elevated SO_4^{2-} , represented by a change in colour of the markers in Fig. 7. This is not the first time the site has observed acid displacement; Twigg et al. (2015) observed the site to be rich in sea salt due to its proximity to the sea, with 35 % of the annual average of the inorganic composition of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ attributed to sea salt. During high nitrate (NO_3^-) episodes it was observed on occasion that this coincided with an apparent depletion of Cl^- from sea salt, which was attributed to the displacement of Cl^- by HNO_3 . Roberts et al. (2009) have previously modelled the likely perturbations within a volcano plume upon mixing with background air, which found that both ozone and NO_x were perturbed with bromine chemistry as the key driver. In order to understand the net impact of this eruption on the chemical perturbation of background sea salt aerosol and the production of HCl in the gas phase, there would need

to be a full chemical transport model which includes both chloride and bromine chemistry, which is beyond the scope of this paper. It is, however, noted that between 09:00 (GMT) on 21 September and 03:00 (GMT) on 22 September the Na^+ was known to be underestimated, attributed to acidic composition of the aerosol resulting in a reduction in the performance of the cation column (concentration of the Li^+ internal standard decreased). Whilst correction based on the Li^+ standard is possible, this assumes that the retention was similarly depressed for all cations. The data therefore have been flagged as invalid during the QA/QC procedures of data submission to UK-Air and EMEP but have been presented here as it is thought to be useful data for research purposes. As such the depletion of Cl^- is thought to be even greater than that demonstrated in Fig. 7.

It is surprising that both acid displacement and nucleation events would be observed in parallel, as one process would be expected to be favoured over the other, depending on the aerosol surface area. Instead it is hypothesized that though both events are observed at the same time, it does not nec-

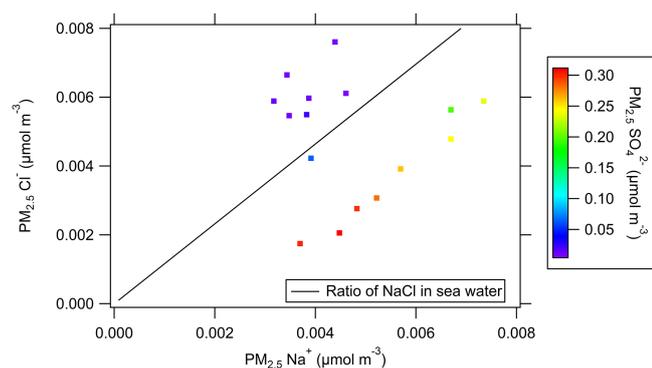


Figure 7. Evidence of acid displacement in sea salt ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$) on 21 September 2014 from 00:00 to 18:00 (GMT) at Auchencorth Moss where the solid line is the known ratio of NaCl in sea water (Seinfeld and Pandis, 2006).

essarily mean that they occur at the same time and at the same location. For the displacement reaction to occur, the sea spray aerosol needs to mix with the volcanic plume from aloft. It is feasible that this mixing generates “pockets of air” that are dominated by the volcanically influenced air (where nucleation is favoured) and others which have efficiently mixed with the sea salt (where heterogeneous chemistry is favoured). Through continued mixing and through the long-term integration of the measurement, both would be reported at the same time. Similarly, the conditions that favour one process over the other may vary along the trajectory between Iceland and the UK.

3.3 Long-term perturbation of the UK atmosphere

The relative importance of the volcanic plume over the 4 months on the UK surface composition and the wider region with respect to air quality and acid deposition can only be assessed with measurements over a wider geographic region. The low-temporal-resolution (monthly) measurements of gas and aerosol composition from AGANet at 30 sites (Fig. 1) provided a clear signal of the impact across the UK in particular for SO_2 (Fig. 8). The national average concentration of SO_2 from this network for September 2014 was about a factor of 6 larger than in the preceding month. Remote sites such as Strathvaich Dam in northern Scotland (Fig. 8: middle panel), which typically experience very little anthropogenic air pollution, experienced the highest monthly SO_2 concentration on record (network operational since 1999), with September and October concentrations an order of magnitude higher than the long-term average ($2 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ cf. $0.2 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$). Similarly Yarnier Wood in the south-west of England experienced the highest concentrations on record for the site and, even taking into account the underlying decreasing trend in SO_2 concentrations, return probabilities were as low as 3×10^{-4} (Table 1, refer to Sect. 2.7 for statistical methods). At sites which are much more anthropogeni-

