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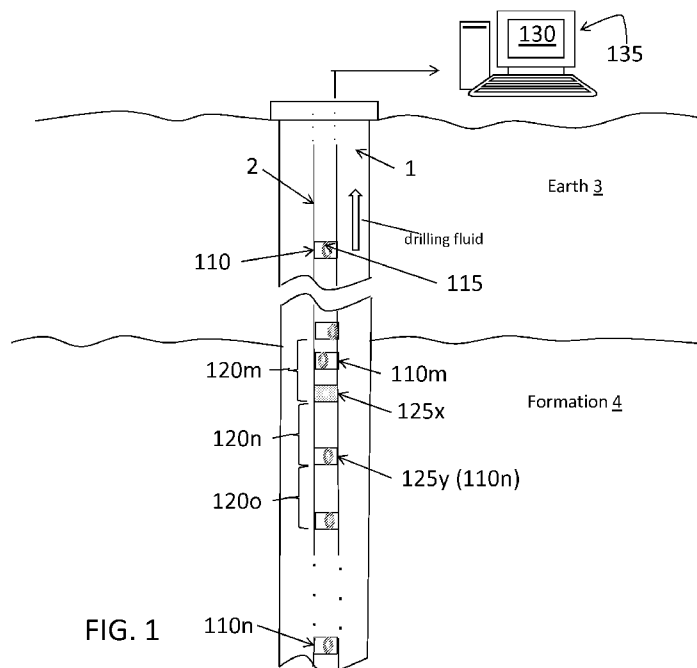
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- as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii))
- as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii))

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(54) **Title:** SYNCHRONIZATION OF DISTRIBUTED MEASUREMENTS IN A BOREHOLE



(57) **Abstract:** A system and method to synchronize distributed measurements in a borehole are described. The system includes a plurality of wired segments coupled together by couplers and a plurality of nodes configured to measure, process, or relay information obtained in the borehole to a surface processing system, each of the plurality of nodes comprising a local clock and being disposed at one of the couplers or between couplers. The system also includes a surface processing system coupled to a master clock and configured to determine a time offset between the master clock and the local clock of an nth node among the plurality of nodes based on a downhole generated synchronization signal

SYNCHRONIZATION OF DISTRIBUTED MEASUREMENTS IN A BOREHOLE

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Application No. 13/743720, filed on January 17, 2013, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] During downhole exploration and formation excavation, a number of sensors and measurement devices may be used to characterize the downhole environment. Each measurement, or record of measurements, may be time-stamped, or associated with a known time, so that the measurements from the various devices may be processed together at the surface. However, each of the downhole measurement platforms operates with a respective local clock that is typically not synchronized with the surface master clock. Thus, before the various distributed measurements may be processed together, they must be synchronized to a common time. In prior systems, the surface processing system has undertaken the synchronization. For example, the master clock at the surface generates a synchronization signal, and the local clocks downhole use the signal to set their time in agreement with the master clock's time so that all time stamps are referenced to the same (master clock) time. As another example, the master clock generates a synchronization signal, and based on a response to that signal from each downhole device, the surface processing system stores a measured offset from the master clock for each device.

SUMMARY

[0003] According to one aspect of the invention, a system to synchronize distributed measurements in a borehole includes a plurality of wired segments coupled together by couplers; a plurality of nodes configured to measure, process, or relay information obtained in the borehole to a surface processing system, each of the plurality of nodes comprising a local clock and being disposed at one of the couplers or between couplers; and a surface processing system coupled to a master clock and configured to determine a time offset between the master clock and the local clock of an nth node among the plurality of nodes based on a downhole generated synchronization signal.

[0004] According to another aspect of the invention, a method of synchronizing distributed measurements in a borehole includes disposing a known number of wired segments coupled together by couplers in the borehole; disposing nodes along the wired segments, the nodes being disposed at two or more of the couplers or between couplers and each node comprising a local clock and configured to measure or relay information obtained in the borehole to a surface processing system; generating a time-stamped signal at an nth node based on the local clock of the nth node; receiving the time-stamped signal at the surface processing system; and the surface processing system computing a time offset between a master clock associated with the surface processing system and the local clock of the nth node.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] Referring now to the drawings wherein like elements are numbered alike in the several Figures:

[0006] FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional illustration of a borehole including nodes with local clocks according to an embodiment of the invention; and

[0007] FIG. 2 is a flow diagram of a method of synchronizing distributed measurements in a borehole according to an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0008] As noted above, prior systems have synchronized local clocks of downhole devices with a master clock at the surface by using a synchronization signal generated by the master clock or some other form of synchronization initiated by the master clock.

