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► **To cite this version:**

Weikang Song, Yu-Jun Cui, Anh Minh A.M. Tang, Wenqi Ding. Development of a Large-Scale Environmental Chamber for Investigating Soil Water Evaporation. *Geotechnical Testing Journal*, 2013, 36 (6), pp.847-857. 10.1520/GTJ20120142 . hal-00926880

**HAL Id: hal-00926880**

**<https://enpc.hal.science/hal-00926880v1>**

Submitted on 25 Apr 2018

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1                   **Development of a Large-Scale Environmental Chamber for**  
2                                   **Investigating Soil Water Evaporation**

3  
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20

21 **ABSTRACT:** A large-scale environmental chamber was developed to study the soil water  
22 evaporation mechanisms. A large soil specimen (300 mm high, 800 mm large and 1000 mm  
23 long) was used, allowing sensors to be installed with minimal effect on the soil hydraulic  
24 properties. Sensors for measuring soil suction, temperature and volumetric water content were  
25 either buried inside the soil specimen or installed on the chamber's wall at various locations.  
26 Other sensors for monitoring air temperature, relative humidity, air flow rate and soil surface  
27 temperature were installed at different locations above the soil surface. Meanwhile, various  
28 atmosphere conditions were controlled by an air supply system and a steady water table at the  
29 bottom of soil was set through a big water tank. Fontainebleau sand was studied and it was  
30 compacted in the chamber in layers. After saturation, an 11.5-day evaporation test was  
31 performed. The results obtained were presented in terms of evolutions of suction, volumetric  
32 water content, air relative humidity and soil/air temperature. The data of air relative humidity  
33 and air temperature were further used for determining the actual evaporation rate; the data of  
34 soil volumetric water content and soil suction were used for determining the soil water  
35 retention curve. The quality of the results obtained showed the performance of the  
36 environmental chamber developed. In addition, these results can be further analyzed for  
37 theoretical and numerical developments involving soil water evaporation.

38

39 **KEYWORDS:** environmental chamber; Fontainebleau sand; soil water evaporation; soil  
40 suction at surface

## 41 **Introduction**

42 Soil water evaporation is an essential component in the land surface energy balance (Daamen  
43 and Simmonds 1996). Water is lost from soil during evaporation, thereby influencing the soil  
44 behavior, especially for clayey soils. In the field of agronomy, water loss due to evaporation  
45 can significantly affect crops in the planting and germination periods (Lal and Shukla 2004);  
46 in the geotechnical field, considerable water loss (e.g., drought) can induce significant soil  
47 volume changes, thereby damaging buildings and other infrastructures (e.g., Cui and Zornberg  
48 2008; Corti et al. 2009; Corti et al. 2011). Furthermore, soil water evaporation also affects the  
49 design, selection and assessment of soil cover for landfill and mining application (e.g., Wilson  
50 et al. 1994; Yanful and Choo 1997; Yanful et al. 2003). Therefore, it is important to better  
51 understand the soil water loss process during evaporation.

52

53 In order to estimate soil water evaporation, various devices and methods have been developed.  
54 Evaporation pan is usually used in the field for the measurement of free water evaporation  
55 that is considered as potential soil water evaporation (e.g., Blight 1997; Singh and Xu 1997;  
56 Fu et al. 2004; Fu et al. 2009; Li and Zhang 2011). For soil water evaporation investigation,  
57 several un-complex devices have also been developed. For instance, a circular pan with 300  
58 mm in diameter but different heights and filled with compacted soil was developed by Kondo  
59 et al. (1990, 1992), a soil column drying test device (Wilson et al. 1994) and a pan with 258  
60 mm in diameter and 74 mm in height and filled with thin enough soil sample by Wilson et al.  
61 (1997). The evaporation rate was obtained directly by weighing these devices over time.  
62 Furthermore, the devices developed by Kondo et al. (1992) and Wilson et al. (1994) allow

63 continuously monitoring the soil temperatures at various depths. For the water content profile,  
64 it was obtained only once by oven-drying at the end of experiment conducted by Kondo et al.  
65 (1992) while the evolution of it during evaporation can be obtained by direct measurement via  
66 sampling ports at various depths in the test performed by Wilson et al. (1994). More recently,  
67 McCartney and Zornberg (2010) developed a large soil column evaporation system based on  
68 the infiltration test devices developed by Stormont and Anderson (1999), Bathurst et al. (2007)  
69 and Bathurst et al. (2009), to investigate both the evaporation and infiltration processes. Their  
70 system allows the simultaneous measurements of soil temperature, water content/suction.  
71 Following the similar measurement principle that water evaporation approximately equals the  
72 mass loss of soil, weighing lysimeter was developed that allows direct measurement of  
73 evaporation as changes in total mass of soil (e.g., Benson et al. 2001; Benli et al. 2006). In  
74 order to make the in-situ measurement simpler and more accurate, micro-lysimeter are used  
75 (e.g., Boast and Robertson 1982; Plauborg 1995; Wang and Simmonds 1997; Qiu et al. 1998;  
76 Bonachela et al. 1999; Liu et al. 2002). Micro-lysimeter can also be combined with water  
77 content sensors like TDR (time domain reflectometry) for water evaporation monitoring  
78 (Wythers et al. 1999).

79

80 A better control of atmospheric conditions is obviously essential in investigating soil water  
81 evaporation mechanisms. In this regard, the wind tunnel system is a good example. Typically,  
82 this system allows not only the control of wind velocity and solar radiation, but also the  
83 monitoring of air temperature and relative humidity (e.g., Yamanaka et al. 1997; Komatsu  
84 2003; Yamanaka et al. 2004; Yuge et al. 2005; Wang 2006). This system can be used in

85 combination with the experimental devices mentioned above like pan (e.g., Komatsu 2003),  
86 soil tank (e.g., Wang 2006), weighing lysimeter (e.g., Yamanaka et al. 1997; Yamanaka et al.  
87 2004) and micro-lysimeter (e.g., Yuge et al. 2005). Furthermore, if some sensors are used for  
88 soil temperature, suction and volumetric water content monitoring, this system allows a  
89 comprehensive monitoring of parameters for studying soil water evaporation (e.g., Yamanaka  
90 et al. 1997; Yamanaka et al. 2004).

91

92 Another commonly used system is the environmental chamber. A fast air circulation box was  
93 developed by Kohsiek (1981) with the simulation of wind. It is a useful chamber for the  
94 measurement of stomatal resistance of grass. After some minor adjustments and equipment of  
95 a fast dry and wet bulb thermocouple and a thermal infrared radiometer, this box was then  
96 used for soil surface resistance investigation (van de Griend and Owe 1994). Furthermore,  
97 based on the principle that changes in absolute humidity at inlet and outlet of the  
98 environmental chamber is due to the soil water evaporation, Mohamed et al. (2000) developed  
99 a new chamber for predicting the solute transfer in unsaturated sand due to water evaporation,  
100 and Aluwihare and Watanabe (2003) developed a chamber to study the surface resistance of  
101 bare soil. On the whole, these chambers focus on the control atmosphere conditions, such as  
102 wind velocity, relative humidity, temperature etc., but rarely account for the soil parameters  
103 such as water content and suction. On the other hand, Yanful and Choo (1997) performed an  
104 evaporation experiment on a compacted soil using cylindrical columns placed in an  
105 environmental chamber. This chamber can control air temperature and relative humidity and  
106 measure soil temperature and water content at different depths during evaporation. However,

107 the soil mass, temperature and water content measurements should be done outside the  
108 chamber, the measurements being not instantaneous and continuous. Tang et al. (2009)  
109 developed a large-scale infiltration tank allowing instantaneous monitoring of soil water  
110 content, temperature and suction during evaporation (Ta et al. 2010; Cui et al. 2013).

111  
112 The various devices and methods mentioned above show that the large-scale environmental  
113 chamber is a good tool for investigating soil water evaporation in the laboratory. Compared to  
114 the wind tunnel system, the environmental chamber is less expensive and easier to operate but  
115 can provide rich data involving both air and soil parameters. Moreover, it has the same  
116 function as the combination of the wind tunnel and lysimeter. However, most existing  
117 environmental chambers only have a good performance in controlling air conditions, the soil  
118 being hardly taken into account (e.g., Kohsiek 1981; Van de Griend and Owe 1994;  
119 Aluwilhare and Watanabe 2003). In addition, the relationship between actual evaporation and  
120 soil suction or water content near the soil surface was rarely studied.

121  
122 In this study, a large scale environmental chamber (1000 mm long, 800 mm wide and 895 mm  
123 high) was developed for studying soil water evaporation. An 11.5-day evaporation test was  
124 performed on the Fontainebleau sand. Various sensors were buried in the soil or installed on  
125 the wall of chamber at different depths, allowing monitoring of soil temperature, suction,  
126 volumetric water content, in addition to the air temperature and relative humidity. The  
127 recorded data were further analyzed to determine the actual evaporation rate and soil water

128 retention curve. Note that this study focuses on soil water evaporation. To some extent, it  
129 corresponds to an extension of unsaturated soil mechanics.

130

## 131 **Experimental Setup**

132 The experimental setup consists of an environmental chamber, a wind supply unit, an air  
133 collection unit, a water supply unit and a data logging system. A sketch of this system is  
134 shown in Fig. 1. Schematic views of the environmental chamber are presented in Fig. 2 and a  
135 photograph is shown in Fig. 3. The chamber includes the main body, the ventilation part, the  
136 soil column part, the water drainage layer and an acrylic chamber cover of 8 mm thick.

137

138 The main body is an acrylic transparent chamber fixed on a base. The chamber consists of  
139 four acrylic plates mounted together by epoxy glue. The chamber has a wall of 20 mm thick,  
140 an internal width of 800 mm and an internal length of 1000 mm (Fig. 2(a)). Silicon glue was  
141 used to seal the joints in the four corners for preventing any leakage of air or water.

142

143 The soil column was prepared by compaction. The sensors measuring volumetric water  
144 content and soil temperature were installed at various depths during the compaction. The  
145 drainage layer was a compacted gravel (diameter: 2 - 4 mm) layer of 15 mm thick and  
146 sandwiched between two layers of geotextile of 1 mm thick (Fig. 2(b)). Two outlets were  
147 prepared at the bottom of the drainage layer for soil saturation, drainage and water supply.

