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GEOLOGY OF THE ANDERSON MESA  
QUADRANGLE, COLORADO

By Fred W. Cater, Jr.,  
with a section on "The Mines" by C. F. Withington

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Trace Elements Memorandum Report 690

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Dr. Phillip L. Merritt, Assistant Director  
Division of Raw Materials  
U. S. Atomic Energy Commission  
P. O. Box 30, Ansonia Station  
New York 23, New York

Dear Phil:

Transmitted herewith is one copy of TEM-690, "Geology of the Anderson Mesa quadrangle, Colorado," by Fred W. Cater, Jr., with a section on "The Mines" by C. F. Withington, July 1953.

We are asking Mr. Hosted to approve our plan to publish this report in the Survey's Quadrangle Map Series.

Sincerely yours,

*Andrew Brown*

W. H. Bradley  
Chief Geologist



FEB 1 1954

Geology and Mineralogy

This document consists of 34 pages,  
plus 1 figure.  
Series A

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

GEOLOGY OF THE ANDERSON MESA QUADRANGLE, COLORADO\*

By

Fred. W. Cater, Jr.,

with a section on "The Mines" by

C. F. Withington

July 1953

Trace Elements Memorandum Report 690

This preliminary report is distributed without editorial and technical review for conformity with official standards and nomenclature. It is not for public inspection or quotation.

\*This report concerns work done partly on behalf of the Division of Raw Materials of the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission.

## USGS - TEM-690

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## GEOLOGY OF THE ANDERSON MESA QUADRANGLE, COLORADO

by Fred W. Cater, Jr., with a section on  
"The Mines" by C. F. Withington

## ABSTRACT

The Anderson Mesa quadrangle is one of eighteen  $7\frac{1}{2}$ -minute quadrangles covering the principal carnotite-producing area of southwestern Colorado. The geology of these quadrangles was mapped by the U. S. Geological Survey for the Atomic Energy Commission as part of a comprehensive study of carnotite deposits. The rocks exposed in the eighteen quadrangles consist of crystalline rocks of pre-Cambrian age and sedimentary rocks that range in age from late Paleozoic to Quaternary. Over much of the area the sedimentary rocks are flat lying, but in places the rocks are disrupted by high-angle faults, and northwest-trending folds. Conspicuous among the folds are large anticlines having cores of intrusive salt and gypsum.

Most of the carnotite deposits are confined to the Salt Wash sandstone member of the Jurassic Morrison formation. Within this sandstone, most of the deposits are spottily distributed through an arcuate zone known as the "UraVan Mineral Belt". Individual deposits range in size from irregular masses containing only a few tons of ore to large, tabular masses containing many thousands of tons. The ore consists largely of sandstone selectively impregnated and in part replaced by uranium and vanadium minerals. Most of the deposits appear to be related to certain sedimentary structures in sandstones of favorable composition.

## INTRODUCTION

The U. S. Geological Survey mapped the geology of the Anderson Mesa quadrangle, Colo., as part of a comprehensive study of carnotite deposits. The study, covering the principal carnotite-producing area in southwestern Colorado, included detailed examination of mines and geologic mapping of eighteen  $7\frac{1}{2}$ -minute quadrangles, of which Anderson Mesa quadrangle is one. Parts of the texts accompanying these maps have been standardized; these parts comprise some descriptions of geologic formations and general descriptions of regional structural setting, geologic history, and ore deposits. A comprehensive report presenting in greater detail the geologic features of the entire area and interpretations of these features is in preparation. Work was started in the area in 1939 as a cooperative project with the State of Colorado and the Colorado Metal Mining Fund, and was continued through 1945 as a wartime strategic minerals project. Since 1947 the Geological Survey has been continuing this geologic study on behalf of the Division of Raw Materials of the Atomic Energy Commission. Most of the Anderson Mesa quadrangle was mapped in 1945; the rest was mapped and some of the earlier mapping was revised in 1951.

The Anderson Mesa quadrangle covers about 59 square miles in Montrose and San Miguel Counties, Colo., and lies in the Canyon Lands division of the Colorado Plateau physiographic province. The quadrangle is a rugged area of mesas and canyons. Total relief within the quadrangle is about 2,160 feet; altitudes range from about 5,020 feet in the canyon of the Dolores River to 7,180 feet on Island Mesa. The Dolores River and its tributaries drain the quadrangle.