Embodiments of the invention described herein use the fact that the time at a local clock need not be synchronized and reset as long as its offset from the master clock is determined and accounted for. Accordingly, embodiments described herein include downhole initiation of a synchronization process rather than synchronization by the master clock.

[0009] FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional illustration of a borehole 1 including nodes 110 with local clocks 115 according to an embodiment of the invention. Nodes 110 are disposed in the borehole 1 penetrating the earth 3, which may include a formation 4. The formation 4 represents any subsurface material of interest that the nodes 110 may help to characterize. The nodes 110 may be conveyed through the borehole 1 by a carrier 2. The carrier 2 may be a wireline used in wireline logging after drilling has ceased. In this case, the nodes 110 are disposed along the wireline. In alternate embodiments, the carrier 2 may be a drill string used

in Logging While Drilling (LWD) with the nodes 110 disposed in a bottomhole assembly. In general, the nodes 110 with local clocks 115 may be part of any system for obtaining downhole measurements in a borehole 1 in which the nodes 110 are distributed along the borehole 1, and in which the nodes 110 transfer data along the borehole 1. That is, a given node 110 may obtain downhole data (act as a sensor measuring data) for transmission to the surface, relay downhole data sent from another node 110 without any additional processing, or may process measured data or data received from another node 110. The data transfer by the nodes 110 may be via signals including, for example, mud pulse, acoustic, electro-magnetic, electrical, or optical.

[0010] In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, the carrier 2 is a wired pipe system composed of multiple wired segments 120 with interspersed couplers 125. These couplers 125 are used to transfer data between sections of tubular elements that make up the carrier 2 (e.g. drill string). The wired segments 120 may, therefore, all be of approximately the same length and, therefore, periodic. The couplers 125 may be nodes 110, though not all couplers 125 may be nodes 110, and a node may lie between couplers 125 (see e.g., 110m). For example, coupler 125x is not a node 110 while coupler 125y is a node 110 that measures or senses some information downhole. Each of the nodes 110 relays information from another node 110 farther from the surface. Each node 110 includes a local clock 115 so that information provided by each node 110 is time-stamped with the local time at which the information was obtained. Information relayed to the surface may be processed by a surface processing system 130 that includes one or more processors and memory devices. The surface processing system 130 also includes or is coupled to the master clock 135.

[0011] The local clocks 115 of the nodes 110 may be relatively simple crystal oscillators that are intended to work in an asynchronous manner (i.e., independent of any other timing device in the borehole 1). The local clocks 115 are intended to ensure that inter-sample time periods are accurate to a specified amount, but a local clock 115 at a node 110m may experience time drift with respect to a local clock 115 at another node 110n over the long term. Local clocks 115 are used to time-stamp individual measurements, or records of measurements, with a local time. In general, the master clock 135 may be a very accurate time keeping system, possibly

synchronized to a remote timing system, such as that supplied by a Global Positioning System (GPS).

[0012] The couplers 125, wired segments 120, and nodes 110 operate in a time-varying thermal environment and are also subject to vibration. As a result, the local clocks 115 of the nodes 110 drift with respect to one another. In addition, signal propagation speeds vary with temperature because, for example, material properties of the wired segments 120 change with temperature. The signal propagation delay includes time delay through the multiple wired segments 120, time delay through the multiple couplers 125, and time delay at each of the nodes 110 encountered by the signal prior to reaching the surface processing system 130. Each of these is discussed in turn.

