

Investigation of the Ultra-High-Energy gamma-ray emission from the Northern Fermi Bubble with LHAASO-KM2A

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We analyze gamma-ray emission from the Northern Fermi bubble region at the ultra-high-energy range, using the data collected by LHAASO-KM2A from December 2019 to September 2022. Employing an improved gamma/hadron separation method, the median energy of the gamma rays is above 25 TeV. We perform the “direct integral method” in the background estimation; however, no significant excess is observed. Consequently, we present the expected upper limits for gamma-ray emissions within the Fermi bubble region at this energy range.

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1. Introduction

The Fermi bubbles are two large-scale structures of gamma-ray emission situated above and below the Galactic Center, extending to $|b| \sim 50^\circ$. They were initially detected in 2010 using data from the Fermi-LAT telescope[1] and have since been commonly referred to as the "Fermi bubbles". These bubbles exhibit a consistent and uniform spectral index of approximately -2 within the 1 GeV to 100 GeV energy range. The morphology of the Fermi bubbles observed in the gamma-ray band has been identified to be consistent with what has been observed in other wavelengths [2–5]. The formation of the Fermi bubbles and these associated features in different energy bands might have originated from the same past violent event of the Galactic center[1, 5]. Despite discovering the Fermi bubble several years ago, there is ongoing debate regarding their underlying physical mechanisms[6–11]. Notably, observations of the Fermi bubbles in the TeV range have not revealed any significant excess, with upper limits established by HAWC between TeV and 100 TeV[12]. As a portion of the Northern sky region of the Fermi bubble falls within the field of view of LHAASO, our study utilizes the data gathered by LHAASO-KM2A, which has a high sensitivity to ultra-high-energy gamma rays, to investigate gamma-ray emissions from the Northern Fermi bubble region.

2. LHAASO Experiment

The Large High Altitude Air Shower Observatory (LHAASO) is a hybrid ground-based extensive air shower array located at Haizi Mountain in Daocheng, Sichuan province, China (100.01°E, 29.35°N, 4410 m a.s.l.) [13]. LHAASO comprises three sub-arrays: a 1.3 square kilometer array (KM2A), a 78000 m^2 water Cherenkov detector array (WCDA), and a wide field of view Cherenkov/fluorescence telescopes array (WFCTA). The construction of the entire KM2A was completed in July 2021, and the full array has been operational since July 20, 2021. The KM2A consists of 5195 electromagnetic detectors (EDs) measuring 1 m^2 each and 1188 muon detectors (MDs) with an area of about 36 m^2 each. KM2A provides unprecedented sensitivity at energies above a few tens of TeV, enabling the search for very- and ultra-high-energy gamma-ray emissions in the northern sky.

3. Data Analysis

In this study, we utilize the data collected during various running periods, specifically from December 27, 2019, to September 30, 2022. These periods include the following: half array (December 27, 2019, to November 30, 2020), three-quarters array (December 1, 2020, to July 19, 2021), and full array (July 20, 2021, to September 30, 2022). The region of interest (ROI) in our study is determined based on the findings of the Fermi bubbles as reported in the paper by [1]. The ROI is restricted to $|b| > 10^\circ$ and covers a declination range of -20° to 4° , as well as a right ascension range of 220° to 258° . The right panel of Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this region. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the point source of PKS 1510-089 is within the ROI. To exclude any influence from this source, we employ a circular mask with a radius approximately 5 times that of the point spread function (PSF).

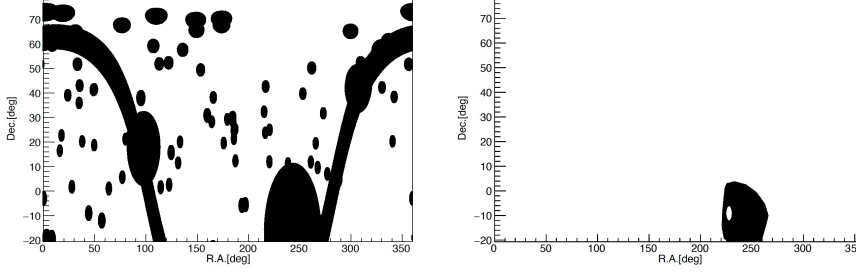


Figure 1: Left) The masked region is in the equatorial coordinate, where the black region is masked in the background estimation procedure. Right) The region of interest (ROI) used in this work, is indicated by the black area.