No accurate information on rainfall is available, but the annual precipitation is probably between 10 and 15 inches; the area is semiarid and supports a moderate growth of juniper and piñon on rocky terrain and abundant sagebrush where soils are thick. Cacti and sparse grass are widely distributed. Most of the quadrangle is accessible over a system of dry-weather roads.

### REGIONAL GEOLOGY

Rocks exposed in the 18 quadrangles mapped consist of crystalline pre-Cambrian rocks and sedimentary rocks that range in age from late Paleozoic to Quaternary. Crystalline rocks crop out only in the northeastern part of the area along the flanks of the Uncompahgre Plateau; the rest of the area is underlain by sedimentary rocks. The latest Paleozoic and earliest Mesozoic units wedge out northeastward against the crystalline pre-Cambrian rocks, but later Mesozoic beds were deposited on top of the pre-Cambrian rocks. Over most of the region the sedimentary rocks are flat-lying, but in places they are disrupted by high-angle faults or folded into northwest-trending monoclines, shallow synclines, and strongly developed anticlines. The largest of the folds is the Uncompahgre Plateau uplift, a fold nearly 100 miles long that traverses the northeastern part of the area. Well developed anticlines having intrusive cores of salt and gypsum underlie Sinbad Valley, Paradox Valley, and Gypsum Valley in the central part of the area; the Dolores anticline in the southwestern part of the area probably has a salt-gypsum core, although it is not exposed.

The Anderson Mesa quadrangle lies in the west-central part of the area, about 20 miles southwest of the Uncompahgre Plateau. The center of the quadrangle is traversed by the northwest end of Gypsum Valley known as Little Gypsum Valley.

#### STRATIGRAPHY

The oldest rocks exposed in the quadrangle are the rocks of early Pennsylvanian age in Little Gypsum Valley. Rocks of late Pennsylvanian crop out along the northeast edge of the valley, but rocks of Permian and Early Triassic age are cut out low on the flanks of the Gypsum Valley anticline and do not crop out. Upper Triassic rocks are exposed both in the valley and along the canyon of the Dolores River. Jurassic rocks are widespread and crop out in the canyon walls and on the benches and mesas. Rocks of Cretaceous age cap the mesas and crop out in the center of the downwarp in Little Gypsum Valley. Recent deposits of wind-blown material and sheet wash are widely distributed on top of the mesas, along the benches, and on the valley floors.

The stratigraphic sequence is similar to that studied by Baker (1933) and Dane (1935) in nearby areas in Utah; most of the formations can be traced continuously from the Anderson Mesa quadrangle into Utah.

### Hermosa formation

The Pennsylvanian Hermosa formation comprises two members in this area; these are the lower or Paradox member consisting largely of intrusive salt and gypsum, and the upper or limestone member.

#### Paradox member

The Paradox member, where exposed, consists largely of cellular and earthy gypsum and minor amounts of limestone, sandstone, and black shale. At depth more than half the member is rock salt. All known exposures of the Paradox are intrusive, and the beds are complexly folded and contorted. The true undisturbed thickness of the member is not known, but a well drilled in the Paradox Valley anticline penetrated over 10,800 feet of Paradox without reaching the base, and there is little reason to believe the salt-gypsum core of the Gypsum Valley anticline is appreciably thinner. Baker (1933, p. 17-18) and Dane (1935, p. 27-29) assigned Paradox beds to the lower Pennsylvanian.

#### Limestone member

Presumably the upper or limestone member of the Hermosa formation conformably overlies the Paradox member. The upper member consists very largely of fossiliferous thick-bedded gray limestone, although thin shale beds occur. Data from bore-holes in nearby areas indicated the member is 2,000 to 2,300 feet thick. The member is probably upper Pennsylvanian.

