Cold Pool Properties from Oklahoma Mesonet Data

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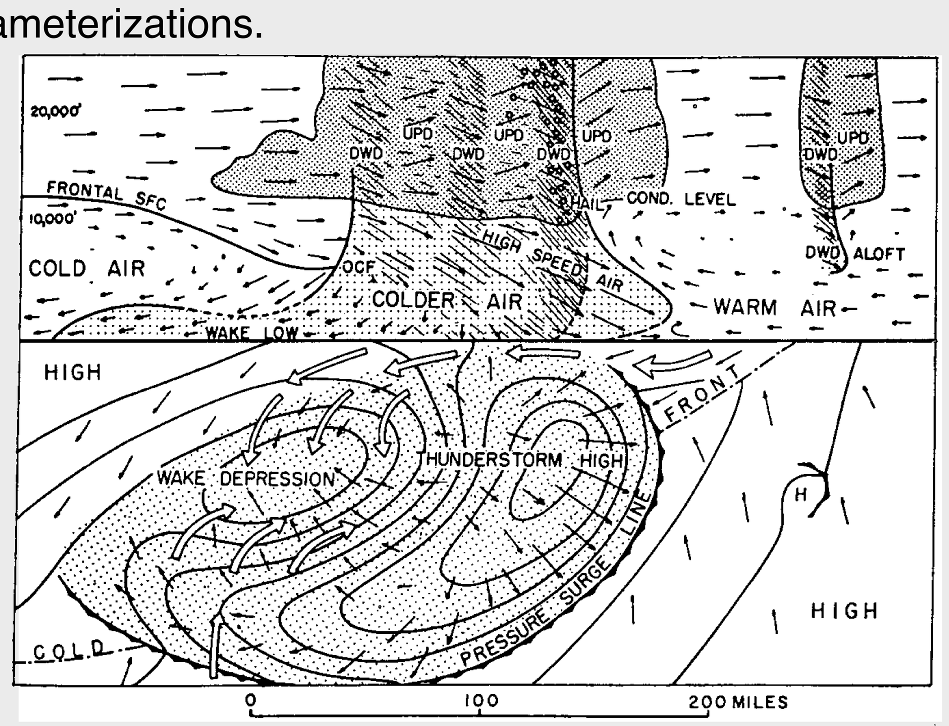
Motivation

Because convective cloud systems generally have strong interactions with boundary layer circulations and thermodynamics, the boundary layer wind and thermodynamic fields contain a great deal of information about convective cloud systems and their interactions with the boundary layer. We are in the process of “retrieving” this information from 15 years of 5-minute Oklahoma Mesonet data and hourly Arkansas Basin River Forecast Center (ABRFC) gridded precipitation data.

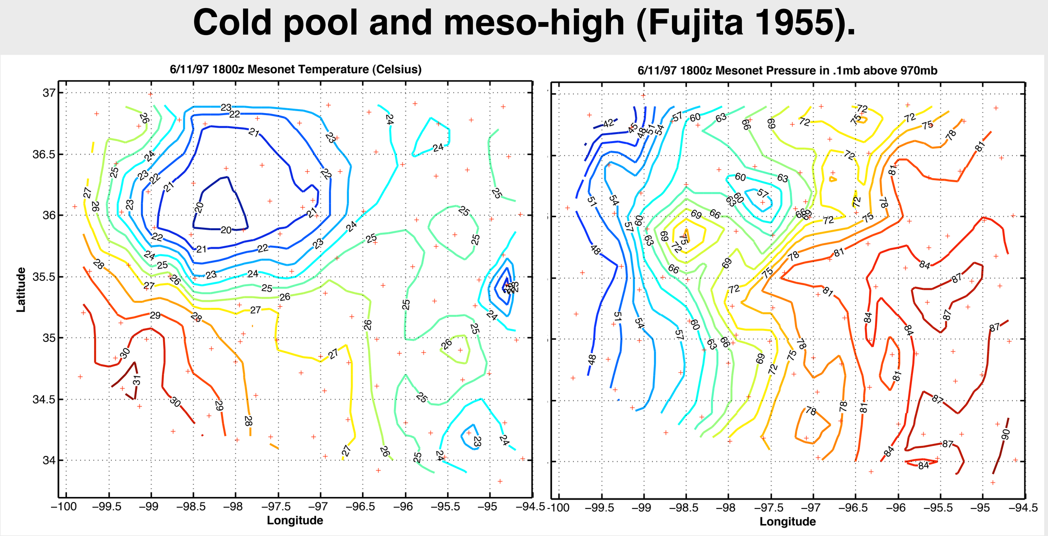
We have already demonstrated that estimates of cloud base updraft and downdraft mass fluxes can be retrieved from the surface divergence field. We also investigated a method to estimate rain evaporation in convective systems from the cold pool hydrostatic surface pressure anomaly (Fujita 1959).