In the Crab-like point source analysis, we apply the muon selection criteria, ensuring a gamma-ray survival fraction of 90% for energies greater than 100 TeV based on simulations [13]. Given that the Fermi bubble encompasses a substantial solid angle, approximately 0.25 sr, we incorporate additional criteria to effectively reduce the cosmic ray background at higher energies.

The Q factor is defined as the ratio between the survival fraction of gamma rays, ϵ_γ , and the square root of the survival fraction of cosmic ray background, ϵ_{CR} , as shown in

$$Q = \frac{\epsilon_\gamma}{\sqrt{\epsilon_{CR}}}. \quad (1)$$

Both fractions are determined after performing a separation between gamma rays and cosmic rays. The parameter utilized for the separation of gamma rays and hadrons [13] is defined as:

$$R = \log \left(\frac{N_\mu + 0.0001}{N_e} \right) \quad (2)$$

where N_μ represents the number of muons and N_e corresponds to the number of electromagnetic particles in a shower induced by either a gamma ray or a hadron. The comparison of Q obtained from two sets of parameters is shown in Figure 2.

The event selection criteria employed in our study are as follows: Firstly, we require that the triggered EDs and the particles deposited for shower reconstruction exceed a minimum count of ten. Secondly, we impose a condition where the reconstructed direction's zenith angle must be below 50° . Lastly, we restrict the shower age to fall within the range of 0.6 – 2.4. Celestial coordinates bin the data into pixels of size $0.1^\circ \times 0.1^\circ$, while energy bins are logarithmic and equal width $\Delta \log E = 0.4$.

To estimate the background in each pixel, we use the "direct integral method" [14] in this study. This method assumes that the spatial distribution of the collecting efficiency remains stable over a short period in the detector coordinates. We can accurately determine the background by convolving the total event rate with the normalized spatial distribution. We use background data from ± 3 hours to estimate the efficiency of the time bin for the central hour.

To reduce the influence of known sources on the background estimation, we exclude the corresponding areas of the sky during the calculation, as shown in Figure 1. We detect sources using LHAASO-KM2A and consider their fitting position, size, and energy distribution, with a

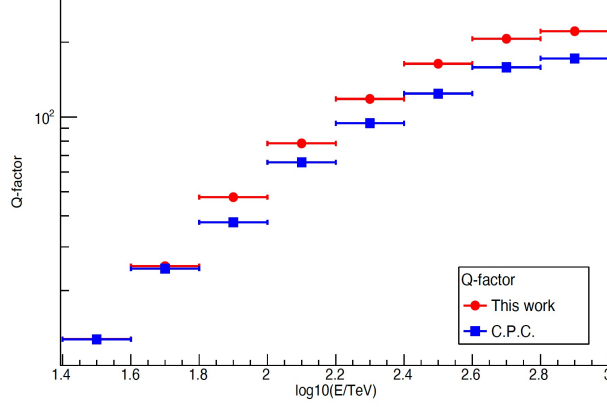


Figure 2: Q-factors at different energy bins for two sets of gamma/hadron separation parameters.

pre-trial significance threshold of 5σ . Each source is assumed to have a two-dimensional Gaussian shape and a power-law spectrum. Furthermore, we also mask the region of interest.

4. Results

By utilizing the "direct integral method," we obtain the counts within the on-source and off-source regions. The significance is determined using the Li-Ma formula. However, no significant excess is detected. Consequently, the upper limits are calculated following the Helene prescription[15]. In our calculations, we assume a power-law spectrum with an index of -2.75 for gamma-ray emissions within the Northern bubble region. Additionally, we assume a uniform flux distribution. The upper limits at the 95% confidence level for each bin are computed, and the results will be presented in the poster. We also employ the equi-zenith angle method for background estimation, yielding consistent results in both significance and upper limits.

