

## Authors' response to reviewer comments

*We thank both reviewers for their time and for their many suggestions/comments, which have improved the manuscript. We detail our responses to each of these comments in turn below, followed by the changes made in the manuscript.*

*We have also taken the opportunity to improve the flow of our manuscript by dividing Section 2 into various sub-sections, and change some of the terminology used for consistency where there were previously differences. These changes can be seen in the Tracked Changes version of the document.*

*Where line numbers are mentioned in our responses, these correspond to the line numbers of the revised document unless otherwise stated.*

### **Reviewer #1**

*We note that many of these issues have been addressed prior to publication in AMT Discussions following comments made by the same reviewer during the Technical Corrections stage. Our responses to these comments reflect the changes that were made to the manuscript at this stage, and make explicit where any further changes have been made.*

#### **Main remarks/comments:**

P3, 1st paragraph: The first sentence “Measuring the continuum...present in the atmosphere” is too general. For example CRDS/OF-CEAS techniques allow for measurements at room temperature and at low pressure close to atmospheric conditions. Same remark for the next sentences: equivalent pathlength with CRDS/OF-CEAS techniques can reach several hundreds of km and base lines are highly stable.

*We agree that CRDS allows for measurements at room temperature (and in principle lower) and at low pressure, and have added in a statement to this effect. Room temperature is not the same as atmospheric temperature however; there are not yet (to our knowledge) measurements by CRDS of the continuum in these windows at temperatures as low as 280K, which are the atmospherically relevant temperatures we refer to here. We have changed the text (P3, L5) to indicate that we consider temperatures below room temperature and added a further sentence to acknowledge the importance of CRDS at room temperature.*

P6, L7: The authors have to specified the cutoff value for the Voigt profile and if they include or not in the continuum the plinth below the absorption lines.

*This is the standard  $25\text{ cm}^{-1}$  with the plinth subtracted from the absorption lines, as it is assumed to be included in the continuum. We have now explicitly included this information in the manuscript on P6 L13.*

P9, Figure 3: On panel (d) the water vapour optical depth is around 0.025. This value doesn't correspond to values reported in Fig 4 and in Supplementary Material which are between 0.01 and 0.008 for the same spectral region. Can the authors clarify this?

*Thank you for spotting this. This Figure was in error, due to a software bug, and has now been corrected.*

P9 or P10: In addition to figures 4 and 5, a figure showing the relative contribution of the aerosols and of the continuum to the optical depth after subtraction of the line-by-line and Rayleigh contributions will be very helpful to demonstrate the importance of the aerosols optical depth knowledge.

*We agree. Figure 5 has been updated with a second panel showing the relative contribution of aerosol and continuum to the combined continuum + aerosol optical depth.*

P19, L17-18: ...due to the lack of laboratory measurements at atmospheric temperatures, one must assume a temperature dependence of the self-continuum. This sentence has to be reformulated as CRDS/OF-CEAS measurements of the self-continuum are available at room temperature. Why the authors did not adopt this data set instead of the extrapolated high temperature data of the CAVIAR laboratory measurements?

*Even with room-temperature measurements of self-continuum, it is still necessary to extrapolate down to ~280K for our purposes. We chose to use the CAVIAR-lab data since it has broad spectral coverage across all the windows, and measurements at a range of temperatures across each of these windows. We have made this more explicit in the manuscript (P21 L5).*

P21, L25-29: In these lines, authors discuss the two possible temperature dependences and they seem to have the same "degree of confidence" in both. This is a little bit strange as they decided to replace the room temperature CAVIAR data by the values extrapolated at 280 K from high temperature CAVIAR measurements.

*Our stance on this is that there are two possible temperature dependences; given the consistency of the straight line fit through the high-T CAVIAR-lab data, we believe it is reasonable to suggest that there is possibly an issue with the low-T CAVIAR-lab data in this window, unless there is some unexpected temperature dependence. This lower temperature dependence is also consistent with the OF-CEAS data of Richard et al. It is our belief that this is likely to be a more robust estimate of the temperature dependence given the agreement between the high-T CAVIAR-lab data and the Richard et al. data.*

*The paragraph has been modified starting on P23 L2 to say "There are therefore two possible experimentally-implied temperature dependences, a lower one implied by the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab, Richard et al. (2017) and Burch and Alt (1984) measurements, and a stronger dependence implied by the less-certain lower-temperature CAVIAR-lab, and Baranov and Lafferty (2011) measurements.", and the figure caption updated with the low-temperature CAVIAR-lab data point, as we agree that it was not clear.*

P24, Fig 14 (b): The data point called Mondelain et al. (2015) should not be plotted on this panel as it was obtained at 4250 cm<sup>-1</sup> and not at 4300 cm<sup>-1</sup>.

*Thank you for pointing out this error. This data point has been removed from the Figure.*

P24, L20: The authors should mention here that the difference is due to the fact that, in one case (Vasilchenko et al) a purely quadratic function was used to fit the data considering that there was no adsorption on the mirrors and that in Mondelain et al an additional linear term was used to take into account the supposed adsorption contribution.

*A sentence has been added to this effect explaining why the two do not agree within the uncertainties (P27 L5), saying "This [difference] can be attributed to the differences in the fits used to obtain these cross-sections; both used a quadratic fit of vapour pressure versus absorption to obtain their cross-sections, but Mondelain et al. use an additional linear term to account for supposed adsorption on the mirrors, whereas Vasilchenko et al. did not need to use this additional term. The Vasilchenko et al., (2019) data, being more recent, is regarded as the more reliable, but is only available at one temperature."*

P26, L5: The authors should mention that in the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window the continuum is stronger than MT\_CKD and the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab self-continuum.

*We agree that this should be made explicit. This has been added; P28 L11 now states: "However, there are clearly some issues in the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window, where at lower wavenumbers the derived continuum is significantly stronger than MT\_CKD\_3.2 and the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab self-continuum, and in the low-wavenumber edge of the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window, where when estimating the self-continuum using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum there is a significant decrease in the self-continuum."*

P26, L9: The authors should add: ... a factor of 100 would be required to bring the CAVIAR-lab and CAVIAR-field self-continua into agreement, in contradiction with CAVIAR foreign continuum.

*We agree that this is inconsistent with the majority of available data, and have included this rewording into the sentence. P28 L16 now states "In the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window, a significant strengthening of the foreign continuum of over a factor of 100 would be required to bring the central values of the CAVIAR-lab and CAVIAR-field self-continua into agreement, which is inconsistent with the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum in this window".*

P27, Figure 16: Several experimental points from CRDS/OF-CEAS experiments are missing in the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window (see Campargue 2016 and Richard 2017) and in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window. In the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window the plotted data have to be replaced by the more recent measurements of Vasilchenko 2019. In Figure 16 (and also in Fig. 17), the uncertainties on the CAVIAR lab measurements are missing and have to be added.

*These data points have been added to the Figures. We have added the uncertainties in the CAVIAR-lab measurements to the plots; in the self-continuum case we used a Monte Carlo simulation to extrapolate the uncertainty in the 280 K data from the higher-temperature data, which takes into account the uncertainty in these data and uncertainty in the extrapolation. We also make clear that the comparison here is with the various Grenoble measurements at room temperature, and indicate that an additional scaling factor would need to be applied to these measurements to bring them down to ~280 K.*

*P28 L8 now states “The CRDS measurements are shown at their original temperature, since for many wavenumbers observations are only available at one temperature. Assuming the MT\_CKD temperature dependence holds, these can be scaled by a factor of ~1.35 to be brought to 280 K.”*

P28, L 29-30: A strong affirmation is made here by considering that almost all the continuum observed in Reichert and Sussmann is due to the foreign contribution. The authors have to justify this.

*We justify this based on Page 9 lines 2-4 of Reichert and Sussmann (2016), which states “the foreign continuum... is by far dominant for most spectral regions given the dry atmospheric conditions encountered in [their] data set.”.*

*P30 L31 now states “Given the high altitude and low water vapour path of their measurements, Reichert and Sussmann indicate that the foreign continuum is by far the dominant contributor to the continuum in the majority of their measured spectral regions...”*

### **Specific comments**

P3, L12: ...the adjustement of the water vapour...

*P3 L17 has been corrected to read “In the window regions, the MT\_CKD continuum mostly originates from adjustment of the water vapour lineshape...”*

P3, L13: in addition to additional empirical adjustments?

*P3 L19 now says “with additional empirical adjustments” to avoid the repetition.*

P3, L32: Only the reference for the foreign-continuum is given. Which self-continuum cross-section is used to obtain the estimated values given in the sentence?

*The given reference (Ptashnik et al. (2012)) contains within it the estimates for the partitioning of the foreign and self-continuum based on Ptashnik et al. (2011a) and Ptashnik et al. (2012). The sentence has been updated to reflect this; P4 L3 now states “(as calculated in Ptashnik et al., 2012)”*

P6, Eq. (2): What means tother as there is already tother\_gases in the equation?

*This refers to other continua, such as the O2 and CO2 continua which are included in MT\_CKD. The text now more explicitly refers to this. P6 L30 now reads "Continuum absorption by other molecules (N2, O2, O3 and CO2, defined here as  $\tau_{\text{other}}$ ...)"*

P18, L13: ...self-continuum cross-section...

*A "c" has been added to the beginning of cross-section to fix this.*

P35, L17: The term AOD has to be defined.

*The acronym "AOD" has been removed from all instances of the manuscript and replaced with  $\tau_{\text{aerosol}}$ , to remain consistent with the rest of the manuscript.*

P36, L7: Such an analysis...

*The extraneous "a" has been removed from this sentence.*

P36, L25: ... the water vapour self-continuum in the near-IR windows at sea level.

*The hyphen has been removed.*

#### **In AMT paper supplementary:**

P2: Just before equation (S12) it is written  $y=mx+c$ . This is misleading as in fact  $x$  equal to  $m$  in Equation (S12). Authors should replace  $m$  by  $b$  for example.

*Thank you for pointing this out. We have changed the format of the linear equation from  $y = mx + c$  to  $y = ax + b$ , to remove this confusion.*

P3: Additionally, the agreement between the Langley and closure data (Figure 8)...

*This has been changed.*

Figure S3: Cosinus is missing in the legend of the y-axis. Moreover the angle  $\theta$  is already used at the beginning of the paper to name the solar zenith angle. Another Greek letter should be used.

*The cosine has been added and theta replaced with phi, to avoid this confusion.*

#### **Reviewer #2**

A small adaption of the overall structure could improve the readability of the paper further. Section 3 with the results contains with subsection 3.2 a comparison with MT\_CKD. Section 4 is then about the comparison with laboratory observations. Although section 3.2 is about optical depth and section 4 mostly about cross sections, it could be an advantage to lift both to the same level of sections.

*We agree that the treatment of MT\_CKD and the laboratory observations is inconsistent. Section 3 now exclusively refers to the Langley-derived optical depth, with all comparison taking place in individual sections; Section 4 is a short section detailing the comparison with MT\_CKD (previously Section 3.2), and Section 5 now deals with the laboratory data comparison.*

#### Specific comments

P3, line 13: The authors state that “in many cases they use either version 2.5 or version 3.2” of MT\_CKD. It would be helpful, if the authors could give a more specific reference or a short indicative list of some relevant cases.

*We agree that including some examples with citations is beneficial here; we have included a list of various codes which use MT\_CKD.*

*P3 L14 now says: Examples of codes using this model include the Atmospheric Radiative Transfer Simulator (Buehler et al. 2018), the Reference Forward Model (Dudhia et al. 2017), the Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2 (O’Dell et al 2018), the Met Office Unified Model (Walters et al. 2019) and the GFDL Global Atmosphere and Land Model (Zhao et al. 2018).*

P4, line 22: How do the authors come to the conclusion that Zugspitze measurements were taken at airmass factors of  $\sim 6$ ? Please explain this in more detail.

*This number is taken from the fact that the lowest airmass factor at the surface for Zugspitze in Dec/Jan is  $\sim 3$ , and the limit imposed by the authors indicating that only observations with airmass below 9 are used. The sentence has been changed to reflect this range of airmasses more precisely.*

*P4 L23 now states: “To obtain a long enough path length to mitigate the lack of water vapour, the Zugspitze measurements were taken at large airmass factors ( $\sim 3$ -9).”*

P5 concerning experimental setup: It remains unclear how the Microtops II sunphotometer was operated. Was this handheld device mounted on a stand/tripod? Was it mounted on a solar tracker? It would be helpful if the authors describe how it was ensured that the aerosol optical depth measurements were performed along the same atmospheric path.

*The Microtops sunphotometer was operated by hand by an operator at the field site co-incident with the FTIR measurements – the lack of a dedicated solar tracker on this is potentially a source of uncertainty in the aerosol measurements. However, this is not something that we can quantify or cross-check, given the lack of measurements from another source other than the FTIR. We have included this caveat when discussing the Microtops measurements, and added the need for better tracking of the solar disc as a suggestion in Section 5 (now 6).*

*P5 L29 now states “The Microtops has a field of view of 2.5°, and was operated by hand rather than mounted on a solar tracker, which could lead to some additional uncertainty (see Section 2.4).”*

*P37 L18 now states “Mounting our sunphotometer on a solar tracker may have aided our analysis and possibly reduced some of the problems described in Section 2.4.”*

P9, fig. 3c: The data shown is marked as smoothed. How exactly was this smoothing mathematically performed? Is it the same smoothing about 15 cm<sup>-1</sup> mentioned for the continuum on p6, line 14?

*This is the same smoothing (at 15 cm<sup>-1</sup>) as performed for the final analysis, which was performed using a moving average (boxcar) filter. The text has been updated to reflect this.*

*P8 L10 now states explicitly “...smoothing using a 15 cm<sup>-1</sup> boxcar filter...”*

P10, fig. 4: In this figure the blue shading corresponds to k=1 and the cyan shading to k=2 uncertainty. There seems to be an envelope below and above the cyan shading that is colored again blue. If there is a physical meaning of it, could the authors please explain it?

*These lines are there to demarcate the edges of the uncertainty limits. Given that they caused ambiguity as to their meaning, they have been removed.*

P13, line 8: A suggestion for improvement is to mention the magnitude of the field-of-views of both the Microtops and the FTS.

*We now include the FOV of the Microtops and FTS within the manuscript, and point toward our discussion of the forward scattering/FOV issue on Page 13.*

*P5 L29 now states “The Microtops has a field of view of 2.5°, and was operated by hand rather than mounted on a solar tracker, which could lead to some additional uncertainty (see Section 2.4).”*

P16, fig. 8: Is there any reason why the Langley and closure method derived optical depths in the upper part of the figure do not cover the same region of the residual in the lower part of the figure? If possible, they should be the same

*We have now updated Figure 8 to show the residual on the same scale as the top panel.*

P19, line 4: The section title with laboratory observations fits to the lab measurements, but does not quite fit to the comparison with Reichert and Sussmann (2016) that are also included in the comparison. Their observations were field observations as the CAVIAR field data in this paper.

*Section 4 (now Section 5, see top-level response to Reviewer #2 above) has been renamed to “Comparison with other observations”, and the text in the first paragraph changed to reflect that we are also comparing to these field observations.*

*P19, L5 now reads “This section describes the relevant laboratory and field measurements...”*

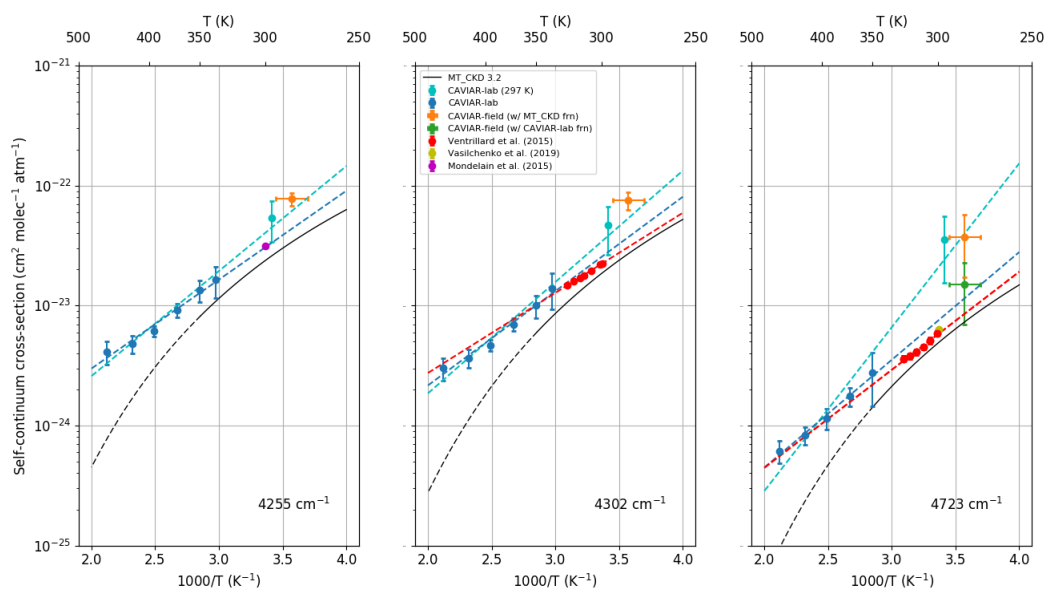
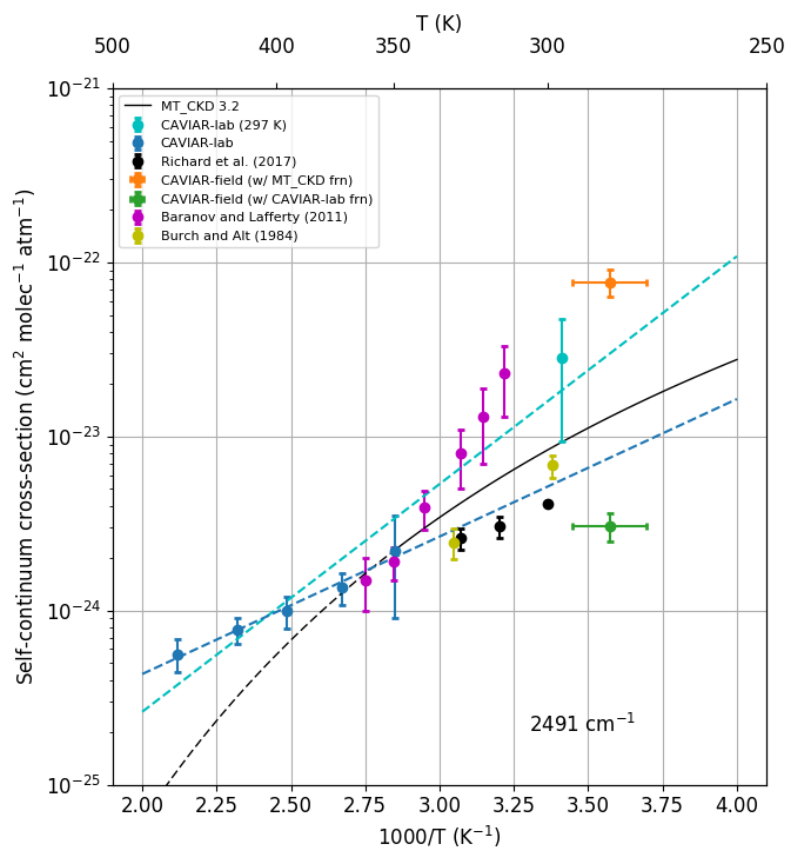
P19, line 8: The derived continuum optical depth  $\tau_{\text{total}}^{\text{CAV}}$  has another naming in the following formulas, e.g. formulas (3) and (5). Additionally, the quantity  $\tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{lab}}$  mentioned on P20, fig. 11 was not introduced

*$\tau_{\text{total}}^{\text{CAV}}$  has been renamed to more accurately fit what is in the Figures and the Equations. Equation (4) has been updated to fix a typo, where the left-hand-side of the equation is equal to  $\tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{CAV}}$  rather than the correct  $\tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{lab}}$ . We have also changed Figure 11 to now show the correct variables.*

.P24, line 10: The authors refer to lower temperature data (cyan point and dashed line), but in figure 13 there is no cyan point and no cyan dashed line. Seemingly, this passage is from an earlier version of this paper. CAVIAR-lab (297K) should be removed from the legend in figure 13.

