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THE FABRICATION OF A SOLAR BATTERY

This invention relates to solar cells. More specifically, this invention relates to a method of fabricating series-connected solar cells and series-connected  
10 tandem junction solar cells.

Background of the Invention

Photovoltaic devices, i.e., solar cells, are capable of converting solar radiation into usable electrical energy. The energy conversion occurs as a result of what  
15 is well-known in the solar cell field as the photovoltaic effect. Solar radiation impinging on a solar cell and adsorbed by an active region of semiconductor material generates electrons and holes. The electrons and holes are separated by a built-in electric field, for example, a  
20 rectifying junction, in the solar cell. This separation of electrons and holes across the built-in electric field results in the generation of the photovoltage and photo-current of the cell.

As the area of the solar cell increases, the series  
25 resistance of the solar radiation incident electrode of the solar cell also increases and requires larger and more complicated grid electrodes to withdraw the current generated during illumination of the solar cell with sunlight.

Fabricating solar cells in long narrow strips and series-  
30 connecting the strips alleviates the need for complicated grid patterns. However, heretofore the fabrication of thin strips of series-connected solar cells or the series-connection of tandem junction solar cells required extensive photolithographic and chemical etching procedures. The  
35 photolithographic and chemical etching procedures often created pinholes in the semiconductor materials which resulted in the shorting out and degradation of portions of or the entire solar cell. In addition, photolithography is not readily adaptable to a large scale continuous processing

and greatly increases the cost of fabrication of series-connected solar cells. Thus, it would be highly desirable to have a method of fabricating series-connected solar cells or series-connected tandem junction solar cells without numerous liquid processing steps.

#### Summary of the Invention

A method of fabricating a series-connected and tandem junction series-connected solar battery using laser scribing is described. The method incorporates, inter alia, the laser scribing of a transparent conductive oxide (TCO) deposited on a transparent substrate into strips. Thereafter, the semiconductor material is deposited on the transparent substrate and strips of transparent conductive oxide. The transparent conductive oxide forms the top contact of the device. The device is then laser scribed again to divide the semiconductor material into strips without effecting the TCO. The strips are parallel with and adjacent to the previously formed laser scribing strips. Thereafter, a back metal contact is applied across the strips of transparent conductive oxide and semiconductor material and finally either laser scribed or sectioned parallel and adjacent to but disposed from the earlier two laser scribings so as to fabricate a device which is connected in series.

Individual panels of series-connected solar cells and tandem junction solar cells can be connected in parallel so as to provide any desired voltage and current. The semiconductor materials, transparent conductive oxides, and back electrodes used in the fabrication of the solar battery should be selected so that either a single laser is required to scribe each successive layer with decreasing power or lasers of differing wavelength which can scribe one layer without affecting the other layers. Alternatively, for example, very short laser pulses of about 10 to about 20 nanoseconds and large pulse rates of about 0.2 to about 5 MHz can be used to scribe one layer without scribing other layers.

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

FIGURE 1 illustrates a cross-section of a tandem junction hydrogenated amorphous silicon solar battery

fabricated according to the invention from a plurality of tandem junction solar cells.

FIGURES 2a through 2f illustrate the process of fabricating a series of interconnected solar cells according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIGURES 3a and 3b illustrate an alternative embodiment of the invention for interconnecting solar cells after the steps illustrated in FIGURES 2a through 2e.

#### Detailed Description of the Invention

This invention will be more clearly illustrated by referring to FIGURE 1 which illustrates a cross-section of a complete tandem junction solar battery fabricated from a plurality of interconnected tandem junction solar cells. The tandem junction solar battery 10 incorporates a series of tandem junction solar cells 20, 21, and 22 connected in series on a substrate 32. For example, the solar cells are fabricated with materials in accordance with U.S. Patent No. 4,064,521 or British Patent Specification 2060251 (U.S. Application, Serial No. 070,513, filed August 28, 1979) or U.S. Application Serial No. 109,637, filed January 4, 1980, or British Patent Specification 2047463 said Application and U.S. Patent and said British Specifications being incorporated by reference herein. Alternatively, the amorphous silicon can be fabricated with modifiers in addition to hydrogen and the silanes such as the halogens, evaporated or sputtered silicon or other semiconductor materials such as CdS, CdSe, CdTe, Cu<sub>2</sub>S, and the like can be employed.