148

149 The details of the sensors used are presented in Table 1 and their locations are shown in Fig.



150 2(b). These sensors were installed at different monitoring points in both the soil column and  
151 air. The volumetric water content sensors, namely ThetaProbe, were buried at different depths  
152 (i.e., 25 mm, 40 mm, 55 mm, 125 mm and 225 mm below the soil surface). Four  
153 high-capacity tensiometers of 1.5 MPa working suction (Cui et al. 2008, Tang et al. 2010)  
154 were installed on two sides of the wall at various depths (i.e., 25 mm, 77 mm, 173 mm and  
155 276 mm below the soil surface). One tensiometer was placed near the surface of soil (10 mm  
156 below the soil surface in order to ensure the good contact between the tensiometer and soil).  
157 Six soil temperature sensors (PT1000) were set every 50 mm along the soil column. Moreover,  
158 an infrared thermometer was fixed at the cover to measure the soil surface temperature. Six  
159 T3111 transmitters were mounted inside and outside the chamber. Two of them were placed at  
160 the air inlet and outlet. For the other four sensors, one was fixed on the chamber's wall in the  
161 middle from the soil surface to the cover of chamber (i.e., 275-mm height); the second one  
162 was mounted outside the chamber for monitoring the laboratory relative humidity; the last  
163 two sensors were placed on the soil surface and at 50 mm above the soil surface, respectively.  
164 The thermistors that allow the measurement of air temperature were fixed at different  
165 elevations along one side of the wall in the ventilation part.

166

167 The wind supply unit (see Fig. 1) was used for controlling the atmospheric conditions such as  
168 air temperature and air flow rate. This system consists of five parts: (1) high-pressure  
169 compressed air source; (2) air flow rate measurement unit; (3) air heating unit; (4) relative  
170 humidity and temperature measurement unit; and (5) air distributor. The compressed air  
171 source corresponds to the common laboratory compressed air system. The air flow rate is

172 controlled by a valve and is monitored by a flowmeter. The air heating unit consists of heating  
173 hoses and temperature regulator. This unit can heat the air to a temperature up to 250 °C. The  
174 unit measuring air relative humidity and temperature is equipped with a rigid plastic cell in  
175 which a T3111 transmitter is inserted. The air distributor is a metal tube on which eight holes  
176 of 8.4 mm in diameter are drilled along the length of tube with a spacing of 100 mm.

177

178 The air collection unit, assembled on the opposite wall to the air distributor, is half of a  
179 polyvinyl chloride cubic box of 755 mm long, 30 mm large and 100 mm high. This unit  
180 collects the air from the chamber and a T3111 transmitter inside measures both the relative  
181 humidity and temperature of air. A total of five holes of 25 mm diameter in the wall of  
182 chamber enable the air to enter the collection unit.

183

184 The water supply unit for the chamber consists of a plastic water tank and a water table  
185 survey tube. The water tank supplies water to the chamber and the water level inside the tank  
186 is kept the same as the water table in the chamber (bottom of chamber in this study). The  
187 water table survey tube is a glass tube with marks and connected to the water tank. Thereby,  
188 any change of water table in the chamber can be detected. When the water table lowers down  
189 due to soil evaporation in the chamber, more water is added to the tank to keep a constant  
190 water table. The quantity of water added is also recorded.

191

## 192 **Material and Experimental Procedure**

193 The soil used for this experiment is the Fontainebleau sand. It is a natural, fine, white

194 siliceous sand. Its specific gravity, maximum density and minimum density are 2.64, 1.39  
195  $\text{Mg/m}^3$ , and  $1.75 \text{ Mg/m}^3$ , respectively. The effective grain size  $D_{10}$  is 0.14 and the coefficient  
196 of uniformity,  $C_u = D_{60}/D_{10}$ , is 1.6 (see Delfosse-Ribay et al. 2004).

197

198 For the compaction of sand, 68 kg of dry sand was first poured into the tank and compacted  
199 manually to have a layer of 50 mm thick, corresponding to a dry density of  $1.7 \text{ Mg/m}^3$ . This  
200 procedure of compaction was repeated until reaching the total height of 300 mm.

201

202 During compaction, the installation of sensors was performed. The PT1000 sensors measuring  
203 the soil temperature were buried above each layer (the spacing was then 50 mm). For the  
204 ThetaProbe sensors, two were inserted in the sand during the compaction and the others were  
205 buried in the first 60 mm below the soil surface after the soil saturation. For burying the  
206 ThetaProbe sensors, a hole having similar dimensions as the sensor was created manually at  
207 the defined level, and then the sensor was placed horizontally in the hole by inserting the four  
208 steel guides inside the soil. The hole was finally filled and manually compacted with a  
209 previously determined quantity of sand in order to ensure the same dry density. This  
210 procedure aimed at minimizing the effect of sensors installation on the soil density as  
211 described by Tang et al. (2009).

212

213 After the soil compaction and sensors installation, the soil column was saturated through the  
214 water tank connected to the bottom of chamber. After saturation, the water level in the tank  
215 was lowered to a depth of 280 mm, i.e., the bottom of soil column. The installation of

216 tensiometers was conducted during this water drainage progress. Furthermore, a relative  
 217 humidity sensor on the soil surface was installed and the cover of chamber was sealed by  
 218 silicon to ensure the air-tightness.

219

220 As far as the evaporation rate calculation is concerned, the basic principle is the calculation of  
 221 the variation of air absolute humidity at the inlet and outlet of chamber. This method is  
 222 described as follows (Mohamed et al. 2000; Aluwihare and Watanabe 2003):

223 The evaporation rate is calculated by the following expression:

$$224 \quad E_a = 86400 \frac{Q(H_{a\_outlet} - H_{a\_inlet})}{\rho_w A} \quad (1)$$

225 where  $E_a$  is the actual evaporation rate (mm/day),  $H_{a\_outlet}$  is the absolute humidity at outlet  
 226 ( $\text{Mg}/\text{m}^3$ ),  $H_{a\_inlet}$  is the absolute humidity at inlet ( $\text{Mg}/\text{m}^3$ ),  $Q$  is the air flow rate through the  
 227 chamber (L/s),  $\rho_w$  is the density of water ( $\text{Mg}/\text{m}^3$ ) and  $A$  is the area of soil evaporation surface  
 228 in the chamber ( $\text{m}^2$ ).

229 The absolute humidity ( $H_a$ ) is calculated as follows:

$$230 \quad H_a = \frac{0.622 p_a}{1000RT_a} \quad (2)$$

$$231 \quad e_a = \frac{e_{sat} H_r}{100} \quad (3)$$

$$232 \quad e_{sat} = 101325 \exp\left(\frac{17.63 - 185}{T_a} - \frac{9760}{T_a^2} - 0.644\right) \quad (4)$$

$$233 \quad t_{R_a} = 1 - \frac{373.1}{T_a} \quad (5)$$

234 where  $e_a$  is the vapor pressure (Pa);  $T_a$  is the air temperature (K);  $R$  is the gas constant (287.04  
 235  $\text{J}\cdot\text{kg}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}$ );  $e_{sat}$  is the saturated vapor pressure (Pa);  $H_r$  is the air relative humidity (%); and  
 236 0.622 is the ratio of the molecular weights of water and dry air.

237

238 In this study, the air flow rate was maintained at 172 L/min and the heating tube temperature  
239 was 200 °C which corresponds to a temperature of 47 °C at the inlet of chamber.

240

## 241 **Experimental Results**

242

243 The air supply unit provided compressed hot air to the chamber at a rate of  $172 \pm 5$  L/min.

244 Figure 4 shows changes of air temperature over time. The values in the chamber increase

245 during evaporation within a range from 24 °C to 32 °C. The shapes of the curves are similar

246 showing a slight increase during the first six days and a quick increase during the last six days.

247 The values are very similar when the locations are above 185 mm. Note that the sensors at

248 275 mm, 380 mm and 465 mm above the soil surface give similar temperatures and they are

249 therefore termed as “other sensors” in Fig. 4.

250

251 The changes of air temperatures at the inlet, outlet of chamber and in the laboratory are shown

252 in Fig. 5. The value at the inlet is  $47 \pm 3$  °C, whereas the value at the outlet is lower and is

253 increasing during the test from 25 °C to 30 °C. The laboratory room temperature varies from

254 20 °C to 24 °C and is lower than at the inlet and outlet.

255

256 The evolution of soil temperature is shown in Fig. 6. It is observed that the values increase

257 slightly during the first six days but significantly during the last six days. The highest

258 temperature is at the soil surface. In the deeper levels (25, 40, 55, 125 and 225-mm depths)

259 corresponding to “other sensors” in this figure, the values are very close and increase from

260 18 °C to 25 °C. However, the soil surface temperature increases from 19 °C to 30 °C. Note  
261 that the surface temperature is not available for the period of  $t = 2 - 3$  days due to some  
262 technical problems.

263

264 All the temperature data recorded are used to plot the air-soil temperature profiles (Fig. 7).  
265 For the air temperature, the highest value appears at the elevation corresponding to the  
266 location of air distributor (300 mm above the soil surface), the temperature in the zone close  
267 to the cover being lower due to the influence of laboratory room temperature. Regarding the  
268 soil temperature changes, a sharp temperature decrease can be observed in the near soil  
269 surface zone. The air temperature is significantly higher than the soil temperature.  
270 Furthermore, the temperature gradient above the soil surface (in the zone from 80 mm above  
271 the soil surface to the soil surface) decreases progressively over time while the gradient  
272 between the soil surface and 25-mm depth increases. The soil temperatures in deeper zone  
273 (from 25-mm depth to the soil bottom) are quite similar with a difference less than 0.5 °C.

274

275 The changes of air relative humidity are shown in Fig. 8. The values in the chamber decrease  
276 from 67.4 % to 23.8 % in the zone near the soil surface and from 35.4 % to 12.4 % at the  
277 outlet, while the values at the inlet are very low and nearly constant. On the whole, the  
278 variations of relative humidity (except that at the inlet of chamber and in the laboratory) can  
279 be divided into two parts: during the first six days, the relative humidity declines at a low rate;  
280 then it drops in the next six days. The value at the soil surface was higher than in other  
281 locations. The relative humidity in the laboratory shows a large fluctuation, from 19.7 % to

282 40.5 %, but this does not affect the values measured in the chamber.

283

284 The changes of volumetric water content are shown in Fig. 9. The volumetric water content at  
285 60 mm below the soil surface decreases from 25.4 % to 7.1 % at 25-mm depth and from  
286 31.9 % to 12.3 % at 55-mm depth. In the deeper locations, i.e., at 125 and 225-mm depths,  
287 there are no changes before  $t = 7$  days. The value remains unchanged at 225-mm depth during  
288 the whole test while the value at 125-mm depth starts to change from  $t = 7$  days. As far as the  
289 first 60-mm layer near the soil surface is concerned, the variation can be divided into two  
290 parts: at the beginning, the water content decreases quickly in the first six day and then  
291 decreases slowly and reaches a stabilization state at end of the test.

