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Depositional Complexities in Sea-Ice Environment of Arctic Shelves: Example from Harrison Bay, Alaska

Harrison Bay, a gently sloping, shallow embayment on the continental shelf of northern Alaska near the Colville delta, is ice covered 9 months of the year. The 3 to 5-m Holocene marine sediment blanketing the shelf commonly is gouged into jagged relief forms by ice, and periodically winnowed or shaped into 1-m high sand waves by waves and currents. Yearly fathometer and sidescan sonar surveys, many diving observations, and numerous cores collected along a 14-km long test line show a complex sedimentation pattern, apparently typical for much of the shallow circum-Arctic shelves.

Ice-plowed sediments piled 20 to 80 cm above the shelf surface form a rough topography composed of soft cohesive mud. Locally the excavation products border gouges as continuous ridges; elsewhere they form isolated massive extrusion mounds with fissured crests. In some years a transient layer, as thick as 50 cm of flocculated silt and clay, blankets the surface, and only the crests of excavation products protrude. This transient layer remains trapped only in narrow gouges, where as much as 60 cm of mud may accumulate yearly. Original gouge floors commonly consist of smoothly striated compacted mud, as distinguished from the soft fill. The sea floor between recent gouges has subdued relief, is very firm, and is characterized by sediment-texture variations from clean sand to silty clay over distances of 10 m or less; pebbles are rare. Cores typically contain clean cross-bedded sand interbedded with mottled mud in 10 to 20-cm thick lenses, as well as ice-disruption structures. Distinct layers in closely spaced cores cannot be correlated. The addition of gouge fill—sinuous, crisscrossing shoestring-like deposits of mud—appears to be the primary accretional process on shallow arctic shelves.

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Significance of Shallow Gas in Ancient Marine Sequences

Shallow, methane-rich gas is generated at low temperatures by decomposition of organic matter by anaerobic microorganisms in accumulating marine sediments, and is referred to as biogenic gas. The most efficient biologic mechanism of methane generation is anaerobic respiration and CO₂ reduction. The factors that control methane production after sediment burial are: anoxic and sulfate-deficient environments, low temperature, availability of organic matter, and sufficient pore space. The timing of these factors is such that most biogenic gas is generated prior to burial depths of 1,000 m. Biogenic gas is characterized by enrichment of the light isotope ¹²C in the methane ($\delta^{13}\text{C}_1$ lighter than -55 ppt) and by large proportions of methane (C₁/C₁₋₅ > 0.98).

In marine sediments most of the biogenic gas formed is retained in solution in the interstitial (pore) waters. This can be attributed to higher methane solubility at the higher hydrostatic pressures and lower temperatures due to the weight of the overlying column of cool seawater. This dissolution capacity permits accumulation of gas in nonindurated sediments while they are being compacted, and while traps and seals are being formed. Free gas occurs either when the solubility minimum is exceeded, or by exsolution brought about by a reduction in hydrostatic pressure or an increase in temperature. Possible trapping and sealing mechanisms are as follows: early carbonate cementation in zones of high CO₃²⁻ activity resulting from reduction of CO₂, low-permeability reservoirs, bentonites, gas hydrates, and subnormal pressures.

More than 20% of the world's discovered gas reserves are of biogenic origin and commonly are associated with marine sequences. Accumulations of ancient biogenic gas have been discovered in Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Trinidad, U.S.A., and U.S.S.R. The accumulations occur in Cretaceous and younger rocks and at depths of burial less than 3,350 m.

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Oblique Dunes of Oregon Coast

The oblique dunes of the Oregon coast are the largest (as high as 55 m) on the west coast of the United States. Where best developed, these perennial ridges have been migrating northeastward at an average rate of 4.4 m/year, as measured from aerial photographs dating from 1939 to 1975. The wind regime of the area can be characterized as obtuse bimodal, with sand-transporting winds from the north and northwest throughout the dry summers and between storms at other seasons, and from the south and southwest during fall, winter, and spring storms. Although the sand-transporting capacity of the southerly winds is reduced by accompanying rainfall, these winds are nevertheless strong enough to do more work than the northerly winds.

Dune processes during the winter season of southerly storms include: (a) erosional smoothing of the south (stoss) slope; (b) erosion and formation of sawtooth remnants (yardangs) on the dune crest; (c) deposition by adhesion on the wet, low-angle north slope between the dune crest and the slip-face brink; (d) grainfall deposition on the west slip face, causing steepening to angles of 44° or more, followed by slumping; (e) local deposition by adhesion in wet interdune troughs; and (f) local subaqueous deposition in ephemeral interdune ponds and streams. Dune processes during the summer season of northerly winds include: (a) growth of small southeast-facing transverse dunes at the crests and on the south slopes of the oblique dunes, and in troughs between the oblique dunes; (b) plastering of wind-rippled sand sheets against the base of the winter slip face, leading to the formation of a gently north-sloping apron; and (c) erosion of the upper part of the winter slip face, reducing the slope angle to 25° or less.

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Geologic Hazards and Constraints, Federal Oil and Gas Lease Sale 53 Area, Offshore Central and Northern California

Studies have been completed to assess potential geologic hazards and constraints which could adversely affect safe petroleum resource development in offshore areas of central and northern California. The study includes 243 tracts tentatively selected for the proposed federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Lease Sale 53. Geologic hazards and constraints are identified in five offshore areas of central and northern California: Santa Maria, Santa Cruz, Bodega, Point Arena, and Eel River. A total of 10,500 line-km of high-resolution data was collected on a 1.0 × 2.0-km grid over the five areas.

Geologic hazards are defined for this study as any geologic feature or process that would inhibit the safe development of petroleum resources. Geologic hazards present on the central and northern California continental margins are: (1) mass movement of unconsolidated to semiconsolidated sediments due to earthquakes, overloading, oversteepening, or other