[0013] With regard to the wired segments 120, when these are coaxial segments, then signal propagation velocity is approximately $180 \text{ m}/\mu\text{s}$, assuming a velocity factor of 60% for the dielectric. If each coaxial segment is 10 m in length, then the delay over each segment is $1/18 \mu\text{s}$. Over an exemplary borehole 1 of length 10 km, the resulting delay over the combined coaxial segments is 0.056 ms. Because seismic recording rates are 1000 s/s, a clock accuracy (offset accuracy) to 0.5 ms is needed. As illustrated by the exemplary case, this accuracy is apparently achievable by at least a factor of 10, even with this conservative estimate of the coaxial velocity factor. Thus, delays through the wired segments 120 may be ignored, although they may be compensated for if needed. The delay through the wired segments 120 may be modeled to account for temperature effects, for example. With regard to the couplers 125, their cumulative effect may be significant. However, because there are a relatively large number of couplers 125 within a carrier 2 (e.g., wired pipe), the delay introduced by the couplers 125 may be measured experimentally and handled statistically. The surface processing system 130 has knowledge of the number of couplers 125 between itself and a given node 110 and can, therefore, estimate the delay resulting from the couplers 125. If the coupler 125 delay is found to be affected by temperature, then periodic temperature measurements along the carrier 2 may be used to correct the delay values. With regard to the nodes 110, the delay associated with each may be more problematic because nodes 110 are computation points and may read and write messages, as well. As such, the delay at each node 110 is unlikely to be the same from one transmission to the next. Further, the delay at a given node 110 is likely to be different from the delay at another node 110. However, the delay at a node 110 may be made deterministic by delaying a time synchronization signal a specified amount of time at each node 110. That is, as long as the specified amount of time that is assumed as the delay is greater than the actual computation,

read/write time taken by any node 110, the actual delay at the node 110 need not be known. For example, if the longest delay at any node 110 is x , a forced delay of $x +$ some margin may be imposed on all the nodes 110 in order to make the delay related to the nodes 110 deterministic. In alternate embodiments, a processing delay ($x +$ some margin) may be imposed on those nodes 110 that process data but not on nodes 110 that merely relay data. In alternate embodiments, the delay at each node 110 may also be determined statistically.

[0014] The offset associated with a particular node 110 n may then be calculated as:

$$B[n] = C[n] + da[n] + dc[n] + dr[n] - C_M \quad [EQ. 1]$$

where $B[n]$ is the offset for the n th node 110;

$C[n]$ is the local clock time of the n th node 110;

$da[n]$ is an aggregate of the delay associated with every acquisition platform or node 110 from the surface to the n th node 110;

$dc[n]$ is an aggregate of the delay associated with every wired segment 120 from the surface to the n th node 110;

$dr[n]$ is an aggregate of the delay associated with every coupler 125 from the surface to the n th node 110; and

C_M is the master clock 135 time.

As noted above, the delay associated with every node 110 ($da[n]$) may be an artificial delay that is introduced at each node 110 (or each processing node 110) and ensured to be greater than the actual processing time at every node 110. Also, a node 110 may not be disposed at every coupler 125 but may also be disposed between couplers 125. Thus, the number of couplers 125 between the n th node 110 and the surface may be greater or less than the number of nodes 110 between the n th node 110 and the surface. Once the offset ($B[n]$) is determined, the timestamp of a data point received from the n th node 110 may be standardized to the time of the master clock 135 as follows:

$$\text{master timestamp} = \text{timestamp from } n\text{th node} - B[n] \quad [EQ. 2]$$

Once all the data points from all the nodes 110 are adjusted to have timestamps standardized to the master clock 135 according to EQ. 2, measurements taken at different nodes 110 at the same time may be matched up and used in the analysis of the downhole environment.

[0015] In one embodiment, node 110 n is the farthest node 110 in the borehole 1 from the surface processing system 130. A time-stamped signal originates at node 110 n and is relayed to the surface processing system 130 by each node 110 between node 110 n and the surface processing system 130. By having each node 110 add its local timestamp to the relayed signal, the offset associated with each node 110 from the farthest (node 110 n) to the closest to the surface processing system 130 may be determined. As such, the node 110 n would have generated the synchronization signal. In alternate embodiments, any node 110 may generate the synchronization signal for the surface processing system 130 to determine its offset and the offset of nodes 110 between the node 110 generating the synchronization signal and the surface processing system 130.

[0016] FIG. 2 is a flow diagram of a method 200 of synchronizing distributed measurements in a borehole 1 according to an embodiment of the invention. Disposing a known number of couplers 125, nodes 110, and wired segments 120 in the borehole 1 (block 210) may be as shown in FIG. 1, for example. Generating a time-stamped signal at a node 110 (block 220) includes generating the synchronization signal at the node 110 n that is farthest from the surface processing system 130. The method 200 also includes receiving the signal at the surface processing system 130 at block 230. Computing the offset at block 240 may be for one or more nodes 110. For example, as discussed above, in one embodiment, a synchronization signal generated at the farthest node 110 n is used to determine offsets for every node 110 from the farthest node 110 to the closest node 110 to the surface processing system 130.