292

293 The profiles of volumetric water content and the contour map are shown in Fig. 10. The  
294 profiles in Fig. 10(a) show a clear water loss process during evaporation. It can be noted that  
295 the gradient of water content between the three points at 25, 40, and 55-mm depths  
296 respectively is constant and equal to 0.2 %/mm. This gradient is also the maximum for the  
297 whole depth. Similar linear gradient of water content can be observed from 25-mm to  
298 225-mm depth at end of the test ( $t = 11.5$  days). The contour map allows the visualization of  
299 the drying front over time (see Fig. 10(b)). For instance, the point having a water content of  
300 30 % is at 50-mm depth at the beginning; this point goes down quickly and reaches the first  
301 stabilization stage at 120-mm depth after  $t = 2$  days. It starts to increase again only at  $t = 7$   
302 days. This means that from  $t = 2$  days to  $t = 7$  days, the water loss in the soil takes place only  
303 in the zone from the soil surface to 120-mm depth.

304

305 The evolution of soil matric suction is presented in Fig. 11. All the suction values at various  
306 locations are increasing with the water loss. Near the soil surface, the soil matric suction  
307 increases gradually from 14 kPa at  $t = 0$  day to 46 kPa at  $t = 8$  days. It increases quickly and  
308 reaches the limit of the sensor (i.e., 1.5 MPa) a few hours later. For the soil suction at other  
309 depths, the value at 77-mm depth is higher than at 173-mm depth but the difference is small.  
310 The lowest suction is at 276-mm depth. The profile of soil suction is presented in Fig. 12. A  
311 clear and sharp suction gradient is observed in the zone from the soil surface to 77-mm depth.  
312 This gradient is increasing over time: it increases from 0.13 kPa/mm at the beginning to 0.46  
313 kPa/mm at  $t = 8$  days.

314

315 The simultaneous measurement of suction and volumetric water content at various depths  
316 during the drying process allows determination of the soil water retention curve, as shown in  
317 Fig. 13. For each level of soil suction measurement (see Fig. 11), the corresponding  
318 volumetric water content is determined based on the volumetric water content profiles shown  
319 in Fig. 10(a); the volumetric water content at the soil surface is extrapolated by taking a  
320 constant water content gradient of 0.2 %/mm in the near surface zone. An air entry value of 7  
321 kPa can be estimated in Fig. 13. It is also possible to use the model proposed by Fredlund and  
322 Xing (1994) to fit the water retention curve:

323 
$$\theta_w = \theta_r + \frac{\theta_s - \theta_r}{\left\{ \ln \left[ e + (\psi / a)^n \right] \right\}^m} \quad (6)$$

324 where  $\theta_w$  is the volumetric water content (%);  $\theta_s$  is the volumetric water content in saturated  
325 state ( $\theta_s = 35.6\%$ );  $\theta_r$  is the residual volumetric water content ( $\theta_r = 4.4\%$ );  $\psi$  is the matric



326 suction (kPa);  $e$  is the base of natural logarithm ( $e = 2.71828$ );  $a$ ,  $n$  and  $m$  are fitting  
327 parameters. The fitting curve shown in Fig. 13 corresponds to  $a = 45.74$ ,  $n = 1.9$  and  $m =$   
328 15.2.

329

330 The actual evaporation rate determined following Eq 1 and the evolution of suction gradient  
331 between soil surface and 77-mm depth are plotted in Fig. 14. Regarding the evolution of  
332 evaporation rate, three phases can be identified: from  $t = 0$  to  $t = 6$  days, the rate decreases  
333 slightly from 2.3 mm/day to 2.0 mm/day; in the next 4 days, it decreases rapidly from 2.0  
334 mm/day to 0.9 mm/day; after  $t = 10$  days, the value decreases slowly, from 0.9 mm/day to 0.8  
335 mm/day in 1.5 days. As far as the suction gradient is concerned, it increases slowly from the  
336 initiation of evaporation to  $t = 8$  days, and then quickly reaches 4.8 kPa/mm at  $t = 8.5$  days.  
337 Interestingly, the high suction gradient corresponds to the significant decrease of evaporation  
338 ratio, indicating the increase of soil resistance to evaporation by suction increase.

339

340 As far as the cumulative evaporation is concerned, the calculation results of two different  
341 methods are presented in Fig. 15. Method 1 corresponds to direct calculation according to the  
342 actual evaporation rate - the results are shown in solid line. Method 2 corresponds to indirect  
343 determination by summing up the quantity of water infiltrated and the quantity from changes  
344 of volumetric water content - the results are plotted in dashed line. Note that the quantity of  
345 water infiltrated is calculated through the mass of water flowing out of the water tank divided  
346 by the soil evaporation surface, i.e., 1000 by 800 mm. The changes of volumetric water  
347 content are determined by considering the volumetric water content profiles shown in Fig.

348 10(a). The cumulative evaporation derived from Method 1 increases linearly over time but  
349 slows down after six days due to the decrease of evaporation rate. A total of 20.4 mm water is  
350 evaporated at the end of test. The cumulative quantity of water infiltrated increases following  
351 a linear function with time from the beginning to  $t = 3.7$  days; it starts to slow down after four  
352 days. A total of 7.7 mm of water enter the chamber at the end of test. The cumulative quantity  
353 from changes of water content profiles increases during the test and reaches 24.5 mm at the  
354 end. It appears clearly that Method 2 gives higher cumulative evaporation than by Method 1,  
355 32.2 mm against 20.4 mm.

356

## 357 **Discussion**

358 The environmental chamber system is a promising method for soil water evaporation  
359 investigation. As mentioned before, a fast air circulation box was developed by Kohsiek  
360 (1981) and a similar facility was used by van de Griend and Owe (1994), focusing on the  
361 reproduction of wind. Furthermore, the chamber built by Mohamed et al. (2000) and the  
362 chamber system used by Aluwihare and Watanabe (2003) had a good control and  
363 measurement of air conditions but not the soil conditions. The environmental chamber  
364 presented in this study provides the possibility of simultaneous controlling/measuring both the  
365 atmospheric and soil conditions: the air conditions were controlled (see Fig. 4, Fig. 5 and Fig.  
366 8) and soil parameters were monitored simultaneously (see Fig. 6, Fig. 7, Fig. 9 and Fig. 11).  
367 In addition, the attempt of the suction measurement suction in the zone near soil surface (see  
368 Fig. 11) was also successful, which is, to the authors' knowledge, important and original  
369 results. On the other hand, this chamber has also the functions of the tunnel system developed

370 by Yamanaka et al. (1997) and Yamanaka et al. (2004).

371

372 As far as the thickness of the soil column is concerned, previous studies (e.g., Ta et al. 2010;  
373 Cui et al. 2013) showed that only the zone close to the soil surface is subjected to the effect of  
374 evaporation. For this reason, the thickness of the soil column studied in the present work was  
375 reduced to 300 mm. Furthermore, the sensors used for volumetric water content and soil  
376 suction measurements were installed mainly in the near surface zone.

377

378 The soil water evaporation is an energy-consumption process. The main source of energy in  
379 this experiment is the hot air circulated above the soil surface: the constant air rate and the  
380 high inlet temperature (see Fig. 5) defined the energy for soil water evaporation. Therefore, at  
381 the beginning of evaporation (i.e., the first six days), the soil water evaporation consumed a  
382 lot of energy with a high evaporation rate (see Fig. 14), thereby, the air temperature increased  
383 at a low rate (see Fig. 4). With the decrease of evaporation rate, the energy consumed by  
384 water evaporation gradually decreased, resulting in air temperature increase at a high rate  
385 after six days. On the other hand, the difference between the inlet and outlet air temperature  
386 also shows that the soil water evaporation consumed energy from air. It should be noted that  
387 the high temperature of 200 °C at the heating pipe generated a temperature of 47 °C at the  
388 inlet and resulted in a temperature range from 24 °C to 32 °C in the chamber. This  
389 temperature range is quite usual in France (Cui and Zornberg 2008).

390

391 The soil temperature change is an indicator of the energy (heat) change of soil during

392 evaporation. Figure 6 shows that the soil temperature increased as the air temperature (see Fig.  
393 4) was rising, indicating that the soil was heated by hot air and the energy for water  
394 evaporation was from the hot air. Furthermore, as evaporation is a progress of energy loss, the  
395 temperature gradient in the soil surface zone (25-mm depth) is larger than in other depths.  
396 This explains why evaporation is often limited to the near surface zone. Note that the soil  
397 surface temperature measured by infrared thermometer in this study is more accurate than that  
398 by sensors buried at the soil surface (e.g., Aluwihare and Watanabe 2003).

399

400 It can be noted in Fig. 7 that the air temperature in the zone close to the cover of chamber was  
401 slightly lower than in the middle-height of the air part. This phenomenon suggests that heat  
402 exchange existed between the environmental chamber and the laboratory ambience. Therefore,  
403 when estimating the soil water evaporation in the chamber, the energy balance method can not  
404 be used. Regarding the fluctuation of soil temperature (about 0.5 °C) in deeper levels, it can  
405 also be attributed to the influence of ambient temperature. Indeed, the temperature sensors  
406 were buried at various distances from the chamber's wall (from 100 mm to 300 mm) and the  
407 laboratory temperature effect is expected to be different.

408

409 For the air relative humidity (see Fig. 8), its decrease inside the chamber suggests that the  
410 total water loss progressed (i.e., drying process) in the chamber. The relative humidity in the  
411 chamber was not affected by the ambient one, showing that the good performance of the  
412 chamber in controlling the air relative humidity; in other words, the ventilated part above the  
413 soil surface was sealed efficiently and the water evaporated from soil was completely

414 transported to the outlet of chamber during the test. Thus, the calculation of evaporation based  
415 on the measurements of the temperature and relative humidity at the inlet and outlet is reliable.  
416 The similar value of relative humidity at different positions of chamber (e.g., 50-mm height,  
417 275-mm height and outlet) confirms the homogeneity of relative humidity in the chamber.  
418 The large gap of relative humidity between the inlet and outlet shows the effect of evaporation  
419 in terms of supplying water vapor to the air.

420

421 The soil volumetric water content is an important indicator of water loss during evaporation.  
422 The evolution of volumetric water content (see Fig. 9, Fig. 10(b)) shows a clear decline in the  
423 near surface zone (i.e., within 60-mm depth). This justifies the denser disposition adopted for  
424 the water content sensors in the near surface zone because it allows the water content profile  
425 to be well defined in this zone. The water content decline during the first six days corresponds  
426 to the initiation stage of evaporation (see Fig. 9, Fig. 10(a)) as reported by Wythers et al.  
427 (1999). In this stage, the evaporation rate is high and the quantity of water consumed is large.  
428 This explains the quick decline observed for the first six days. Afterwards, with the decrease  
429 of evaporation rate due to the increasing suction in the soil (see Fig. 14), the water content  
430 decrease was slowed down.