*The versions of Figures 13 and 14 used in the uploaded drafts of the paper do not include this data point and the corresponding extrapolation – this was in error. The correct versions of these Figures are shown below – they are the figures uploaded for the original draft, but including the 297 K data in the legend. These are now included in the manuscript.*





P26, fig. 14: CAVIAR-lab (297) is not anymore included in the figure, so it should be removed from the legend. The same applies to the caption.

*See previous comment.*

P29, fig. 16: At the beginning of the second line of the caption self-continuum is assumed to be the foreign-continuum.

*The caption has been fixed to reflect that the CAVIAR-field self-continuum is estimated using the CAVIAR-lab foreign-continuum.*

*P29 L3 now reads: “Figure 16: Self-continuum from CAVIAR-field as estimated using (a) the MT\_CKD foreign-continuum and (b) the CAVIAR-lab foreign-continuum, alongside MT\_CKD\_3.2 and selected laboratory measurements. The grey shaded regions indicate the  $k = 1$  confidence limits in the CAVIAR-field self-continuum, and the blue shaded regions the uncertainty in the temperature-extrapolated (to 280 K) CAVIAR-lab data. The darker shaded regions are where these uncertainty limits overlap. The CAVIAR-lab uncertainties are obtained via Monte Carlo fits using the uncertainties in the higher-temperature ( $> 350$  K) CAVIAR-lab data.” This also reflects the changes made in response to Reviewer #1’s comment about the uncertainties in the CAVIAR-lab data.*

P33, fig. 17: In the caption it would be more precise, to mention that the showed data corresponds only to atmospheric windows in the mentioned region. The authors could insert “in atmospheric windows” between continuum and across.

*We now make explicit that the CAVIAR-field data corresponds to the window regions only, and use “CAVIAR-field” rather than “Langley-estimated” for consistency.*

*P33 L3 now says “CAVIAR-field foreign continuum in the atmospheric windows across the 2000-7000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  region...”*

P33, fig. 17: Concerning the showed Reichert and Sussmann (2016) data, ignored is the fact that they used MT\_CKD\_2.5.2 model for their continuum retrieval. As the self-continuum was assumed to be consistent with the MT\_CKD model a direct comparison like in this figure is challenging.

*We believe that this comparison is reasonable, given we have used MT\_CKD\_3.2 in panel a) of this Figure to obtain the foreign continuum, and that since the foreign continuum contribution is dominant in the Reichert and Sussmann (2016) case, we believe that it is not likely to have an impactful effect on the comparison. We have added an additional sentence to the text to make clear that this is the case.*

*P30 L32 now says “Reichert and Sussmann indicate that the foreign continuum is by far the dominant contributor to the continuum in the majority of their measured spectral regions; we therefore compare their measurements to our foreign continuum measurements directly, but there may be some small self-continuum component which we do not account for in the Reichert and Sussmann data.”*

P38, line 27: Constraining the spectral coverage from 2000-7000 cm<sup>-1</sup> to 2100-6600cm<sup>-1</sup> would be more precisely .

*The text has been updated to match the title and more precisely reflect the wavenumber range.*

*P38 L29 now says “We have presented new field observations of the near-IR continuum in the atmospheric windows at 4, 2.1, 1.6, μm (2500-6600 cm<sup>-1</sup>)”.*

Supplement: The airmass factor definition  $m = \cos \theta$  contradicts the airmass factor definition given in the paper. The Beer-Bouguer-Lambert law given here is only valid with  $m = 1/\cos \theta$ .

*This was a typo and has been corrected.*

Technical corrections

P3, line 7: remove “at” after temperature

*This has been corrected to “as”.*

P10, line 5: word repetition (distance 2) of approximation/approximately

*This sentence has been reworded to “...which in the limit of small absorption is approximately the optical depth noise in that region”.*

P12, line 9: insert vapor (or vapour) between water and continuum

*This has been added.*

P27, line 3: Period/full stop is missing right after “term”.

*This full stop has been added.*

P37, line 27, word repetition (distance 1) of aircraft

*We now reword this to remove the repetition, and also define FAAM.*

P40, line 16: remove “10”, which seems to be a line number of an earlier version of this paper

*This has been removed.*

Supplement, P2: remove “the” in front of “account” in the third-to-last paragraph

*This has been removed.*

There is an inconsistency in the writing of the MT\_CKD versions. Mostly the current version is named MT\_CKD3.2, but sometimes the naming is with a space in front of the version number. For the future reader a coherent way of writing would be an advantage, e.g. in browsing the paper. The model’s developers are using with MT\_CKD\_3.2 a third way of spelling

*We now use the MT\_CKD\_ syntax, to be consistent with other literature.*

# Atmospheric observations of the water vapour continuum in the near-infrared windows between 2500-6600 cm<sup>-1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Water vapour continuum absorption is potentially important for both closure of the Earth's energy budget and remote sensing applications. Currently, there are significant uncertainties in its characteristics in the near-infrared atmospheric windows at 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$ . There have been several attempts to measure the continuum in the laboratory; not only are there significant differences amongst these measurements but there are also difficulties in extrapolating the laboratory data taken at room temperature and above to temperatures more widely relevant to the atmosphere. Validation is therefore required using field observations of the real atmosphere. There are currently no published observations in atmospheric conditions with enough water vapour to detect a continuum signal within these windows, or where the self-continuum component is significant. We present observations of the near-infrared water vapour continuum from Camborne, UK at sea level using a sun-pointing, radiometrically-calibrated Fourier transform spectrometer in the window regions between 2000-10000 cm<sup>-1</sup>. Analysis of this data is challenging, particularly because of the need to remove aerosol extinction, and the large uncertainties associated with such field measurements. Nevertheless, we present data that is consistent with recent laboratory datasets in the 4 and 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  windows (when extrapolated to atmospheric temperatures). These results indicate that the most recent revision (3.2) of the MT\_CKD foreign continuum, versions of which are widely used in atmospheric radiation models, requires strengthening by a factor of  $\sim 5$  in the centre of the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window. In the higher-wavenumber window at 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$ , our estimated self and foreign continua are significantly stronger than MT\_CKD. The possible contribution of the self and foreign continua to our derived total continuum optical depth is estimated by using laboratory or MT\_CKD values of one, to estimate the other. The obtained self-continuum shows some consistency with temperature-extrapolated laboratory data in the centres of the 4 and 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  windows. The 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  region is more sensitive to atmospheric aerosol and continuum retrievals and therefore more uncertain than the more robust results at 2.1 and 4  $\mu\text{m}$ . We highlight the difficulties in observing the atmospheric continuum and make the case for additional measurements in both the laboratory and field and discuss the requirements for any future field campaign.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1: Background

The near-infrared spectrum (defined here in wavenumber space as 2000-10000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) is characterised by its spectral band-window structure, where parts of the spectrum are completely opaque to radiation and others are mostly transparent over typical (clear-sky) atmospheric paths. Within this spectral region, in addition to the many discrete spectral lines of various gases, there is additional absorption due to the water vapour continuum absorption (henceforth simply continuum), a smoothly varying (with wavenumber) component of the total absorption which underlies this band-window structure. The cause of this continuum is not known but is postulated to be due to a combination of far-wing broadening, e.g. by collisional effects, and absorption due to water dimers (bound or quasi-bound complexes of two water vapour molecules), as discussed in e.g. Shine et al., (2012). The continuum is normally broken down into two components; a self-continuum component that depends on the square of the vapour pressure, and a foreign continuum component that depends linearly on vapour pressure and the pressure of the ambient air. The foreign continuum is observed to have at most a-very weak temperature dependence (Ptashnik et al., 2012), while the self-continuum has a negative exponential temperature dependence (Mondelain et al., 2014; Ptashnik et al., 2011a). The temperature dependence of the self-continuum is broadly consistent with a dimer-like theory, but this has not been verified due to the difficulty of performing *ab initio* calculations of the water dimer spectrum, and the strength of the temperature dependence varies amongst different sets of measurements and may depend on wavenumber (e.g. Ptashnik et al., 2019)).

Since the continuum absorbs radiation (particularly in the atmospheric windows) which would otherwise penetrate further into the atmosphere or reach the surface, it influences the surface-atmosphere partitioning of energy and is therefore important for understanding the global energy budget. In the more transparent window regions, most of the continuum absorption occurs in the troposphere where water vapour is more abundant and has a potential influence on the hydrological cycle. The continuum contribution to climate feedbacks could also be enhanced in a warming climate via the water vapour feedback; the strongly absorbing water vapour bands are already close to saturation, meaning that the window regions, in which the continuum is comparatively more important, could contribute more to the change in absorption in a warming climate. For example, Radel et al. (2015) found that the near-IR continuum contributes ~10-20% of the total water vapour shortwave feedback in thea scenario with a 33% increase in water vapour, depending on whether a weaker or a stronger continuum is used. The continuum also impacts upon remote sensing of the Earth's atmosphere and surface. Some remote sensing platforms e.g. the Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2 (OCO-2) (Oyafuso et al., 2017) have channels observing in the 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  (~4000 and 6300  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  respectively) windows, as does the MODIS satellite (Platnick et al., 2017), which is used to retrieve gas concentrations, cloud properties, surface albedo and aerosol optical depth.

The strength of the near-infrared continuum is uncertain, particularly in the 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  windows. There have been relatively few attempts to measure the self-continuum in the laboratory, with observed absorption coefficients that differ significantly (e.g. Shine et al., 2016) in the centres of these windows at room temperature. Measuring the continuum in the laboratory is problematic in some ways, due to the need to extrapolate in temperature and pressure to conditions present in the atmosphere (which are frequently below room temperature). The weak absorption strength of the continuum in the windows makes it difficult to measure at typical tropospheric temperatures ( $\sim 280$  K) without long path lengths (such as that from the top of atmosphere (TOA) to the surface) which are difficult to attain in a laboratory. These issues can be mitigated using certain high-precision techniques (e.g. cavity ring-down spectroscopy (CRDS)), at the cost of wide spectral coverage; however, while CRDS measurements exist at room temperature, ~~at~~ there are none reported in the literature at the lower temperatures considered here. Additionally, the weak (and featureless) absorption means that the measurements are very sensitive to the experimental conditions, such as the baseline stability of the spectrometer when using Fourier transform spectroscopy (FTS) techniques (e.g. Ptashnik et al., 2015).

The continuum is parameterised in most radiative transfer codes used in models and remote sensing by the MT\_CKD (Mlawer-Tobin\_Clough-Kneizys-Davies) model (Mlawer et al., 2012); ~~in many cases they use~~ typically using either version 2.5 or version 3.2 (Mlawer et al., 2019). ~~MT\_CKD is a semi-empirical model.~~ MT\_CKD is a semi-empirical model. Examples of codes using this model include the Atmospheric Radiative Transfer Simulator (Buehler et al. 2018), the Reference Forward Model (Dudhia et al. 2017), the Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2 (O'Dell et al 2018), the Met Office Unified Model (Walters et al. 2019) and the GFDL Global Atmosphere and Land Model (Zhao et al. 2018). In the window regions, the MT\_CKD continuum mostly originates from the adjustment of the water vapour lineshape using a  $\chi$ -factor derived primarily from measurements at wavenumbers in the mid and far-infrared ( $< 2000$   $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ), with additional empirical adjustments. It is not an *ab initio* calculation, and uses selected observations to adjust its continuum strength. Any such adjustment should therefore consider the uncertainty and differences in the available measurements. A particularly important aspect is the temperature dependence; atmospheric radiative transfer models generally use the MT\_CKD formulation to extrapolate the self-continuum absorption to temperatures at which there are no laboratory measurements.

Measurements of the continuum in the atmosphere are therefore necessary to supplement laboratory measurements. While field measurements present their own issues, explained more in Sections 3 and 5.6, they provide data with which to test the experimentally-implied temperature dependence, as well as that of MT\_CKD. Ideally, a combination of field and laboratory measurements would converge on a set of continua at different temperatures and pressures that could be included into spectroscopic databases such as HITRAN (Gordon et al., 2017), or at least provide a set of robust values (with agreement within the uncertainties) that can be used to adjust MT\_CKD.

In this work, we present the first reported derivation of the near-IR atmospheric continuum in the 4, 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  windows at mean sea level with a well-constrained uncertainty budget, and the first to be derived using a radiometrically calibrated spectrometer. These measurements were made during the CAVIAR (Continuum Absorption at Visible and Infrared wavelengths and its Atmospheric Relevance) field campaign in Camborne, Cornwall, UK in August-September 2008 (Gardiner et al., 2012). Since these measurements are at mean sea-level, it has been estimated that the continuum absorption will be roughly evenly split between the self and foreign continua at 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$ , and  $\sim 70:30\%$  in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window based on laboratory measurements (as calculated in Ptashnik et al., 2012). Additionally, observing at sea-level allows us to measure the continuum within the windows, as the expected continuum contribution is above the signal-to-noise of our spectrometer (see Section 2.2). These conditions set our results apart from those of Reichert and Sussmann, (2016), who used an FTS at a high altitude site to measure the continuum. This allowed observations of the continuum within the bands but restricted the ability to detect it within the windows. Additionally, our measurements are radiometrically calibrated and traceable to SI (*Système international d'unités*, BIPM, 2006); this allows us to obtain the top-of-atmosphere solar spectral irradiance (SSI) directly (Elsey et al., 2017; Menang et al., 2013), which is itself uncertain to  $\sim 8\%$  in the 4000-7000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  region.

## 1.2: Atmospheric observations of the near-IR continuum

This Section discusses the current literature in terms of field measurements of the near-IR continuum. Reichert and Sussmann, (2016), henceforth “Zugspitze”, presented a continuum absorption obtained in atmospheric conditions at a high-altitude site at the Zugspitze in the German Alps. This used an FTS calibrated using a combination of Langley-derived TOA irradiance, a medium-temperature ( $\sim 1970$  K) blackbody and an assumed SSI from a radiative transfer model (Reichert et al., 2016). The high altitude allows for measurements of the continuum well into the main water vapour absorption bands and ostensibly allows for an upper limit to be set on the absorption in the windows. These are the most immediately comparable measurements in the literature to the ones presented here. There are several key differences between the two field campaigns which makes them difficult to compare directly. The Zugspitze measurements were performed in conditions that had a significantly smaller water vapour path, meaning that observations of the continuum in the windows are extremely difficult, while allowing observations in the bands that sea-level observations are not capable of. Additionally, the higher altitude measurements are dominated by the foreign continuum due to the lower vapour pressures, whereas the sea-level observations are more of a mixture of foreign and self-continua. The higher altitude measurements are above the atmospheric boundary layer, mitigating the effect of aerosol extinction which is a significant problem for sea-level observations. To obtain a long enough path length to mitigate the lack of water vapour, the Zugspitze measurements were taken at large airmass factors ( $\sim 6$  airmasses<sup>3-9</sup>). This may be problematic however since a) the effects of atmospheric refraction are more pronounced, and b) extrapolating from high airmass to zero airmass using the Langley method increases the effect of the uncertainty in the individual measurements, since these primarily use the closure method and are therefore reliant on their calibration to a prescribed SSI.

These factors mean that Zugspitze observations are available in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window and within several of the adjacent water vapour bands, but values are not presented in the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window (many of these are in fact negative). Due to the large uncertainties, these are seemingly consistent with both MT\_CKD and contemporary laboratory measurements of the foreign continuum (see Section 4.5.2), despite the considerable differences between these datasets. These will be examined in more detail in [Section 4](#) and [5](#). Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that these measurements are a significant advance in our understanding of the in-band continuum. Additionally, as understanding of the near-IR SSI is improved, the calibration used in the Zugspitze measurements could be used to measure the continuum without the need for an expensive and time-consuming blackbody calibration, which would allow for measurements in a wider variety of conditions. This would both help validate radiative transfer models and allow for separation of the foreign and self-continuum contributions in atmospheric conditions; this task is extremely challenging to do with a single field campaign at one location if only modest changes in water vapour column occur.

