



NASA Sounding Rockets, 1958-1968: A Historical Summary (The NASA Historical Report Series)

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, William R. Corliss

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To explore the upper atmosphere man first used kites, then balloons, then aircraft. For many years balloons were the most effective means of obtaining direct measurements in the stratosphere. But they were limited in altitude, so scientists had to probe the ionosphere and other portions of the atmosphere beyond the stratosphere by indirect means. Sounding rockets provided the first means to carry instruments to the outermost reaches of the Earth's atmosphere. They were, indeed, our first space vehicles. As the author relates in this history, in this day of satellites and deep space probes, sounding rockets remain as important to space science as ever, furnishing our most powerful means for obtaining vertical profiles of atmospheric properties. NASA continues to depend on sounding rockets for research in aeronomy, meteorology, ionospheric physics, exploratory astronomy, and other disciplines. This monograph represents a first attempt at sketching the evolution and history of NASA sounding rockets. If it seems to be a Goddard Space Flight Center story, that is because NASA's sounding rocket program has been directed from that Center. The study is complicated by the great abundance of different vehicles, different governmental and private organizations, and by the many hundreds of NASA launchings since 1958. Original measurements were in the English system.

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