IMPACTITE AND PSEUDOTACHYLITE FROM ROTER KAMM CRATER, NAMIBIA. J. J. Degenhardt Jr., P. C. Buchanan, and A. M. Reid, Department of Geosciences, University of Houston, Houston TX 77204, USA; Texaco Inc., E&P Technology Division, 3901 Briarpark, Houston TX 77042, USA.

Pseudotachylite is known to occur in a variety of geologic settings including thrust belts (e.g., the Alps and the Himalayas) and impact craters such as Roter Kamm, Namibia. Controversy exists, however, as to whether pseudotachylite can be produced by shock brecciation [1] as well as by tectonic frictional melting. Also open to debate is the question of whether pseudotachylites form by frictional fusion or by cataclasis [2]. It has been speculated that the pseudotachylite at Roter Kamm was formed by extensional settling and adjustment of basement blocks during “late modification stage” of impact [3]. The occurrence of pseudotachylite in association with rocks resembling quenched glass bombs and melt breccias in a relatively young crater of known impact origin offers a rare opportunity to compare features of these materials. Petrographic, X-ray diffraction, and electron microprobe analyses of the impactites and pseudotachylite are being employed to determine the modes of deformation and to assess the role of frictional melting and comminution of adjacent target rocks. The first findings are reported here.

The Roter Kamm Crater is located in the southern part of the Namib Desert about 80 km north of Oranjemund, Namibia. The crater rim has a crest diameter of ca. 2.5 km with the highest exposed point reaching 158 m above the lowest point of the crater floor. The impact, which excavated Precambrian granitic-granodioritic orthogneisses of the 1200–900-m.y.-old Namaqualand Metamorphic Complex, has been dated at 3.5–4.0 Ma by Hartung et al. [4]. No volcanic rocks have been discovered in the area [5]. This has been substantiated by others [3]. A detailed account of the crater geology was published by Reimold and Miller [6].

A variety of impactites was collected from the crater rim. These have been described in the literature as “impact-melt breccias,” “melt bombs,” and “ejecta melts.” In this study, three main rock types have been examined:

1. Meltlike rocks (also called fladle), common only along the northwest crater rim, are dark gray to black in color and exhibit apparent flow patterns characteristic of quenched glass “bombs.” Because of their smooth, fluidlike shapes, the fladle have been interpreted as impact melt. In spite of their meltlike appearance, the specimens that were examined exhibited pervasive subparallel millimeter-wide veinlets containing subhedral mica and quartz. The fact that these veins are sharply (visibly) truncated by the surfaces of the fladle brings into question the interpretation that these rocks were melt-derived (see Fig. 1). XRD and electron microprobe analyses of the veins confirmed the mica-quartz composition and showed the mica to be a K, Mg-bearing variety. The finer-grained, optically opaque matrix is composed of mica and quartz similar to that of the veins. A Ti-rich mineral was also found to be present in the matrix, mainly in the form of clustered grains scattered throughout. Further analysis is being carried out to determine the cause of the opacity.

2. Quartz breccias containing large irregular shocked quartz fragments were also collected along the north crater rim. The fragments are cemented by an aphanitic matrix that resembles pseudotachylite in hand specimen. In contrast to the fladle, this matrix is not opaque in thin section, but appears finely crystalline. Of significance is the presence of opaque clasts (some containing micaceous veins) located throughout the matrix, which upon preliminary examination appear to be composed of the same material as the fladle (Fig. 2). Work is currently being done to determine if the chemical compositions of these entrained clasts match that of the fladle, and thus whether the fladle material predates the quartz breccia.

3. Pseudotachylite samples in the form of allochthonous fragments were collected at the south rim. Petrographic examination reveals the presence of angular entrained clasts that have not undergone recrystallization. However, finely crystalline quartz resembling the quartz breccia matrix appears in (plastically?) deformed grains and intermediate zones that often separate the pseudotachylite from its host rock. The composition of the vein material, including nonrecrystallized entrained clasts, was found to
be essentially that of the host rock. It is apparent from grain
deformation that transport distances were on the order of millime-
ters to centimeters along the veins.

The textures of fliddle, quartz breccia, and pseudotachylite are
fundamentally different when viewed petrographically. Although
each of the rock types appears darkly opaque (dark gray or black) in
hand specimen, the only sample with a matrix that is truly opaque
in thin section is the fliddle. No clasts representing compositions and
textures of the other impactites have been observed in the
pseudotachylite thus far. Present work is directed at determining
what textural and compositional changes were involved during
formation and whether the pseudotachylite represents material
comparable to associated impactites.

References:

Fig. 1. $\varepsilon_{\text{Nd}}$-$\varepsilon_{\text{Sr}}$ diagram for different lithologies of the structure with data recalculated to 1.85 Ga, the time of the impact event [14];
data sources [4–6,11,12,15–17,19].

Neodymium isotope ratios of the impact melt concur with Nd
characteristics of the target lithologies in the Sudbury region, for
example, the Levack gneiss [12]. The observed spread in $\varepsilon_{\text{Sr}}$
reflects the widely varying $^{187}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ of the Archean basement
[4,15], Proterozoic Intrusives [16,17], and the Huronian Supergroup
[16,18] that were mixed into the melt. Distinct fields for the sublayer
different localities [12,19] in Fig. 1 show that the impact melt
sheet (SIC) assimilated local bedrocks after its emplacement in the
final modified crater. Strongly deviating Sr isotope ratios for some
Onaping rocks in Fig. 1 with $^{187}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}T=1.85$ Ga as low as
0.700 [6,7] or 0.67 [20] are due to a reopening of the Rb-Sr system during
the Penokean orogeny [4, see also 7]. This is demonstrated with selected
growth curves in Fig. 2: Some recrystallized melt particles and
devitrified glass have enhanced Rb/Sr ratios but the majority of the
material has $I_e$ identical to the granophyre. Together with their $\varepsilon_{\text{Nd}}$,
this fact supports our view that the melt-breccia on top of the
granophyre and the melt material in the suevitic Onaping breccias
and in the Green Member originated from the same source as the
SIC, namely impact-melted crustal material.

Oxygen isotope data [21] support our findings. The norite, the
granophyre, and the matrix of Onaping breccias all show a consider-
able spread in $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, but typical trends as known from differenti-
ated layered intrusions are absent. The $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values of these lithologies
are bracketed by oxygen isotopic compositions observed for local
Archean and Proterozoic bedrocks with the Onaping breccias re-
flecting a higher input of Huronian greywackes. To explain the Os
isotope ratios for the Sudbury ores [22] by mixing between a mantle
magma and crust would need up to 90% crustal material. Therefore
these data are also in line with a derivation of the ores exclusively
from ancient crustal sources by impact melting followed by segre-
gation of a sulfide liquid out of the melt sheet.

Summary and Outlook: While in the original contributions
SIC isotope systematics were discussed preferentially in terms of a
possible mixing between a hypothetical mantle component with up
to 75% crustal material, the impact melt model does not have any
problem explaining the crustal signatures of the SIC, the Onaping
breccias, and the Sudbury ores—total melting of basement and
supracrustal lithologies can only produce crustal signatures. Future
studies on Sudbury should concentrate on combined analyses of