### Chinle formation

The Upper Triassic Chinle formation consists of red to orange-red siltstone, with interbedded red fine-grained sandstone, shale, and limestone-pebble and mud-pellet conglomerate. These lithologic units are lenticular and discontinuous. The lower part of the formation contains numerous lenses of a highly distinctive limestone-pebble and mud-pellet conglomerate; in places the lowermost lenses contain quartz pebbles or consist of a relatively clean quartz grit. These quartz-bearing lenses are probably the stratigraphic equivalent of the Shinarump conglomerate, which is widely distributed in eastern Utah and northern Arizona. Much of the Chinle formation consists of indistinctly bedded red siltstone that breaks into angular fragments. Evenly bedded shale is rare. The sandstone layers differ in bedding characteristics; some layers are massive, whereas others are cross-bedded, and still others are conspicuously ripple-bedded. Almost everywhere the formation crops out as a steep slope broken in places by more resistant ledges of sandstone and conglomerate.

The normal thickness of the formation, as projected from adjoining quadrangles, probably ranges from 475 feet to 525 feet; it thins abruptly on the flanks of the Gypsum Valley anticline.

### Glen Canyon group

The Glen Canyon group, of Jurassic (?) age, comprises, in ascending order, the Wingate sandstone, the Kayenta formation, and the Navajo sandstone.

### Wingate sandstone

The Wingate sandstone conformably overlies the Chinle formation. The sandstone is a massive, fine-grained rock composed of clean, well-sorted quartz sand. It typically crops out as an impressive red, dark-brown wall, stained and streaked in places with a surficial red and black desert varnish. Vertical joints cut the sandstone from top to bottom; the spalling of vertically jointed slabs largely causes the recession of the cliff. The sandstone is divided into horizontal layers by extensive bedding planes spaced 2 to 50 feet apart. Within each horizontal layer the sandstone is cross-bedded on a magnificent scale; great sweeping tangential cross-beds of eolian type, in places extending across the entire thickness of the horizontal layer, are disposed in all directions. The sandstone is poorly cemented and crumbles easily; this quality probably accounts for the readiness with which the rock disintegrates in faulted areas.

In the Anderson Mesa quadrangle the Wingate sandstone ranges in thickness from 290 to 325 feet, except in Little Gypsum Valley, where it thins to a vanishing edge.

### Kayenta formation

The Kayenta formation conformably overlies the Wingate sandstone; the contact between the two formations is gradational in most places. The formation is notable for its variety of rock types. Sandstone, red, buff, gray and lavender in color, is the most abundant type; but the formation also contains considerable quantities of red siltstone, thin-bedded shale, and conglomerate. The conglomerate contains pebbles of

sandstone, shale, and limestone. The sandstone is composed of rounded to subrounded quartz grains and minor quantities of mica, feldspar, and dark minerals. Most of the sandstone is thin bedded, cross-bedded in part, and flaggy; some is massive. Individual sandstone beds are lenticular and discontinuous and interfinger with shale and, in places, with conglomerate. The Kayenta typically crops out in a series of benches and ledges. The ledges in many places overhang recessions where softer beds have eroded back. The lower part of the formation is more firmly cemented and forms resistant, thick ledges that protect the underlying Wingate sandstone from erosion.

The Kayenta formation in the Anderson Mesa quadrangle ranges in thickness from 190 to 220 feet, except in Little Gypsum Valley, where it wedges out entirely. Abrupt local changes in thickness of 10 to 20 feet are common. The irregular bedding, channel filling, and range of thickness all indicate a fluvial origin.

#### Navajo sandstone

The Navajo sandstone conformably overlies the Kayenta formation. The Navajo is a gray to buff massive fine-grained clean quartz sandstone. Tangential cross-beds of tremendous size leave little doubt of the eolian origin of the sandstone. The sandstone weathers by disintegration and tends to develop rounded topographic forms where exposed on slopes or benches and vertical cliffs where protected by overlying rocks.

The Navajo sandstone ranges in thickness from a maximum of more than 350 feet on the southwest side of Little Gypsum Valley to a knife-edge in the center of the valley. This large range in thickness is attributed to

flowage of salt core of the Gypsum Valley anticline during deposition of the Navajo.