Each tandem junction solar cell 20, 21, and 22 comprises a strip of transparent conductive oxide 34 (TCO) as an incident electrode and two or more active layers 38 and 42 of semiconductor material separated by a tunnel junction 40 e.g., of cermet material. The active layers have regions 38a, 38b, and 38c and 42a, 42b, and 42c of differing conductivity type. The semiconductor layer or layers and tunnel junctions are collectively referred to as the active region 43. The active region 43 has a rectifying junction either within the region, i.e., a PN junction, or at a surface, i.e., a Schottky barrier. The active region of 43 can be a layer of semiconductor material or a plurality of semiconductor layers as described

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above. The tandem junction solar cells are interconnected with a back electrode 44 and a series-connect 46.

5           Laser scribing is used to fabricate the transparent conductive oxide 34 and semiconductor layers 38 and 40 into strips. The strips of TCO are parallel and adjacent to the strips of semiconductor material. The laser scribing technique can also fabricate solar structures wherein there  
10 are strips of only one active region of semiconductor material 38 connected in series. The transparent incident electrode, semiconductor material, and back electrode material should be selected so that a laser of a single wavelength but of varying power, decreasing from the power needed to scribe  
15 the incident electrode, can scribe the devices. Alternatively, the materials can be selected so that a laser emitting light at one frequency can scribe one material, for example, amorphous silicon, but not another material such as the TCO.

20           Having described the finished solar cell structure 10, the fabrication procedure can be illustrated according to FIGURES 2a through 2f. The process will be illustrated by the description of the fabrication of a hydrogenated amorphous silicon solar battery.

25           FIGURE 2a illustrates a substrate 32 such as a glass, plastic, and the like. FIGURE 2b illustrates the substrate 32 coated with a transparent conductive oxide 34 (TCO) as the incident electrode of a material such as indium tin oxide, tin oxide, and the like. The TCO is  
30 deposited by evaporation or sputtering or other methods known in the art. Alternatively, the glass substrate 32 coated with a transparent electrode material such as indium tin oxide is commercially available. The transparent conductive electrode material 34 should have a thickness  
35 of about 6.5 nanometers and a sheet resistivity of less than about 150 ohms per square, preferably less than about 100 ohms per square.

Referring to FIGURE 2c, the substrate 32 containing the TCO layer 34 is laser scribed into strips. The laser can  
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be any laser capable of scribing the TCO material. For example, a continuously excited (CW) neodymium YAG laser radiating at 1.06 micrometers operated in a Q-switched mode at an average power of about 4.5 watts with a pulse rate of about 36 kilohertz and a scribing rate of about 20 centimeters per second can be used.

Thereafter, as illustrated in FIGURE 2d, the active region 43 is deposited on the incident electrode strips. The substrate 32 incorporating the TCO layer 34 and the active semiconductor region 43 is laser scribed again, parallel and adjacent to the previous scribing down to the transparent electrode as illustrated in FIGURE 2e. For example, a 1.06 micrometer CW neodymium YAG laser operating at a pulse rate of 36 kilohertz, a scribing rate of 20 centimeters per second and adjusted power of 1.7 watts is sufficient to scribe hydrogenated amorphous silicon, and a cermet down to the TCO strips 34 but not through them.

As illustrated in FIGURE 2f, a back electrode material of titanium, aluminium, indium or like material is angle evaporated onto the solar cell strips for example at an angle of from about 30° to about 45° with respect to a perpendicular drawn from the substrate 32 such that the material forms strips 46 which interconnect the individual cells in series. Finally, contacts 50 and 52 are connected to the solar battery structure by methods known in the art.

Alternatively, the back electrode material can be evaporated, sputtered, or deposited by other means known in the art completely across the back of the strips of semiconductor material as illustrated in FIGURE 3a and thereafter laser scribed parallel to the laser scribing which formed the groove illustrated in FIGURE 2e. The groove is adjacent to the groove in FIGURE 2e as illustrated in FIGURE 3b. A CW neodymium YAG laser scribing with a similar pulse rate and speed but with a power of about 1.3 watts is sufficient to scribe the back electrical contact forming a groove in same, but not scribe the semiconductor or TCO layers. This fabrication technique is applicable to semiconductor materials

where the lateral sheet resistivity is sufficiently high, e.g.  $>10^{10}$  ohms per square, such that the back electrical contact contacting two walls of adjacent semiconductor strips does not short out the cells, for example, hydrogenated amorphous silicon, cermet and the like. If the semiconductor or other materials are used in forming the active region have a low lateral sheet resistivity then the edge of the active region must be shielded with a suitable dielectric before the strips are connected in series.