During the past year, we implemented an objective method to locate fronts using mesonet station time series, and applied the method to 4 summer months of 5-minute data from the Oklahoma Mesonet. Our method is similar to that used by Engerer, Stensrud, and Coniglio (2008). These fronts are then used with surface divergence to locate cold pool boundaries.

Datasets of observed cold pool properties can be used to evaluate convective microphysics parameterizations and cold pool parameterizations used in large-scale cumulus parameterizations.

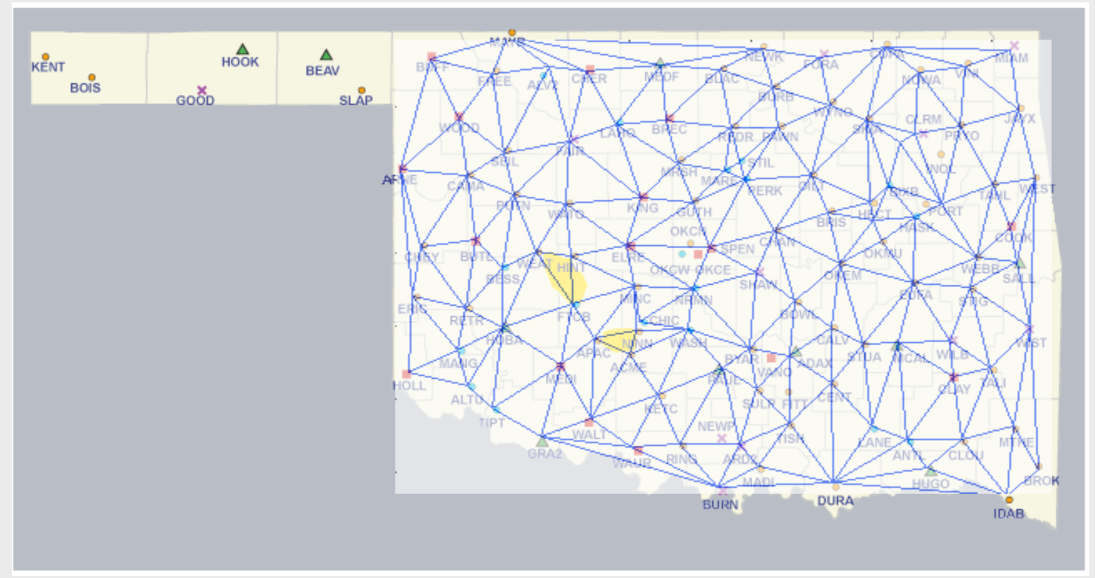


Cold pool and meso-high (Fujita 1955).



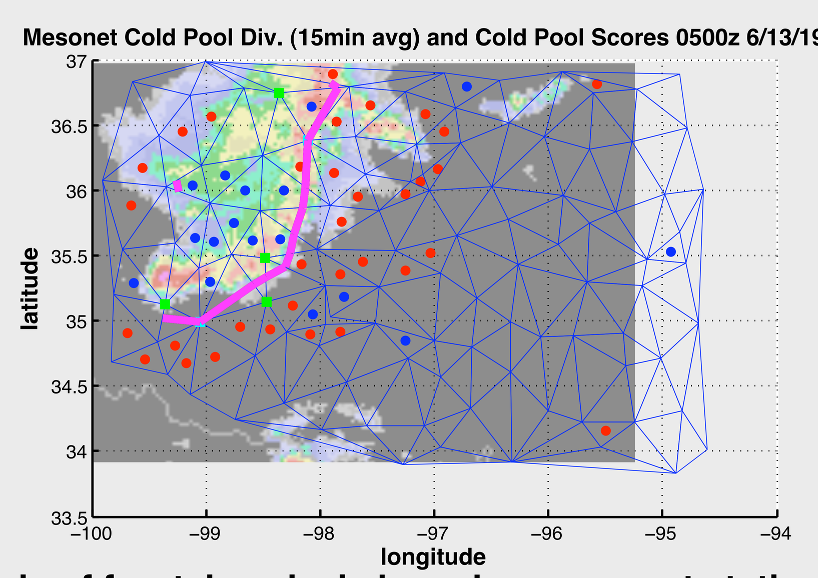
Cold pool and meso-high observed by the Oklahoma Mesonet.

