structure very close to the right age, but the rocks excavated at the crater appear to be a likely source for the shocked grains as well as most other grains lacking observable shock lamellae in the upper stratum.

The occurrence of two impacts separated in time by at least part of a growing season appears to be most readily explained if the Earth intercepted a compact comet stream at the end of the Cretaceous [20]. In repetitive passes through the stream, the Earth may have encountered more than two crater-forming projectiles and may have swept up substantial amounts of cometary material that did not produce craters. The peak Ir abundance, which occurs in the upper stratum, may reflect a somewhat protracted accumulation of cometary material. Iridium is relatively low in abundance in the boundary claystone, possibly as a consequence of blowoff and escape of the vaporized projectile that formed the large Chicxulub impact structure [cf. 21].

A comet stream is most likely to have been formed by breakup of a large Sun-grazing comet. Reexamination of the flux of active and extinct Earth-crossing comets suggests that collision of periodic comets accounts for about 25% of the terrestrial impact craters larger than 20 km in diameter. Periodic comets initially on orbits with inclinations near 90° become Sun grazers [22]. More than one fifth of the Earth-crossing periodic comets probably become Sun grazers that are subject to tidal disruption.


GEOLoGICAL EVIDENCE FOR A 2.6-Ga STREWN FIELD OF IMPACT SPHERULES IN THE HAMERSLEY BASIN OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA. Bruce M. Simonson, Geology Department, Oberlin College, Oberlin OH 44074, USA.

Sand-sized spherules up to 1.7 mm across with spherulitic, vesicular, and other crystalline textures that consist mainly of K-feldspar help define a unique horizon in the well-preserved 2.6-Ga Wittenoom Formation in the Hamersley Basin of Western Australia [1,2]. This layer, informally known as the spherule marker bed, is nowhere thicker than about 1.3 m, yet it persists for more than 300 km across the basin, blanketing an area of at least 13,700 km². Sedimentological evidence indicates the layer is a single turbidite, and the spherules are a minor constituent that are usually concentrated along its base; locally, however, they are restricted to centimeter-thick lenses of pure spherules along a single horizon in the argillite close beneath the turbidite. The total volume of preserved spherules is estimated at 8 \times 10^3 m³. Assuming a specific gravity of 2.5, typical of silicate glass, the lower limit of the total original mass of spherules is about 1.7 \times 10^7 g.

In the northeastern part of the Hamersley Basin, similar spherules again occur at only one horizon, but here they are a minor constituent of a dolomitic debris-flow deposit 9.9 to 22.7 m thick known as the dolomixtite layer. The dolomixtite layer occurs in the Carawine Dolomite, which is stratigraphically equivalent to the Wittenoom Formation [3]. Moreover, paleocurrent data from closely associated carbonate [4,5] and volcanioclastic [6,7] turbidites indicate the spherule marker bed was deposited in deeper-water paleoenvironments than the dolomixtite layer. Therefore, the dolomixtite layer is believed to be a proximal equivalent of the spherule marker bed. In addition to spherules, the dolomixtite layer contains particles that also consist of K-feldspar, but are larger than the spherules (up to 11 mm across) and have much more internal heterogeneity. Some display internal flow banding or schlieren, while others contain typical spherules as inclusions. These larger particles are in the size range of true tektites, but ablated forms have yet to be observed.

Based on their similarity to microtektites and microkrystitcs in shape, size, and internal textures, and their occurrence as a very thin layer over a large area, the spherules are interpreted as droplets of silicate melt that were generated and dispersed across the Hamersley Basin by a major bolide impact. The mass of the spherules preserved in the Hamersley Basin is of the same order of magnitude as the estimated masses of microtektite glass in major Cenozoic strewn fields, despite the fact that the spherules currently cover an area that is 2 to 3 orders of magnitude smaller. The layers that host the spherules are interpreted to be the deposits of a major sediment gravity flow that exhumed and redeposited most of the spherules after shallow burial, although the flow is not believed to have been a direct result of the proposed impact. The internal textures of the spherules suggests the target rocks were mafic in composition, but the presence of trace amounts of microcline and quartz crystals in both the spherule marker bed and dolomixtite layer suggests some continental basement rocks were also present in the target area. Given this, plus the fact that the spherules and related particles are largest in the northeastern corner of the Hamersley Basin, the most likely site for the proposed impact would have been in the early Precambrian ocean close to the northeastern edge of the Pilbara Craton.