## 4.2. Methods and experimental setup

### 2.1: Retrieval methods

This work builds upon the work of Tallis et al., (2011), Menang et al., (2013), and Elsey et al., (2017). These all used observations obtained using an absolutely-calibrated ground-based sun-pointing Fourier transform spectrometer (Gardiner et al., 2012) set up at a field site in Camborne, Cornwall, UK (50.218°N, 5.327°E). Those papers focused on water vapour spectral lines and SSI respectively. Gardiner et al., (2012) presents the calibration procedure and FTS setup in detail. The spectrometer measures the centre of the solar disk (using dedicated solar tracker optics) in the range 2000-10000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , with a spectral resolution of 0.03  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The FTS is radiometrically calibrated, with traceability to SI via calibration to the 3000 K Ultra High Temperature Blackbody (UHTBB) at the UK National Physical Laboratory. [The field-of-view of the FTS is 0.26°.](#)

The total optical depth  $\tau_{total}$  can be determined from the irradiance  $I$  observed by the FTS at a given airmass factor  $m = \sec(\theta)$  (with  $\theta$  the solar zenith angle). This is done using measurements at a range of airmasses via the Langley method, or given a top-of-atmosphere irradiance  $I_0$ , the radiative closure method. Taking the logarithm of the Beer-Bouguer-Lambert law:

$$(1) \ln(I) = \ln(I_0) - m\tau_{total}.$$

The radiative closure method is a simple inversion of this equation to solve for  $\tau_{total}$ . In this case, the SSI of Elsey et al., (2017) is used, since this is determined directly by the spectrometer used in this work. This does however introduce significant extra uncertainty, given the large uncertainty in the near-IR SSI, particularly in the lower-wavenumber windows.

The Langley method exploits the fact that Eq. (1) can be solved as a linear equation given observations at various airmasses, assuming that the optical depth does not vary significantly between these airmasses. This means that the aerosol optical depth

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( $\tau_{aerosol}$ ) needs to be measured at the same time as a spectrometer measurement and along the same atmospheric path, as does the integrated water vapour (IWV). It also means that measurements must be taken when there are no clouds present.  $\tau_{aerosol}$  was measured using a handheld Microtops II sunphotometer (Solar Light Company, 2001) at 0.38, 0.44, 0.675, 0.936 and 1.02  $\mu\text{m}$ . The Microtops has a field of view of 2.5°, and was operated by hand rather than mounted on a solar tracker, which could lead to some additional uncertainty (see Section 2.4). Integrated water vapour was measured using a HATPRO microwave radiometer (Rose and Czekala, 2009). The effects of clouds were minimised by visually checking for clouds at the time of measurement, and by using the variation in the observed voltage of the spectrometer detector to determine whether any sub-visible clouds or haze passed into the line-of-sight of the spectrometer during a measurement.

The continuum optical depth,  $\tau_{cont}$  derived from the total optical depth  $\tau_{total}$  obtained from the spectrometer measurements, can be characterised as:

$$(2) \quad \tau_{cont} = \tau_{total} - \tau_{H_2O_{lines}} - \tau_{other\_gases} - \tau_{Rayleigh} - \tau_{other} - \tau_{aerosol}.$$

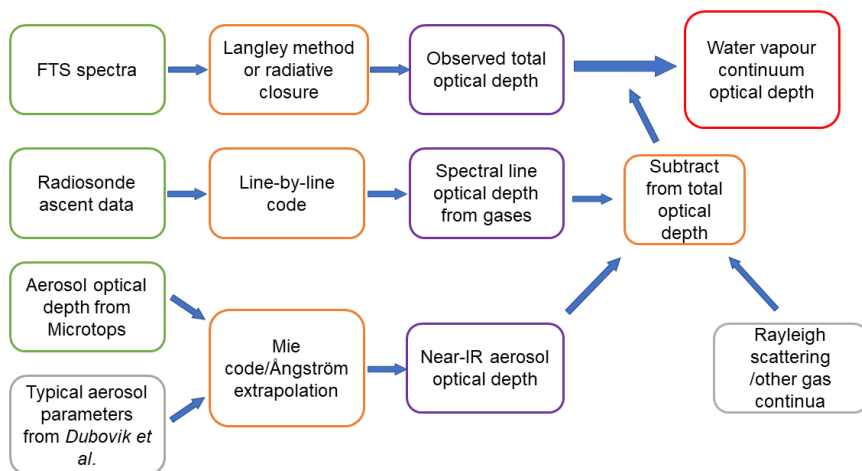
The retrieval of the continuum mostly relies on accurate determination of the line-by-line absorption from water vapour and other gases, and aerosol extinction. Rayleigh scattering was modelled using the calculations of Bucholtz, (1995). It is mostly negligible in the near-IR windows (Elsey et al., 2017) and thus has minimal effect on the derived continuum. The line-by-line optical depth was determined using the Reference Forward Model (version 5.01, Dudhia, (2017)) and the HITRAN2016 spectroscopic database (Gordon et al., 2017) and the Voigt lineshape cut off at 25  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (with the line contribution at 25  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  subtracted at wavenumbers less than 25  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , as this is assumed to be part of the continuum following the MT\_CKD definition).

It follows that the choice of spectroscopic database has an effect on the derived continuum, since a change in line parameters will affect the amount of absorption attributed to the spectral lines rather than the continuum. This may also affect our comparison with earlier studies, since these may use different line databases to HITRAN2016. Since HITRAN2016 is one of the most up-to-date linelists available, we believe it is the most suitable here.

The atmospheric profiles were derived using co-located radiosonde ascents and checked using ECMWF and Met Office analysis data. To minimise the effect of solar lines, all regions within 0.1  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  of a solar line (as observed by Menang et al., (2013) and Elsey et al., (2017)) are filtered out. To minimise the effect of line shifting in the measurements or misattributed line positions in HITRAN, the observed continuum is smoothed over 15  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . This smoothing is suitable for observing the continuum, as the continuum varies smoothly with wavenumber. This is necessary in particular due to the high spectral resolution of the measurements, and also filters out any high frequency noise within these observations that may not be accounted for otherwise. Regions with  $\tau_{total}$  above 0.1 are also filtered out, to ensure that continuum derivation only takes

place within microwindows, and in regions where the modelled spectral lines can be reasonably subtracted from the observed ones (where the absorption is not saturated).

Continuum absorption by other molecules ( $N_2$ ,  $O_2$ ,  $O_3$  and  $CO_2$ , defined here as  $\tau_{other}$ ) was obtained from MT\_ ~~CKD3~~CKD\_3.2 (Mlawer et al., 2012; 2019). This non-water vapour continuum absorption is mostly important in the  $1.25 \mu m$  window, where there is significant absorption due to a collision-induced oxygen band; however, this window is not the focus of discussion here. Figure 1 shows a schematic of how this information is put together to retrieve the continuum from the FTS measurements.



**Figure 1: Schematic of the derivation process of the water vapour continuum from the primary data (green), supplementary data (grey), computational methods (orange), intermediate outputs (purple) and final output (red).**

## 2.2: Best estimate of the continuum

The best estimate of the continuum is from measurements made on 18 September 2008, with additional observations from other days. The IWV observed by the HATPRO microwave radiometer on 18 September was  $16.25 \pm 0.49 \text{ kg m}^{-2}$ . The reliance on the observations of 18 September 2008 is due to the need to observe in clear skies, and to minimise the effects of atmospheric aerosol. 18 September 2008 had clear skies for most of the day, allowing observations at a wide range of airmasses for Langley

extrapolation. Additionally, the aerosol optical depth was significantly lower (observed via the sunphotometer) than the other days that fit this criterion. This is a significant issue for a continuum derivation; when deriving SSI a small absolute change in aerosol optical depth across the course of a day has a minimal effect on the y-intercept of the Langley plot, but the effect on the gradient (i.e. optical depth) is comparatively much larger. Constraining the aerosol change throughout the day is a significant challenge for such sea-level observations. Since the analysis is reliant mostly on one day of observations, and given the large uncertainties, it is not possible to retrieve the self or foreign continua separately. Therefore, to compare with the laboratory measurements, an assumption needs to be made about the relative strength of either the foreign or self-continuum (see Section 4.5). Figure 2 shows four Langley plots from the 18 September 2008 data, at wavenumbers 2500, 4500, 6500 and 9800  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (in the 4, 2.1, 1.6 and 1.02  $\mu\text{m}$  windows, respectively). These plots demonstrate the quality of fit (and therefore the strong constraint on the observed total optical depth) we were able to obtain from the observations of 18 September 2008.

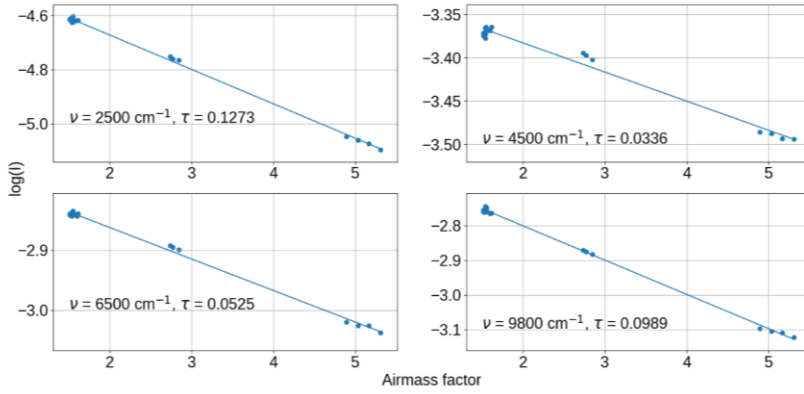
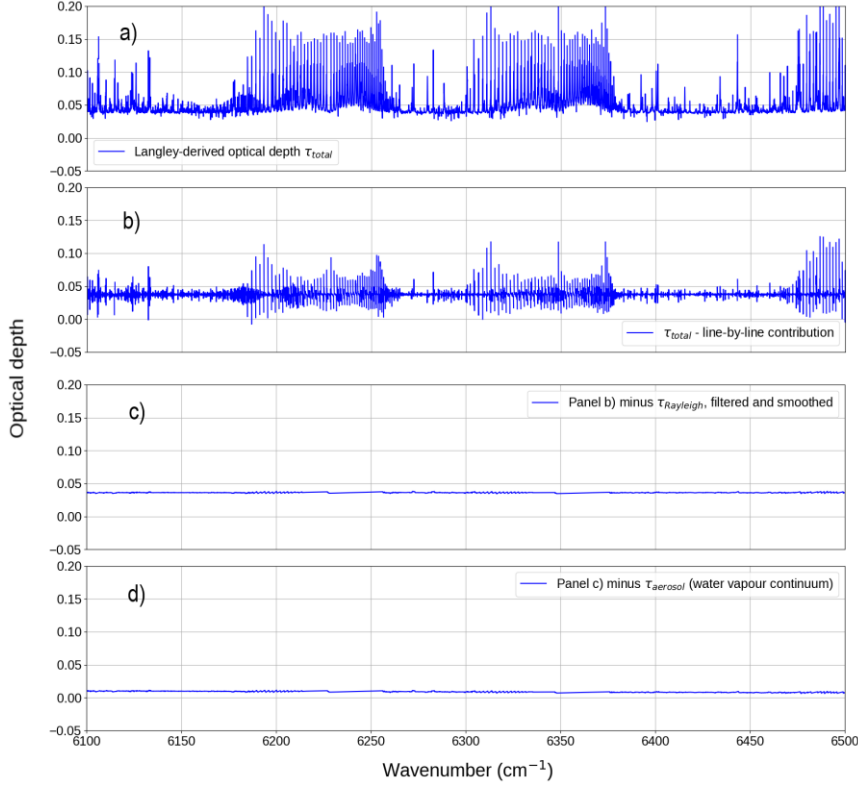


Figure 2: Langley plots from selected wavenumbers in the 4, 2.1, 1.6 and 1.02  $\mu\text{m}$  near-infrared atmospheric windows, along with the total optical depth obtained at that wavenumber. Taken from observations of 18 Sept 2008.

Figure 3 shows the derivation process in the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window, starting with the Langley-derived  $\tau_{total}$  from the FTS observations (panel a), subtracting the line-by-line contributions (panel b), smoothing using a 15  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  boxcar filter and subtracting Rayleigh scattering and other gaseous continua (panel c), and finally obtaining the water vapour continuum by subtracting aerosol extinction (panel d).



**Figure 3: Example derivation of the water vapour continuum optical depth  $\tau_{cont}$  from the total optical depth  $\tau_{total}$  (a) via subtraction of  $\tau_{H2O\_lines}$  and  $\tau_{other\_gases}$  (b), smoothing and subtraction of Rayleigh scattering  $\tau_{Rayleigh}$  and continuum absorption by other gases  $\tau_{other}$  (c), and finally subtracting  $\tau_{aerosol}$  to get the water vapour continuum optical depth (d).**

5

Figure 4 shows the minimum detectable optical depth capable of being observed by the FTS. This was calculated using the following method. For a series of repeated observations from the calibration campaign (measurements of the UHTBB, see Gardiner et al., (2012) for more details) the window regions (2500 – 2800; 4400 – 4800; 6000 – 6400; 7900 – 8400; 9200 –

10000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) were selected. In each window region, the mean signal level was calculated for each measurement. From this, the absolute difference between these levels and the mean level across *all* the measurements was obtained. The average difference gives a measure of the noise ~~on this difference~~ in each region. We then take an observation of the Sun (one used in the Langley analysis) and calculate the mean solar irradiance signal in each spectral window. The ratio of the offset noise to the solar signal

5 gives the fractional offset noise in each window, ~~which, using in the limit of~~ small absorption ~~approximation~~, is approximately the optical depth noise in that region. The minimum detectable offset is then assumed to be 3 times the optical depth noise. It is found that the minimum detectable optical depth in each of the atmospheric windows is typically 0.001, significantly below the derived continuum optical depth in most cases.

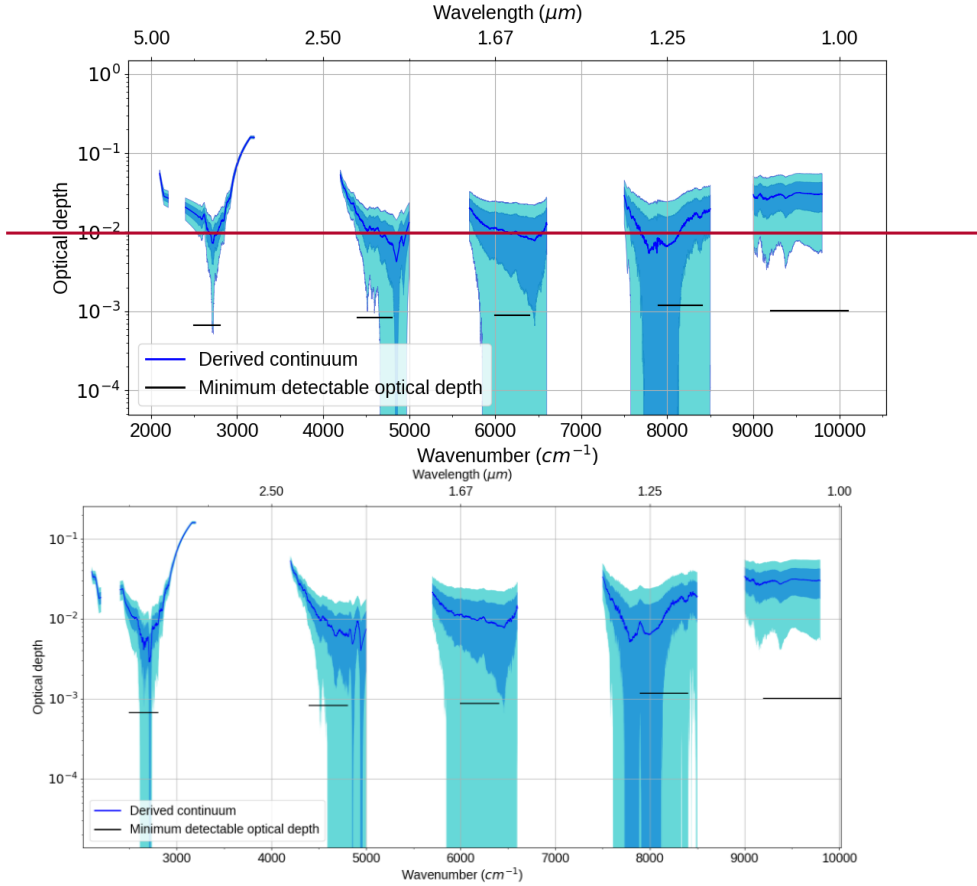
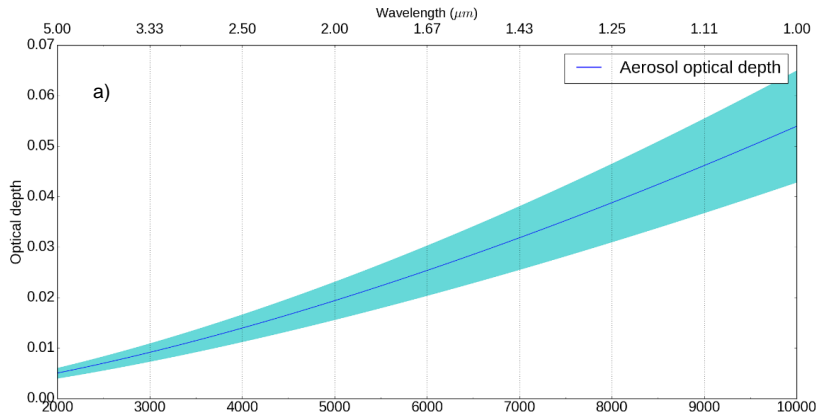


Figure 4: Minimum detectable optical depth in the various atmospheric windows presented in this work (horizontal black line) against derived continuum optical depth from 18 September 2008 (blue line). The shadings indicate the  $k = 1$  (blue) and  $k = 2$  (cyan) uncertainty limits.