### San Rafael group

In this area the San Rafael group, of Middle and Late Jurassic age, comprises, in ascending order, the Carmel formation, (Middle and Upper Jurassic), the Entrada sandstone, (Upper Jurassic) and the Summerville formation (Upper Jurassic). The group crops out in a narrow band along the canyon walls and on the sides of Little Gypsum Valley. The Carmel formation and the Entrada sandstone were mapped together because in most places they form a narrow outcrop.

#### Carmel formation and Entrada sandstone

The Carmel formation consists largely of red to buff, nonresistant, horizontally bedded siltstone, mudstone, and sandstone. In some localities the basal beds consist of reworked Navajo sandstone. Pebbles and angular fragments of white and gray chert, as much as an inch across, are scattered rather abundantly through the lower part of the formation and less abundantly through the upper part. These chert pebbles and angular fragments are sufficiently abundant locally to form layers of conglomerate. Included in these layers are scattered greenish-gray, red, and yellow quartzitic pebbles and cobbles as large as 5 by 8 inches. In many places the upper part of the formation contains scattered barite nodules as much as an inch across.

The Carmel formation ranges from less than 10 feet to 70 feet in thickness. This large range appears to be due chiefly to deposition on irregular, eroded surfaces of Navajo sandstone or beds of the Kayenta formation. No definite evidence indicates that the Carmel formation of this

area is of marine origin as is the Carmel of central Utah, but the probabilities are that the Carmel of southwestern Colorado was deposited in shallow water marginal to a sea.

The Carmel formation grades upward, in most places without a prominent break, into the Entrada sandstone. The Entrada sandstone, known locally as the "slick rim" because of its appearance, is perhaps the most picturesque of all the formation in the plateau region of Colorado. The smoothly rounded, in places bulging, orange, buff, and white cliffs formed by this sandstone are a distinctive scenic feature of the region. Horizontal rows of pits resulting from differential weathering and ranging from a few inches to a foot or more across are characteristic of these cliffs. The Entrada consists of alternating horizontally bedded units and sweeping, eolian-type cross-bedded units. The horizontally bedded units are most common in the basal part and in the uppermost, lighter-colored part of the Entrada, whereas the cross-bedded units are dominant in the middle part. The Entrada sandstone differs from the somewhat similar Wingate sandstone and Navajo sandstone by the sorting of sand into two distinct grain sizes. Subrounded to subangular quartz grains mostly less than 0.15 mm in diameter make up the bulk of the sandstone. The sandstone also contains larger grains, which are well-rounded, have frosted surfaces, and range from 0.4 to 0.8 mm in diameter; most of these grains are of quartz, but grains of chert are scattered among them. Most of the larger grains are distributed in thin layers along bedding planes.

The Entrada sandstone is 130 to 150 feet thick, except in Little Gypsum Valley, where it thins to less than 100 feet.

## Summerville formation

The Summerville formation generally crops out as a steep, debris-covered slope, with few good exposures. Where exposed the Summerville exhibits a remarkably even, thin, horizontal bedding. Beds are predominantly red of various shades, although some beds are green, brown, light yellow, or nearly white. Sandy and silty shale are the most abundant kinds of rock but all gradations from claystone to clean, fine-grained sandstone are interbedded with them. Well-rounded amber-colored quartz grains with frosted or matte surfaces are disseminated throughout most of the formation, including beds consisting almost entirely of claystone. Thin beds of autochthonous red and green chert are widespread. A thin discontinuous bed of dark-gray dense fresh-water limestone occurs in the upper part of the formation. Sandstone beds are thicker and sandstone is more abundant in the lower part of the formation than in the upper part. Commonly the sandstone beds are ripple-marked, and in places they show small-scale low-angle cross-bedding.

The Summerville formation rests conformably on the Entrada sandstone, and, although a sharp lithologic change marks the contact, no cessation of deposition separated the two formations. Regionally the upper part of the Entrada and the lower part of the Summerville intertongue, and the contact does not occur everywhere at the same stratigraphic horizon. The upper contact of the Summerville is uneven and channeled, and the channels are filled by the overlying basal sandstones of the Morrison formation. Locally, however, the contact is difficult to determine, because the overlying shale and mudstone of the Morrison formation are similar to beds of the Summerville.

