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Carbonatites in the Lemitar Mountains, Socorro County, New Mexico

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Introduction

A carbonatite is a carbonate-rich rock of apparent magmatic derivation or descent. Carbonatites are generally characterized by > 50% carbonate minerals, apatite, magnetite, pyroxenes, and various other minerals (Heinrich, 1966), and they may contain economic concentrations of U, Th, Nb, rare-earth elements, and phosphate. These rocks are generally associated with alkalic rocks, although there are rare occurrences of carbonatites not associated with any alkalic complexes (Heinrich, 1966).

Carbonatites generally form one or two small plugs or stocks situated more or less in the center of a ring complex of cone sheets or ring dikes. The carbonatite plug may or may not be exposed. Alkalic rocks are generally common around carbonatite complexes. A halo of fenites generally surrounds the entire complex, as well as the cone sheets and the ring dikes. Fenites are the products of fenitization, a distinctive alteration typically associated with carbonatite and alkalic complexes. This is the classic model for the emplacement of a carbonatite complex and includes examples such as Fen, Norway; Alnö, Sweden; and Magnet Cove, Arkansas (Heinrich, 1966). Carbonatites may also occur as dikes, stockworks, or sills, and be associated with alkalic complexes (McClure Mountain, Colorado; Heinrich, 1966). Rare occurrences of carbonatite dikes and sills without any associated alkalic rocks have also been found (Ravalli County, Montana, and Verity, British Columbia; Heinrich, 1966).

In thin section, many carbonatites can be differentiated as to primary magmatic and replacement carbonatites (Armbrustmacher, 1979). Texture and mineralogy are the primary criteria for this differentiation (Armbrustmacher, 1979). Primary magmatic carbonatites exhibit igneous textures, either hypidiomorphic-granular or porphyritic. Replacement carbonatites are characterized by fine- to coarse-grained carbonate that partially or completely replaced relict phenocrysts of feldspar, pyroxenes, and amphiboles and thus preserved the original texture of the rock. Apatite is generally more abundant in primary magmatic carbonatites, but magnetite is more abundant in replacement carbonatites. Other

minerals are more likely to be present in one or the other type, and Armbrustmacher (1979) includes a table listing minerals found in both primary magmatic and replacement carbonatites

The occurrence of carbonatite dikes in the Precambrian rocks of the Lemitar Mountains (7 mi northwest of Socorro, New Mexico) has been confirmed. Since the 1950's a controversy has existed as to the nature of these calcareous dikes. Several geologists have called these dikes carbonatites; others have called them altered lamprophyres or basaltic dikes. Mineralogic and chemical studies indicate that these dikes are carbonatites; they consist of > 50% carbonate minerals and display the chemistry and accessory minerals characteristic of such rocks. The Lemitar carbonatites occur as dike swarms and are not associated with any alkalic rocks, providing another example of this rare occurrence without any associated alkalic rocks. The exact age of the Lemitar carbonatites is unknown; however, Pennsylvanian and Tertiary faults have offset the dikes, indicating a pre-Pennsylvanian age.

The economic potential of the carbonatites in the Lemitar Mountains encouraged the New Mexico Bureau of Mines to undertake more detailed studies of the Lemitar carbonatites. This work was undertaken as part of a master's thesis that includes more detailed information on the geology and geochemistry of the area (McLemore, 1980). Highly radioactive carbonatites (100 times background) occur in secs. 6 and 7, T.2 S., R.1W. (fig. 1). Two of these highly radioactive samples were analyzed and found to contain 0.08 and 0.06% U₃O₈ (Christopher Rautman, personal communication, August 1979). Eight carbonatite samples collected by the author for this study were analyzed and found to range from 0.0011 to 0.0045% U₃O₈.

Geologic setting

The Precambrian rocks of the Lemitar Mountains consist of a sequence of metamorphosed and recrystallized sediments: the Corkscrew Canyon sequence, intruded sequentially by mafic dikes; a diorite/gabbro body; granitic rocks; and carbonatite dikes (fig. 1). The Corkscrew Canyon sequence is divided into a lower unit composed of massive arkose to sub-

arkose and an upper unit composed of interbedded and foliated arkoses, subarkoses, and quartzites. The diorite/gabbro is a lithologically heterogeneous unit ranging in composition from gabbro and diorite to quartz gabbro and quartz diorite. Granitic rocks include a gneissic granite, a muscovite-biotite granite, a biotite granite, and the Polvadera granite. Mafic dikes, pegmatites, and quartz veins intrude all of the Precambrian rocks except the carbonatites.