### 2.3: Uncertainty budget

The uncertainty budget on the continuum optical depth is obtained in a similar way to Elsey et al., (2017). The Monte Carlo method used there was extended to obtain the experimental uncertainty in the total optical depth. Uncertainty in the optical

depth from the line-by-line model comes from sensitivity tests using the uncertainty limits in temperature, pressure and water vapour from the radiosonde. Due to the increased sensitivity to the atmospheric aerosol (when deriving continuum absorption rather than SSI),  $\tau_{aerosol}$  was determined using the Microtops measurements and a Mie scattering code based on Wiscombe, (1980), in addition to the Ångström exponent method described in Elsey et al. (2017). The Mie code was fed with a range of parameters for a comparable atmosphere obtained from Dubovik et al., (2002). This allowed us to test the range of validity of the Ångström exponent method, by using a physically-based wavelength dependence. The uncertainty budget was more conservative than that of Elsey et al. (2017), since this was estimated using the Mie scattering calculations which were sensitive to various parameters (e.g. size distribution) which had large ranges in Dubovik et al., (2001). Figure 5 shows the optical depth and  $k = 1$  (67 % confidence interval) uncertainties of the  $\tau_{aerosol}$  used in this work, and the relative contribution this optical depth has to the combined continuum + aerosol optical depth.



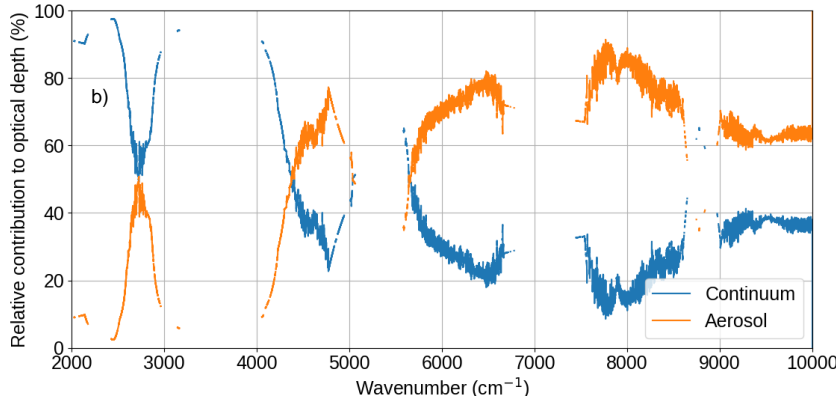
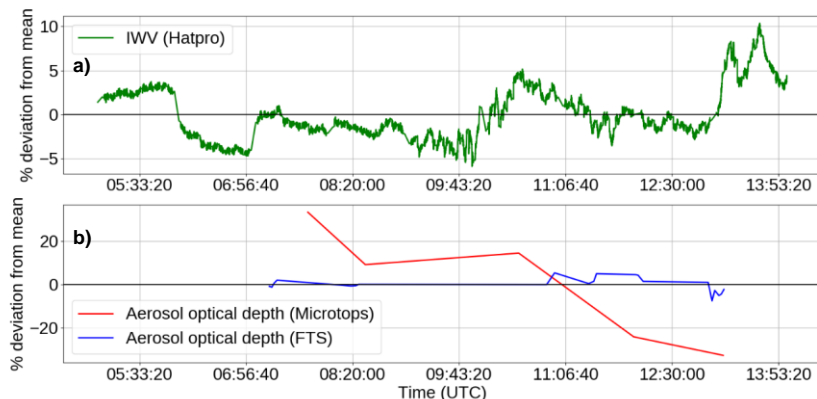


Figure 5: Panel a): Aerosol optical depth obtained from the Mie scattering calculations for 18 September 2008 with the Microtops  $\tau_{aerosol}$  at  $1\ \mu\text{m}$ , along with the estimated  $k=1$  uncertainties (shaded region). Panel b): Relative contribution of the continuum and aerosol in each of the near-infrared windows to the combination of the two ( $\tau_{aerosol} + \tau_{continuum}$ ).

#### 5 2.4: Comparison between FTS and Microtops observations at $1\ \mu\text{m}$

An issue with our derivation of  $\tau_{aerosol}$  is our inability to reconcile the observed variation in the sunphotometer  $\tau_{aerosol}$  (+  $\tau_{cont}$  in the  $1\ \mu\text{m}$  channel, since this is not corrected for in the Microtops processing algorithm) on 18 September 2008 with the variation in the Langley-derived  $\tau_{aerosol} + \tau_{cont}$  from the FTS. Figure 6 shows the time variation of the IWV and the continuum plus aerosol optical depth from the FTS and the sunphotometer. The FTS showed a consistent combined continuum and aerosol optical depth throughout the day, while the Microtops showed a significant drop in aerosol optical depth over the course of the day. This is very unlikely due to the continuum, since the IWV observed by the HATPRO varied by only ~5% throughout the day, which would not be enough to cause such large changes. The surface temperature as observed by the radiosondes varied by less than 1 K throughout the period of measurement. Additionally, the Microtops does not contain a correction for the water vapour continuum; if there was a significant change in continuum absorption then this again should be seen in both the Microtops and FTS data.





**Figure 6:** Percentage variation across 18 September 2008 in integrated water vapour as measured by the HATPRO microwave radiometer (a) and aerosol (+ continuum) optical depth as measured by the Microtops sunphotometer and the FTS (b) in the 1.02  $\mu\text{m}$  channel (9583  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  in the FTS). The FTS-observed aerosol optical depth (+ water vapour continuum) is  $\sim 0.1$  in this window, while the Microtops-observed aerosol optical depth is  $\sim 0.05$ .

It is therefore unclear what is causing this discrepancy in the time-variation, but it may be due to uncertainties arising from the operation of the sunphotometer, or some systematic time-varying effect impacting the FTS measurements. For the continuum derivation it was decided to use the day-average of the 18 September 2008  $\tau_{\text{aerosol}}$  measurements, with a corresponding increase in the uncertainty, since we could not determine which aerosol variation was more likely to be the true case.

In addition to the issue with the temporal variation, there is also an ~~unreconcilable~~ difference between the optical depth observed by the FTS at 1  $\mu\text{m}$  ( $\sim 0.1$ ) and that observed by the Microtops (0.03 – 0.08). Due to the small variation in IWV and temperature across the day, the larger signal observed by the FTS is extremely unlikely to be due to water vapour absorption. It is unclear why the FTS and the Microtops do not observe the same signal. If the effect were physical, one would expect the Microtops and FTS to both observe it. While the variability in the Microtops is large, the absolute level of  $\tau_{\text{aerosol}}$  is believed to be more reliable than that from the FTS, particularly given the consistency with shorter-wavelength Microtops measurements. This makes it a more reliable instrument for extrapolating optical depth to lower wavenumbers. It was postulated that the discrepancy may be due to a change in forward scattering with wavenumber and the differences between the field-of-view of the Microtops and the FTS: (0.26° and 2.5° respectively), but this correction to  $\tau_{\text{aerosol}}$  is less than 10% at all wavenumbers observed by the FTS (Box and Deepak, 1979)

Another issue is the assumptions made regarding the mirror reflectivity correction. Since the mirrors were exposed to the elements, a correction is made to the observed irradiance based on observations of the mirrors prior to the field campaign, and subsequent measurements afterward using the National Reflectance Reflectometer (NRR) at NPL. However, the NRR observations only cover the spectral region 4000-6600  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The reflectance outside of these regions must be extrapolated based on the observations within this spectral region. It is for this reason that we have more confidence in the observations at these wavenumbers, and in the adjacent windows where the extrapolation takes place over fewer wavenumbers. There is significant uncertainty in the behaviour in the 1  $\mu\text{m}$  window, where the mirror correction is extrapolated further, which may be in excess of the uncertainty estimate in Gardiner et al. (2012). The Supporting Information has more details on the possible effect of this mirror extrapolation.

It was postulated that there could be significant uncertainty at higher wavenumbers ( $> 7500 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) due to some uncertainty or systematic offset in the phase correction used in the OPUS software used to derive spectra from the FTS measurements (see Supporting Information). This was motivated by the observation of systematic changes in the FTS phase spectrum with respect to time across 18 September 2008, that were particularly large at higher wavenumbers. It was found that uncertainties in this phase correction would have small effects at lower wavenumbers, but could significantly impact the observed optical depth at higher wavenumbers. However, we do not have a physical justification for why this may have been the case and cannot *ab initio* determine the magnitude of this uncertainty.

We believe that the combination of the above factors (mirrors, phase correction issues, larger aerosol effect) warrants significant caution being used when interpreting the results at wavenumbers beyond  $\sim 6700 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . The observed optical depth (see Section 3) is seemingly inconsistent with the (admittedly sparse) laboratory estimates or MT\_CKD. Therefore, the apparently high continuum optical depth derived from the FTS near 1  $\mu\text{m}$  ( $\sim 0.05$  optical depths, see Section 3) is regarded as an undiagnosed issue (potentially due to the reasons postulated above) with the instrument sensitivity at high wavenumbers, and henceforth we focus on the 1.6, 2.1 and 4  $\mu\text{m}$  windows. This is additionally motivated by the lack of laboratory measurements to validate in the larger-wavenumber windows. However, we cannot rule out that the large observed optical depth is some unexplained physical effect (or indeed an unexpectedly-large water vapour continuum signal). Further clear-sky observations in this spectral region could affirm whether this is the case.

## 2.3. Results

### 3.1: Best estimate from Langley measurements of 18 September 2008 and comparison with closure measurements

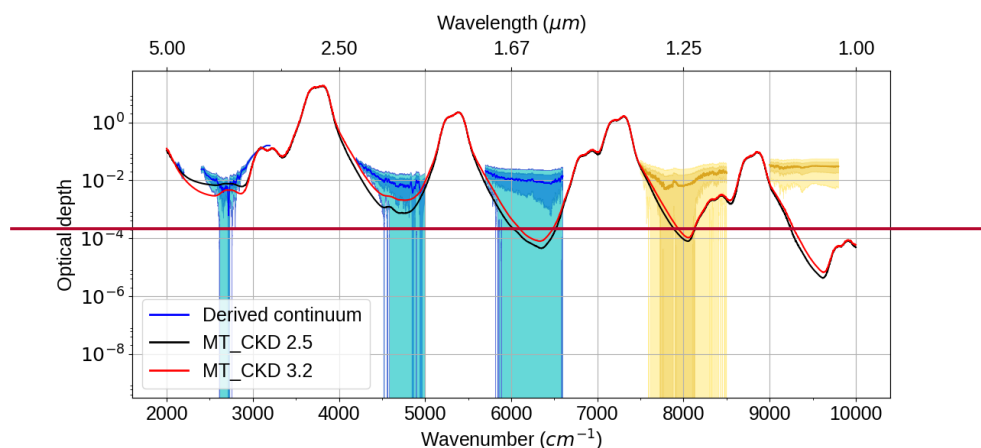
Figure 7 shows the best estimate (henceforth referred to as “CAVIAR-field”) of our continuum from 21 observations on 18 September 2008 using the Langley method. Also shown are the MT\_CKD-3.2 and MT\_CKD-2.5 modelled continuum optical

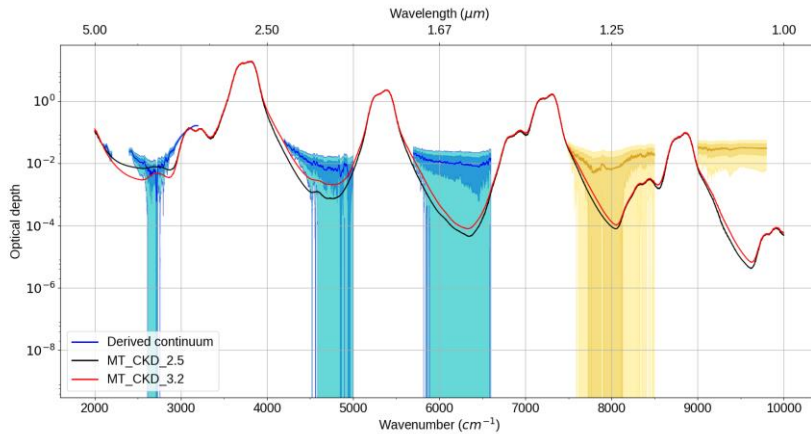
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depth (self + foreign) for atmospheric conditions on this day. Since the uncertainties in our observations are large, there is agreement with MT\_CKD\_3.2 and 2.5 within the  $k = 2$  uncertainty limits in the centres of the 4, 2.1, 1.6 and 1.3  $\mu\text{m}$  windows. Note that the MT\_CKD continuum does not provide any uncertainties. The comparison between CAVIAR-field and MT\_CKD will be discussed further in Section 3.24. Section 45 focuses on a comparison of this data to the available laboratory data. This

5 Section demonstrates the consistency between the closure and Langley-derived data, which are quasi-independent methods of deriving the continuum (see Supplementary for more details). The Supplementary also includes a comparison of the 18 September best estimate to data from other days from the field campaign, which were less suitable for analysis of the continuum due to measurement issues, increased aerosol extinction and lack of data availability.

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**Figure 7: Langley-derived CAVIAR-field continuum optical depth and optical depth for two versions of the MT\_CKD water vapour continuum for 18 September 2008. The blue shaded regions indicate the  $k = 1$  uncertainties, the cyan regions indicate the  $k = 2$  uncertainties. The yellow shaded areas indicate spectral regions in which the CAVIAR-field derived continuum is potentially spurious and should be treated with caution (see Section 2.4).**

Figure 8 shows the comparison of the Langley-derived and closure-derived spectra from 18 September 2008. As with the Langley-derived spectrum, the closure-derived spectrum is a mean of 21 spectra from this day. The green and red lines overlap significantly on this Figure, indicating that there is excellent agreement between the two quasi-independent methods. This provides additional confidence in the accuracy of the Langley retrieval. The uncertainty in the closure-derived spectra is significantly larger, due to the use of an assumed SSI (from Elsey et al., (2017)) which itself has uncertainties.

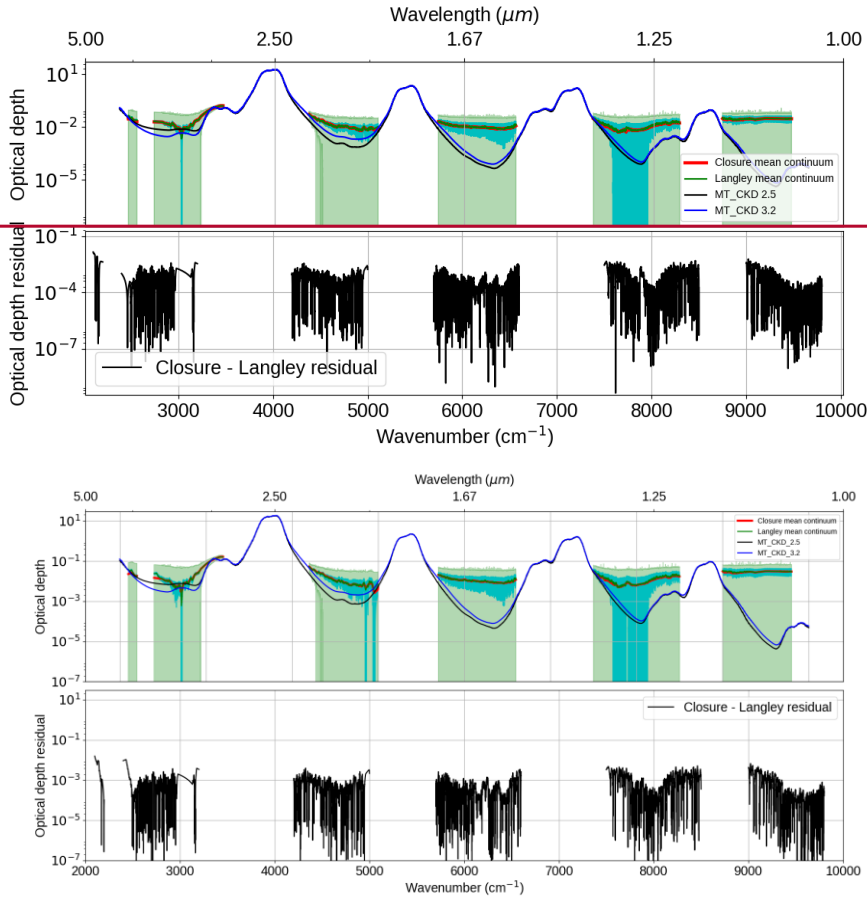


Figure 8: Comparison between the Langley and closure method derivations of the continuum optical depth on 18 September 2008. Panel a) shows absolute values and b) the residual of the two. Teal shaded region is the  $k = 1$  Langley uncertainty, green is the  $k = 1$  closure uncertainty. The optical depth from two versions of MT\_CKD is shown in the first panel for comparison.

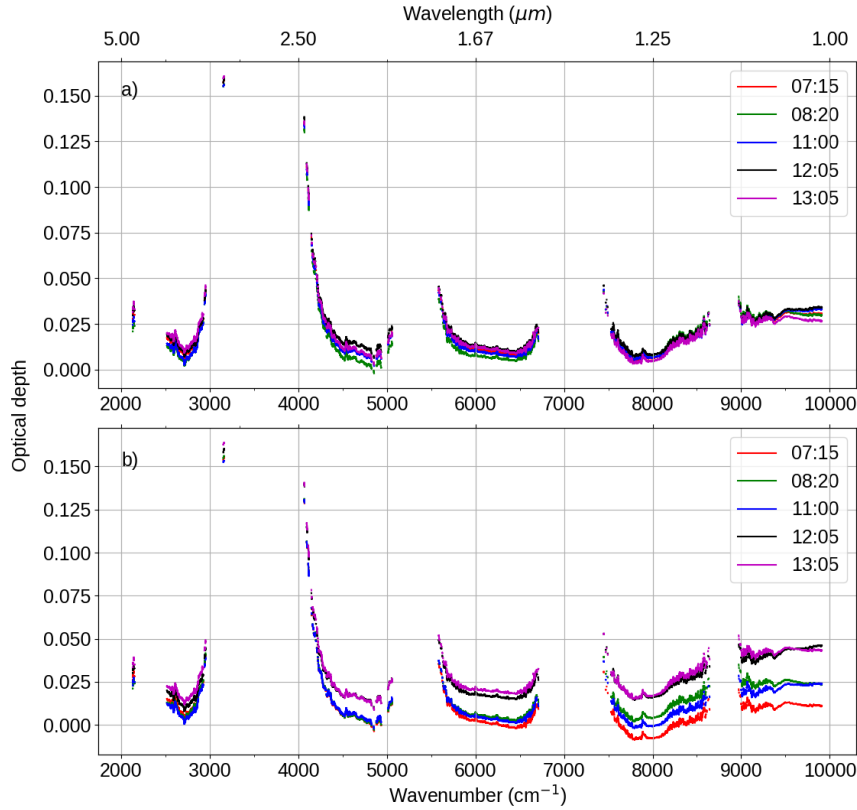
One way of assessing any potential aerosol contamination is to look at the spectra at individual times, rather than the day-averaged continuum from the Langley method or the mean continuum as measured via the closure method. The closure-derived continua are calculated with aerosol extinction subtracted as observed by the Microtops at the time of each measurement. They are shown at different times across 18 September 2008 in Figure 9. Figure 9a shows the case with time-averaged aerosol as

observed by the Microtops, and Figure 9b the case with time-varying aerosol. The uncertainties are not plotted for clarity, but are large ( $\pm 0.04$ ), meaning that, despite the observed differences, the observations are consistent. Therefore, this change in aerosol over the day cannot be confirmed with any degree of significance; it is difficult to tell if observed differences in central values are real or a consequence of the uncertainties.