The Summerville formation has a moderately uniform thickness of about 105 feet except where it thins in Little Gypsum Valley.

#### Morrison formation

The Morrison formation of Late Jurassic age is of special interest economically because of the uranium- and vanadium-bearing deposits it contains. The formation comprises two members in this area; the lower is the Salt Wash sandstone member, and the upper is the Brushy Basin shale member. In the Anderson Mesa quadrangle the Morrison formation ranges in thickness from 700 to 800 feet; between Little Gypsum Valley and Silveys Pocket in the vicinity of The Hat the formation thickens abruptly over the salt core of the Gypsum Valley anticline. The Brushy Basin shale member, in general, is somewhat thicker than the Salt Wash. In some areas, however, the thicknesses of the two members vary independently, whereas in other areas a thinning in one member is accompanied by a thickening in the other.

#### Salt Wash sandstone member

The Salt Wash sandstone member ordinarily crops out above the slope-forming Summerville formation as a series of thick, resistant ledges and broad benches. Sandstone predominates and ranges from nearly white to gray, light-buff, and rusty red. Red shale and mudstone and locally a few thin lenses of dense gray limestone are interbedded with the sandstone. Sandstone commonly occurs as strata traceable as ledges for considerable distances along the outcrop, but within each stratum individual beds are lenticular and discontinuous; beds wedge out laterally, and other beds occupying essentially the same stratigraphic position wedge in. Thus, any relatively

continuous sandstone stratum ordinarily consists of numerous interfingering lenses, with superposed lenses in many places filling channels carved in underlying beds. Lenses are separated in places by mudstone and contain mudstone seams. Most of the sandstone is fine- to medium-fine-grained, cross-bedded, and massive; single beds or lenses may attain a maximum thickness of 120 feet. Ripple marks, current lineations, rill marks, and cut-and-fill structures indicate that the Salt Wash member was deposited under fluvial conditions.

The sandstone consists largely of subangular to subrounded quartz grains, but orthoclase, microcline, and albite grains occur in combined amounts of 10 to 15 percent. Chert and heavy-mineral grains are accessory. Considerable quantities of interstitial clay and numerous clay pellets occur in places, especially near the base of some of the sandstone lenses. Fossil wood, carbonaceous matter, and saurian bones occur locally.

The Salt Wash sandstone member ranges from 320 to 360 feet in thickness except in the vicinity of The Hat where it thickens abruptly to nearly 500 feet. Local changes in thickness of as much as 30 feet are common.

#### Brushy Basin shale member

The Brushy Basin shale member contrasts strongly in overall appearance with the underlying Salt Wash sandstone member. Although the lithologic differences are marked, the contact between the two members is gradational. The mapped contact, taken as the base of the lowermost layer of conglomerate lenses, is arbitrary in many respects and probably does not mark an identical stratigraphic horizon in all localities.

The Brushy Basin shale member consists predominantly of varicolored bentonitic shale and mudstone, with intercalated beds and lenses of conglomerate and sandstone, and a few thin layers of limestone. Because of its high proportion of soft, easily eroded bentonitic shale and mudstone, the Brushy Basin member forms smooth slopes covered with blocks and boulders weathered from the more resistant layers of the member and from the overlying formations. The shale and mudstone are thin-bedded and range from pure white to pastel tints of red, blue, and green. Exposed surfaces of the rock are covered with a loose, fluffy layer several inches thick, caused by the swelling of the bentonitic material during periods of wet weather. Scattered through the shale and mudstone are thin beds of fine-grained silicified rock that breaks with a conchoidal fracture. The silica impregnating these beds may have been released during the devitrification of volcanic debris in adjacent beds. Beds of chert-pebble conglomerate, a few inches to 25 feet thick, occur at intervals throughout the member. These conglomerate beds are commonly dark rusty red and form conspicuous resistant ledges. Silicified saurian bones and wood are much more abundant in the Brushy Basin shale member than in the Salt Wash sandstone member, especially in some of the conglomerate beds.

The Brushy Basin shale member, like the Salt Wash sandstone member, undoubtedly was deposited under fluvial conditions. The conglomerate and sandstone lenses mark stream channels that crossed flood plains on which were deposited the fine-grained sediments now represented by the mudstone and shale.