[0017] While one or more embodiments have been shown and described, modifications and substitutions may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, it is to be understood that the present invention has been described by way of illustrations and not limitation.

CLAIMS:

1. A system to synchronize distributed measurements in a borehole, the system comprising:

a plurality of wired segments coupled together by couplers;

a plurality of nodes configured to measure, process, or relay information obtained in the borehole to a surface processing system, each of the plurality of nodes comprising a local clock and being disposed at one of the couplers or between couplers; and

a surface processing system coupled to a master clock and configured to determine a time offset between the master clock and the local clock of an nth node among the plurality of nodes based on a downhole generated synchronization signal.

2. The system according to claim 1, wherein the surface processing system determines a time offset associated with every node between the nth node and the surface processing system.

3. The system according to claim 1, wherein the wired segments are part of a wired pipe.

4. The system according to claim 1, wherein the surface processing system determines the time offset associated with the local clock of the nth node as follows:

$$B[n] = C[n] + da[n] + dc[n] + dr[n] - C_M$$

where $B[n]$ is the time offset for the nth node;

$C[n]$ is the local clock time of the nth node;

$da[n]$ is an aggregate of a delay associated with every node from the surface processing system to the nth node;

$dc[n]$ is an aggregate of a delay associated with every wired segment from the surface processing system to the nth node;

$dr[n]$ is an aggregate of a delay associated with every coupler from the surface processing system to the nth node; and

C_M is the master clock time.

5. The system according to claim 4, wherein the delay associated with every coupler is based on a statistical analysis of experimental results.

6. The system according to claim 4, wherein the delay associated with every wired segment is the same based on a length of each of the plurality of wired segments.

7. The system according to claim 4, wherein the delay associated with each wired segment is determined based on a model.

8. The system according to claim 4, wherein the delay associated with every node that performs processing is an artificial delay greater than a processing delay at any node.

9. The system according to claim 4, wherein the delay associated with each node is determined statistically.

10. The system according to claim 1, wherein the surface processing system determines a synchronized time stamp from a time stamp associated with data from the nth node based on the time offset associated with the local clock of the nth node from the time stamp.

11. A method of synchronizing distributed measurements in a borehole, the method comprising:

disposing a known number of wired segments coupled together by couplers in the borehole;

disposing nodes along the wired segments, the nodes being disposed at two or more of the couplers or between couplers and each node comprising a local clock and configured to measure or relay information obtained in the borehole to a surface processing system;

generating a time-stamped signal at an nth node based on the local clock of the nth node;

receiving the time-stamped signal at the surface processing system; and

the surface processing system computing a time offset between a master clock associated with the surface processing system and the local clock of the nth node.

12. The method according to claim 11, further comprising the surface processing system computing a time offset between the master clock and the local clock of every node between the nth node and the surface processing system.

13. The method according to claim 11, wherein the surface processing system computing the time offset for the nth node is as follows:

$$B[n] = C[n] + da[n] + dc[n] + dr[n] - C_M$$

where B[n] is the time offset for the nth node;

C[n] is the local clock time of the nth node;

$da[n]$ is an aggregate of a delay associated with every node from the surface processing system to the nth node;

$dc[n]$ is an aggregate of a delay associated with every wired segment from the surface processing system to the nth node;

$dr[n]$ is an aggregate of a delay associated with every coupler from the surface processing system to the nth node; and

C_M is the master clock time.

14. The method according to claim 13, wherein the delay associated with every coupler is based on a statistical analysis of experimental results.

15. The method according to claim 13, wherein the delay associated with every wired segment is the same based on a length of each of the wired segments.

16. The method according to claim 13, wherein the delay associated with each wired segment is determined based on a model.

17. The method according to claim 13, wherein the delay associated with every node that performs processing is an artificial delay greater than a processing delay at any node.

18. The method according to claim 13, wherein the delay associated with each node is determined statistically.

19. The method according to claim 11, further comprising the surface processing system determining a standardized time stamp from the time stamp associated with data from the nth node based on the time offset associated with the local clock of the nth node from the time stamp.