431

432 The measurement of matric suction near the soil surface using high-capacity tensiometer was  
433 successful. If the volumetric water content increased linearly with depth in the near surface  
434 zone (Fig. 10(a)), it is not the case for the suction which varied non-linearly with depth in this  
435 zone, as indicated by the water retention curve in Fig. 13. Thereby, the measurement of soil

436 suction on soil surface is essential because we cannot estimate it by simple extrapolation. On  
437 the other side, soil suction on soil surface is a key parameter in the determination of soil water  
438 evaporation.

439

440 Regarding the evaporation rate (Fig. 14), it was decreasing during the test, showing three  
441 distinct evaporation stages: constant-rate stage (from  $t = 0$  day to  $t = 6$  days), falling-rate stage  
442 (from  $t = 6$  days to  $t = 10$  days) and low-rate stage (after  $t = 10$  days), as also observed by Idso  
443 et al. (1974) and Hillel (2004). This evaporation process resulted from the following  
444 conditions:

- 445 (1) a continuous supply of heat by the hot air;
- 446 (2) a vapor pressure gradient between the soil surface and air - this gradient is reflected by the  
447 air relative humidity gradient above the soil surface (see Fig. 8);
- 448 (3) a continuous supply of water from the tank outside the chamber.

449

450 According to the water balance during soil water evaporation, the cumulative evaporation  
451 calculated by Method 1 should be equal to that by Method 2. However, Figure 15 shows that  
452 at the end of test, the cumulative evaporation calculated by Method 1 is less than Method 2:  
453 20.4 mm against 32.2 mm. This could be attributed to the presence of trapped air in the gravel  
454 layer. During evaporation, the air bubbles dissipated and water could occupy the space  
455 initially occupied by air, leading thereby to water flow to the chamber from the water tank. In  
456 other words, this quantity of water just entered the gravel layer but not necessarily the soil  
457 layer. As a result, the cumulative evaporation from Method 1 is close to that from the

458 cumulative changes of water content (i.e., 24.5 mm).

459

## 460 **Conclusion**

461 A large-scale environmental chamber was developed in order to study the soil water  
462 evaporation process. The atmospheric conditions (air rate, relative humidity and temperature)  
463 were controlled and monitored. The soil column was instrumented by various sensors for  
464 measuring matric suction, volumetric water content and temperature. An evaporation test was  
465 performed on the Fontainebleau sand to verify the relevance of the setup developed. The  
466 following conclusions can be drawn:

467

468 The air temperature in the chamber was found to increase after six days, showing that with the  
469 decrease of evaporation rate due to the soil suction increase, the energy consumed was  
470 decreased, giving rise to air temperature increase.

471

472 The soil temperature was found to increase, indicating that the soil was heated by hot air and  
473 the energy for water evaporation was from the hot air. In addition, as evaporation is a progress  
474 of energy loss, the temperature gradient in the soil surface zone is larger than in deeper levels.

475

476 The temperature in the chamber was affected by the laboratory environment. But the relative  
477 humidity in the chamber was not affected by the relative humidity of the laboratory - This  
478 validated the method of actual evaporation determination based on the inlet and outlet relative  
479 humidity values.

480

481 The evolution of volumetric water content showed significant changes of water content in the  
482 near surface zone (within 60-mm depth). This justifies the denser disposition adopted for the  
483 water content sensors in the near surface zone on the one hand, and the choice of a limited  
484 height (300 mm) for the soil column on the other hand.

485

486 The attempt of near soil surface suction measurement by high-capacity tensiometer was  
487 successful. This measurement is, to the authors' knowledge, original results. These results are  
488 important since the soil surface suction is a key parameter in the determination of soil water  
489 evaporation.

490

491 The relevant data obtained allowed the determination of actual evaporation rate and the water  
492 retention curve. They also show the performance of the environmental chamber developed in  
493 studying soil water evaporation. Moreover, they can be used in further theoretical  
494 development for soil-atmosphere interaction investigation.

495

#### 496 *Acknowledgments*

497 The authors are grateful to the support of China Scholarship Council (CSC).

498

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619

620 **List of Tables**

621 TABLE 1. *The sensors used*

622

623 **List of Figures**

624 FIG. 1—*Sketch of the environmental chamber test system*

625 FIG. 2—*Schematic presentation of the environmental chamber:(a) Three-dimension view of environmental*

626 *chamber (in mm) and (b) schematic cross section of the environmental chamber (A-A)*

627 FIG. 3—*Photograph of the environmental chamber test system*

628 FIG. 4—*Evolutions of air temperature at different elevations*

629 FIG. 5—*Evolutions of air temperature at the inlet and outlet of chamber as well as in the laboratory*

630 FIG. 6—*Evolutions of soil temperature at different locations*

631 FIG. 7—*Profiles of air-soil temperature*

632 FIG. 8—*Evolutions of air relative humidity at different locations in the chamber as well as in the*

633 *laboratory*

634 FIG. 9—*Evolutions of volumetric water content at different depths*

635 FIG. 10—*Profiles of volumetric water content (a) and contour map (b) at different times*

636 FIG. 11—*Evolutions of soil matric suction at different depths*

637 FIG. 12—*Profiles of soil matric suction at different times*

638 FIG. 13—*Soil-water retention curve determined based on the measured suction and volumetric water*

639 *content values*

640 FIG. 14—*Evolutions of actual evaporation rate and suction gradient between soil surface and 77-mm*

641 *depth*

642 FIG. 15—*Comparison of cumulative evaporation determined by two different methods*

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644

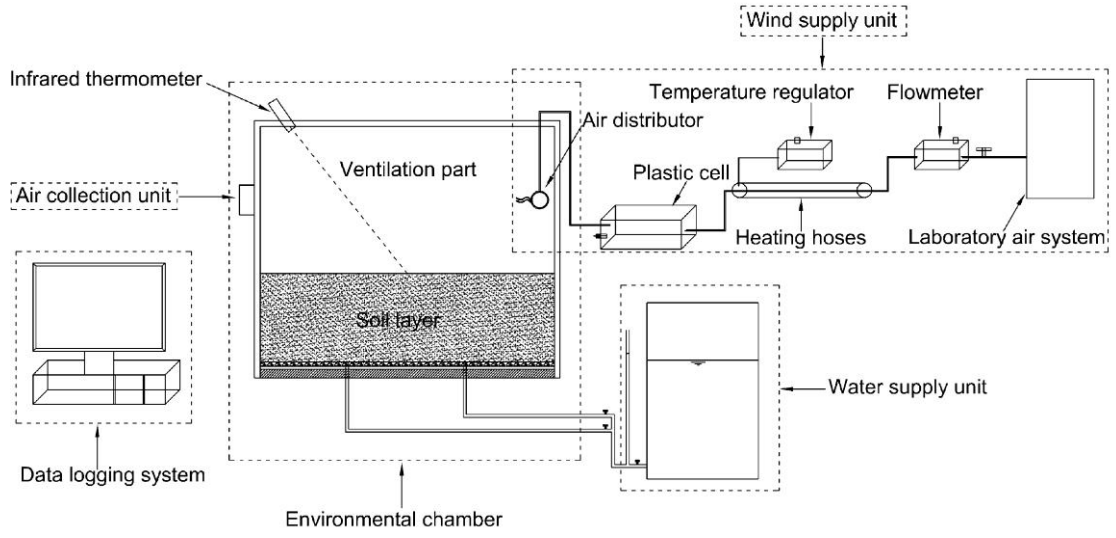
645 TABLE 1—*The sensors used*

Sensor	Manufacturer	Model	Parameter measured	Range	Accuracy	Number
High-capacity tensiometer	ENPC		Matric suction	0-1.5 MPa		5
Transmitter	Elcowa	T3111	Relative humidity	0-100 %	± 2.5 %	6
			Temperature	-30-150 °C	± 0.4 °C	
ThetaProbe	Delta-T	ML2x	Volumetric water content	0-100 %	± 1.0 %	5
Resistance temperature detectors	Correge	PT1000	Temperature	0-100 °C	± 0.3 °C	6
Thermistor	Radiospare	DO-35	Temperature	-40-250 °C	± 1.0 %	5
Infrared Thermometer	Calex	Pyropen-D	Temperature	-20-250 °C	± 1.0 %	1
Flowmeter	Kobold	MAS-3120	Air flow	0-500 L/min	± 1.5 % full scale	1

646

647

648



649

650 FIG. 1—Sketch of the environmental chamber test system

651

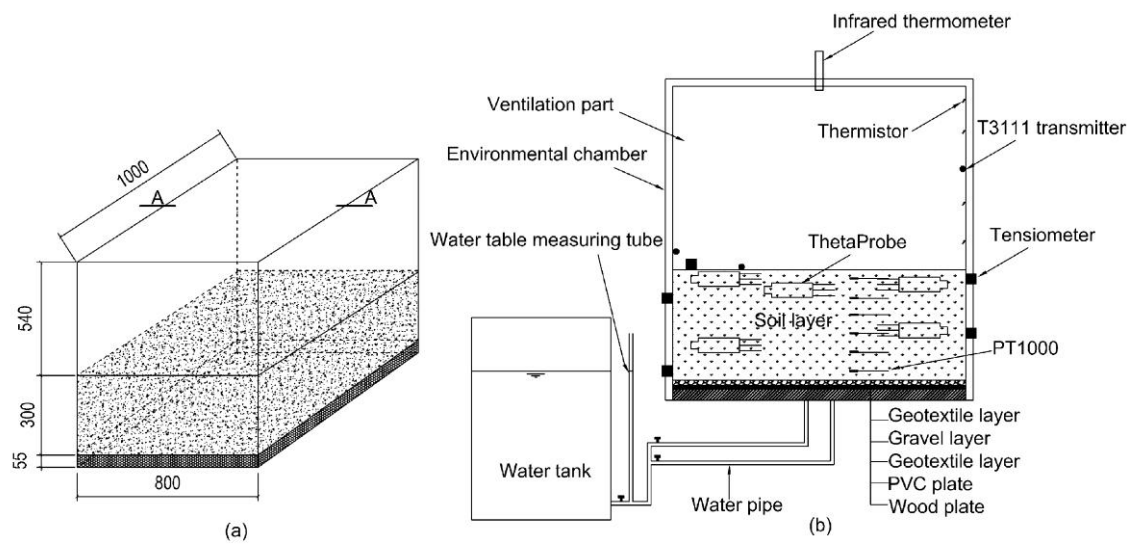


FIG. 2—Schematic presentation of the environmental chamber:(a) Three-dimension view of environmental chamber (in mm) and (b) schematic cross section of the environmental chamber (A-A)