The Brushy Basin shale member ranges from 350 to 500 feet in thickness; erratically distributed local variations in thickness of 20 to 30 feet are common throughout the quadrangle.

#### Burro Canyon formation

The name Burro Canyon formation was proposed by Stokes and Phoenix (1948) for the heterogeneous sequence of Lower Cretaceous conglomerate, sandstone, shale, and thin lenses of limestone that overlies the Morrison formation. The Burro Canyon characteristically crops out as a cliff or a series of thick, resistant ledges. The bulk of the formation consists of white, gray, and red sandstone and conglomerate that form beds as much as 100 feet thick. These beds are massive, irregular, and lenticular. Cross-bedding and festoon-bedding are prevalent throughout the formation. The sandstone is poorly sorted and consists of quartz and lesser amounts of chert. The conglomerate consists largely of chert pebbles, but intermixed are pebbles of quartz, silicified limestone, quartzite, sandstone, and shale. In places beds are highly silicified. A considerable part of the formation consists of bright-green mudstone and shale, and locally these predominate over the sandstone and conglomerate. Thin, discontinuous beds of dense gray limestone crop out in a few scattered localities. The formation was undoubtedly deposited under fluvial conditions. The lower contact is indistinct in many places and appears to interfinger with the upper part of the Brushy Basin shale member; elsewhere local erosion surfaces intervene and the contact is sharp. The upper contact is an erosion surface of regional extent.

The Burro Canyon formation in the Anderson Mesa quadrangle is 220 to 260 feet thick; abrupt local variations of 10 to 30 feet are common.

#### Dakota sandstone

The Dakota sandstone of Early and Late Cretaceous age crops out in the center of the downwarp in Little Gypsum Valley. The Dakota consists principally of gray, yellow, and buff flaggy sandstone; less abundant are conglomerate, carbonaceous shale, and impure coal. Some of the sandstone is fine-grained and thin-bedded, but much of it is coarse-grained and cross-bedded. Scattered through the sandstone are irregular, discontinuous beds and lenses of conglomerate containing chert and quartz pebbles as much as 2 inches across. Interfingering with the sandstone beds are thin-bedded gray and black carbonaceous shales and thin coal seams and beds. Plant impressions abound in both the sandstone and the shale. The total thickness of the Dakota sandstone is not exposed in the quadrangle; the upper beds have been stripped off by erosion; but the beds that remain attain a thickness of nearly 100 feet.

#### Mancos shale

The Upper Cretaceous Mancos shale is a dark-gray soft homogeneous fissile rock that erodes either to smooth, round topographic forms or to badlands. It crops out in the folded and faulted area in the northwest end of Little Gypsum Valley. Only part of the formation is preserved within the quadrangle.

#### Quaternary deposits

The deposits of Quaternary age consist of wind-deposited material, alluvium, talus, and landslides. Extensive deposits of light-red sandy

and silty material mantle the benches and mesa tops. This material appears to be mostly wind-deposited, although much of it has been reworked by water and intermixed with sheet wash. These deposits have not been mapped where they are unusually spotty, discontinuous, or less than a foot thick; the greatest observed thicknesses in some dry washes on mesa tops is about 10 feet. The floor of Little Gypsum Valley is covered with soils that generally differ markedly from the wind-deposited material on the mesas. These valley soils are derived not only from wind-blown material but also from the disintegration of the rocks exposed on the valley walls and floors. A little gravel and alluvium occur in some of the stream beds. Considerable talus covers many of the steeper slopes. Because these various deposits are difficult to differentiate in some places, they have not been separated on the geologic map. Landslides consisting largely of Brushy Basin debris are prominent along the southwest side of Little Gypsum Valley.

## STRUCTURE

### Regional setting

Many geologic structures on the Colorado Plateau are so large that a  $7\frac{1}{2}$ -minute quadrangle covers only a small part of any complete structural unit. The larger structural units consist of salt anticlines, 45 to 80 miles long, uplifted blocks, 50 to 125 miles long, bounded by monoclinial folds; and domical uplifts, 8 to 20 miles across, around stock-like and laccolithic intrusions.