5

Assuming that the central values are well characterised, they show that the derived continuum (+ residual aerosol contribution) increases by a factor of two across the day. It is clear from Figure 6b that the time variation in the aerosol extinction is not observed by the FTS. When using a time-averaged aerosol (Figure 9a), the different closure spectra are much more consistent. The agreement between the Langley and closure-derived continua in this case indicates that there are not significant issues

10 with calibration of the instrument, unless such issues were strongly time-varying.



**Figure 9: Observed time-varying continuum optical depth derived from the closure method at different times throughout 18 September 2008. a) with time-averaged aerosol as observed by the Microtops and b) with time-varying aerosol. The uncertainties are not shown for visual clarity, but are on the order  $\sim 0.04$  ( $k = 1$ ).**

- 5 Given the level of uncertainty in these results, it is not certain if the differences between Figure 9a and 9b are significant. However, one possible source of difference that was considered was inaccuracy in the external mirror reflectivity correction (explained in more detail in Gardiner et al., 2012). However, as discussed in the Supplementary, a change in the reflectance will not lead to any change in the slope of a Langley fit, and therefore not impact the Langley-derived continuum in any way, provided the change is independent of angle. The Supplementary shows that this cannot account for the optical depth in the

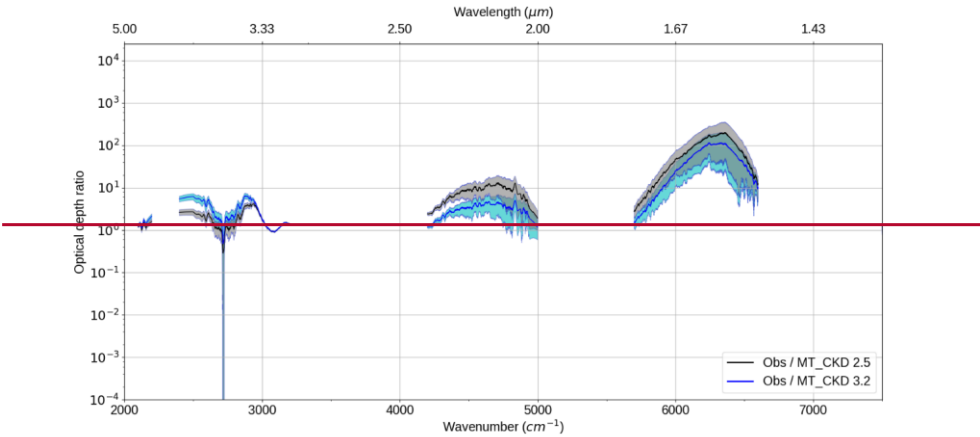
higher-wavenumber windows without an undiagnosed change in the irradiance with angle, e.g. due to uncertainties in the phase correction as discussed in Section 2.-4.

**4. 3.2: Comparison with MT\_CKD**

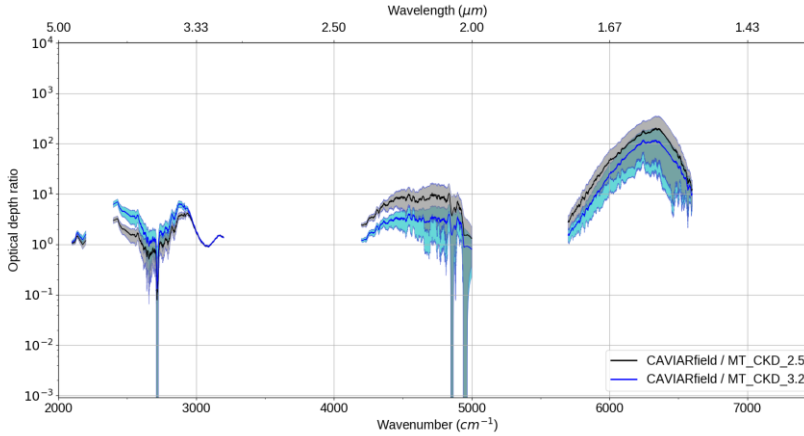
Figure 7 shows that, in the centre of the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window, the CAVIAR-field continuum optical depth appears to be in reasonable agreement with the optical depth obtained using MT\_CKD (and in better agreement with version 2.5 than version 3.2), but less so toward the edges of the window. This is further demonstrated in Figure 10, which shows the ratio of the CAVIAR-field continuum to two versions of MT\_CKD. The agreement at the centre of the window is indicative of agreement with various FTS measurements in this region; this will be explored further in Section 4.5. At the higher-wavenumber edge however, there is no agreement between MT\_CKD and CAVIAR-field within the  $k = 2$  uncertainties; if our measurements are accurate (and in agreement with other datasets), this indicates a strengthening to MT\_CKD is required in that region.

In the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window, CAVIAR-field is inconsistent with both versions of MT\_CKD within the  $k = 1$  uncertainties in a significant portion of the window, and inconsistent within the  $k = 2$  uncertainties in the lower-wavenumber part of the window. The ratio of CAVIAR-field to MT\_CKD 3.2 is  $\sim 5$  in this region (Figure 10) but this is in significantly better agreement than would be the case using the older MT\_CKD 2.5 values; this implies that either or both of the MT\_CKD self and foreign continua need to be strengthened. Section 4.5 will further discuss the relative contribution of the self and foreign continua to this discrepancy.

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**Figure 10: Ratio of Langley-derived CAVIAR-field continuum optical depth divided by MT\_CKD optical depth (for two different versions of MT\_CKD) in the 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  atmospheric windows for 18 September 2008. Uncertainties (shaded regions) shown at  $k = 1$ .**

5

The CAVIAR-field continuum is significantly stronger than either of the recent versions of MT\_CKD within the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window, disagreeing within the  $k = 1$  uncertainties, but consistent within the  $k = 2$  uncertainties. This is the region in which there is the most difference between available laboratory spectra. ~~Section 4 will discuss this in more detail.~~

#### 4.5. Comparison with ~~laboratory~~other observations

10 This section describes the relevant laboratory ~~and field~~ measurements in each of the 4, 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  atmospheric windows, and compares them to the continuum absorption from this work. The continuum absorption derived in Section 3 is difficult to directly compare to the laboratory measurements of the continuum absorption cross-section, since our derived continuum optical depth  ~~$\tau_{\text{total}}^{\text{CAV}}$~~  $\tau_{\text{tot}}^{\text{CAV}}$  is the sum of the self + foreign continuum optical depths. However, it is possible to compare these data indirectly, via their ratio to MT\_~~CKD3CKD~~3.2 using atmospheric conditions at the time of the measurements. Since:

15 (3)  $\tau_{\text{tot}}^{\text{CAV}} = \tau_{\text{self}}^{\text{CAV}} + \tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{CAV}}$

either the self or foreign continuum coefficient can be estimated by subtracting the optical depth contribution from the other. Consider the case in which  $C_{\text{self}}^{\text{CAV}}$  (i.e. the CAVIAR-field self-continuum cross-section) is to be obtained. The foreign continuum optical depth  $\tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{CAV}}$  is an unknown which must be estimated. This can be done by assuming either a)  $\tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{CAV}} = \tau_{\text{for}}^{\text{MT\_CKD}}$  (the MT\_~~CKD3CKD~~3.2 foreign continuum optical depth derived for the conditions of 18 September 2008), or b) by assuming

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$$(4) \frac{\tau_{for}^{CAV,lab}}{\tau_{for}^{MT\_CKD}} = \frac{C_{for}^{lab}}{C_{for}^{MT\_CKD}} \tau_{for}^{MT\_CKD}$$

where  $\tau_{for}^{lab}$  is the foreign continuum optical depth for the atmospheric conditions of interest,  $C_{for}^{lab}$  is the foreign continuum cross-section from laboratory observations and  $C_{for}^{MT\_CKD}$  is the MT\_CKD 3.2 foreign continuum cross-section. The ratio  $\frac{C_{for}^{lab}}{C_{for}^{MT\_CKD}}$  effectively scales the MT\_CKD optical depth to the laboratory observations. This is shown visually

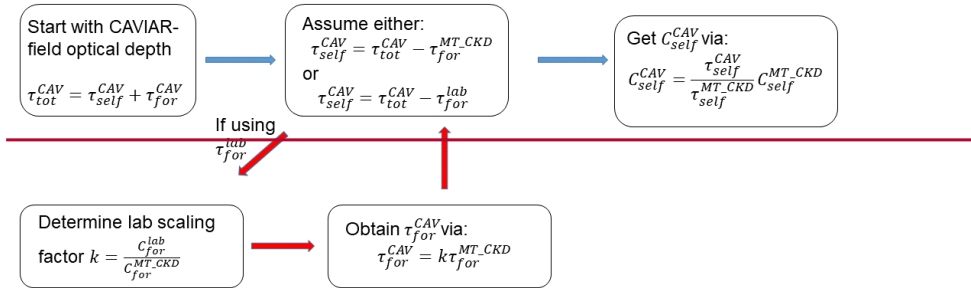
5 in Figure 11.

There is no constraint on the total optical depth  $\tau_{tot}^{CAV}$  from the laboratory observations or MT\_CKD. Taking  $\frac{C_{for}^{lab}}{C_{for}^{MT\_CKD}}$  as the lab scaling factor  $k_f$  (for the foreign continuum), with a corresponding scaling factor  $k_s$  for the self-continuum:

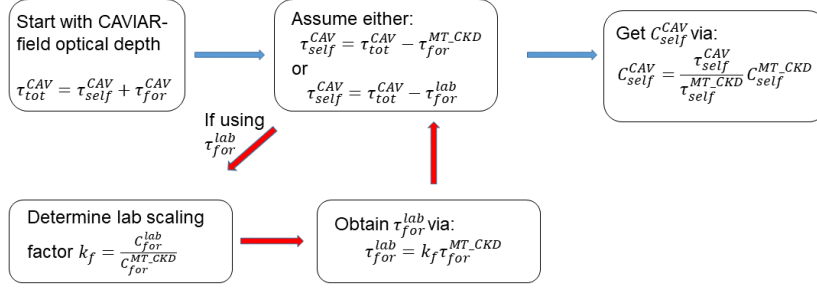
$$(5) \tau_{tot}^{CAV} = a k_s \tau_{self}^{MT\_CKD} + b k_f \tau_{for}^{MT\_CKD}$$

- 10 These parameters  $a$  and  $b$  determine the relative contribution of the self and foreign continua to the offset between the CAVIAR-field optical depth, and the optical depth from MT\_CKD (with or without the laboratory scaling). However, as  $a$  and  $b$  are both unknowns, it is not possible to estimate one or the other without making some assumptions. In this analysis, we therefore assume that  $b = 1$  when estimating the self-continuum, and that  $a = 1$  when estimating the foreign-continuum, i.e. that the MT\_CKD (with or without scaling to the laboratory observations) optical depth accurately represents the self or foreign
- 15 component that is to be subtracted from the total to estimate the foreign or self-component respectively.

As will be demonstrated, for the conditions observed on 18 September 2008, both the self and foreign continua make significant contributions in the various windows to the total continuum. This is strongly dependent on whether MT\_CKD or the laboratory data is used to estimate the self or foreign continua.



20



**Figure 11: Derivation process of the self-continuum absorption cross-section implied by the FTS optical depth. This process can be done for the foreign continuum, in which case all references to the self-continuum in the Figure apply to the foreign continuum and vice versa.**

- 5 This approach is reasonably robust when estimating the self-continuum, as this relies on the laboratory or MT\_CKD foreign continuum, which is believed to be relatively independent of temperature (Ptashnik et al. 2012, Baranov 2011). Therefore, high-temperature laboratory foreign continuum measurements (with their lower uncertainties) can be used. In this case, we use the average of the 350 K, 372 K, 402 K and 431 K foreign continuum measurements of Ptashnik et al. (2012), henceforth the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, and assume that it is entirely independent of temperature. However, a lack of broadband
- 10 room temperature measurements of the foreign continuum in the windows means that there may be some additional (and unquantifiable) uncertainty arising from this assumption.

When estimating the CAVIAR-field foreign continuum, due to the lack of laboratory measurements at atmospheric temperatures (i.e. below room temperature), one must assume a temperature dependence for the self-continuum. This is done

15 by extrapolating the high-temperature laboratory data (above 374 K, even where lower-temperature data are available due to their higher uncertainties) to atmospheric temperature either by a statistical fit when scaling to the laboratory data, or by relying on the MT\_CKD temperature dependence when scaling to MT\_CKD. This statistical fit assumes that the temperature dependence is proportional to  $\exp(\frac{D_0}{T})$ , where  $D_0$  could be interpreted as relating to the dissociation energy of a water dimer (e.g. Ptashnik et al. (2011a)). For the axes used in Figures 13, 14 and 15 (1000/T vs. the logarithm of the continuum cross-

20 section), this shows as a straight line. This temperature dependence is an assumption; this may break down at lower temperatures due to e.g. a change in regime from bound to quasi-bound dimers with increasing temperature (Ptashnik et al. (2011b, 2019)). We apply this temperature dependence to the self-continuum measurements of Ptashnik et al. (2011a), henceforth the CAVIAR-lab self-continuum. This dataset was chosen due to its wide spectral coverage and range of temperatures, making it more suited to such an extrapolation, rather than using the room-temperature CRDS and OF-CEAS

25 data (Section 4.5.1), where there are measurements at room temperature, but only at specific wavenumbers.

#### 45.1: Self-continuum

When deriving the CAVIAR-field self-continuum this way, a representative temperature must be chosen to compare to the laboratory measurements, since the continuum observed by the FTS is the integrated continuum across the entire temperature and pressure range of the atmosphere. Figure 12 shows the fractional contribution to the total continuum optical depth from the surface upwards for selected wavenumbers, as calculated using MT\_CKD\_3.2 and RFM for the conditions of 18 September 2008 at Camborne. This is calculated as the fractional contribution at each layer as observed by our radiosonde profiles to the total continuum absorption. This shows that more than 95% of the continuum optical depth is in the bottom 2 km of the atmosphere. This corresponds to a temperature range of ~275-290 K, which was ~~taken assumed~~ to be ~~representative~~ of the temperature for which the CAVIAR-field self-continuum is representative.

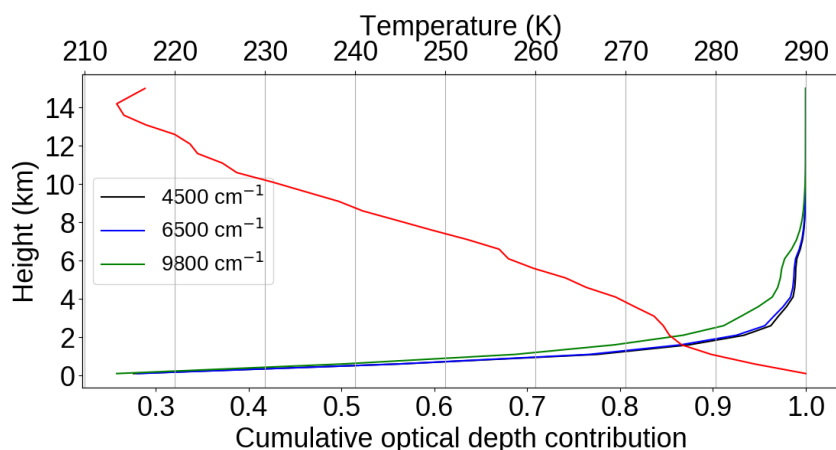


Figure 12: Fractional contribution to the total continuum optical depth (using MT\_CKD\_3.2) with height from the surface up to 10 km at three wavenumbers. The temperature profile (top axis) derived from radiosonde on the 18 September 2008 is shown in red.

Shine et al (2016) presents a review of the laboratory data up to 2016 in significant detail. The following paragraphs introduce the main data available across multiple spectral windows used to compare the CAVIAR-field self-continuum. Other datasets will be introduced as required for each specific window.

