

The University of Manitoba

SULPHUR ISOTOPE AND TRACE ELEMENT GEOCHEMISTRY
OF SULPHIDE MINERALISATION IN THE
BIRCH-UCHI GREENSTONE BELT, NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

by

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A Thesis

*Presented to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy*

Department of Earth Sciences

Winnipeg, Manitoba

October, 1973



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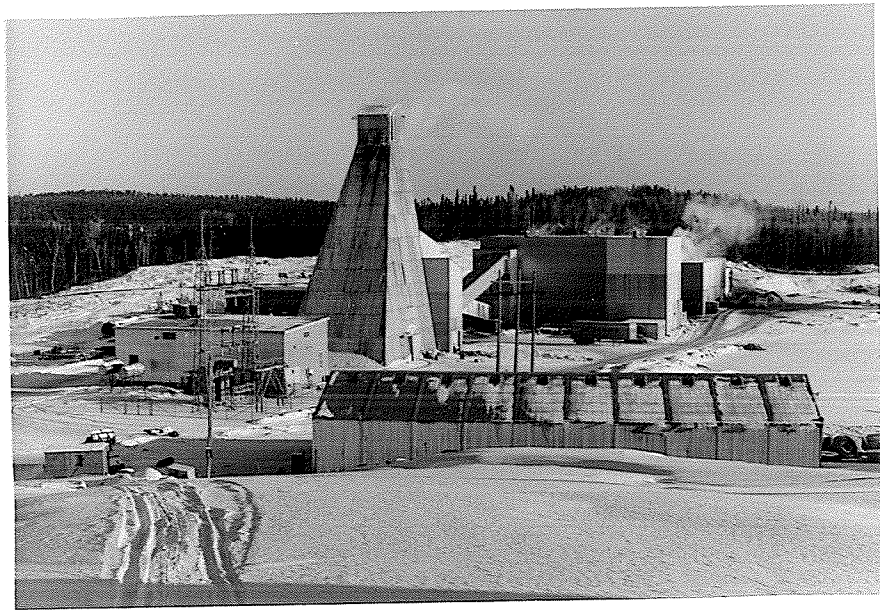
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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South Bay Mines, Confederation Lake

ABSTRACT

Sulphur isotope and trace element data are presented for sulphides from the South Bay Mines (Uchi) massive pyrite-sphalerite-chalcopyrite orebodies and sub-economic and barren sulphide mineralisation in the Archean Birch-Uchi metavolcanic-metasedimentary belt of northwestern Ontario.

δS^{34} values of ore sulphides from South Bay Mines exhibit a narrow (2 permil) range and proximity to zero permil. A statistical study indicates that the South Bay ore sulphides are similar to sub-economic sulphides in host rocks of comparable acid volcanic lithology. Sulphides from other prospect areas demonstrate a broad (greater than 6 permil) spread in isotopic values, and averages generally removed from, and commonly lighter, than zero permil. Isotopic temperatures obtained for co-existing sulphides from a number of areas indicate equilibration temperatures in the range 250°C to 350°C.

The trace metals, Ag, Sn, and Cd, and to a lesser extent, high In and high, but variable Co:Ni ratios characterise both the ore association and several of the sub-economic deposits. Excellent representation of ore affinity is obtained from selected plots of sulphide δS^{34} values and major and trace metal content. A general trend

towards S³⁴ depletion corresponding to a decrease in host rock silica content is interpreted as evidence of a sulphide-host rock relationship and the operation of a magmatic isotopic fractionation effect.

Chemical studies of wallrock from the South Bay deposit indicate migration and anomalous values for all major elements and analysed metals in the vicinity of the orebodies. Chemical and mineralogical changes show a spatial relationship to ore and are considered to represent superimposed features.

The bulk of the sulphur from all areas is volcanogenic and of an isotopic composition related to the chemical composition of the parent magma. Sulphides from the barren prospect areas, although they may have suffered minor remobilising effects due to subsequent metamorphism, are believed to have formed syngenetically as volcanic exhalative accumulations. The ores, and sulphides of sub-economic prospect areas showing similar isotopic distributions, represent epigenetic hydrothermal deposits that contain sulphur and ore metals of remobilised volcanogenic origin. At South Bay, ore deposition took place under the influence of a falling temperature gradient in a region of structural control. Incorporation and partial re-equilibration of syngenetic pyrite from the volcanic wallrocks accompanied ore emplacement.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is especially grateful to Professor G.S. Clark of the University of Manitoba for much helpful guidance and discussion during the course of the study. Special thanks are extended to Professor H.D.B. Wilson of the University of Manitoba who was instrumental in arranging the project and who provided valuable criticism in the preparation of the manuscript.

The cooperation and hospitality extended by officials of Selco Mining Corporation and South Bay Mines Limited, in particular G.D. Pollock, J.S. Auston and J.C. Gibson is gratefully acknowledged. Dr. Pollock's suggestions for revising the thesis are appreciated.

Thanks are due to Professor R.H. Betts and the Department of Chemistry, University of Manitoba for the use of spectrometer facilities. The author is grateful for the assistance of Department of Chemistry personnel, W. Buchannon, in performing the isotope ratio determinations, and H. Griffiths for the manufacture and maintenance of vacuum equipment. The additional assistance of Professor Betts in the derivation of spectrometry correction factors is appreciated.

Jan Monster of McMaster University and

Dr.M.L. Jensen of the University of Utah kindly provided isotopic standards and offered helpful advice during development of the SO₂ extraction procedure.

Mr. K. Ramlal and staff of the Department of Earth Sciences Analytical Laboratory are acknowledged for chemical analyses, Miss I. Berta prepared thin and polished sections and Mr. R. Pryhitko and Miss W. Wilson were responsible for much valuable photography and drafting.

A special word of thanks is due to my wife, Margaret, for typing assistance and continued encouragement throughout the duration of the study.

The investigation was made possible by the provision of a University of Manitoba Fellowship and National Research Council of Canada Funding.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the period since 1949, following publication of the fundamental work of Thode, Macnamara and Collins, studies of the distribution of sulphur isotopes in natural environments have become increasingly important. An upsurge in the application of the method commenced just over a decade ago as a result of a re-evaluation of the capabilities of the technique and the development of new high-precision instrumentation, and sulphur isotope studies are now commonplace adjuncts to investigations in the field of sulphide ore genesis.

Many studies relate to individual deposits, and a number are directed towards the correlation of isotope distribution patterns of genetically similar deposits, however, a detailed regional comparison has not been made previously between an economic ore deposit and bodies of low-grade or barren mineralisation existing within a similar geological environment.

This study then was designed to investigate the distribution of sulphur isotope values from sulphide showings throughout a major portion of the Birch-Uchi greenstone belt of northwestern Ontario; a typical greenstone belt in an