The salt anticlines trend northwest and lie in a group between eastward-dipping monoclines on the west side of the Plateau and westward-dipping monoclines on the east side of the Plateau. The cores of these anticlines

consist of relatively plastic salt and gypsum, derived from the Paradox member of the Pennsylvanian Hermosa formation and intruded into overlying late Paleozoic and early Mesozoic rocks. All the anticlines are structurally similar in many respects, but each exhibits structural peculiarities not common to the rest; furthermore, all are more complex than their seemingly simple forms would suggest. Faults, grabens, and collapse and slump structures alter the forms of the anticlines. Erosion has removed much of the axial parts of these anticlines, leaving exposed large intrusive masses of the Paradox member and forming valleys such as Sinbad Valley, Paradox Valley, and Gypsum Valley in Colorado and similar valleys in Utah. Alternating with these anticlines are broad, shallow, simple synclines.

#### Structure of Anderson Mesa quadrangle

The dominant structural feature of the Anderson Mesa quadrangle is the northwest end of the Gypsum Valley salt anticline. This anticline enters the southeast corner of the quadrangle and trends northwest to the upper end of Little Gypsum Valley, where it turns north and passes into a fault that continues northward for several miles. The crest of the anticline has collapsed, and the collapsed part forms a complexly faulted structural trough. A prominent fault system that coincides with the axis of the collapsed anticline follows the center of Little Gypsum Valley and Silveys Pocket. This fault system probably formed during relaxation of early Tertiary compressive stresses and is the oldest system of faults in the quadrangle. Rocks to the northeast of this fault system have been dropped in places at least 1,000 feet. Other northwesterly trending faults, probably related to later collapse of the anticline, cut the margins of the collapsed area; very likely of the same age are the transverse faults on

the west side of Silvey's Pocket. Undoubtedly much of the collapse was due to removal of salt by ground water; nevertheless it seems likely that a good part of the collapse is the result of flowage of the underlying salt in response to differential pressures.

On the flanks of the anticline dips of the beds are low, and in the vicinity of Skein, Wray, and Island Mesas the rocks are nearly flat-lying.

### Structural history

In order to understand the structural history of the Anderson Mesa quadrangle, it is necessary to understand the structural history of the adjoining part of southwestern Colorado. Parts of this history are still in doubt, because no clear record remains of some events; the record of other events, although legible, is subject to different interpretations. All the events described in the following discussion affected the Anderson Mesa quadrangle either directly or indirectly, although the evidence for some of them is not visible within the boundaries of the quadrangle.

Mild compressive forces, which probably began in early Pennsylvanian times, gently warped the region. This warping gave rise to the ancestral Uncompahgre highland, an element of the ancestral Rocky Mountain, and to the basin in which the Paradox member of the Pennsylvanian Hermosa formation was deposited. These major structural features controlled the pattern and the prevailing northwest-trending grain of the smaller structures later superimposed on them. The boundary between the highland and the basin, which is closely followed by the southwest margin of the present-day Uncompahgre Plateau, was a steep northwest-trending front, possibly

a fault scarp, along which were deposited arkosic fanglomerates during late Pennsylvanian and Permian time. The older fanglomerates interfinger with Pennsylvanian marine sedimentary rocks of the Hermosa formation. The bulk of the fanglomerates probably is of Permian age and belongs to the Cutler formation. Intrusion of salt, from the Paradox member probably initiated by gentle regional deformation, began sometime during deposition of the Permian Cutler formation. Isostatic rise of salt ruptured the overlying Hermosa and Cutler formations, and at the end of Cutler deposition salt broke through to the surface. From then until flowage ceased, late in the Jurassic, the elongate salt intrusions such as those in Paradox Valley and Gypsum Valley stood as actual topographic highs at one place or another along their lengths. The rate of upwelling of additional salt, perhaps accelerated by the increase of the static load of sediments accumulating in the surrounding areas, balanced or slightly exceeded the rate of removal of salt by solution and erosion at the surface. Consequently, all the Mesozoic formations to the base of the Morrison formation wedge out against the flanks of the salt intrusions. Salt flowage was not everywhere continuous or at a uniform rate; rather, in many places it progressed spasmodically. Local surges of comparatively rapid intrusion gave rise to cupolas at different times and in different places along the salt masses. At the beginning of Morrison deposition, sediments finally covered the salt intrusions, perhaps because the supply of salt underlying the areas between the intrusions was exhausted. Relative quiescence prevailed throughout the remainder of the Mesozoic and probably through the early part of the Tertiary.