Method

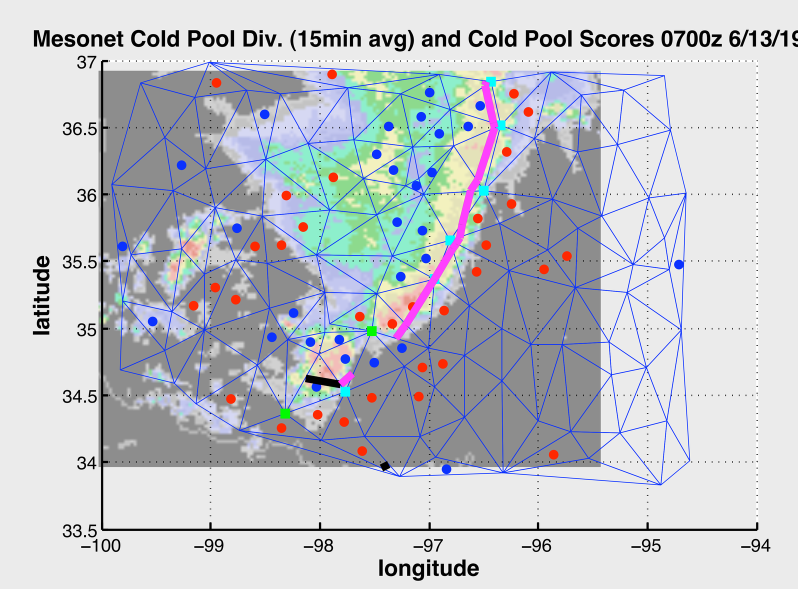


Oklahoma Mesonet stations are at analysis triangle vertices.

To locate a front, we first calculate a “cold pool score”, which (currently) combines two indicators of frontal passages: surface pressure rise and surface temperature drop, over 30-minute time intervals. A **frontal passage** occurs at a station if (1) the cold pool score exceeds a threshold, and (2) the cold pool score has reached its largest value during the 6-hour interval centered on this time. If a front eventually reaches all three stations that define a mesonet triangle, the front can be tracked as it traverses the triangle.

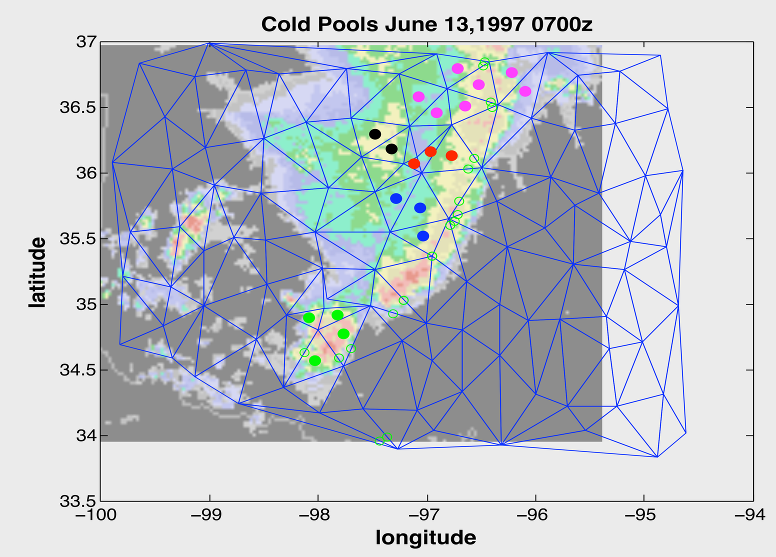


Example of frontal analysis based on mesonet station time series. Red dots indicate triangles with strong convergence. Dark blue dots indicate triangles with strong divergence. (Radar images from the UCAR image archive.)



Example of frontal analysis based on mesonet station time series.

