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A Rossby Wake due to an Island in an Eastward Current

Warren B. White

Dept. of Oceanography, Texas A&M University, College Station

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ABSTRACT

A mathematical barotropic model based upon the conservation of absolute vorticity is used to determine the effect of the spherical shape of the rotating earth [approximated by the beta (β) effect] on a steady uniform eastward current streaming past a cylindrical island in an unbounded ocean of uniform depth. Upstream far-field conditions are introduced that confine the disturbance pattern produced by the island to the region downstream from the island.

For an initially uniform eastward flow of velocity u_0 streaming past a cylindrical island of radius a , the downstream disturbance consists of a trail of meanders and eddies. The amplitude of these features depends upon the magnitude of the Island number [$I_s = (\beta a^2 / u_0)^{1/2}$] and the radial wavenumber equals $(\beta / u_0)^{1/2}$, which is, the Rossby wavenumber for stationary planetary waves.

In order to confirm the theoretical results of the beta-plane wake for an eastward flow situation, appeal is made to a laboratory model, consisting of a rotating annulus with a sloping bottom to simulate the beta effect. Dynamic similarity is achieved through the nondimensional Island number. The resulting flow pattern reveals a uniform flow field upstream from the island with the formation of a stationary disturbance downstream that agrees qualitatively with the theoretical results.

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Headquarters: 45 Beacon Street Boston, MA 02108-3693

DC Office: 1120 G Street, NW, Suite 800 Washington DC, 20005-3826

amsinfo@ametsoc.org Phone: 617-227-2425 Fax: 617-742-8718

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