Another thin horizon in the overlying Brockman Iron Formation contains spherules that again consist largely of K-feldspar and have internal textures strikingly similar to those of the Wittenoom Formation and Carawine Dolomite. They differ in being slightly larger on average (up to 1.8 mm) and extensively replaced by iron-rich minerals (particularly stilpnomelane) as they are hosted by iron formation rather than argillite. This horizon is about 250 m higher stratigraphically and persists laterally for at least 30 km. The close resemblance of these spherules to those of the Wittenoom Formation and Carawine Dolomite suggests they also originated as impact melt droplets, even though they are admixed with volcanioclastic detritus. Using the sedimentation rate of 3-4 m/m.y. typical of the Hamersley Group [8], the stratigraphic separation between the two suggests that a second major impact occurred near the Hamersley Basin after a time interval of about 75 m.y. elapsed. This suggests the record of impacts in early Precambrian strata is richer than is generally appreciated.


Imaging radar is an important contributing source of information for a range of geological problems and environments. Airborne SAR and ERS-1 data integrated with other geoscience datasets are being used in an attempt to characterize the crustal fracturing associated with the Sudbury structure. This presentation highlights examples of integrated and composite images aimed at facilitating the interpretation of the Sudbury structure. This work is the result of an ongoing cooperative multidisciplinary SAR study of the basin carried out by the Canada Centre for Remote Sensing, Ontario’s Provincial Remote Sensing Office, the Ontario Geological Survey, and the Geological Survey of Canada.

VISCOSITY DETERMINATIONS OF SOME FRICTIONALLY GENERATED SILICATE MELTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SLIP ZONE HEAT PRODUCTION DURING IMPACT-INDUCED FAULTING. John G. Spray, Department of Geology, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.

Analytical scanning electron microscopy, using combined energy dispersive and wavelength dispersive spectrometry, has been used to determine the major-element compositions of some natural and artificial silicate glasses and their crystalline equivalents derived from the frictional melting of acid to intermediate protoliths. The major-element compositions are used to calculate the viscosities of their melt precursors using the model of Shaw [1] at temperatures of 800°C-1400°C, with Fe*/Fe(tot) = 0.5 and for 1-3 wt% H2O. These results are then modified to account for suspension effects (i.e., the presence of mineral and rock clasts) in order to determine effective viscosities.

The critical factors in controlling the viscosities of the silicate melts are SiO2 and H2O contents and temperature, as has been well established for silicate melts of magmatic origin. Additionally, for fault-generated melts, the effects of shear thinning can reduce the viscosity to a significant degree. At 1200°C, the viscosities range from 7 p for the more basic melt sample (40 wt% SiO2) to 1 x 106 p for the more acid melt sample (64 wt% SiO2). These viscosities are low and indicate that at least the friction melt derived from the more basic protolith would have been highly fluid within the slip zone during displacement. The effects of shear thinning at very high strain rates would reduce these viscosities even further.

Where friction melts are generated during coseismic slip to form pseudotachylites this implies that the melt may help to lubricate the sliding interface and dissipate stored strain energy. These results are contrary to the views of earlier workers, who suggested that any melts generated by frictional heating would possess high viscosities and so inhibit slip. Part of this inference was based on the erroneous assumption that pseudotachylite generation involved the bulk fusion of wallrocks. Although a pseudotachylite matrix plus clasts has a very similar chemistry to the wallrock lithology, the matrix typically possesses a more basic chemistry and hence, due to its lower SiO2 content, a significantly lower viscosity than that of its protolith. On the other hand, smaller entrained clasts (<1 cm diameter) are typically felsic and dominated by quartz.

These results have implications for the generation of pseudotachylitic breccias as seen in the basement lithologies of the Sudbury and Vredefort structures and possibly certain dimict lunar breccias. Many of these breccias show similarities with the more commonly developed pseudotachylite fault and injection veins seen in endogenic fault zones that typically occur in thicknesses of a few centimeters or less. The main difference is one of scale: Impact-induced pseudotachylite breccias can attain several meters in thickness. This would suggest that they were generated under exceptionally high slip rates and hence high strain rates and that the friction melts generated possessed extremely low viscosities.