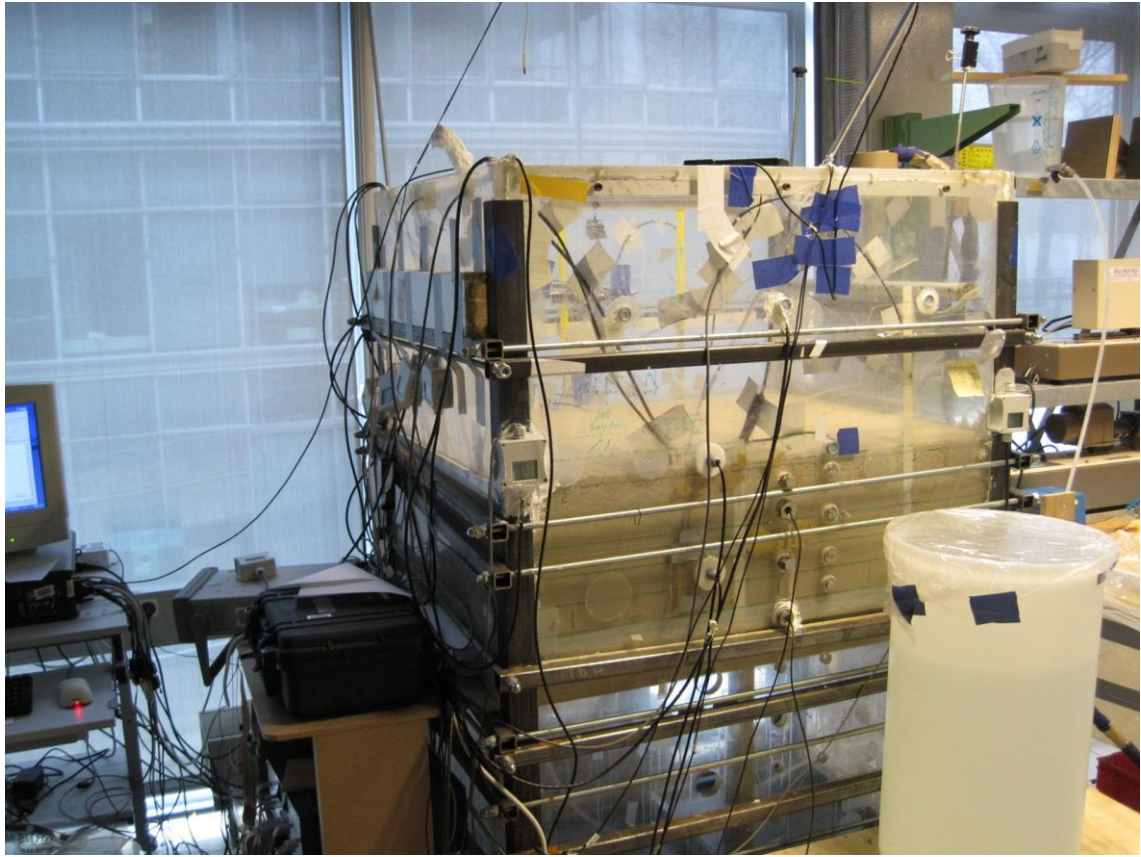


FIG. 3—*Photograph of the environmental chamber test system*

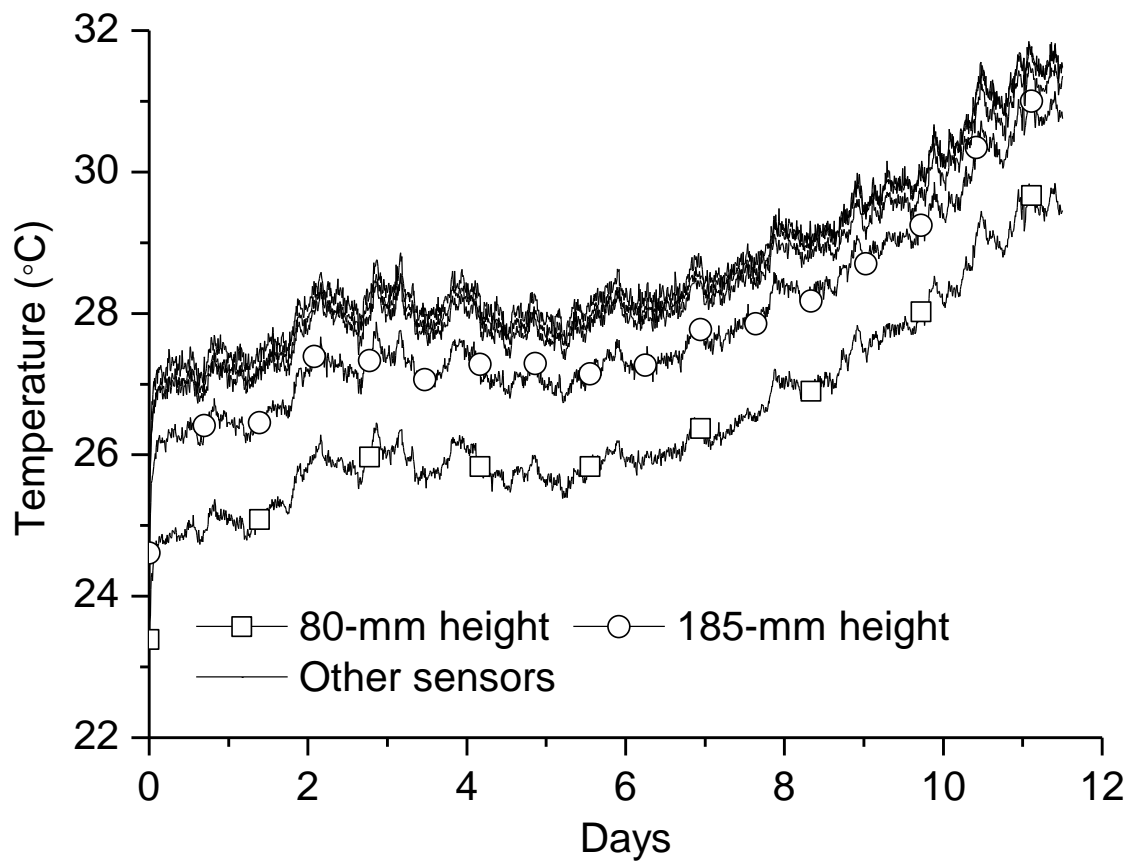


FIG. 4—Evolutions of air temperature at different elevations

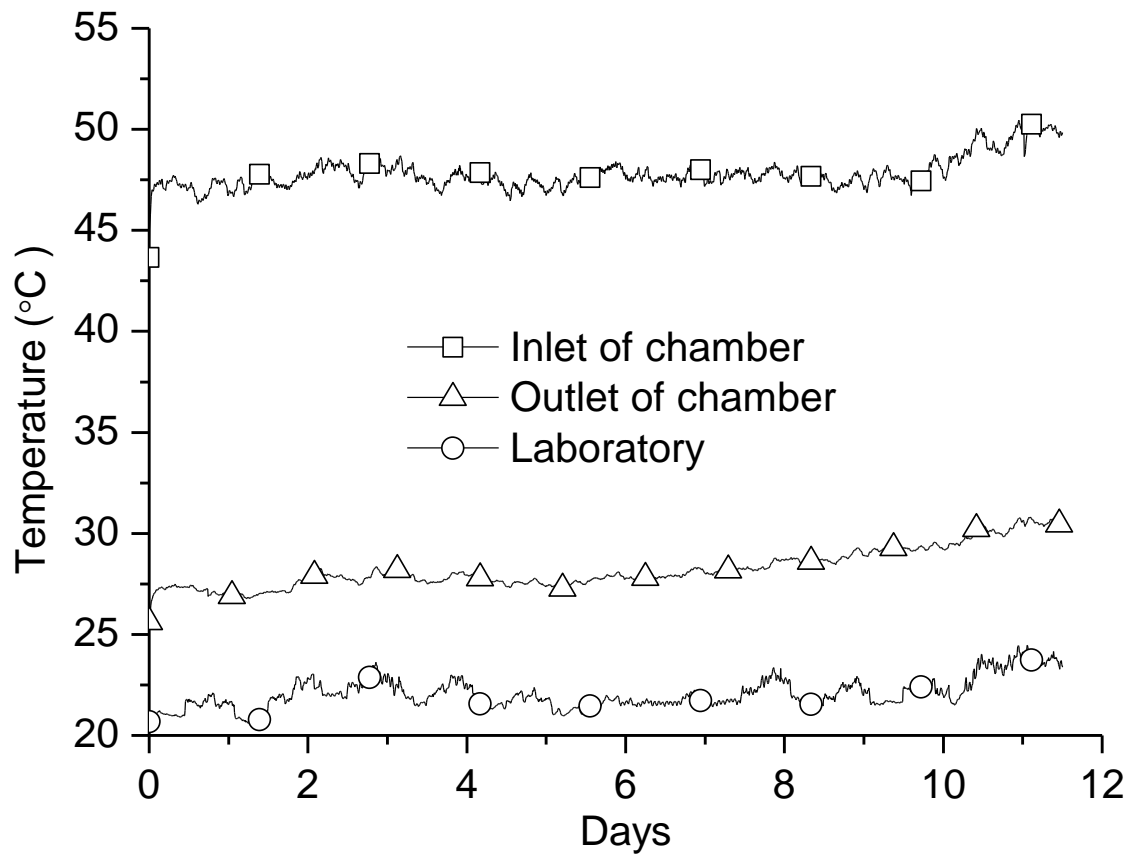


FIG. 5—Evolutions of air temperature at the inlet and outlet of chamber as well as in the laboratory