Calcareous basic dikes that intrude the Precambrian rocks of the Lemitar Mountains were originally reported by Stroud and Collins (1954) and Anderson (1954, 1957). These dikes are distinct texturally, mineralogically, and geochemically from all other intrusive rocks of the area. Geologic, petrographic, mineralogic, and geochemical studies indicate that these calcareous basic dikes are carbonatites.

Description of carbonatite dikes

The carbonatite dikes strike dominantly north-south and east-west, dip steeply, and crosscut the entire exposed Precambrian sequence. The dikes range in thickness from a few centimeters to a few meters. Most dike exposures are presently discontinuous due to erosion and faulting; however, a few dikes can be traced for several hundred meters along strike. Flow structure or banding commonly parallels the contacts of the dikes. The dikes appear not to form any circular or elliptical patterns on a geologic map (fig. 1), suggesting that the carbonatite fluids followed preexisting fracture zones in the Precambrian rocks. The carbonatite fluids commonly followed earlier mafic dikes, partially or completely replacing them.

Petrologic variability is characteristic of the Lemitar carbonatites. Their mineralogy is shown in table 1. However, despite their variability, the Lemitar carbonatites can be subdivided as:

- 1) xenolith-bearing dikes (breccia and
- microbreccia dikes) and 2) xenolith-free dikes.

The xenolith-bearing breccia and microbreccia carbonatite dikes are light to medium gray, weathering to a medium- to dark-brown. The dikes consist of 10-40% xenoliths and >60% matrix consisting of carbonate (50-70%), biotite/phlogopite (5-15%), magnetite (5-10%), apatite (5-10%), feldspar (>2%), and trace amounts of fluorite. quartz, and chlorite. The xenoliths vary in size from a few millimeters to a meter across and include fragments of the host rock: foliated granite, foliated arkoses, quartzites, gray and green schists, phyllites, and red granitic 15



FIGURE 1—PRECAMBRIAN GEOLOGY OF THE LEMITAR MOUNTAINS.

fenites. Bastnaesite has been identified by xray diffraction methods in a dike occurring in the northwest corner of sec. 7 (McLemore, 1980).

Xenolith-free carbonatite dikes can be further grouped according to mineralogical composition:

a) calcite-dolomite carbonatite dikes andb) ankeritic carbonatite dikes.

Calcite-dolomite carbonatite dikes are fine grained, light to medium gray, weathering to a brownish gray. These carbonatite dikes consist of carbonate (50-90%), magnetite (5-15%), biotite/phlogopite (5-15%), and apatite (0-10%). The ankeritic carbonatite dikes are light brown with a mineralogic composition of ankerite/dolomite (50-90%) and varying amounts of calcite, barite, hematite, and magnetite. These dikes generally crosscut the calcite-dolomite carbonatite dikes.

An additional minor variety of thin, lightbrown dikelets and veins of barite, calcite, dolomite, ankerite, and hematite fill the fractures in the Polvadera granite and form a $\Box \Rightarrow$

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p. 56
p. 59
p.62

COMING SOON:

Barite on White Sands Missile Range ERTS photomosaic map of New Mexico Storrie Lake State Park



TABLE 1-MINERALOGY OF LEMITAR CARBONATITES BY WHOLE-ROCK X-RAY DIFFRACTION.

	305*	427a*	427b*	500*	506†	530†	531a°	531b°
Mineral					_			
biotite	х	х	х	х	х	х		
chlorite	х	х	х		х	х		
quartz	х	х	х	х	х	х	х	х
fluorite	х	х		х	х	х	x	
calcite	х	х	х	x	х	х	х	х
dolomite	х	х	х	х	х	х		
ankerite						х	х	х
apatite	х	х	Х	x	х	х		
magnetite	х	х	х	х	х	х		
barite			х		х	х	х	
bastnaesite				х				

x-present

*-xenolith-bearing carbonatite dikes

†-xenolith-free calcite-dolomite dikes

°—xenolith-free ankerite dikes

stockwork pattern. Carbonatite fluids apparently intruded the granite and followed preexisting fractures or shatter zones. Original granitic textures and minerals are typically preserved in thin section. The stockwork carbonatites are rarely associated with xenolithfree carbonatite dikes.