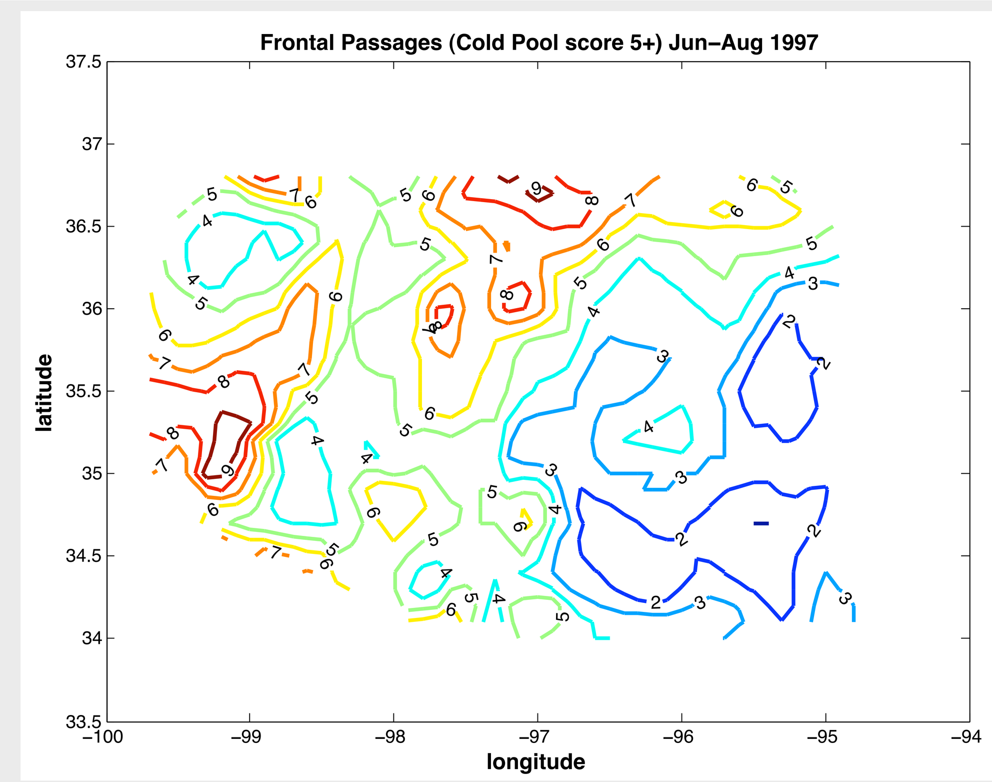
Method



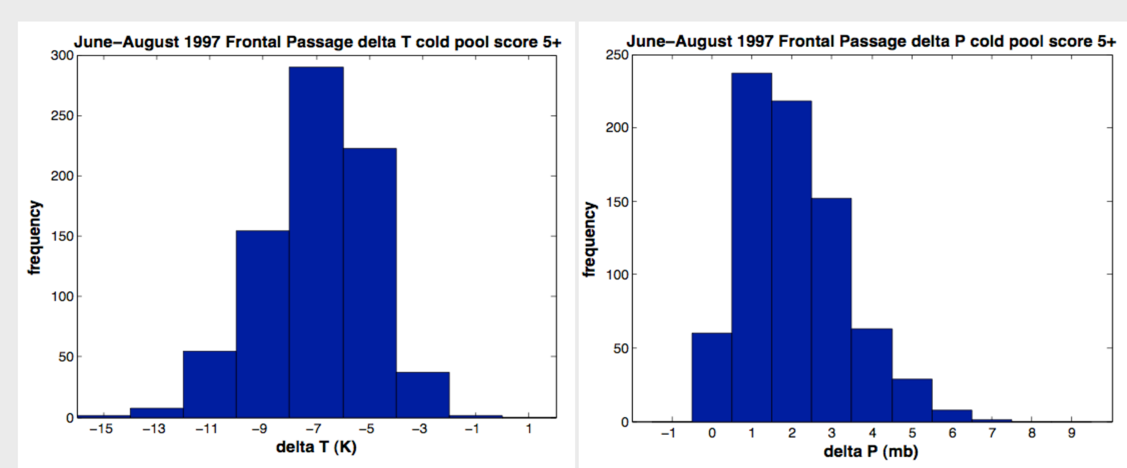
Example of cold pool analysis. Solid circles are cold pools (colors are different pools). Open circles mark the front.