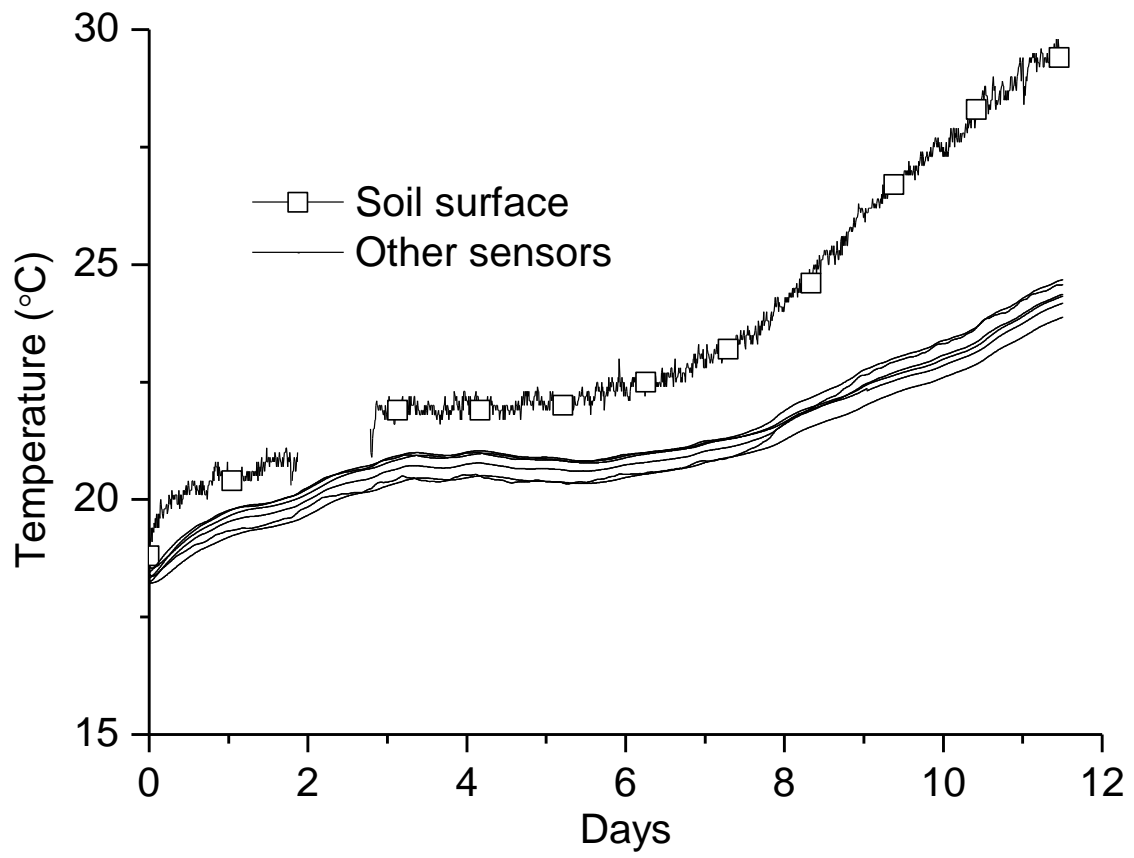


FIG. 6—Evolutions of soil temperature at different locations

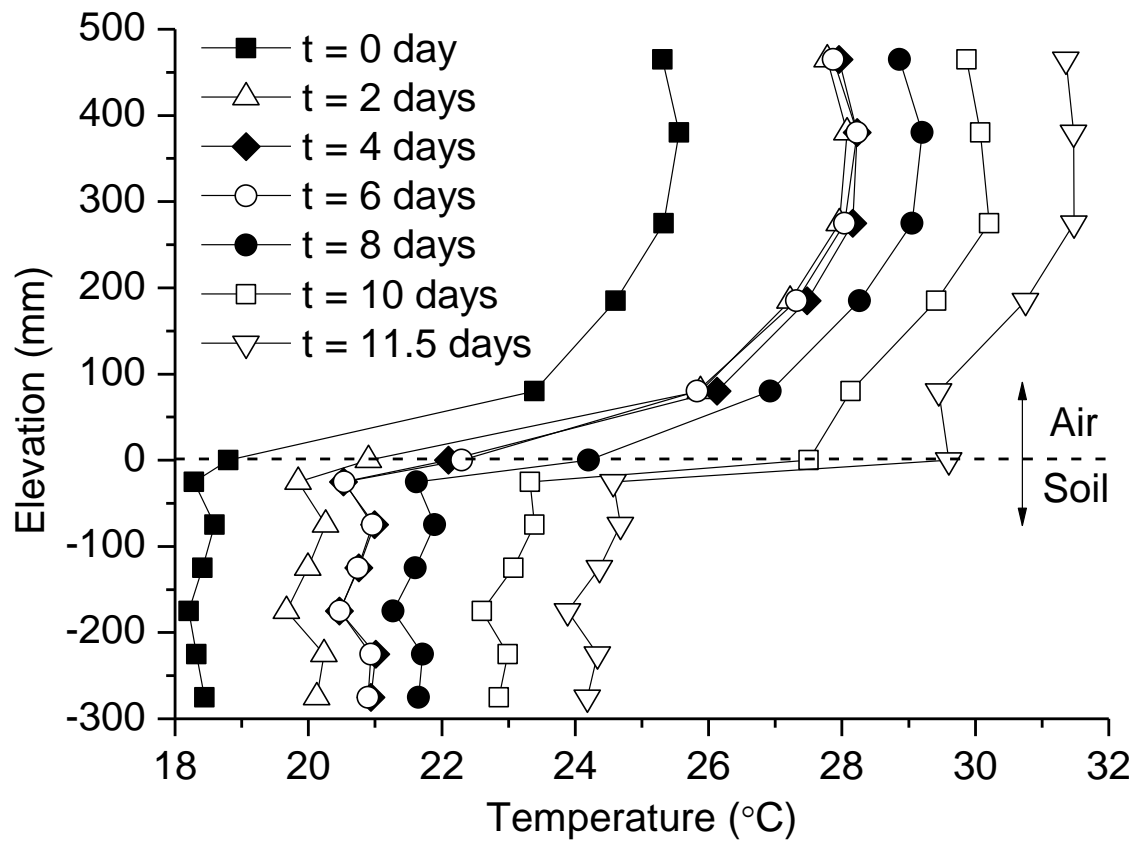


FIG. 7—Profiles of air-soil temperature

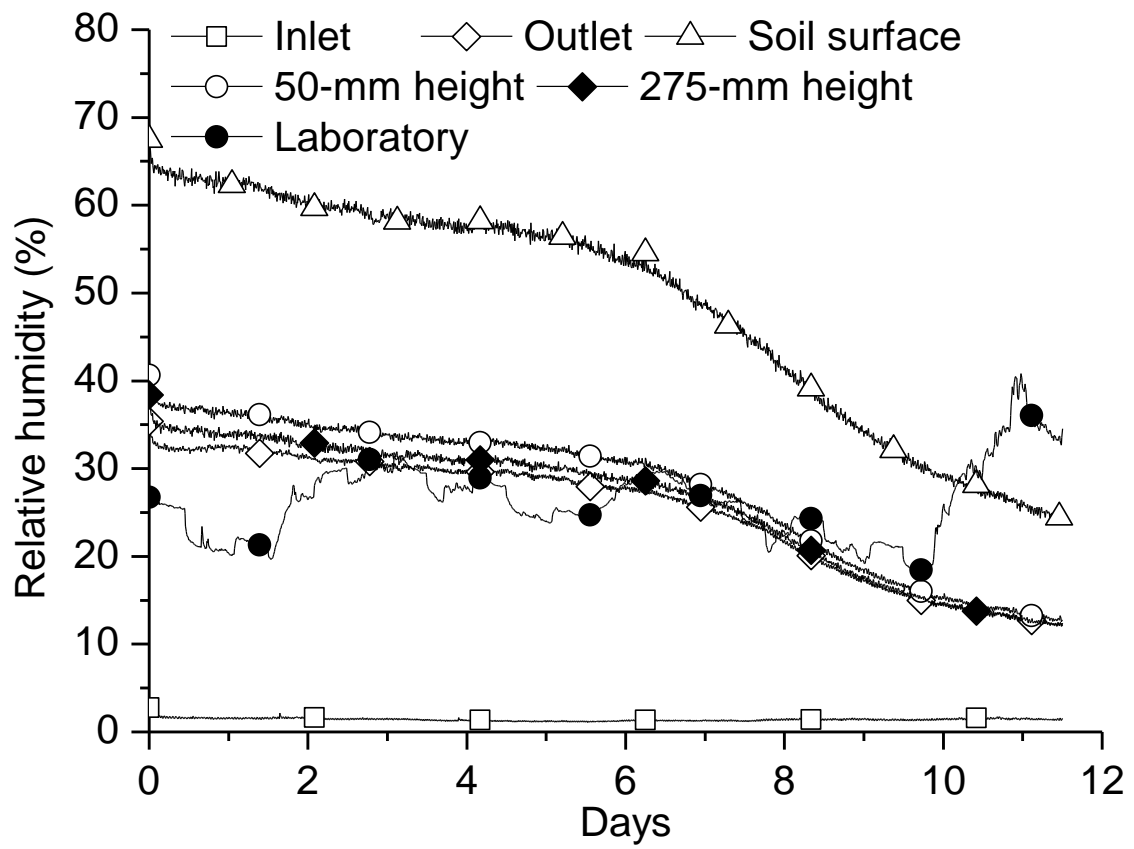


FIG. 8—Evolutions of air relative humidity at different locations in the chamber as well as in the laboratory

