Discovery of VHE Gamma Rays from PKS 2005—489

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Received 29 March 2005; Accepted 20 April 2005

Abstract. The high-frequency peaked BL Lac PKS 2005—489 ($z=0.071$) was observed in 2003 and 2004 with the H.E.S.S. stereoscopic array of imaging atmospheric-Cherenkov telescopes in Namibia. A signal was detected at the 6.7σ level in the 2004 observations (24.2 hrs live time), but not in the 2003 data set (27.3 hrs live time). PKS 2005—489 is the first blazar independently discovered by H.E.S.S. to be an emitter of VHE photons, and only the second such blazar in the Southern Hemisphere. The integral flux above 200 GeV observed in 2004 is $(6.9\pm1.0_{\text{stat}}\pm1.4_{\text{syst}})\times10^{-12}$ cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$, corresponding to $\sim$2.5% of the flux observed from the Crab Nebula. The 99% upper limit on the flux in 2003, $I(>200\text{ GeV})<5.2\times10^{-12}$ cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$, is smaller than the flux measured in 2004, suggesting an increased level of activity in 2004. However, the data show no evidence for significant variability on any time scale less than a year. An energy spectrum is measured and is characterized by a very soft power law (photon index of $\Gamma = 4.0 \pm 0.4$).

Key words. Galaxies: active - BL Lacertae objects: Individual: PKS 2005—489 - Gamma rays: observations
1. Introduction

PKS 2005–489 was initially discovered as a bright (>0.5 Jy) radio source at 2.7 GHz (Wall, Shrimmins & Bolton 1975) and later identified as a very bright BL Lac object (Wall et al. 1986). It is classified as a high-frequency peaked BL Lac (HBL) due to its X-ray-to-radio flux ratio (Sambruna et al. 1995) and because its broadband spectral energy distribution (SED) peaks in the UV. It has been the target of several multi-wavelength observation campaigns and is well studied from the radio to the X-ray regime. PKS 2005–489 was also marginally detected by EGRET at energies greater than 100 MeV (Lamb & Macomb 1997) and in the GeV regime (Lamb & Macomb 1997). It is among the closest (z=0.071) Southern Hemisphere HBLs (Falomo et al. 1987). Based on its SED and its proximity, PKS 2005–489 is viewed as a promising candidate for detection as a VHE emitter (Costamante & Ghisellini 2002; Perlman 1999; Stecker, de Jager & Salamon 1996). However, it has not yet been previously detected in the VHE regime. The CANGAROO collaboration reported upper limits on the flux above 2 TeV in 1993-1994 (Roberts et al. 1998) above 1.7 TeV in 1997 (Roberts et al. 1999) above 1.1 TeV in 1999 and above 450 GeV in 2000 (Nishijima 2002). The University of Durham group has published the most constraining upper limit (3σ) on the flux, I(>400 GeV) < 7.9×10^{-12} cm^{-2} s^{-1}, based on observations made from 1996-1999 with the Mark 6 Telescope (Chadwick et al. 2000). As upper limits are of limited value for interpreting an SED, the present discovery of VHE gamma-rays from PKS 2005–489 yields considerably more insight into the understanding of this object and VHE AGN in general.

2. H.E.S.S. Detector

The H.E.S.S. experiment, located in the Khomas Highlands of Namibia (23° 16’ 18” S, 16° 30’ 1” E, 1835 m above sea level), is designed to search for astrophysical γ-ray emission above ∼100 GeV. The detector consists of a system of four imaging atmospheric-Cherenkov telescopes (diameter 13 m, focal length 15 m, mirror area 107 m²) in a square of 120 m side. Each telescope is equipped with a camera that provides a 5° field of view (f.o.v.) and contains 960 individual photomultiplier pixels, subtending 0.16° each, with Winston cone light concentrators. A H.E.S.S. camera is triggered when one of 38 overlapping 64-pixel sectors has a minimum number of pixels with a signal above a threshold in photoelectrons (PEs) coincident in an effective ∼1.3 ms trigger window. Once a camera has triggered, a signal is sent out to a central trigger system (Funk et al. 2004) which allows for a multiple telescope coincidence requirement (presently a minimum of two triggered telescopes). The sensitivity of H.E.S.S. (5σ in 25 hours for a 1% Crab Nebula flux source at 20° zenith angle) allows for detection of VHE emission from objects such as PKS 2005–489 at previously undetectable flux levels. More details on H.E.S.S. can be found in Bernlohr et al. (2003), Hofmann (2003) and Vincent et al. (2003).