cally influenced, though the plume is clearly observable, the SO_2 concentration is unremarkable with return probabilities of $> 1 \times 10^{-1}$ (e.g. Detling). A few sites on the western side of the UK were not in the pathway of the plume and therefore no elevated concentrations were observed, e.g. Rum. When assessing the wet deposition from Precip-Net, it was seen that many sites across the UK did experience elevated SO_4^{2-} concentrations in rain in September and October 2014 (Fig. 9, upper panel). Again, at particular sites in northern Scotland and South West England elevated concentrations were observed, whereas in Northern Ireland and parts of Wales no increase in SO_4^{2-} concentrations was evident. It has to be noted, however, that there was exceptionally low rainfall during September 2014 across the UK, with the month being the driest on record for the UK, based on a series from 1910 (which also equalled the fifth driest in the England and Wales in the precipitation series from 1766) (Parry et al., 2014). The majority of the western UK received less than 20 % of the long-term average rainfall; hence the amount of sulfur deposited by wet deposition during this period was not important to the UK annual sulfur deposition budget and hence the environmental impact through acid deposition will have been minimal (Fig. 9). It therefore has to be noted that the reported high SO_4^{2-} could be the result of lack of dilution due to low precipitation and cannot be directly attributed to the volcanic plume.

4 Conclusions

The Holuhraun eruption perturbed the UK atmospheric composition periodically during the latter part of 2014. Elevated SO_2 was observed by the networks at both high and low resolution. These observations complement the study by Schmidt et al. (2015), who reported similar observations for SO_2 across Europe for the same period. This study, however, provides further details of the chemistry within the volcanic plume which are not addressed by Schmidt et al. (2015). In this study high SO_2 concentrations were demonstrated to have resulted in an increase in tropospheric HCl due to the acid displacement of Cl^- from sea salt at the EMEP supersite Auchencorth Moss. Elevated particulate SO_4^{2-} and particle size distributions from the two EMEP supersites provide observational evidence for new particle formation and growth was occurring as the plume passed over the UK. Future work now needs to be done to investigate the direct and indirect effects of the perturbation of chemistry, specifically with regards to human health and crop yields.

The analysis also provides evidence to support the recent modelling work undertaken which concluded that volcano eruptions in Iceland will intermittently affect the UK (Witham et al., 2015) both spatially and temporally during an eruption, primarily driven by meteorology. There is a significant difference in effects on both human health and ecosystem effects between acidic and non-acid aerosol and this

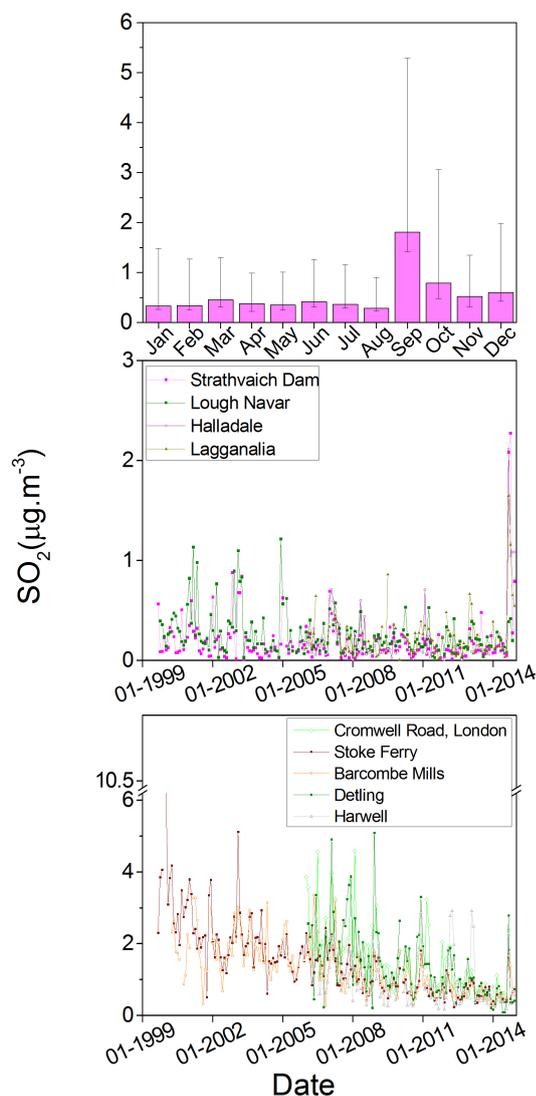


Figure 8. UK Defra Acid Gas and Aerosol Network monthly SO_2 . Top panel: 2014 monthly network average SO_2 concentration (30 sites, whiskers maximum and minimum values); middle panel: five remote sites in the network; bottom panel: five sites in southern England (Refer to Fig. 1 map for location of sites).

study presents the first evidence that volcanic aerosol reaching the UK can be acidic, but this will be highly dependent on the mixing of the plume with the background atmosphere. There are also further impacts which have not yet been fully assessed, for example the net effect on climate (Gauci et al., 2008; Gettelman et al., 2015) and ecosystem function.