A **cold pool** occurs at a triangle if (1) a frontal passage occurred at the triangle, and (2) the divergence maximum during a 3-hour interval centered on the frontal passage is above 1×10^{-4} s^{-1}. Given that (1) and (2) occur, a triangle is part of a cold pool as long as the divergence is at least half the divergence maximum from (2).

Results

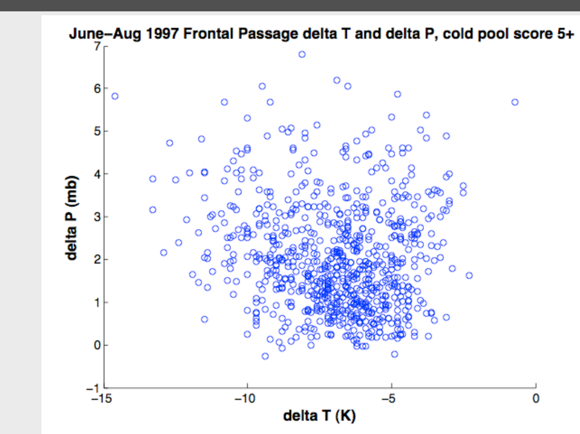


Number of frontal passages (cold pool score > 5)

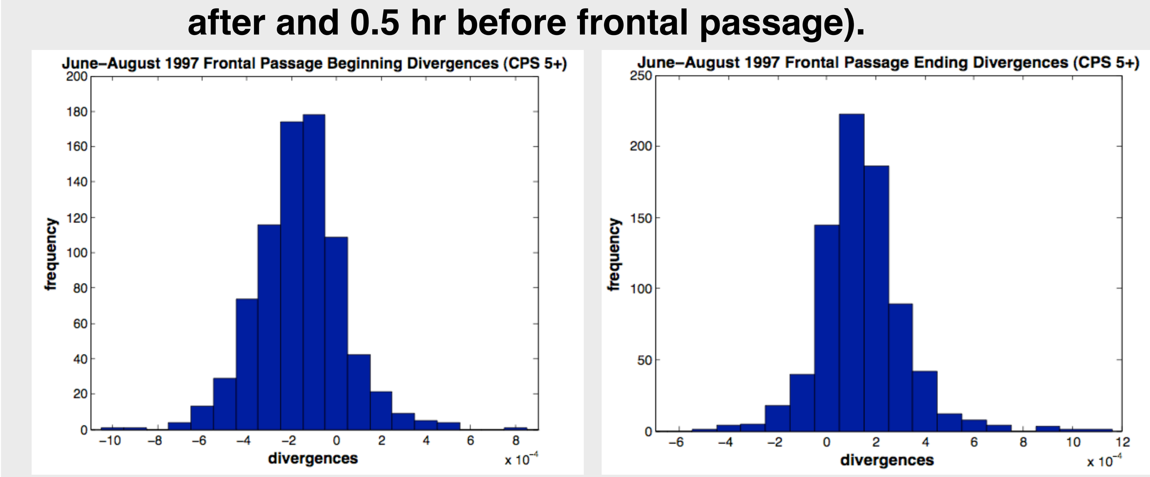


Histograms of temperature and pressure changes during frontal passages (maximum change between 2 hr after and 0.5 hr before frontal passage).

Results



Temperature versus pressure changes during frontal passages (maximum change between 2 hr after and 0.5 hr before frontal passage).



Histograms of divergence before (left) and after (right) frontal passages.

Summary

Frontal passages are characterized by strong surface convergence ahead of the front, and strong surface divergence behind the front. The number of frontal passages during June-August 1997 varied substantially across the mesonet. The median surface temperature drop associated with frontal passages was 6.7 K. The largest drop was 14.6 K. The median surface pressure rise associated with frontal passages was 1.9 mb. The largest rise was 6.8 mb. There was only a weak correlation between temperature drop and pressure rise. This indicates that the vertical structure of the temperature perturbation in the cold pools varies from case to case.

References

Engerer, N. A., D. J. Stensrud, and M. C. Coniglio, 2008: Surface characteristics of cold pools. *Mon. Wea. Rev.,* **136,** 4839-4849.

Fujita, T. T., 1959: Precipitation and cold air production in mesoscale thunderstorm systems. *J. Meteor.,* **16,** 454–466.

Acknowledgements:

This research was supported by the Office of Science (BER), U.S. Department of Energy, Grant No. DE-FG02-08ER64553.

Data were obtained from the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Office of Biological and Environmental Research, Climate and Environmental Sciences Division.