3. Observations

The H.E.S.S. observations of PKS 2005–489 in 2003 were made while the system was under construction. Therefore the data were obtained using different instrument configurations. Most observations in 2003 were made using a two-telescope array, with the exception of a small amount of data taken after the addition of the third telescope to the array in September 2003. Another variation arises because the H.E.S.S. central trigger system was installed in July 2003. Before this time two-telescope data were taken with each telescope separately, and the stereo multiplicity requirement was performed off-line (“Offline Stereo”) using GPS time stamps. After the installation of the central trigger system, the stereo multiplicity requirement was performed in the hardware (“Online Stereo”). As the central trigger system reduced the recording rate considerably, the camera trigger threshold was lowered (3 pixels > 5.3 PEs vs. 4 pixels > 6.7 PEs). This increased the rates, while maintaining a reduced system dead time, and ultimately resulted in a lower energy threshold. All observations made in 2004 use the full four-telescope array.

Table I gives details of the observations of PKS 2005–489 by H.E.S.S. which pass selection criteria which remove data for which the weather conditions were poor or the hardware was not functioning properly. The data were taken in 28 minute runs using Wobble mode, i.e. the source direction is positioned ±0.5° relative to the center of the f.o.v. of the camera during observations, which allows for both on-source observations and simultaneous estimation of the background induced by charged cosmic rays.

4. Analysis Technique

The analysis of the data passing the run selection criteria proceeds in the following steps: First the images are calibrated (Aharonian et al. 2004) and then “cleaned” to remove night sky background noise from the image. The cleaning is done using a two-stage tail-cut procedure (thresholds: 5 & 10 PEs). The moments of the shower image are then parameterized using a Hillas-type analysis (Hillas 1985) and the shower geometry is reconstructed using the intersection of image axes, giving a typical angular resolution of ∼0.1° per event and an average accuracy of ∼10 m in the determination of the shower core location. Only images which exceed a minimum total signal

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Table 1. Shown are the configurations of H.E.S.S. with which PKS 2005−489 was observed, the number of observation runs, the dead time corrected observation time, the mean zenith angle of the observations ($Z_{\text{obs}}$), the post-cuts energy threshold at $Z_{\text{obs}}$, the number of on-source and off-source events passing the cuts, the normalization for the off-source events, the observed excess from PKS 2005−489, and the significance of the excess.

| Periods      | Configuration | $N_{\text{on}}$ | $N_{\text{off}}$ | Obs. Time [hrs] | $Z_{\text{obs}}$ [°] | $E_{\text{th}}$ [GeV] | On | Off | Norm | Excess [σ] | Sig. |
|--------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|----|-----|------|----------|-----|
| 6/2003       | Offline Stereo | 2               | 22               | 7.9            | 28               | 340                 | 194 | 1177| 0.1567| 10       | 0.7 |
| 7 & 8/2003   | Online Stereo | 2               | 43               | 18.6           | 29               | 250                 | 628 | 3717| 0.1585| 39       | 1.5 |
| 9/2003       | Online Stereo | 3               | 2                | 0.8            | 26               | 240                 | 56  | 384 | 0.1574| −4       | −0.5|
| 6, 7, 9 & 10/2004 | Online Stereo | 4               | 57               | 24.2           | 38               | 300                 | 1702| 9410| 0.1567| 288      | 6.7 |
| **Total**    |               |                 |                  |                |                  |                     |     |     |      |          | 6.3 |

Table 2. The selection cuts applied to the data. The same cuts are used, regardless of the number of telescopes, for all Online Stereo configurations.

| Stereo Config. | MRSW $\theta^2$ | MRSL $\theta^2$ | MRSL $\theta^2$ | MRSW $\theta^2$ | MRSW $\theta^2$ |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Offline        | 1.3 ± 2.2        | 1.1 ± 2.5       | 0.02            |                 |                 |
| Online         | 2.0 ± 2.0        | 0.9 ± 2.0       | 0.0125          |                 |                 |

Fig. 1. The distribution of $\theta^2$ for on-source events (points) and normalized off-source events (shaded) from observations of PKS 2005−489 in 2004. The dashed line represents the cut on $\theta^2$ applied to the data.
index is small compared to the statistical error. It should be noted that each of the five highest energy points, $E > 0.64$ TeV, in Figure 2 have statistical significance less than 2σ. However, removing these points from the fit does not change $\Gamma$ significantly. Consistent results are also found using alternative background estimation techniques and/or independent analysis chains. No evidence is found for significant features, such as a cutoff or break, in the energy spectrum.