Ptashnik et al., (2011a) (~~henceforth the~~ CAVIAR-lab self-continuum) presented laboratory observations of the self-continuum taken by ~~a Fourier transform spectrometer (an~~ FTS) from 472-293 K between 2500-10000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ; because uncertainties become too large for the low temperature measurements (because of the lower vapour pressures that are necessary at low temperatures), at wavenumbers greater than 5600  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  ~~their~~ measurements are restricted to 374 K and above, with the exception of a few 350

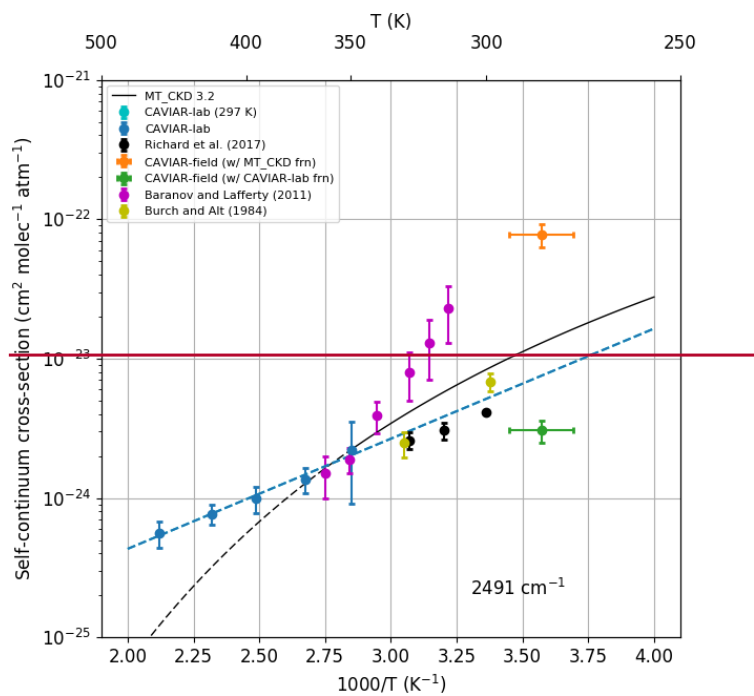
K measurements at the edges of the windows where the continuum is stronger. However, at all wavenumbers, uncertainties are larger at the lower temperatures. Further sets of FTS measurements (Ptashnik et al., 2013, 2015) were taken at the Institute for Atmospheric Optics in Tomsk, Russia. However, recent and ongoing study has indicated that these results may be spurious, due to reflectivity issues arising from adsorption onto the gold mirrors used in their multipass cell (Ptashnik et al. (2019b); [\(2019b\); https://symp-iao.ru/files/symp/hrms/19/en/abstr\\_11485.pdf](https://symp-iao.ru/files/symp/hrms/19/en/abstr_11485.pdf))). For this reason, these results have not been included in our analysis.

Various sets of observations have been made by the Spectroscopy Group at LiPhy (Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire de Physique) at the Université Grenoble-Alpes (henceforth collectively “Grenoble”). Mondelain et al., (2013, 2014) presented observations of the near-IR self-continuum in the 1.6 and 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  windows at room temperature and above using a cavity ring-down spectrometer (CRDS). Newer measurements (Lechevallier et al., 2018; Richard et al., 2017) by this group in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window were presented, which generally agree with the Mondelain et al. observations. Vasilchenko et al., (2019) present updated CRDS measurements at a range of wavenumbers at room temperature in the 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  windows. Ventrillard et al., (2015) present observations in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window (4302 and 4732  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) using an optical feedback cavity enhanced absorption spectroscopy (OF-CEAS) technique at  $\sim(293\text{--}323\text{ K})_{\pm 1}$  while Richard et al. (2017) use the same technique in the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window (2491  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ).

#### 4.1.1: 4 $\mu\text{m}$ window

Figure 13 presents various estimates of the self-continuum from the laboratory in the centre of the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window (2491  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ). The CAVIAR-lab measurements agree reasonably well at  $\sim 350\text{ K}$  with the laboratory FTS data of Baranov and Lafferty (2011), taken at several temperatures across the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window. However, there is poor agreement between these FTS data and both the measurements of Richard et al. (2017), and grating spectrometer measurements of Burch and Alt (1984). The Richard et al. (2017) and Burch and Alt (1984) agree reasonably well and imply a weaker temperature dependence than CAVIAR-lab and Baranov and Lafferty (2011). However, extrapolating only through the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab data (i.e. excluding the point at 293 K) using an assumed  $\exp(\frac{D_0}{T})$  temperature dependence yields excellent agreement with the Burch and Alt (1984) and Richard et al. (2017) data. These higher-temperature CAVIAR-lab measurements have smaller uncertainties than the low-temperature CAVIAR-lab measurements, and appear to lie on a straight line, while the lower-temperature CAVIAR-lab data point does not lie on this line. There are therefore two possible experimentally-implied temperature dependences, a lower one implied by the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab, Richard et al. (2017) and Burch and Alt (1984) measurements, and a stronger dependence implied by the less-certain lower-temperature CAVIAR-lab, and Baranov and Lafferty (2011) measurements. This reflects the importance of making observations at lower temperature with well-constrained uncertainty budgets.

Figure 13 also shows the estimated CAVIAR-field self-continuum, obtained using the algorithm presented in Figure 11. This is estimated by subtracting the MT\_CKD foreign continuum from the observed total continuum (orange point), or by subtracting the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum (green point). When assuming a foreign continuum from MT\_CKD, the CAVIAR-field estimated data agrees better with the low-temperature FTS data, whereas assuming the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum leads to somewhat better agreement with the high-temperature extrapolated CAVIAR-lab, Burch and Alt (1984) and Richard et al., (2017) data, although it is about a factor of 2 below the extrapolated line. This may indicate that the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum is too large, or that the CAVIAR-field derived continuum is too weak. Interestingly, the MT\_CKD 3.2 self-continuum is inconsistent at the  $k = 1$  level with both of the CAVIAR-field data points at these temperatures, being a factor of 4 stronger than the estimate using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum and a factor of  $\sim 5$  weaker than the estimate using the MT\_CKD foreign continuum. This shows the importance of the assumption of a given foreign continuum to this analysis. Given the high precision of the Richard et al. measurements, the anomalous deviation from the assumed temperature dependence from the CAVIAR-lab data point at 297K, and the CAVIAR-field estimate being closer to this temperature dependence when using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, we believe that this provides evidence for the temperature dependence being lower than implied by Baranov and Lafferty (2012). We note however that there is no agreement between the  $k = 1$  CAVIAR-field uncertainty limits and the straight line of the fit to CAVIAR-lab, or Richard et al. (2017).



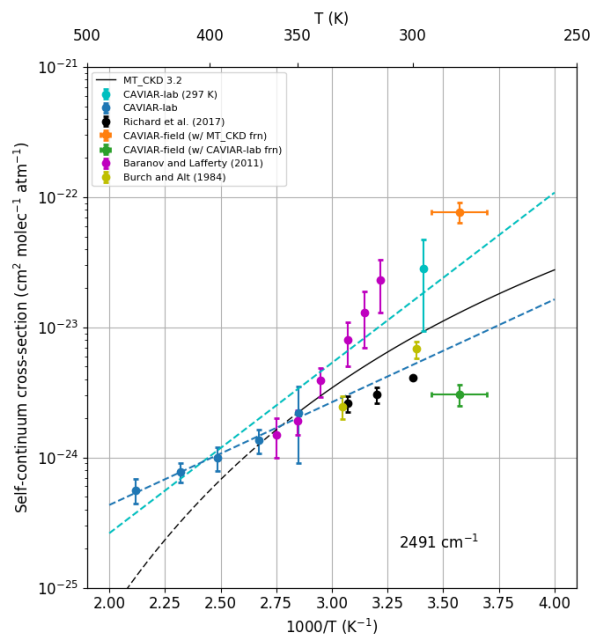


Figure 13: Self-continuum absorption cross-section against temperature for various datasets at 2491 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The error bars indicate the  $k = 1$  uncertainties. Marker size is greater than the stated uncertainty where error bars are not visible. The dashed black line of MT\_CKD above 350 K indicates the region outside of the expected applicability of MT\_CKD. The dashed blue indicates extrapolation of the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab temperature dependence, while the cyan dashed line shows the extrapolation through all of the CAVIAR-lab data points (including the low-temperature cyan data point).

#### 4.1.2: 2.1 $\mu\text{m}$ window

At 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  (Figure 14), there is generally good agreement between the various sets of laboratory data, particularly when extrapolating the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab data to room temperature (blue dashed line), rather than using the lower temperature data (cyan point and dashed line) which has larger uncertainties. There is also good agreement between these laboratory data and MT\_CKD, within the temperature range in which MT\_CKD is expected to be valid (solid black line). Figure 14 also shows the estimated CAVIAR-field at 3 wavenumbers at the edge (4255 and 4302 cm<sup>-1</sup>) and centre (4723 cm<sup>-1</sup>) of the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window. This is derived using both the MT\_CKD 3.2 foreign continuum (orange data point) and the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum (green data point). The error bars show the  $k = 1$  uncertainty limits. The error bars on the Mondelain et al. (2015) and Ventrillard et al. (2015) measurements are smaller than the marker size.



At the edge of the window (Figure 14 a, b), the CAVIAR-field estimated continuum (assuming the MT\_CKD foreign continuum) does not overlap with the available laboratory data within the  $k = 1$  uncertainties. This suggests that, if the available data are robust and the assumed temperature dependence of the self-continuum is correct, the MT\_CKD foreign continuum requires some strengthening at the edge of this window. However, using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum at the low-wavenumber edge of the window results in a negative implied self-continuum, indicating that either the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum is too strong at the window edge, that there is a temperature dependence of the foreign-continuum that is neglected here, or that the observed optical depth from this work is poorly characterised at the edge of the window. In the centre of the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window (Figure 14c) the CAVIAR-field estimated continuum shows reasonable agreement with the observed laboratory data (extrapolated to 280 K) when using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, with overlap between the  $k = 1$  uncertainties. This is not the case when using the MT\_CKD foreign continuum, providing further evidence that this requires strengthening, particularly at the centre of the window. This is consistent with laboratory analyses of the foreign continuum (Section 4.5.2).

It is important to note that there is good consistency between the 297K CAVIAR-lab data point and the CAVIAR-field estimated self-continuum when using the MT\_CKD foreign continuum. This would suggest that if the self-continuum is as large as implied by this lower-temperature data point, the foreign continuum would be robust in MT\_CKD\_3.2. However, given the agreement between the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab data (which have lower uncertainties), and the laboratory foreign-continuum data available in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  region (Section 4.5.2), we believe that the likelihood is that the foreign continuum requires strengthening rather than the self-continuum.

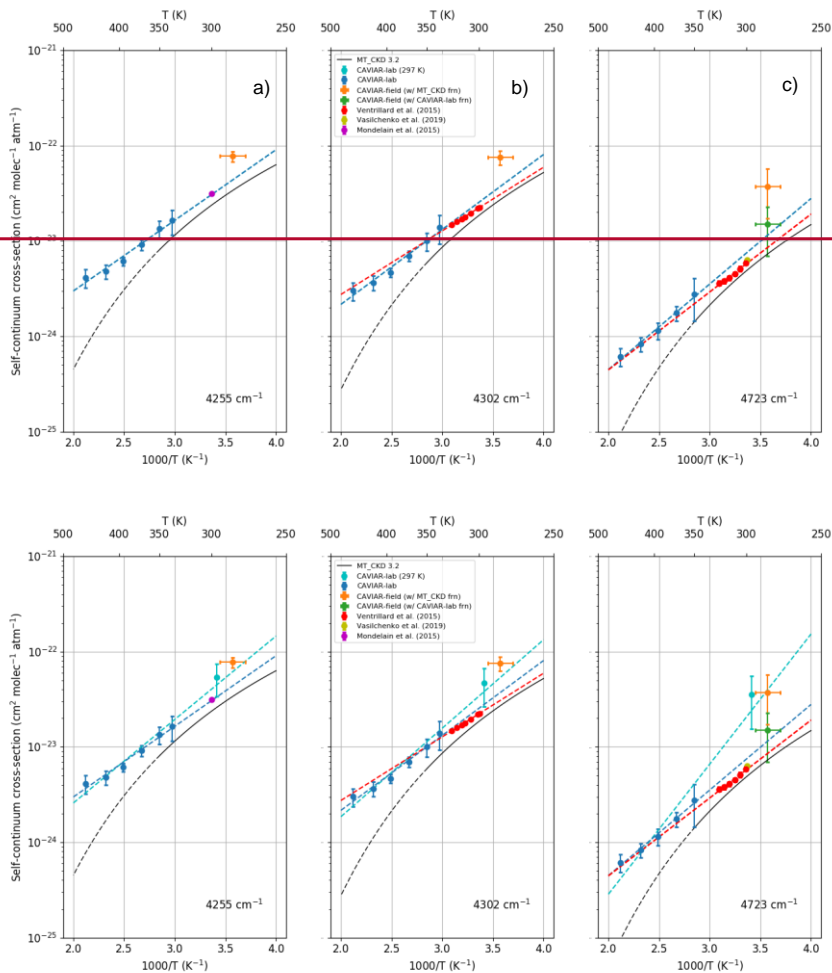


Figure 14: Self-continuum absorption cross-section against temperature for various datasets at (a) 4255, (b) 4302 and (c) 4723  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The error bars indicate the  $k = 1$  uncertainties. Marker size is greater than the stated uncertainty where error bars not visible. The dashed line of MT\_CKD above 350 K indicates the region outside of the expected applicability of MT\_CKD. The dashed blue, cyan and red lines indicate extrapolations of the CAVIAR-lab (with and without the low temperature data) and Grenoble temperature dependence respectively, assuming an exponential temperature dependence. The green (CAVIAR-field with CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum) are missing from frames a) and b) as the inferred self-continuum is negative.

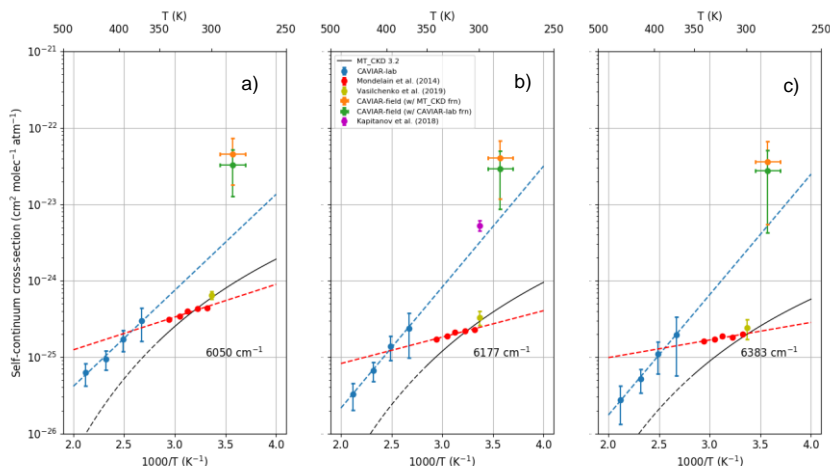
### 45.1.3: 1.6 $\mu\text{m}$ window

Figure 15 shows the observed absorption cross-section as a function of temperature for three wavenumbers in the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window (6050, 6177 and 6383  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) in panels a), b) and c) respectively. These wavenumbers were selected since these are the wavenumbers in which the Grenoble CRDS data is available. The agreement in this window is generally lacking between different laboratory datasets of the self-continuum. At room temperature, the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab data imply significantly stronger absorption than the Grenoble data (from Mondelain et al., (2014) and Vasilchenko et al., (2019)). The data indicate significantly different temperature dependences between CAVIAR-lab and Grenoble; the latter shows a significantly weaker temperature dependence across the window, and a weaker dependence relative to CAVIAR-lab than the Grenoble measurements in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window (Figure 14). Both the Grenoble and CAVIAR-lab temperature dependences are markedly different from the MT\_ ~~CKD3CKD~~ 3.2 temperature dependence. These discrepancies are discussed in Shine et al., (2016). In addition to the data discussed at the beginning of Section 45, we present an additional comparison at 6177  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (Figure 15b) with the continuum derived in Kapitanov et al., (2018) using a photo-acoustic method. We note that the Kapitanov et al. (2018) data point lies in reasonable agreement with the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab continuum, and to a lesser degree with the CAVIAR-field self-continuum, particularly when using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, but has no agreement with the Grenoble measurements.

An additional issue arises when comparing the Mondelain et al. and Vasilchenko et al. data; while the observed absorption cross-sections are similar, there is no agreement within their stated uncertainties. This can be attributed to the differences in the fits used to obtain these cross-sections; both used a quadratic fit of vapour pressure versus absorption to obtain their cross-sections, but Mondelain et al. use an additional linear term to account for supposed adsorption on the mirrors, whereas Vasilchenko et al. did not need to use this additional term. The Vasilchenko et al., (2019) data, being more recent, is regarded as the more reliable, but is only available at one temperature.

The choice of foreign continuum has less of an effect on the CAVIAR-field self-continuum in this window since the absolute difference between MT\_CKD and CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum is too small to significantly affect the large observed optical depth. However, since the associated uncertainties are large (the  $k = 2$  uncertainties intersect with zero), they are not entirely inconsistent with any of the observed data. The Grenoble measurements imply an extremely weak temperature dependence which is inconsistent with that of either CAVIAR-lab or MT\_ ~~CKD3CKD~~ 3.2, and less consistent with the estimated CAVIAR-field data than CAVIAR-lab. While these results indicate a significantly stronger continuum than that implied by the available laboratory data, the uncertainties are too large to form firm conclusions. In addition, the CAVIAR-field results do not reconcile the apparent large discrepancy between the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab continuum and the Grenoble measurements; this contrasts markedly with the situation in the centre of the 2.1 window (Fig. 14c), where there is

consistency between these datasets and reasonable consistency with CAVIAR-field, when the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum is used.