The xenolith-bearing carbonatites generally are primary magmatic; primary hypidiomorphic-granular or porphyritic textures are present in thin section. The xenolith-free carbonatites are generally replacement carbonatites, although some xenolith-free primary magmatic carbonatites are found. Relict porphyritic or subophitic textures are preserved in thin sections of replacement carbonatites where carbonate minerals have replaced the original phenocrysts. Apatite is more abundant in the primary magmatic carbonatites, but magnetite is more abundant in the replacement carbonatites; however, both minerals may be present in either type.

Chemistry

A representative suite of samples from the various carbonatite dikes was analyzed for major and minor elements (tables 2 and 3). More detailed analyses that will include rareearth elements are presently being undertaken.

The chemistry of the Lemitar carbonatites is quite different from the chemistry of Pettijohn's (1957) average limestone (table 2). The Lemitar carbonatites are higher in TiO₂, Fe₂O₃, and P₂O₅ than the average limestone. The Lemitar carbonatites are higher in Ni, Cu, Co, and Cr than Gold's average limestone (table 3). This lack of similarity in chemical composition suggests that the Lemitar carbonatites were probably not derived from remobilization of limestones. Experimental data from carbonatites similar in composition to the Lemitar carbonatites also support this conclusion (Heinrich, 1966).

The Lemitar carbonatites have chemistries similar to Heinrich's (1966) average carbonatite (tables 2 and 3). Some differences exist but can be attributed to variations in mineralogy. The presence of ankerite would account for the higher iron contents, and the absence of apatite in the ankeritic carbonatites would account for lower P_2O_3 contents. The presence of barite would account for the higher Ba contents, and the abundance of magnetite would account for the higher Ni, Co, and Cr.

Alteration

A distinctive alkali metasomatic alteration, termed fenitization, has occurred adjacent to some carbonatite dikes that intrude the diorite/gabbro. This fenitization is primarily characterized by the development of a thin zone that contains large, orange-pink albite phenocrysts. Phenocrysts in the unaltered diorite/gabbro are white andesine and labradorite. The reddish color of the altered plagioclases is common to other occurrences of carbonatites and is thought to be produced by the

TABLE 2—CHEMICAL ANALYSES OF LEMITAR CARBONATITES.

	1	2	3	4	5
SiO2	13.87	24.16	3.40	10.30	5.19
TiO2	0.48	1.78	0.28	0.73	0.06
$A1_2O_3$	2.88	4.95	0.50	3.29	0.81
Fe ₂ O ₃	3.39	7.68	3.04	3.46	0.54
FeO	4.80	6.87	11.75	3.60	
MgO	9.56	6.80	7.05	5.79	7.89
CaO	29.9	17.2	28.7	36.1	42.57
Na₂O	0.37	0.75	0.01	0.42	0.05
K ₂ O	0.63	1.51	0.10	1.36	0.33
MnO	0.64	0.35	0.48	0.68	_
P_2O_5	3.44	1.32	0.06	2.09	0.04
CO2	26.77	17.77	35.80	28.52	41.54
TOTAL	96.73	91.14	95.56	91.17	99.02

1-average xenolith-bearing carbonatite,

Lemitar Mountains

2-average xenolith-free calcite-dolomite carbonatite, Lemitar Mountains

-average xenolith-free ankeritic carbonatite,

Lemitar Mountains

4—average carbonatite (Heinrich, 1966) 5—average limestone (Pettijohn, 1957)

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Analyses are reported in weight %.

oxidation and exsolution of iron molecules originally within the feldspar lattice (Von Eckermann, 1948, p. 29). Oxidation is believed to be a result of the degassing of carbon dioxide from the carbonatite intrusive.

The change in plagioclase composition and other chemical differences between unaltered and altered diorite/gabbro reflect an increase in sodium with increase in fenitization (McLemore, 1980). This sodium increase is consistent with chemical trends during fenitization noted from other occurrences of carbonatites (Verwoerd, 1966; Currie and Ferguson, 1972; Robins and Tysseland, 1979).

Discussion

The carbonatite dikes were emplaced probably at a great distance (laterally or vertically) from the source, as evidenced by:

- 1) the lack of any radial or conical pat-
- terns in the dike outcrop and 2) the lack of fenitized haloes about all of
- the dikes.

The lack of any radial or conical patterns in the dike outcrop in the Lemitar Mountains suggests that a carbonatite magma intruded the crust at depth beneath the present erosion surface. Carbonatite fluids apparently followed preexisting Precambrian fractures and zones of weakness in the crust (forming the present outcrop pattern). The lack of any carbonatites in the southern area (sec. 18, T. 2 S., R. 1 W.) may suggest that the carbonatite source is centered farther north in secs. 6 and 7, T. 2 S., R. 1 W.