Assuming the determined photon index of $\Gamma=4.0$, the integral flux above 200 GeV measured in 2004 is $I(>200 \text{ GeV}) = (6.9 \pm 1.0_{\text{stat}} \pm 1.4_{\text{syst}}) \times 10^{-12} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$. This corresponds to $\sim 2.5\%$ of $I(>200 \text{ GeV})$ determined by H.E.S.S. from the Crab Nebula. The 99% confidence limit on $I(>200 \text{ GeV})$ in 2003 is $5.2 \times 10^{-12} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$. This is slightly less than the flux in 2004 suggesting that PKS 2005–489 was in a higher state during the 2004 observations. The flux upper limit in 2003 and the flux in 2004 are well below all previously published upper limits for this object. No evidence for variability in 2003 or 2004 is found as fits to the integral flux versus time are consistent with being constant. This is the case whether the data are binned by dark period (months) within each year ($\chi^2$ probability, $P(\chi^2)$, of 0.57 in 2003, and 0.98 in 2004), by nights within each dark period ($P(\chi^2) > 0.2$ and 0.6 for each of the four periods in 2003 and 2004, respectively) or runs (~30 min) within individual nights ($P(\chi^2) > 0.05$ and 0.1 for all nights in 2003 (mean $P(\chi^2) = 0.45$) and 2004 (mean $P(\chi^2) = 0.53$), respectively). However, given the low statistics overall, the lack of observed short time scale variability in 2003 and 2004 is not surprising.

6. Conclusions

PKS 2005–489 has been detected by H.E.S.S. at energies greater than 200 GeV in 2004. It is the first AGN independently discovered by H.E.S.S. as an emitter of VHE photons and only the second such AGN known in the Southern Hemisphere. The measured VHE flux is quite low ($\sim 2.5\%$ of the Crab Nebula flux) and no evidence supporting variability of the VHE flux on time scales of less than a year is found. However, the upper limit resulting from the lack of a detection in 2003 suggests that the flux from PKS 2005–489 in 2004 was higher than the previous year. This inference is supported by the behavior of this blazar in the X-ray regime. Quick-look results provided by the ASM/RXTE team show the average count rate from PKS 2005–489 was a factor of $\sim 3$ higher in 2004 ($0.116 \pm 0.025 \text{ s}^{-1}$) than in 2003 ($0.039 \pm 0.026 \text{ s}^{-1}$). Interestingly, the average ASM count rate in 1998 ($0.39 \pm 0.02 \text{ s}^{-1}$) is considerably higher than that in 2004, suggesting that PKS 2005–489 was in a low state during the H.E.S.S. observations. Should the VHE flux increase comparably to the historical (1998 vs 2004) X-ray count rate, a significant signal will quickly accumulate (~1 hour) in H.E.S.S. observations allowing for more detailed studies of the VHE behavior to be performed.

The VHE spectrum of PKS 2005–489 is the softest ($\Gamma=4.0$) ever measured from a BL Lac. Given the proximity ($z=0.071$) of PKS 2005–489, the softness is unlikely to be largely due to absorption of VHE photons on the extragalactic background light. Assuming the softness to be intrinsic to the blazar, inverse-Compton models of the VHE emission predict that the X-ray spectrum should also be steep. A multi-wavelength observation campaign (including X-ray energies) was performed in October 2004, results of which will address this issue among others, but is beyond the scope of this letter.

Given its low flux and soft spectrum, PKS 2005–489 was not detectable by previous generations of VHE instruments. The currently unprecedented ability of H.E.S.S. to detect faint soft-spectrum sources of VHE gamma-rays, such as AGN, should significantly improve the overall understanding of blazars and their physics.

Acknowledgements. The support of the Namibian authorities and of the University of Namibia in facilitating the construction and operation of H.E.S.S. is gratefully acknowledged, as is the support by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), the Max-Planck-Society, the French Ministry for Research, the CNRS-IN2P3 and the Astroparticle Interdisciplinary Programme of the CNRS, the U.K. Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC), the IPNP of the Charles University, the South African Department of Science and Technology and National Research Foundation, and by the University of Namibia. We appreciate the excellent work of the technical support staff in Berlin, Durham, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Palaiseau, Paris, Saclay, and in Namibia in the construction and operation of the equipment.

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