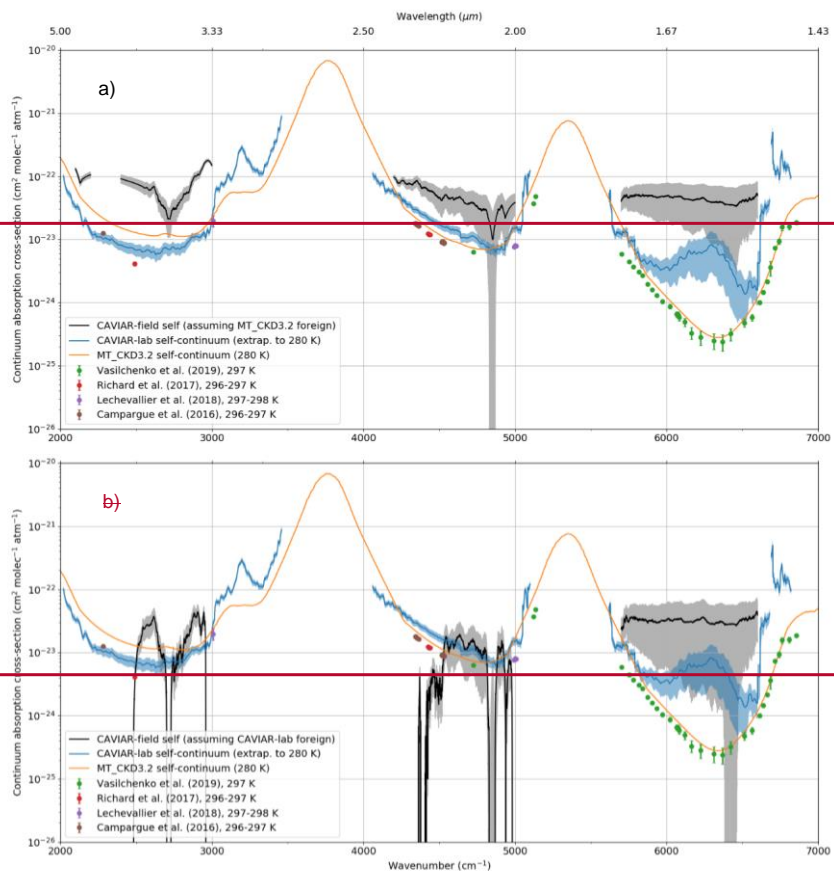


**Figure 15: Self-continuum absorption cross-section against temperature for various datasets at (a) 6050, (b) 6177 and (c) 6383  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The error bars indicate the  $k = 1$  uncertainties. Marker size is greater than the stated uncertainty where error bars not visible. The dashed black line indicates the region outside of the expected applicability of MT\_CKD. The dashed blue and red lines indicate extrapolations of the CAVIAR-lab and Grenoble temperature dependence respectively.**

#### 4.5.1.4: Synthesis

Figure 16 shows the spectrally-resolved self-continuum from CAVIAR-field (using the two foreign continua), alongside other sets of observations. The CRDS measurements are shown at their original temperature, since for many wavenumbers observations are only available at one temperature. Assuming the MT\_CKD temperature dependence holds, these can be scaled by a factor of  $\sim 1.35$  to be brought to 280 K. This Figure 16 shows that the estimated continuum does not vary particularly strongly spectrally in the centres of the windows. However, there are clearly some issues in the  $4 \mu\text{m}$  window, where at lower wavenumbers the derived continuum is significantly stronger than MT\_CKD 3.2 and the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab self-continuum, and in the low-wavenumber edge of the  $2.1 \mu\text{m}$  window, where when estimating the self-continuum using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum there is a significant decrease in the self-continuum. As discussed previously, this is likely due to either the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum being too strong at this low-wavenumber edge, or some issue with the FTS field observations used in this work. In the  $1.6 \mu\text{m}$  window, a significant strengthening of the foreign continuum of over a factor of 100 would be required to bring the central values of the CAVIAR-lab and CAVIAR-field self-continua into

agreement, which is inconsistent with the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum in this window. However, there is some agreement within the  $k = 1$  uncertainty limits between CAVIAR-lab and CAVIAR-field at the centre of the window.



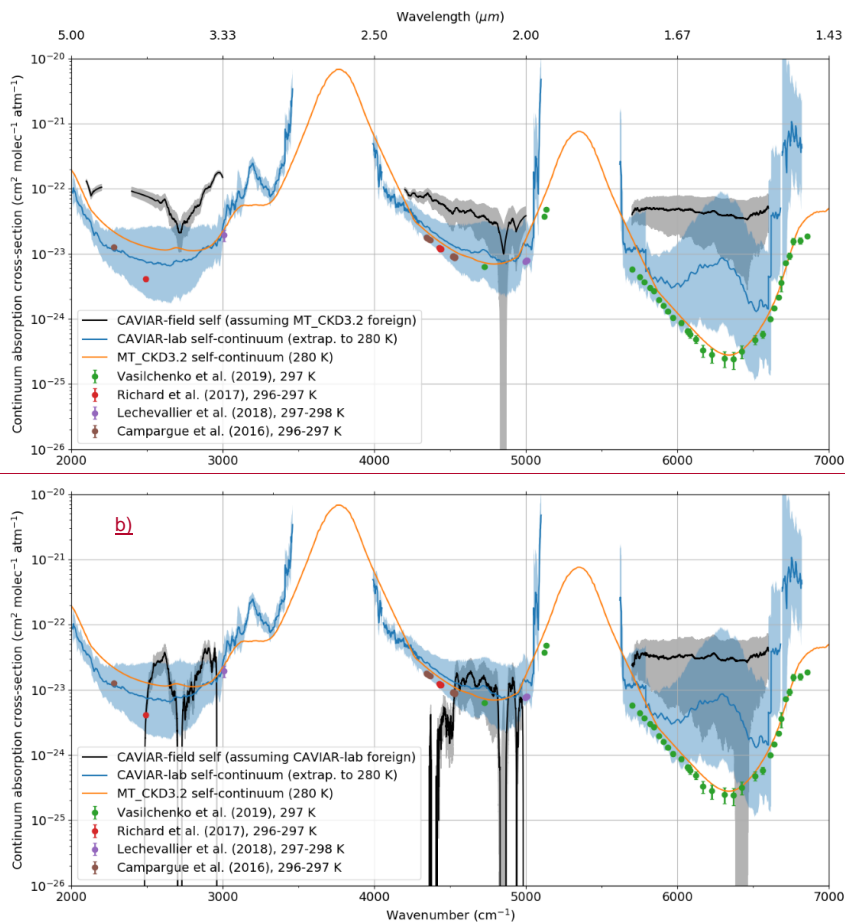


Figure 16: Self-continuum from CAVIAR-field as estimated using (a) the MT\_CKD foreign-continuum and (b) the CAVIAR-lab self-foreign-continuum, alongside MT\_CKD3.2 and selected laboratory measurements. The grey shaded regions indicate the  $k = 1$  confidence limits. The in the CAVIAR-lab self-continuum is derived from extrapolating the high, and the blue shaded regions the uncertainty in the temperature ( $>350$  K) data-extrapolated (to 280 K) CAVIAR-lab data. The darker shaded regions are where these uncertainty limits overlap. The CAVIAR-lab uncertainties are obtained by scaling via Monte Carlo fits using the uncertainties at the higher temperatures with this same extrapolation-temperature ( $> 350$  K) CAVIAR-lab data.

## 4.2: Foreign continuum

### 4.2.1: Current observations

Ptashnik et al. (2012) (CAVIAR-lab) presented foreign continuum coefficients in the 4, 2.1, 1.6 and 1.2  $\mu\text{m}$  windows using FTS; these remain the only laboratory dataset with a large wavenumber coverage. These observations are made using a cell filled with an  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ -air mixture, and then subtracting the self-continuum contribution as measured by Ptashnik et al. (2011a). At all temperatures, their foreign continuum is consistently stronger than all versions of MT\_CKD in the central parts of the 4-1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  windows (between 10-100 times stronger than MT\_CKD\_2.5), although there is better agreement at the edges of these windows.

Baranov and Lafferty (2012) report foreign continuum values in the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window using an FTS technique, assuming the self-continuum as measured by Baranov and Lafferty (2011). These agree very well with the measurements of Baranov (2011), which were taken at four temperatures (326, 339, 352 and 363 K). In a similar way to the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, they observe a factor of 100 stronger foreign continuum than MT\_CKD\_2.5 in the centre of the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window, and are in reasonable agreement with Ptashnik et al. (2012). They also exhibit no significant temperature dependence, in agreement with Ptashnik et al. (2012).

Mondelain et al., (2015) presented a foreign continuum measurement at one wavenumber ( $4250\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) at 298 K using the CRDS technique. Their reported values were a factor of  $\sim 4.5$  stronger than MT\_CKD in this region, and a factor of  $\sim 2$  weaker than CAVIAR-lab. Vasilchenko et al., (2019) present foreign continuum data at 4435, 4522, 4720 and  $4999\text{ cm}^{-1}$  using CRDS. Their data does not agree within the  $k = 1$  uncertainties of the CAVIAR-lab FTS measurements (aside from at  $4720\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) and are systematically lower by a factor of 2-4. They do however agree within the  $k = 2$  uncertainties. The CRDS foreign continuum was measured at room temperature; assuming that both the FTS and CRDS measurements are robust, this would indicate a small positive temperature dependence for the foreign continuum. The Vasilchenko et al. data is systematically a factor of 5 stronger than the MT\_CKD foreign continuum; both the FTS and CRDS data indicate that MT\_CKD therefore requires some strengthening, but by differing amounts.

The only existing dataset of pure foreign continuum measurements in the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window is the CAVIAR-lab data. We therefore focus our comparison solely on MT\_CKD and CAVIAR-lab in this region.

In addition to the laboratory measurements, Reichert and Sussmann (2016) presented measurements of the water vapour continuum in the atmosphere between  $2500\text{--}7600\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (see Section 1.2 for more details). Given the high altitude and low water vapour path of their measurements, Reichert and Sussmann indicate that the foreign continuum is by far the dominant contributor to the continuum in the majority of their measured spectral regions; we therefore compare their measurements to



our foreign continuum measurements directly, but there may be some small self-continuum component which we do not account for in the Reichert and Sussmann data. Reichert and Sussmann indicate that the foreign continuum is by far the dominant contributor to the continuum in the majority of their measured spectral regions. The domination of the foreign continuum is more likely to be the case in the atmospheric windows, where the foreign continuum contribution is larger (e.g. Ptashnik et al. 2012). This is particularly likely to be the case in the atmospheric windows, where the foreign continuum contribution is larger (e.g. Ptashnik et al. 2012). Reichert and Sussmann present data in the 4, 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  windows; however due to the low atmospheric absorption seen in their experiment the results are negative for a significant portion of the spectrum. However, their uncertainty limits provide an upper bound on the strength of the foreign continuum.

#### 4.5.2.2: CAVIAR-field foreign continuum

The foreign continuum can be inferred from the CAVIAR-field measurements using high temperature observations of the self-continuum extrapolated down to room temperature. This allows for comparison with the laboratory foreign continuum data, and with Reichert and Sussmann, (2016). Figure 17 shows the CAVIAR-field foreign continuum for two different cases; assuming a) the MT\_CKD\_3.2 self-continuum, and b) the high-temperature CAVIAR-lab self-continuum extrapolated to 280 K. In this case, only the data points above  $T = 297$  K have been included in the extrapolation, to better reflect the agreement (when extrapolated) with the available Grenoble measurements in these windows, which have lower uncertainties at low-temperature.

We focus the discussion here on the 2.1 and 4  $\mu\text{m}$  windows, since these are the regions in which the most laboratory data are available. It is important to emphasise here that the foreign continuum cannot be derived from laboratory measurements without prior knowledge of the self-continuum, and that therefore the foreign continuum values shown are sensitive to the assumptions made about the self-continuum.

In the centre of the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window, Fig. 17 shows that the foreign continuum is significantly stronger ( $\sim 20\times$ ) than MT\_CKD\_3.2 regardless of the assumption made about the self-continuum, and agrees well with the CAVIAR-lab and Baranov (2011) foreign continua, which are plotted here at 326 K. It is also consistent with Reichert and Sussmann (2016) within the  $k = 1$  uncertainty limits. The weight of available data appears to indicate that a significant strengthening of the MT\_CKD foreign continuum is required in the centre of this window. Given that Baranov and Lafferty (2012) retrieval of the foreign continuum uses the Baranov and Lafferty (2011) self-continuum, which may be an overestimate if the Grenoble measurements are correct (Figure 13), this strengthening could even be larger than indicated.

Figure 17 shows that in the centre of the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window there is excellent agreement between the CAVIAR-lab and CAVIAR-field foreign continua whether using either the MT\_CKD\_3.2 (panel a) or CAVIAR-lab self-continuum (panel b). This provides evidence that, assuming our knowledge of the self-continuum is robust, the foreign continuum is better characterised

by CAVIAR-lab than MT\_CKD [3.2](#). As indicated in Reichert and Sussmann (2016), their values can only represent an upper limit on the continuum in the windows. Nevertheless, these results agree with ours within the  $k = 1$  uncertainties, indicating that the two are consistent. However, at the low-wavenumber edge of the window ( $\sim 4200 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), our results show a somewhat weaker (factor of  $\sim 2$ ) foreign continuum than CAVIAR-lab. This is consistent with the inference made in Section [4.5.1.2](#) when estimating the self-continuum. Our results are consistent with the uncertainty limits of Reichert and Sussmann (2016) at these wavenumbers. There is good agreement between the various laboratory self-continuum data in this window (when extrapolated to room temperature), which gives some confidence in the analysis presented in Figure 14. Our reported uncertainties are also smaller in this region, and any unattributed aerosol effect would be smaller in this window than at  $1.6 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ . These results indicate that the foreign continuum is stronger than the MT\_CKD [3.2](#) foreign continuum by about a factor of 5 in the centre of the window, in agreement with Ptashnik et al., (2012) and Vasilchenko et al. (2019).

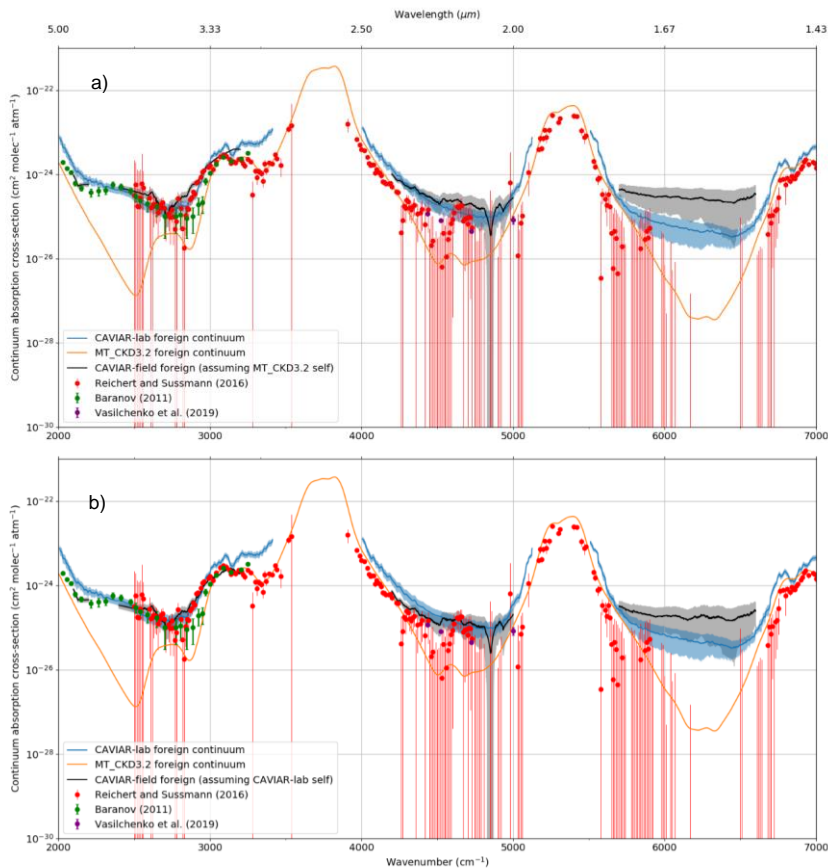


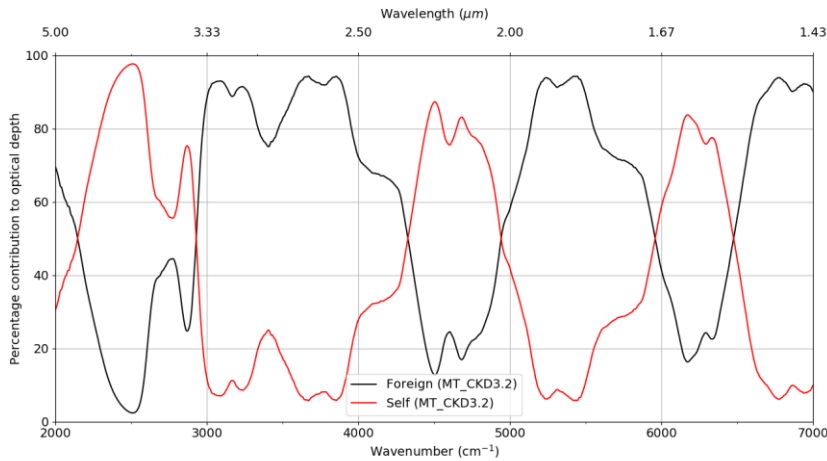
Figure 17: Langley-estimated CAVIAR-field foreign continuum in the atmospheric windows across the 2000-7000 cm⁻¹ region alongside CAVIAR-lab, MT\_CKD\_3.2 and Reichert and Sussmann (2016) data. The shaded regions and error bars indicate the  $k = 1$  uncertainties. Panel a) shows the CAVIAR-field foreign continuum assuming the MT\_CKD3.2 self-continuum and panel b) shows the CAVIAR-field foreign continuum assuming the CAVIAR-lab self-continuum, which is derived from extrapolating the high temperature (>350 K) data to 280 K.

The situation in the 1.6 μm window (Fig. 17) is less clear. The uncertainties in our measurements are greater, and there is less consistency in this window between this work and the laboratory data. The agreement improves when the stronger CAVIAR-lab self-continuum is used (Fig 17b). This could indicate that there is an issue with our measurements in this window (such as

aerosol contamination or a systematic calibration uncertainty), or that the foreign continuum is significantly stronger than predicted by CAVIAR-lab. Despite the large observed values, CAVIAR-field, CAVIAR-lab and Reichert and Sussmann (2016) are all consistent within their  $k = 2$  uncertainty limits. These results indicate a larger absorption than observed in the CAVIAR-lab data. Such a large absorption could explain the results of Oyafuso et al., (2017), who reported that “unrealistically large multiplicative factors ( $\sim 8x$  for the  $2.06\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  band and  $\sim 150x$  for the  $1.6\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  band) for the water ~~vapor~~vapour continuum were required”. This work strongly suggests that a strengthening of the foreign continuum by a factor of  $10x$  is necessary to MT\_CKD3CKD\_3.2 at  $2.1\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  (consistent with laboratory observations), and absorption a factor of  $\sim 100x$  stronger than MT\_CKD3CKD\_3.2 in the  $1.6\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  window (which is less consistent with laboratory observations). There appears to be an urgent need for an independent set of foreign continuum measurements in the  $1.6\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  window to resolve this discrepancy.