The invention will be further illustrated by the following examples but it is to be understood that the invention is not to be limited solely to the details described therein. Modifications which would be obvious to one of ordinary skill in the solar cell art are contemplated to be within the scope of the invention.

#### EXAMPLE I

A 3" by 3" (7.6cm by 7.6cm) glass substrate coated with indium tin oxide (ITO) having a thickness of about 250 nanometers and a resistivity of about 10 ohms per square, manufactured by Triplex Glass Company, Ltd., Kings Norton, Birmingham England was laser scribed with a Q-switched neodymium YAG CW laser at a power of 4.5 watts with a pulse rate of 36 kilohertz, a scribing rate of 20 centimeters per second, and a lens focal length of about 27 millimeters. The laser scribing formed a groove with a width of about 0.002 centimeter between strips of indium tin oxide about 0.5cm wide. The underlying glass slightly melted in spots to a depth of a few hundred angstroms. After the laser scribing, the conductivity across the scribed area was measured and found to be slightly conductive. The slightly conducting area was removed by immersing the substrate in a solution of one part concentrated hydrochloric acid in two parts water for about 45 seconds.

Thereafter, the active semiconductor region comprising  $\text{PtSiO}_2$  cermet about 15 nanometers thick containing about 12 volume percent of platinum, a  $\text{P}^+$  doped layer of hydrogenated amorphous silicon about 36 nanometers thick, an undoped layer of hydrogenated amorphous silicon

about 590 nanometers thick, and a final layer of  $N^+$  doped hydrogenated amorphous silicon 36 nanometers thick was deposited on the substrate and the strips of indium tin oxide by methods taught in U.S. Patent No. 4,167,051, incorporated herein by reference. The amorphous silicon was deposited by a glow discharge in an atmosphere containing silicon, hydrogen, and suitable conductivity modifiers. The cermet was formed by cosputtering of Pt and  $SiO_2$ .

The active semiconductor region was scribed by the previously mentioned laser to form grooves in the active semiconductor region parallel but displaced from the initial laser scribing. The laser was operated at a power of 1.7 watts and a focal length of 48 millimeters with a similar pulse rate and scribing rate as recited previously. The width of the scribed groove was about 0.003 centimeter. The scribing depth was down to the ITO but not through it.

Thereafter, the strips and active region and transparent substrate were coated with a back electrode of titanium to a thickness of about 100 nanometers. The cell was scribed for a third time forming a groove in the back electrical contact parallel and adjacent to previous scribings, with the laser operated at a power of about 1.3 watts, a focal length of about 75 millimeters and previously recited pulse rates and scribing speeds. Copper strips were attached to the ends of the electrodes by means of silver epoxy cement. Finally the electrical shorts and shunts were removed by the application of a 5 volt reverse bias to each cell.

The cell fabricated according to the procedure was tested with a light having an intensity equivalent to AM1 sunlight. A solar battery consisting of 12 individual solar cell strips had a  $V_{oc}$  of 9.3 volts, about 0.775 volt per cell, a short circuit current  $J_{sc}$  of about 5.3 milliamps per centimeter square, a fill factor FF of about 0.51, and an efficiency of about 2.1 percent.

#### EXAMPLE II

A series-connected solar battery was fabricated in accordance with the procedures outlined in Example I, however,

the back contact metal was indium and it was evaporated onto the active region of the semiconductor device along with the indium tin oxide. Thereafter, grooves were laser scribed in the indium using a laser power of 1.3 watts parallel and adjacent to the grooves laser scribed in the hydrogenated amorphous silicon material. After attaching electrodes and removing the electrical shorts, the solar cells comprising 10 individual strip cells connected in series exhibited an open circuit voltage of 7.9 volts, a short circuit current of 4.6 milliamps per centimeter squared, a fill factor of 0.51, and an efficiency of 1.9 percent when exposed to a test light having an intensity of about AM1 sun.

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EXAMPLE III

A 7.6cm x 7.6cm glass substrate coated with indium tin oxide having a resistivity of about 10 ohms by square was laser scribed in accordance with the procedure outlined in Example I.