The lack of fenitized haloes about most of the carbonatite dikes also suggests that the carbonatites were emplaced at a distance from the source. Fenitization is poorly developed in the Lemitar Mountains, partially because the carbonatite dikes were emplaced at a temperature too low to initiate fenitization in the host rock. Lower temperatures and pressures would be expected if the carbonatites were emplaced at a great distance from their source.

Only one other occurrence of carbonatites is reported from New Mexico and is located in the Monte Largo area, Bernalillo County (Lambert, 1961). This carbonatite is a massive dolomitic carbonatite dike with apatite, magnetite, and mica and is associated with a melteigite sill (alkalic rock containing >50%nepheline). Other occurrences of Precambrian alkalic rocks in New Mexico that have no reported carbonatites include the Pajarito Mountain syenite (1,120 m.y., Kelley, 1968); a syenite facies of the Priest pluton in the Manzano Mountains (1,470 m.y., Stark, 1956, Bolton, 1976); and the Florida Mountain syenite (420-700 m.y., Brookins, 1974). Seven small bodies of syenite intruded by Precambrian granite occur in the Burro Mountains (Gillerman and Whitebread, 1956). Precambrian radioactive syenite dikes, resembling fenites in the Wet Mountains, Colorado, have been reported from the southern Caballo Mountains (Staatz and others, 1965). Carbonatites are associated with the alkalic complexes in southern Colorado (Heinrich, 1966) 1.P

TABLE 3-TRACE-ELEMENT CHEMISTRY OF LEMITAR CARBONATITES.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Ва	1,294	2,490	2,155	450-1,120	830	1,000		5,300	15,000
Sr	297	355	130		3,200	3,000		880	3,200
Ni	44	286	59	8	85		20	200	51
Cu	13	63	13	2.5	51		4	39	43
Co	36	64	54	17	nil		0.1	470	110
Cr	16	231	15	48	nil-13		11	470	110
Li	36	40	7		8				
Zn	133	275	527		109				
U	8.7	8.4	4.7			40		5	26

1-average xenolith-bearing carbonatite, Lemitar Mountains

2-average xenolith-free calcite-dolomite carbonatite, Lemitar Mountains

3-average xenolith-free ankeritic carbonatite, Lemitar Mountains

4-average carbonatite (Heinrich, 1966)

5-average of 4 sovites, Sokli, Finland (Vartiainen and Woolley, 1976)

6-carbonatite, Magnet Cove, Arkansas (Erickson and Blade, 1963)

7—average limestone (Gold, 1963)

8-primary magmatic carbonatites, Wet Mountains, Colorado (Armbrustmacher, 1979)

9-replacement carbonatites, Wet Mountains, Colorado (Armbrustmacher, 1979)

Analyses are reported in parts per million (ppm).

and are approximately 520 m.y. old (Olson and others, 1977). This evidence suggests that the Lemitar carbonatites may have been emplaced between 1,400 m.y. and 420 m.y. ago, after the emplacement of the Polvadera granite.

The Lemitar carbonatites are similar in chemistry and mineralogy to the carbonatites in Wet Mountains, Colorado (Armbrustmacher, 1979; McLemore, 1980). Carbon and oxygen isotopic studies in the Wet Mountains, Colorado, carbonatite complex clearly indicate that those carbonatites are from a deepseated source (Armbrustmacher, 1979). Other carbon, oxygen, sulfur, and strontium isotope studies from throughout the world also indicate a deep-seated or upper-mantle source for carbonatites (Hayatsu and others, 1965; Powell and others, 1966; Heinrich, 1966; Taylor and others, 1967; Suwa and others, 1975; Mitchell and Krouse, 1975). The Lemitar carbonatites are probably also derived from a deep-seated or upper-mantle source. The Lemitar carbonatites may be derived from a mafic source that gave rise to the mafic dikes and the diorite/gabbro, although preliminary geochemical studies appear not to exhibit any genetic relationships. An extensive geochemical and isotopic study of these rocks would have to be undertaken before constraints can be placed on the composition of the source.

Experimental evidence confirms that melts with a variety of compositions can produce the wide variance in mineralogy and chemistry seen in carbonatites similar to those found in the Lemitar Mountains (Heinrich, 1966; Wyllie, 1966; Watkinson and Wyllie, 1971). The evidence suggests that carbonatites similar in composition to those in the Lemitar Mountains may have been emplaced at temperatures of 450°-600° C and pressures ranging from 1-1000 bars (Heinrich, 1966).

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