### 4.5.3: Relative contributions of the self and foreign continua

An additional issue of importance is the relative contribution to the total continuum absorption of the self and foreign continua, particularly for atmospheric scientists, since the relative contribution of each is strongly dependent on the atmospheric conditions at the time of measurement. Figure 18 shows the percentage of the optical depth originating from the self and foreign-continua for conditions of 18 September 2008 from MT\_CKD3CKD\_3.2 (the optical depth calculated using MT\_CKD3CKD\_3.2 is shown in Figure 7). In these conditions (with an integrated water vapour column of about  $16\text{ kg m}^{-2}$ , see Section 2), the self-continuum dominates in the centres of the windows ( $\sim 95\%$  in the centre of the  $4\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  window,  $90\%$  in the centre of the  $2.1\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  window and  $\sim 80\%$  in the centre of the  $1.6\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  window), while the foreign continuum dominates in the bands.



**Figure 18: Proportion of the 18 September 2008 Camborne optical depth attributable to the self and foreign continua as calculated using the MT\_**~~CKD3CKD~~**\_3.2** model. The total optical depth is shown by the red line in Figure 7.

Figure 19 shows the percentage contribution of the CAVIAR-field self-continuum (panel a) and CAVIAR-field foreign continuum (panel b). Each of these panels shows the proportion of the total 18 September 2008 continuum optical depth attributable to the self or foreign optical depth by assuming the contribution from the other component via either CAVIAR-lab or MT\_CKD. The relative contribution in this case is as given by Eq. (5). Unlike with MT\_CKD, which is well-constrained (and therefore the total contribution of the self and foreign continua sum up to the total, as in Figure 18), the CAVIAR-field estimated continuum is not, in the case where  $a \neq b \neq 1$ , as we do not have enough information to derive independent values of the two components of the CAVIAR-field continuum. Therefore, it should not be expected that  $\tau_{for}^{CAV} + \tau_{self}^{CAV} = \tau_{tot}^{CAV}$ . Figure 19 should be interpreted as the values implied by CAVIAR-field when assuming that the self or foreign contribution is well-characterised by either CAVIAR-lab or MT\_CKD.

The self-continuum (panel a) contribution is large ( $> 95\%$ ) when using the MT\_CKD foreign continuum across all of the windows of interest, similar to the case shown in Figure 18. However, when using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, this contribution decreases by an amount depending on the window of interest. In the  $4\ \mu\text{m}$  window, the contribution varies from  $\sim 50\%$  to almost  $0\%$  in the centre of the window. Similarly, in the  $2.1\ \mu\text{m}$  window, the self-continuum drops from  $\sim 95\%$  to  $\sim 40\%$  contribution when using the stronger CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum. At  $1.6\ \mu\text{m}$ , almost all of the absorption when assuming the MT\_CKD foreign continuum is implied to come from the self-continuum. This is because the MT\_CKD3CKD**\_3.2** foreign continuum is extremely weak in this region, and the total CAVIAR-field optical depth is much larger than the MT\_CKD3CKD**\_3.2** optical depth (see Fig. 7). Using the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum decreases the contribution of the self-continuum to  $\sim 80\%$  in the centre of this window, comparable with the fraction implied when just using MT\_CKD (Figure 18).

Because of the lack of constraint on the CAVIAR-field optical depth, the implied foreign-continuum contribution when assuming the MT\_CKD or CAVIAR-lab self-continua (Fig. 17b) is also high (over  $60\%$  across all 3 windows). Unlike the self-continuum case, there is reasonable consistency between the implied values using either CAVIAR-lab or MT\_CKD. At  $4\ \mu\text{m}$ , using the CAVIAR-lab self-continuum increases the foreign contribution from  $\sim 60\text{--}80\%$  to  $\sim 75\text{--}90\%$  in the centre of the window, since the CAVIAR-lab self-continuum is smaller at room temperature than that of MT\_CKD in this region (see Fig. 13). At  $2.1\ \mu\text{m}$ , the contribution drops from  $\sim 80\%$  to  $\sim 70\%$  when using the MT\_CKD and CAVIAR-lab self-continua respectively. At  $1.6\ \mu\text{m}$ , the CAVIAR-field foreign is almost  $100\%$  in the centre of the window when using MT\_CKD self-continuum, but drops to  $\sim 80\text{--}90\%$  when using the CAVIAR-lab self-continuum.

The lack of consistency between the CAVIAR-field estimated self and foreign continuum is an indication of the lack of constraint on  $a$  and  $b$ , meaning that there are potentially issues with CAVIAR-field, and/or with the laboratory measurements and/or MT\_CKD.

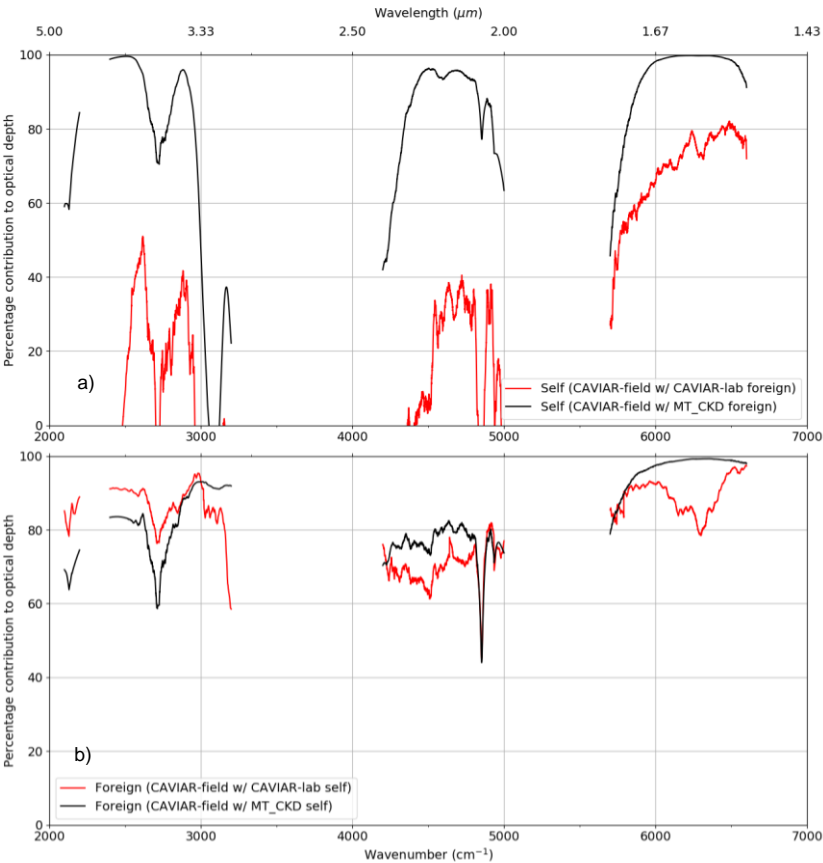


Figure 19: Proportion of the total continuum optical depth for 18 September 2008 from the CAVIAR-field self-continuum assuming the CAVIAR-lab and MT\_CKD 3.2 foreign continua (panel a), and the CAVIAR-field foreign continuum assuming the CAVIAR-lab and MT\_CKD 3.2 self-continua (panel b). As explained in the text, these are insufficient data to constrain the field observations such that the percentage contributions of the self and foreign sum to 100%, given the methodology to derive the self and foreign components of the field continuum.

## 5.6. Future steps

Given the uncertainties present in this analysis, and the need to measure in a wider range of conditions to more accurately separate the foreign and self-continua, more measurements are required to sufficiently constrain the continuum absorption in atmospheric conditions. This section details how a future field campaign might reduce the uncertainty in the derived continuum when performing an analysis such as the one presented in this work.

The main contributor to the uncertainty was the lack of well-characterised aerosol extinction. This is the most significant factor in the uncertainty budget, and there were significant problems in characterising the variation over time. This may have been due to operational problems with the Microtops sunphotometer used to measure aerosol optical depth. While the stated uncertainty is reasonably small (e.g. Ichoku et al., (2002) estimate an optical depth uncertainty of  $\sim \pm 0.02$  in the lower wavenumber channels and  $\pm 0.01$  or less in the higher wavenumber channels) there was a clearly observed time variation in the  $\tau_{aerosol}$  that was not present in the FTS measurements. Additionally, the observations of  $\tau_{aerosol}$  were taken in channels in the visible and near-infrared parts of the spectrum and extrapolated out into the near-infrared. This means that, while the aerosol optical depth decreases with decreasing wavenumber (e.g. Figure 5), there is a higher fractional uncertainty since there is a need to extrapolate further.

Ideally, any future campaign would use a more robust method of measuring aerosol extinction, such as taking place close to an AERONET site (e.g. Giles et al., 2019). Mounting our sunphotometer on a solar tracker may have aided our analysis and possibly reduced some of the problems described in Section 2.4. A future campaign should minimise the aerosol contamination by taking place at higher altitude. High altitude observations would take place in the tropics, to ensure there is enough water vapour for the continuum signal to be detectable in the windows. Additionally, satellite products could be used to measure  $\tau_{aerosol}$ ; these have improved significantly in the decade since the Camborne observations were taken and could be used in conjunction with AERONET and in-situ measurements to constrain aerosol. Some caution should be warranted however, since satellites use atmospheric windows to obtain aerosol which also contain the ill-constrained continuum absorption.

Additionally, aircraft could be used to constrain the aerosol profile, aiding in e.g. calculations using a Mie scattering code. Measuring the aerosol profile in ambient conditions would be a significant step towards a more robust representation of  $\tau_{aerosol}$ , e.g. from a research aircraft. Aircraft could also be used to provide measurements of other variables, such as temperature, or even for fully radiometric measurements. Green et al., (2012) and Newman et al., (2012) measured the mid and far-infrared continuum via aircraft measurements during the CAVIAR project using the FAAM ~~aircraft~~ (Facility for Airborne Atmospheric Measurements). This method works well for measuring the comparatively strong mid and far-infrared continuum, but could potentially be used to measure the in-band continuum in the near-IR. However, this method relies on

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accurate calibration either to a blackbody source or to a prescribed SSI to retrieve the continuum via the closure method, since it is difficult to perform a Langley analysis using an aircraft.

Future campaigns could use the calibration method described in Reichert et al., (2016) to calibrate a spectrometer to the top of atmosphere solar irradiance, rather than using a comprehensive radiometric calibration such as that used in this work, once it is known to higher accuracy. This would reduce the costs of such a campaign, and potentially allow for observations in a wider range of conditions, such as high-altitude sites where maintaining good calibration is difficult. A significant limitation of this study is the lack of measurements in different atmospheric conditions. Measurements over a wide range of IWV would help significantly in strengthening the constraints on the parameters  $a$  and  $b$  in Eq. (5), particularly measurements where the continuum in the windows is dominated by either the foreign or self-continua. It is in principle possible to derive the absorption coefficients directly, given a set of atmospheric observations over a range of conditions, since the self-continuum varies with the square of the vapour pressure, while the foreign varies with the product of vapour pressure and the pressure of the ambient air. Such an analysis would also have to take into account the temperature dependence of the self-continuum.

If the relative contribution of the self and foreign-continua was well constrained, an analysis like that performed in Section 4.5 could be performed, but with significantly more confidence in the results, and allow a more direct comparison with the laboratory measurements without the strong assumptions required in our analysis.

Alternatively, one could use a horizontal atmospheric path, using e.g. a laser source rather than the Sun. This has been performed by e.g. Rieker et al., (2014) to observe carbon dioxide and methane absorption in the centre and edges of the 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  window using a frequency comb method over a 2 km path. Using a horizontal path reduces the effect of clouds and aerosols, and allows for *in situ* measurements of humidity, temperature and pressure directly in the beam path, rather than relying on potentially uncertain radiosonde measurements (which are directed by the prevailing winds and not necessarily representative of the path observed by a spectrometer). However, this would result in similar problems to those found in a laboratory, namely the difficulty in constructing a path length long enough to measure the comparatively weak continuum absorption in the windows. In such a measurement, the experimenter would have significantly less control over the conditions compared to a laboratory measurement.

## 6.7. Conclusions

We have presented new field observations of the near-IR continuum in the atmospheric windows at 4, 2.1, 1.6,  $\mu\text{m}$  (~~2000-7000~~ 2500-6600  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ). These measurements are, to our knowledge, the first and only published measurements which characterise the water vapour continuum in the near-IR windows at sea-level. Our data show good agreement with laboratory spectra in the first two of these windows, but the agreement worsens with increasing wavenumber. This is consistent with

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signal contamination due to atmospheric aerosol, which is more pronounced at higher wavenumbers. These measurements provide some real-world validation of the extrapolated laboratory data and semi-empirical models, which are relied on for radiative modelling purposes.

5 In the centre of the 4  $\mu\text{m}$  window, there is good agreement between the CAVIAR-field self-continuum and the various sets of laboratory data. The laboratory self-continua exhibit two different temperature dependencies, with Baranov and Lafferty (2011) showing a significantly steeper temperature dependence than Richard et al. (2017). The CAVIAR-field data could agree with either of these implied temperature dependences, depending on whether the MT\_CKD [3.2](#) or CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum is assumed respectively. Given that CAVIAR-field is an experimental estimate, and the high precision and accuracy  
10 of the Richard et al. (2017) measurements, we believe that this is evidence for a weaker self-continuum at the centre of this window than observed by Baranov and Lafferty (2011). We also demonstrate that a strengthening is required to the MT\_CKD [3.2](#) foreign continuum in this window, in agreement with the results of Ptashnik et al. (2012), Baranov (2011) and Baranov and Lafferty (2012). This strengthening varies spectrally, but is a factor of  $\sim 100$  in the centre of the window at  $2500\text{ cm}^{-1}$ .

15 We show that, assuming the (temperature-extrapolated) CAVIAR-lab self-continuum is correct in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  window, the foreign continuum in the centre of the window is underestimated by MT\_CKD [3.2](#) by a factor of 5, in agreement with the laboratory measurements of Ptashnik et al., (2012) and Vasilchenko et al., (2019). In the centre of the window, assuming the CAVIAR-lab foreign continuum, our data agrees well with extrapolated self-continuum components from CAVIAR-lab and  
20 the various Grenoble CRDS measurements. At the edge of the window, we demonstrate that the MT\_CKD foreign continuum is likely too weak, but by less than a factor of 5 and not as strong as the window-edge foreign continuum from CAVIAR-lab. Alternatively, there is a possibility that the foreign continuum exhibits more temperature dependence than has been inferred from the available laboratory studies.

25 At 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$ , we show a significantly stronger implied self-continuum than the extrapolated CAVIAR-lab and Grenoble laboratory measurements, regardless of whether the MT\_CKD [3.2](#) or CAVIAR foreign continuum is used. This may indicate one of several things. There may be some systematic error in our retrieval of the continuum optical depth (whether due to aerosol, or a calibration issue). It may also suggest that a significantly stronger self-continuum is realistic, such as the large values reported by Ptashnik et al. (2015). However, this is unlikely to be the case, given that the authors of Ptashnik et al.  
30 (2015) believe their results may be spurious (~~for Ptashnik, pers. comm.~~ [et al. \(2019b\)](#)). Alternatively, it may be that the foreign continuum as measured by CAVIAR-lab ~~may be~~ too weak, or some combination of the above factors.

Across the spectrum, we observe a greater proportion of the total continuum optical depth in the 4, 2.1 and 1.6  $\mu\text{m}$  windows as likely coming from the foreign continuum, rather than the self-continuum (for the atmospheric conditions at the time of our

observations). This may indicate that the foreign continuum is being underestimated by MT\_CKD\_3.2 in these windows, which could have significant implications for atmospheric radiative transfer calculations for both climate modelling and remote sensing applications.

- 5 Given the challenges that come with making absolutely calibrated high resolution results in the atmosphere, rather than a controlled laboratory setting, our results are characterised by high uncertainties. We detail ways in which a future field campaign should improve upon our characterisation of atmospheric aerosol in particular, by either mitigating its effect or measuring it with greater accuracy and precision.
- 10 This work represents a significant advance in understanding of the continuum absorption in near-IR windows, as it is the only existing dataset of direct atmospheric measurements with positive values in these windows. Our results are consistent with the upper limits imposed by Reichert and Sussmann, (2016). Our work, and that of Reichert and Sussmann, demonstrate that it is possible to observe the near-IR continuum in the field within the bands and windows to some degree of accuracy. We encourage future field measurements, in as wide a range of conditions as possible, to more rigorously assess the partition between the
- 15 self and foreign continua in the atmosphere. Such measurements should take steps to avoid the problems encountered in this work, particularly regarding aerosol scattering, with careful consideration of the calibration drift over the course of individual days of measurement and over the course of a measurement campaign.

### 7.8. Data availability

- The data from this work are available via online depository (doi: 10.5281/zenodo.3520519). Included is the best estimate of
- 20 10 the continuum optical depth (18 September 2008), provided with the  $k = 1$  uncertainties, the ratio of this best estimate to the corresponding MT\_CKD\_3.2 optical depth from 18 September 2008, and the CAVIAR-field estimated continuum absorption coefficients using both MT\_CKD and CAVIAR-lab. All data are provided at  $1 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  resolution. Other data (including full resolution data) are available from the corresponding author upon request.

### Acknowledgements

- 25 CAVIAR (NE/D012082/1) was funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. Jonathan Elsey would like to thank the NERC SCENARIO Doctoral Training Partnership for funding his PhD research (studentship number 1503015), and NPL for providing additional financial support. We thank Liam Tallis for his work in performing the initial measurements. The latter stages of the analysis and writing were supported by the Natural Environment Research Council “Advanced Spectroscopy for improved characterisation of the near-Infrared water
- 30 vapour Continuum (ASPIC)” research grant (NE/R009848/1). We thank Nicolas Bellouin for his valuable input regarding the analysis of aerosol optical depth. We thank referees at the Access Review stage for many useful comments.

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### Author contributions:

JE led the analysis of the measurements, building on the initial work of KM, both of whom were supervised and guided by KS, MC and TG. MC and TG designed and calibrated the observing system and led the CAVIAR field measurements. KS was the overall Principal Investigator of the CAVIAR project and led the formulation of the project goals. JE led the writing of the original draft, with input from all other authors over several cycles of revision.

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