The study has highlighted that even though anthropogenic SO_2 concentrations have dramatically decreased in the UK over the last 30 years, there is still a need to maintain the network of analysers as it is not only confirms recovery but also provides a useful tool to track the progression and impact of volcanic plumes and other pollution events. High-resolution chemical composition of aerosol is essential for the identi-

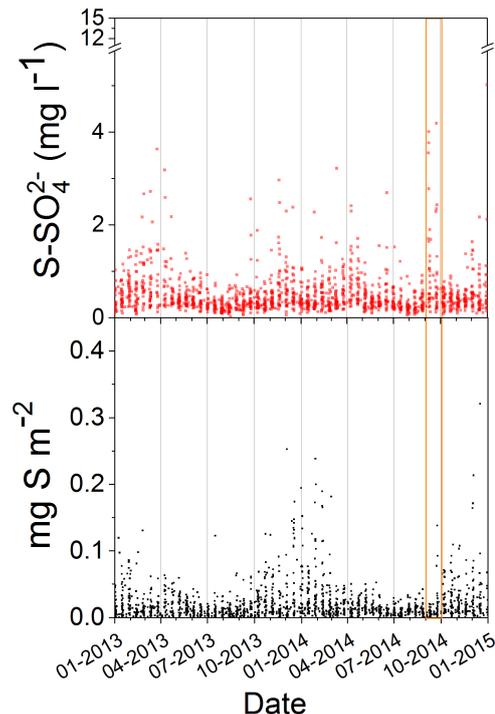


Figure 9. UK Precip-Net data: all fortnightly site data for 2013 and 2014. Upper panel: S-SO_4^{2-} concentrations; lower panel: sulfur deposition (mg S m^{-2}). Note fortnightly data with data plotted using the start date of the measurement period. (Data downloaded from UK-Air on 25 June 2015 and 2 February 2016.) The orange box highlights the measurements in September 2014.

cation of the origin of aerosol events observed concurrently with SO_2 plumes and to understand the atmospheric chemistry. This paper presents the first detailed observations of chemistry within a distal volcano plume at the surface in the UK. This data set is unique and can be used by modellers to test long-term impacts of volcanic eruptions and the evolution of the plume chemistry.

While the 2014–2015 eruption in Holuhraun system was the largest eruption in Europe in over 200 years, there is a potential for even larger events. For example, the 1783–1784 Laki eruption was over 10 times larger in terms of erupted magma and gas volume. An event of this magnitude would cause significant and widespread pollution over Europe and even cause excess mortality (Schmidt et al., 2011). Though some work has been done on a limited data set of the European air quality networks by Schmidt et al. (2015) and Gíslason et al. (2015), a further study is required of the data from across the European compliance networks, as well as the EMEP and ACTRIS networks to integrate both particle characterization and gas chemical composition. This would allow the Holuhraun event to be fully characterized and quantified.

5 Data availability

Data are available from UK-Air (https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/data/data_selector) for the Precip-Net, AGANet sites, the MARGA and the Harwell SMPS. MARGA data can also be found on the EBAS (<http://ebas.nilu.no/>) database. Sulphur dioxide data from Croy and Dundee were obtained from the Air Quality in Scotland Database (<http://www.scottishairquality.co.uk/data/data-selector>). The GOME2B data are a standard volcanic product from the University of Bremen which can be found at http://www.iup.uni-bremen.de/doas/gome2_so2_alert.htm. The EMEP4UK data and SMPS (Auchencorth Moss) are available from the authors on request.

The Supplement related to this article is available online at doi:10.5194/acp-16-11415-2016-supplement.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank Susan Loughlin at the British Geological Survey for her encouragement and useful discussion on this work. We would also like to thank the late Roland Von Glasow for early discussions on the data presented here and acknowledge his great contribution to the study of halogens in the troposphere. The authors would like to acknowledge the following for the funding of the UK measurement networks, the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the devolved administrations, through the operation and management of the EMEP supersite, the UK Eutrophying and Acidifying Atmospheric Pollutants (UKEAP) project (AQ0647), the UK particle number and concentrations network, the UK Automatic Urban and Rural Network, as well as FP7 ACTRIS and Horizon 2020 ACTRIS-2. E. Ilyinskaya's work was funded by NERC urgency grant NE/M021130/1 and the European Community under the FP7 grant agreement no. 308377 (Project FUTUREVOLC).

Edited by: J. Quaas

Reviewed by: two anonymous referees

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