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Thereafter, a tandem junction structure, comprising a platinum cermet, a layer of amorphous silicon, a tunnel junction, and a second layer of amorphous silicon, was deposited on the substrate and the strips of indium tin oxide. The cermet was about 7.5 nanometers thick. The first layer of amorphous silicon, having a P-type region was about 30 nanometers thick, an intrinsic region about 76 nanometers thick, and an N-type region about 38 nanometers thick, was deposited on the platinum cermet. A tunnel junction of a platinum cermet about 7.5 nanometers thick was deposited on the amorphous silicon layer. The second layer of amorphous silicon, having a P-type region, and an intrinsic region, and an N-type region with thicknesses of 30 nanometers, 408 nanometers, and 45 nanometers, respectively, was deposited on the tunnel junction. The amorphous silicon regions were deposited by the glow discharge and the platinum cermets were deposited by the cosputtering platinum and  $\text{SiO}_2$ . These layers were scribed to form a groove parallel and adjacent to the previous scribing with a laser operating under the conditions outlined in Example I at a power of

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1.7 watts. The scribed grooves were adjacent to and parallel with the ITO grooves as depicted in FIGURE 2e. Thereafter, 5 a 100 nanometer thick layer of tin was evaporated in angle of about  $30^\circ$  with respect to the perpendicular from the substrate, as illustrated in FIGURE 2f. Copper strips were attached to the electrode by means of silver epoxy. The shorts were removed by the application of a reverse bias 10 voltage.

The solar battery consisted of 10 cells in series horizontally with two in tandem vertically for a total of 20 cells. The device had an open circuit voltage of 11.8 volts when exposed to light having an intensity of about AM1.



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CLAIMS:

1. A method of fabricating a solar battery  
5 comprising:  
    scribing a transparent electrode on a transparent  
    substrate with laser means for sufficient power to form a plurality  
    of transparent electrode strips;  
    fabricating an active region of a semiconductor  
10 material on said substrate and said transparent electrode  
    strips;  
    scribing said active region with the laser means  
    parallel and adjacent to the first scribing so as to scribe through  
    said active region and form strips of active region but  
15 not the transparent electrode; and  
    interconnecting said strips of active region in  
    series with a back electrode.
2. The method according to claim 1 wherein said  
20 transparent electrode, and said active region,  
    are selected such that the laser means requires a greater  
    power to scribe said transparent electrode than said active  
    region.
- 25 3. The method according to claim 1 or 2 wherein said  
    active region is a semiconductor material selected from the  
    group consisting of hydrogenated amorphous silicon, evaporated  
    silicon, sputtered silicon, CdS, CdSe, CdTe, and Cu<sub>2</sub>S.
- 30 4. The method according to claim 1, 2 or 3 wherein the  
    active region is a plurality of layers of semiconductor  
    material.
- 35 5. The method according to claim 1, 2 or 3 wherein the  
    active region is hydrogenated amorphous silicon.



6. The method according to claim 5 wherein the laser means is a continuously excited neodymium YAG laser emitting 5 light of a wavelength of about 1.06 micrometers.

7. The method according to claim 6 wherein said laser means is operated in a Q-switched mode at a repetition rate of about 36 kilohertz.

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8. The method according to claim 7 wherein the scribing is performed by said laser means operating at a power of about 4.5 watts to scribe said transparent electrode material, and about 1.7 watts to scribe said active region.

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9. The method according to claim 5,6,7 or 8 wherein said active region comprises a plurality of layers of hydrogenated amorphous silicon.

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10. The method according to claim 9 wherein each pair of adjacent layers of hydrogenated amorphous silicon are separated by a tunnel junction.

11. The method according to claim 10 wherein said 25 tunnel junction is a cermet.

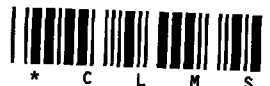
12. The method according to any preceding claim wherein said back electrode is fabricated by angle evaporation.

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13. The method according to any preceding claim further comprising the fabrication of the back electrode across the strips of active region and the transparent electrode followed by the laser scribing of said back electrode parallel and adjacent to the scribing of said strips of active region.

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14. The method according to claim 13 wherein the transparent electrode, the active region and the back electrode are selected such that the laser means can scribe said back electrode with a lower power than is required to scribe said active region and said active region requires a 40 lower power for scribing than said transparent electrode.



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15. A method according to claim 1, wherein at least said transparent electrode and said active region are selected to be scribable by, and are scribed by laser means emitting, light of respective different frequencies, the transparent electrode being unaffected by the light for scribing the active region, and the active region being unaffected by the light for scribing the transparent region.

16. A method of fabricating a solar battery substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Figures 1 and 2a to 2f, optionally as modified by Figures 3a and 3b.

17. A solar battery made by the method of any preceding claim.

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