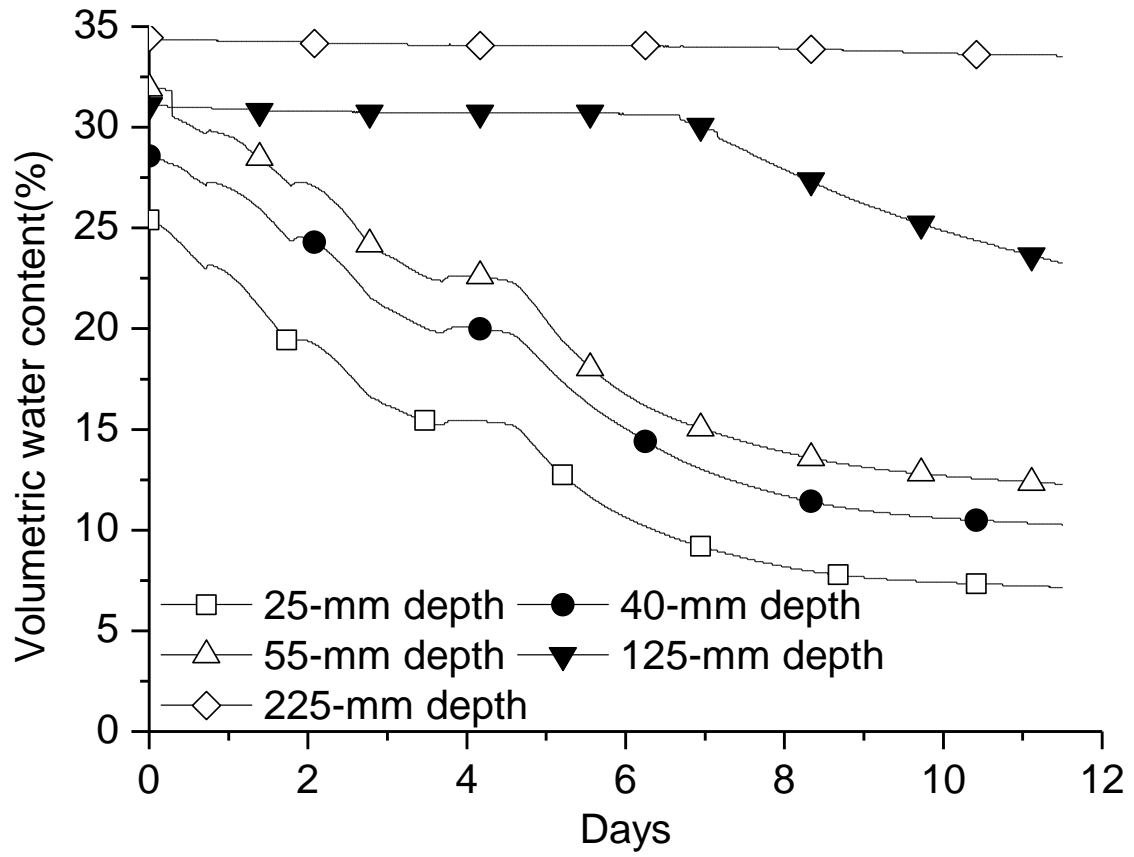


FIG. 9—Evolutions of volumetric water content at different depths

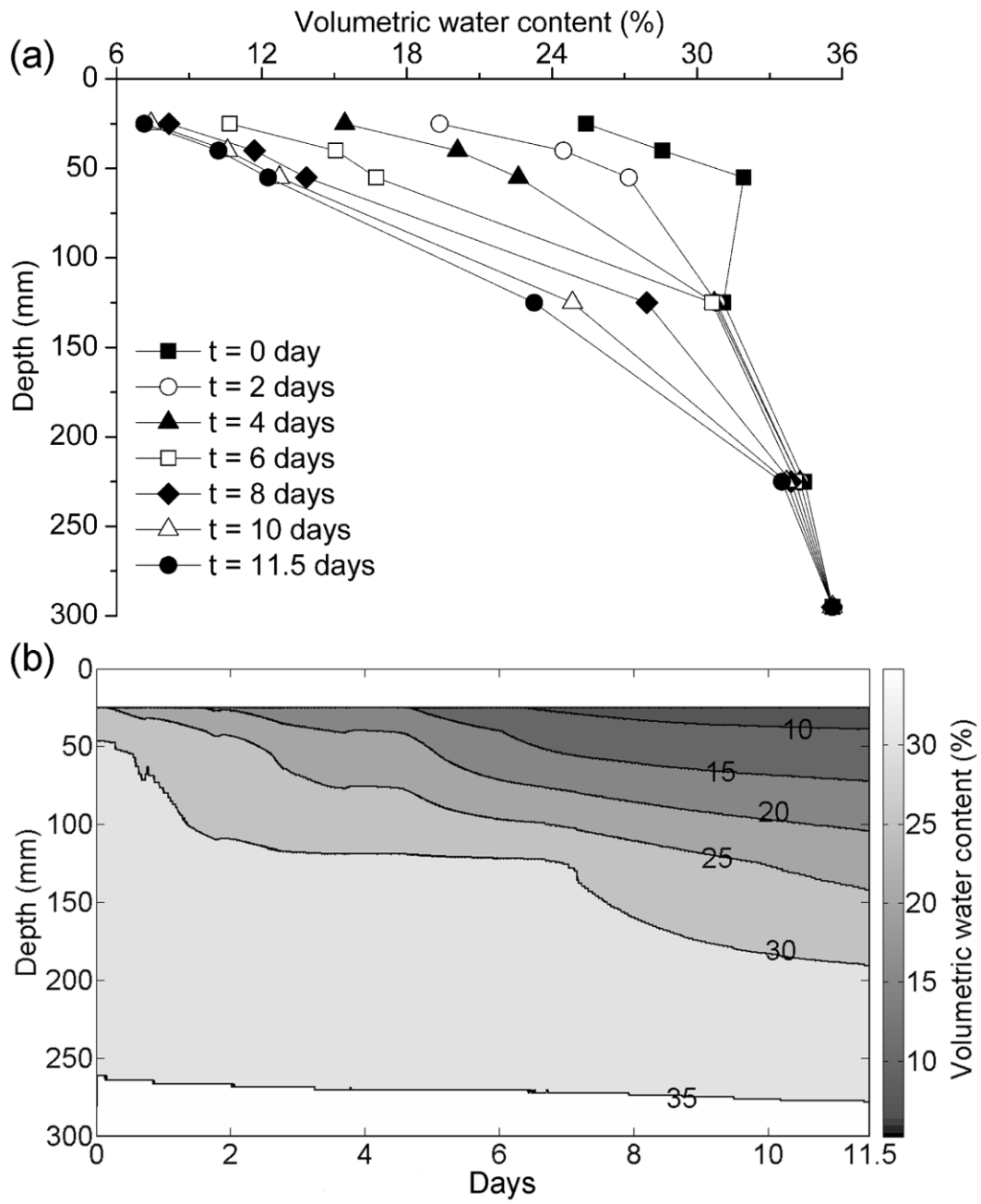


FIG. 10—Profiles of volumetric water content (a) and contour map (b) at different times