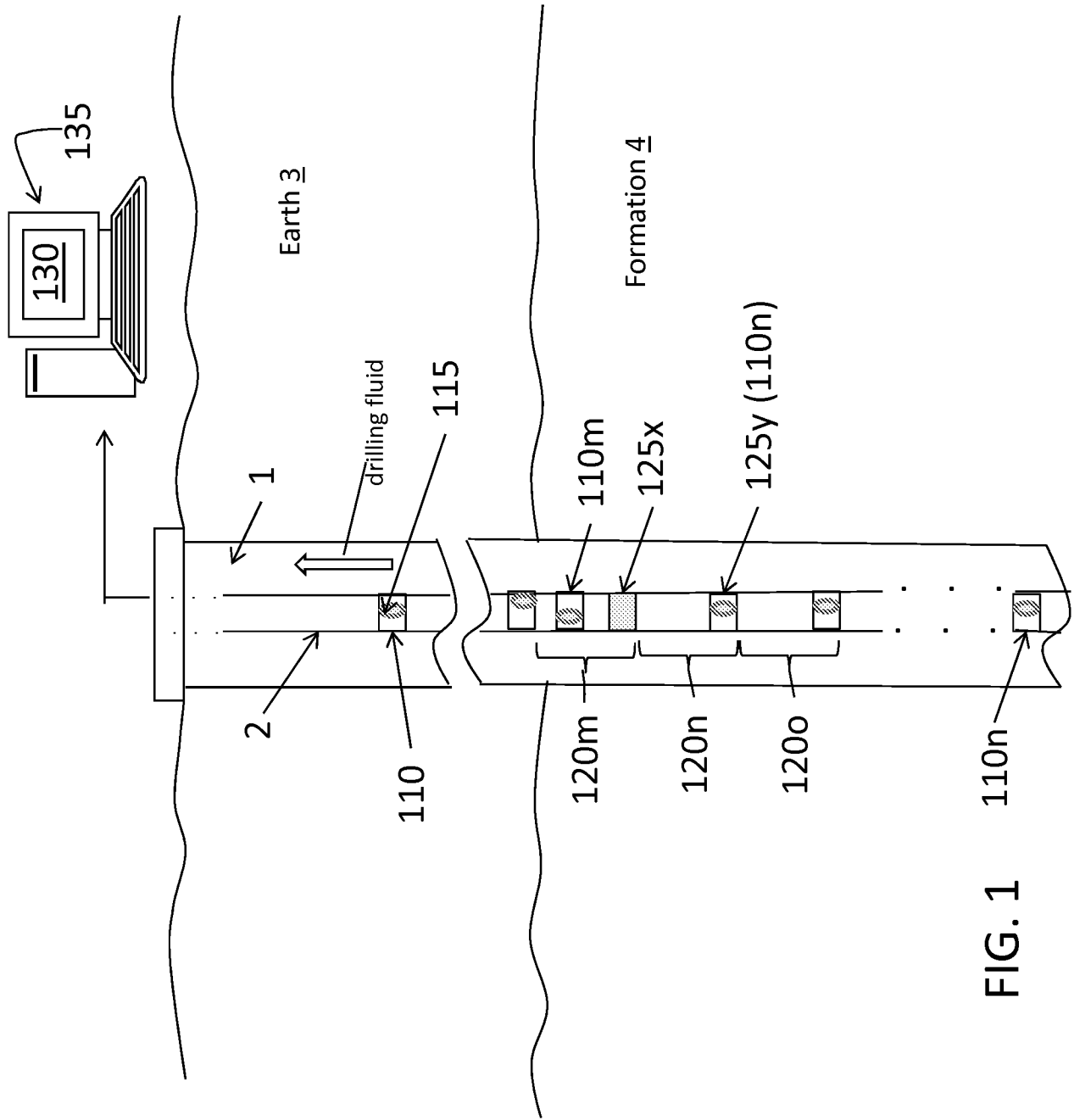


FIG. 1

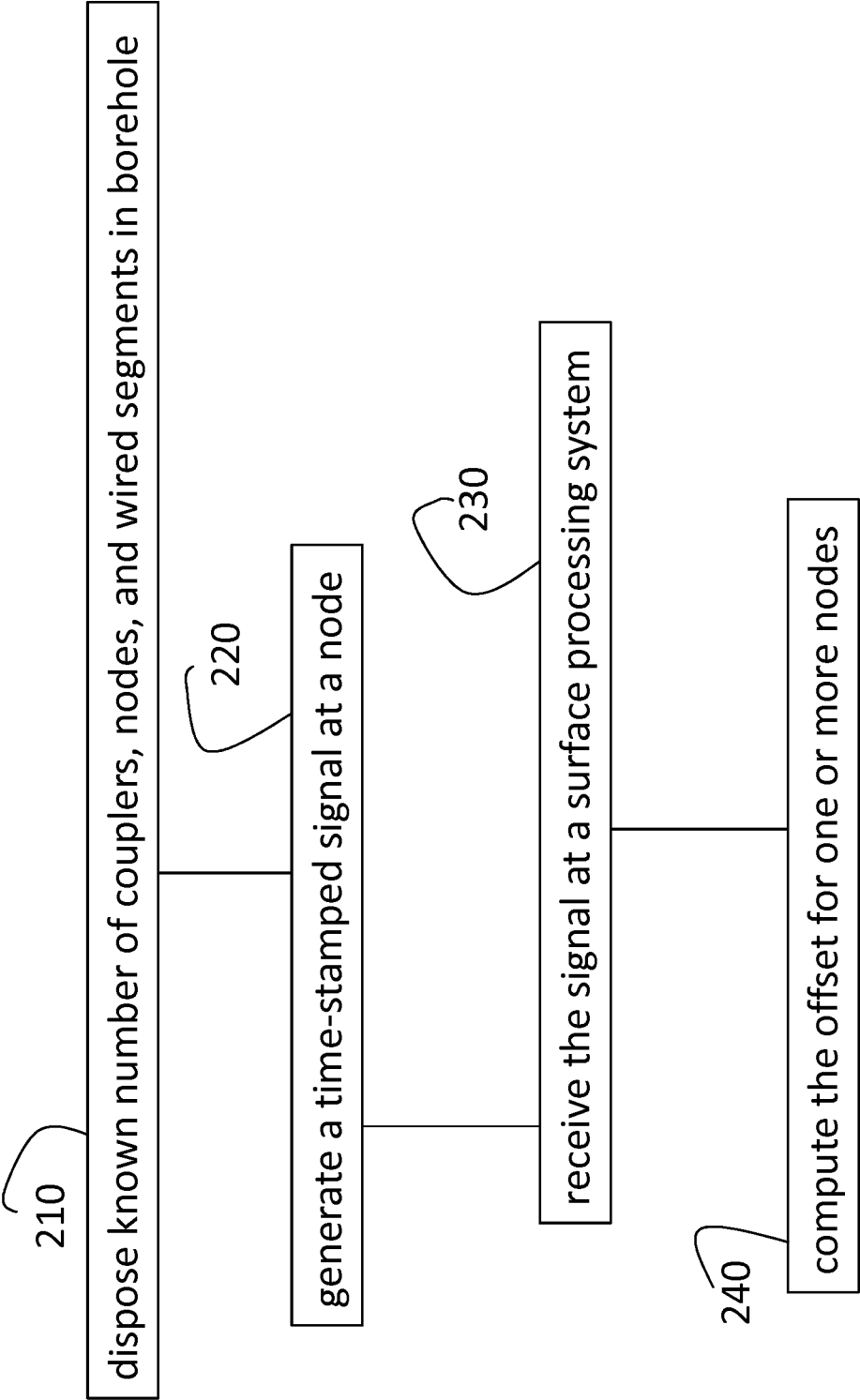


FIG. 2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2014/011824**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER****E21B 47/00(2006.01)i, E21B 47/022(2006.01)i**

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

E21B 47/00; E21B 47/04; H03B 9/14; E21B 47/12; G01V 1/40; G01V 11/00; E21B 47/022

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Korean utility models and applications for utility models

Japanese utility models and applications for utility models

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

eKOMPASS(KIPO internal) & Keywords: synchronization, measurement, clock, time offset, and time stamp

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2010-0313646 A1 (MEHTA, SHYAM et al.) 16 December 2010	1-3, 10-12, 19
A	See claims 1-2, 4, 22; paragraphs [0020]-[0063]; and figures 1-2.	4-9, 13-18
A	US 2009-0187345 A1 (BLANZ, MARTIN) 23 July 2009	1-19
	See paragraphs [0019]-[0045] and figure 1.	
A	EP 2385396 A2 (SAUDI ARABIAN OIL COMPANY) 09 November 2011	1-19
	See abstract and claims 1-18.	
A	US 6079505 A (PIGNARD, GUY et al.) 27 June 2000	1-19
	See column 3, line 43 - column 6, line 46 and figure 1.	
A	US 2009-0038392 A1 (ALFRED, WALTER et al.) 12 February 2009	1-19
	See paragraphs [0007]-[0020] and figure 1.	



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

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