In this study, we conduct calculations to determine the expected upper limit for the Fermi Bubble. These calculations were based on the background of KM2A maps, specifically the off-source map. By fluctuating the background events in the off-source maps, we obtained the median value, as well as the 68%, 95%, and 99.7% confidence intervals (CIs). The expected 95% upper limit is represented by the solid-red dashed line in Figure 3, while the color bands represent the 68%, 95%, and 99.7% CIs for the upper limits, denoted as the 1σ , 2σ , and 3σ containment, respectively.

In Figure 3, we present a summary of various observations of the northern Fermi Bubble. Only upper limits on the flux have been provided in the TeV range. It is worth noting that HAWC has recently updated its results based on a template-based search, leading to more stringent constraints compared to its previous findings [16].

The hadronic model, represented by the black line, is based on the work of Lunardini et al. (2015)[18]. This model serves as a gamma-ray counterpart to the neutrino flux model that best fits the data obtained from IceCube. Specifically, IceCube has observed a total of five events that are spatially associated with the Fermi Bubbles. In order to account for the emitted flux from both bubbles, a differential flux model was developed. The resulting upper limits effectively rule out the parent proton spectrum extrapolated from the IceCube data above 100 TeV. The black dashed line

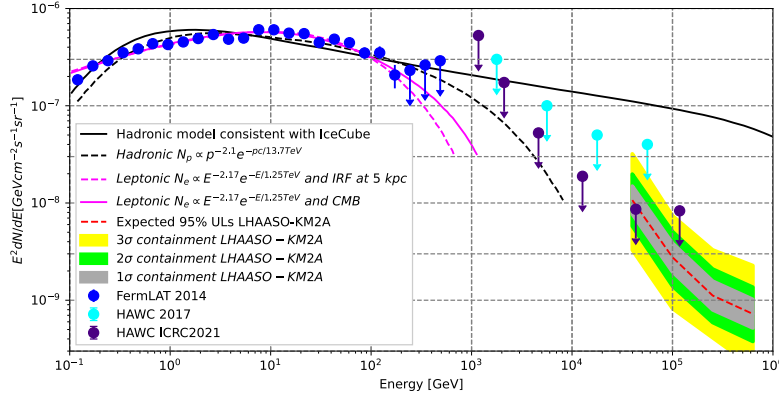


Figure 3: Upper limits on the flux derived from LHAASO-KM2A data, together with data from Fermi, HAWC, and gamma-ray production models proposed by [17] and [18]. The dashed solid-red line represents the predicted limit for the Fermi bubble using KM2A data, while the colored bands depict the 1σ , 2σ , and 3σ containment regions.

represents the hadronic model derived from the research conducted by Ackermann et al. (2014), which assumes a power law with an index of 2.1 and a power law with a cutoff (~ 13.7 TeV) for the injection spectrum of the hadrons. These protons interact with the interstellar medium (ISM), producing neutral pions that subsequently decay into gamma rays. On the other hand, the pink lines correspond to the best-fit leptonic models derived from Fermi-LAT data [17], indicating a cutoff energy of approximately 1.25 TeV.

5. Conclusion

The study presents a search for gamma rays with energies above 25 TeV in the region of the Northern Fermi Bubble. A total of 342 days of data from the half array, 232 days from the 3/4 array, and 438 days from the full array of LHAASO-KM2A are utilized in this investigation. No statistically significant excess of gamma rays is observed above 25 TeV within the search area, leading to the calculation of 95% confidence level upper limits on the flux. These upper limits, covering gamma-ray energies ranging from 25 TeV to 1 PeV, contradict the hadronic injection spectrum derived from IceCube measurements. However, the current findings do not provide conclusive evidence regarding the hadronic or leptonic origin of the Fermi bubbles.

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