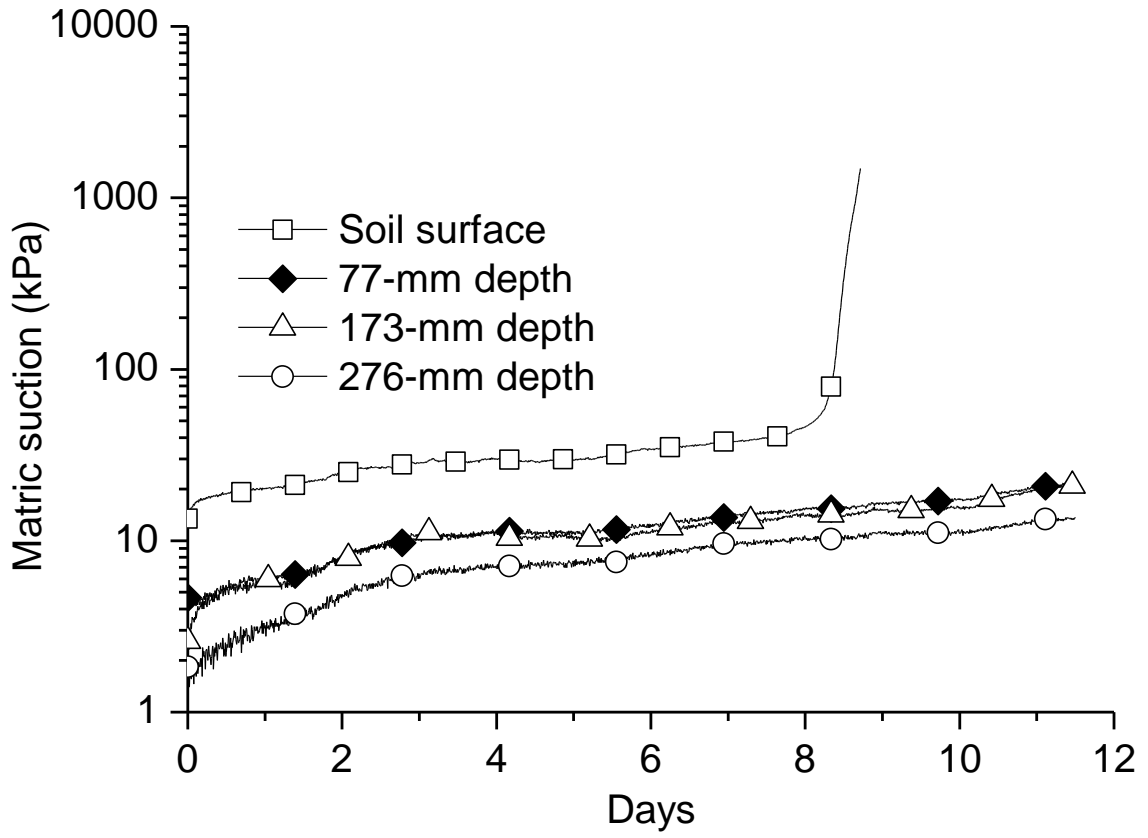


FIG. 11—Evolutions of soil matric suction at different depths

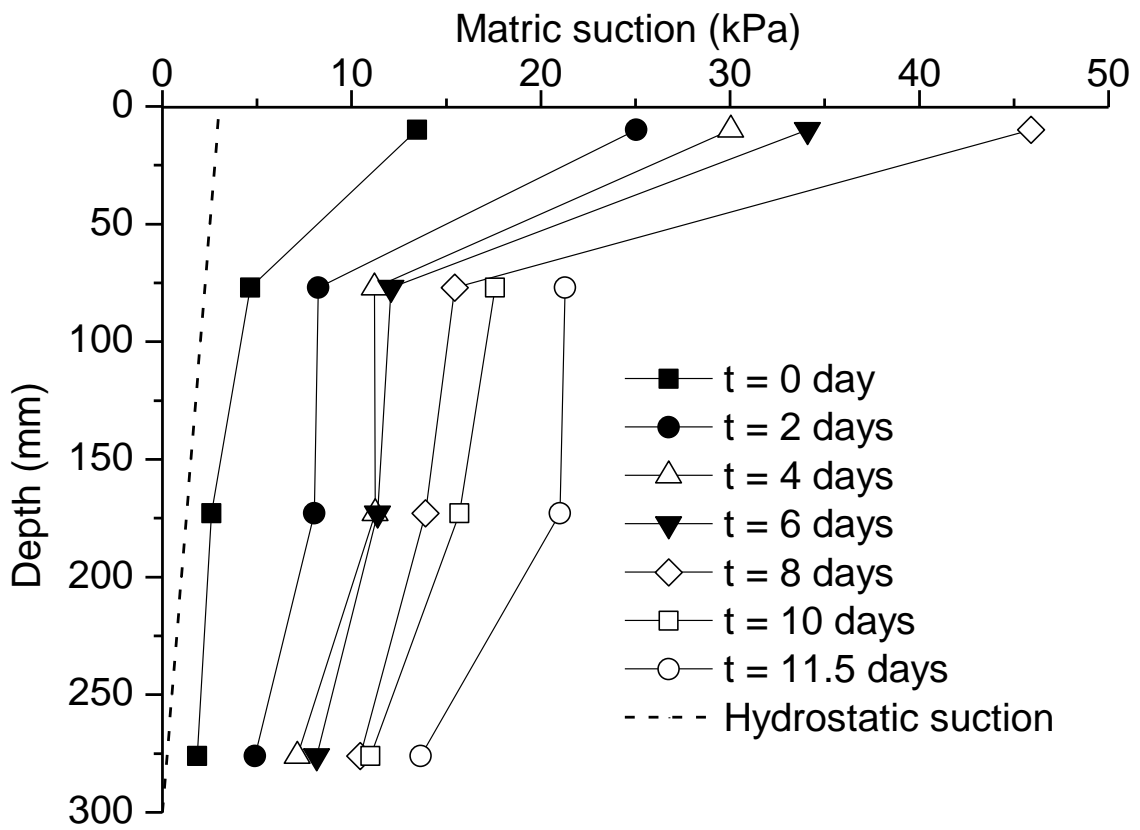


FIG. 12—Profiles of soil matric suction at different times

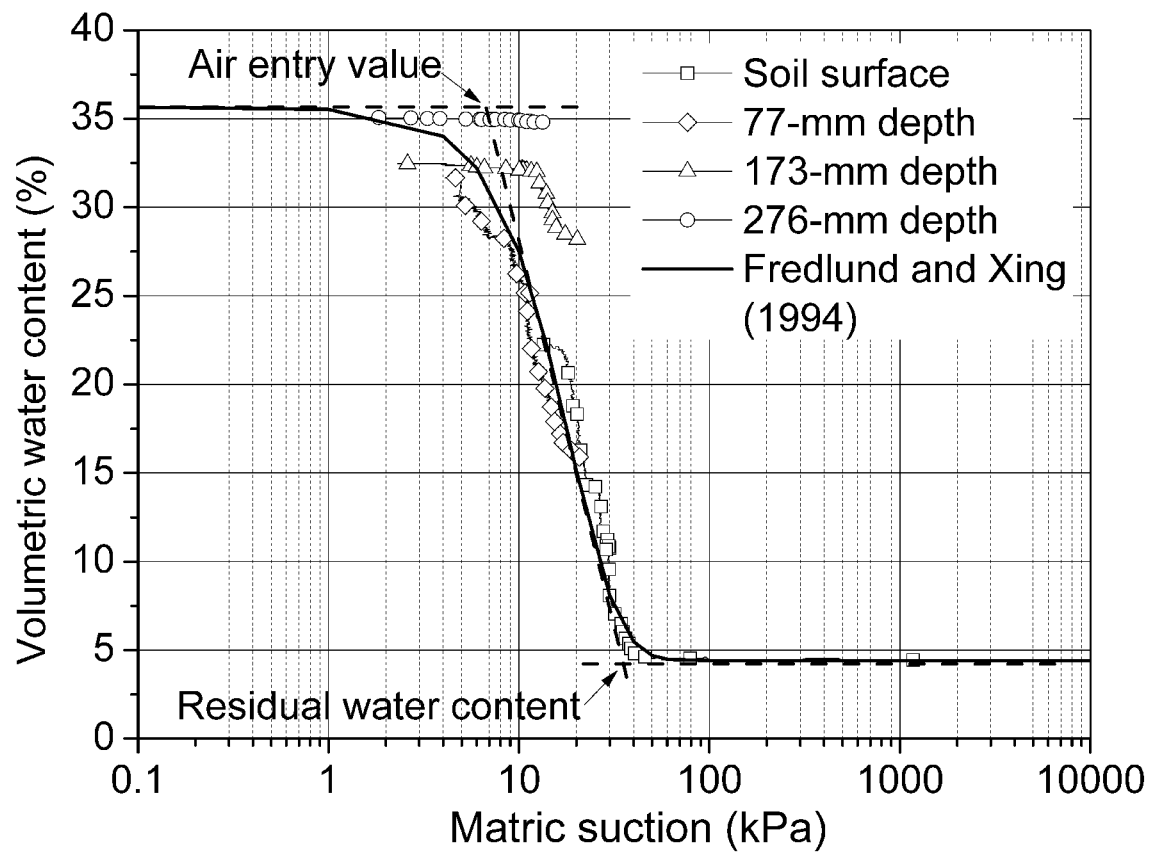


FIG. 13—Soil-water retention curve determined based on the measured suction and volumetric water content values

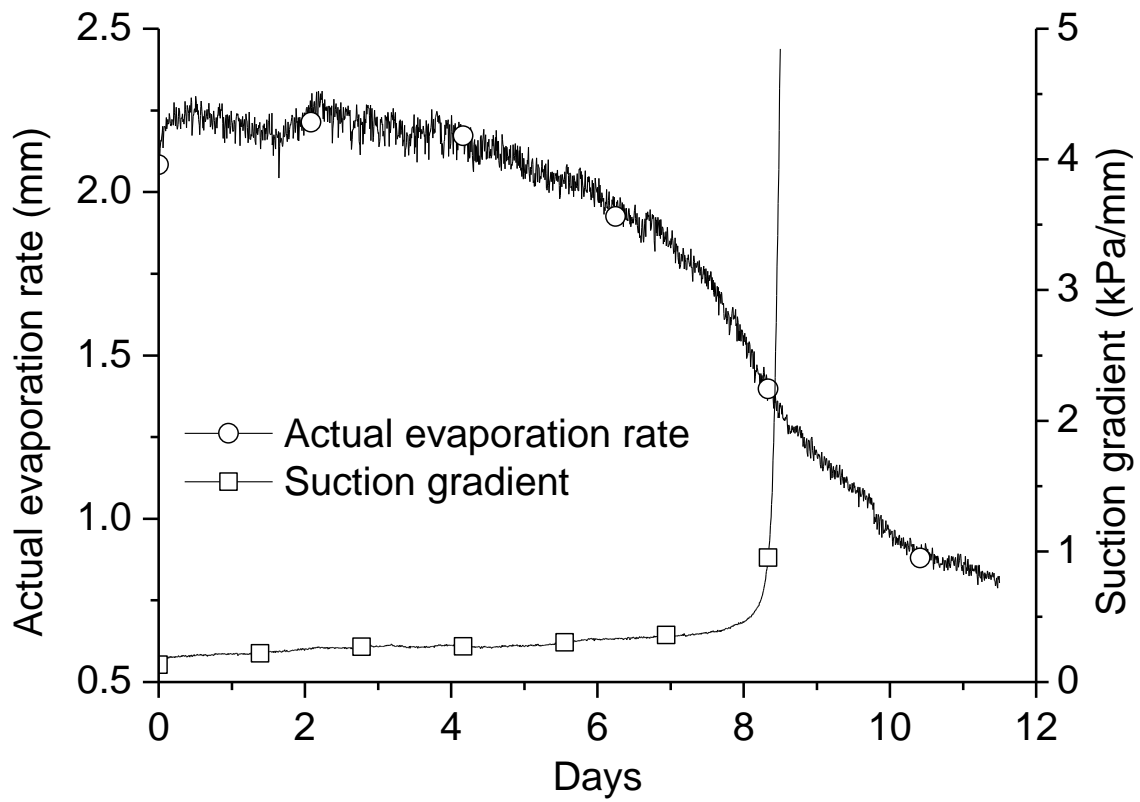


FIG. 14—Evolutions of actual evaporation rate and suction gradient between soil surface and 77-mm depth

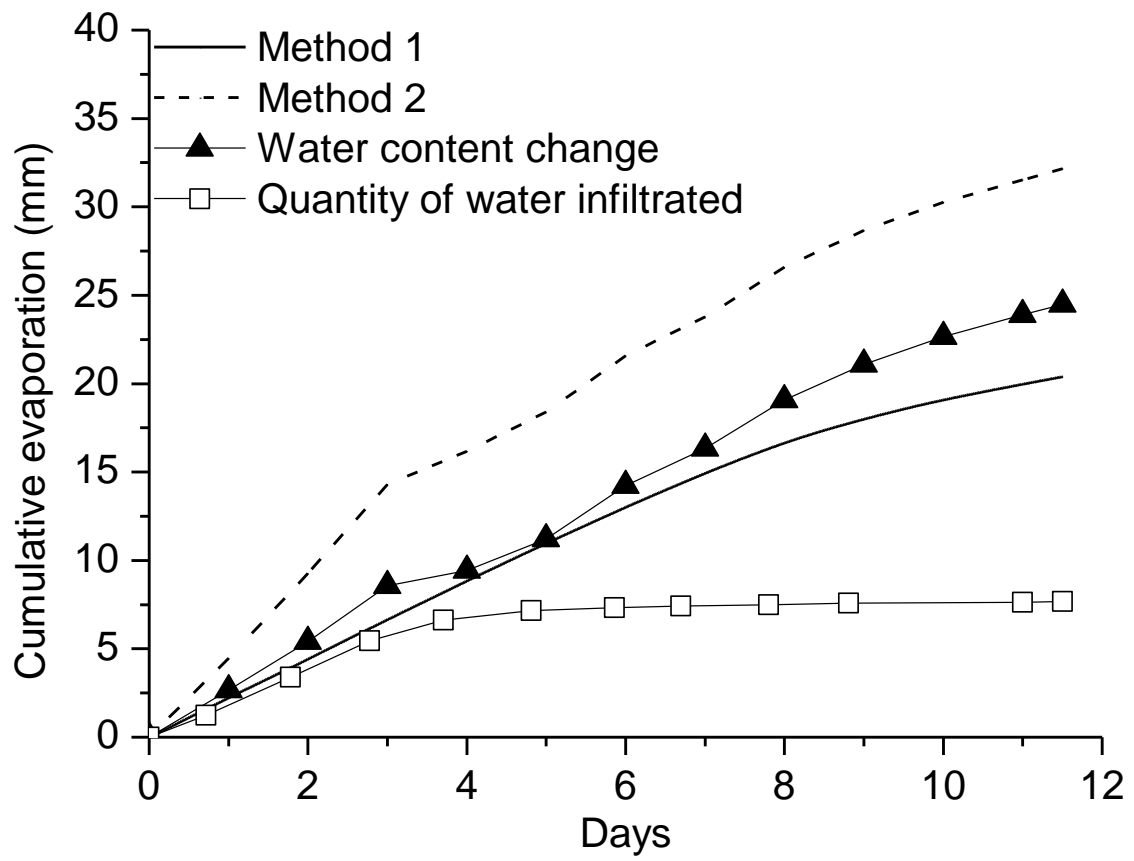


FIG. 15—Comparison of cumulative evaporation determined by two different methods