The second major period of deformation occurred in the Tertiary-- probably during the Eocene (Hunt, written communication). The region of the salt intrusions was compressed into a series of broad folds, guided and localized by the pre-existing salt intrusions. Although salt flowage was renewed, it seems unlikely that any considerable amount of new salt was forced into the intrusions; flowage probably consisted largely of redistribution of the salt already present. By the end of this period of deformation these folds had attained approximately their present structural form, except for modifications imposed by later collapse of the anticlines overlying the salt intrusions. Owing to the mobility of the rocks in the cores of the anticlines, normal faulting took place along the crests of the anticlines, probably during relaxation of compressive stresses after folding ceased. At this time the crests of the anticlines in places were dropped, as grabens, several hundred to a few thousand feet. A period of crustal quiescence followed, during which the highlands overlying the anticlines and domes were reduced by erosion and topographic relief became low throughout the area.

Then, during the middle Tertiary, the entire Colorado Plateau was uplifted. This uplift rejuvenated the streams and increased ground-water circulation. The crests of the anticlines were breached, and the underlying salt was exposed to rapid solution and removal. With the abstraction of salt, renewed collapse of the anticlines began. Although much of the collapse was due directly to removal of salt by solution, it seems unlikely that all the collapse can be attributed to this process, as was believed by earlier workers in the area. Rather, much of the collapse was caused by flowage of salt from the parts of the anticlines still overlain by thick

layers of sediments to the parts from which the overlying sediments had been removed. Once the crests of the anticlines had been breached, the relatively plastic salt offered little support for the beds overlying the Paradox in the flanks of the anticlines; consequently these essentially unsupported beds slumped, probably along fractures and joints formed during earlier flexures. Small faults and folds in Quaternary deposits may indicate that collapse and local readjustments are still continuing.

#### MINERAL DEPOSITS

The only commercially important mineral deposits in the Anderson Mesa quadrangle are those that contain uranium, vanadium, and radium. Although deposits containing these metals were discovered in 1899 near Roc Creek, about 12 miles north of the quadrangle, intensive mining of these ores did not begin in the Plateau region until 1911. Thereafter, the ores were mined primarily for their radium content until 1923, when the Belgian Congo pitchblende deposits began to supply radium. The mines were mostly idle from 1923 until 1937, but since 1937 they again have been exploited intensively, first for vanadium and in more recent years for both vanadium and uranium.

Most of the deposits in the Anderson Mesa quadrangle are in middle and lower lenses in the Salt Wash sandstone member, but within these layers the deposits have a spotty distribution. Ore bodies range from small irregular masses containing only a few tons of ore to large tabular masses containing many thousands of tons; but most ore bodies are relatively small and contain only a few hundred tons. The ore consists mainly of sandstone impregnated with uranium- and vanadium-bearing minerals.

### Mineralogy

The most common ore minerals are carnotite and a fine-grained, vanadium-bearing micaceous mineral. Carnotite,  $K_2(UO_2)_2(VO_4)_2 \cdot 3H_2O$ , is a yellow, fine-grained, earthy or powdery mineral. Tyuyamunite,  $Ca(UO_2)_2(VO_4)_2 \cdot nH_2O$ , the calcium analogue of carnotite, is also present and is nearly indistinguishable from carnotite. The micaceous vanadium mineral, which formerly was thought to be roscoelite, is now considered to be related to the nontronite or montmorillonite group of clay minerals. It forms aggregates of minute flakes coating or partly replacing sand grains and filling pore spaces in the sandstone. It colors the rock gray. Other vanadium ore minerals present are montroseite,  $nFeO \cdot nV_2O_4 \cdot nV_2O_3 \cdot nH_2O$ , corvusite,  $V_2O_4 \cdot 6V_2O_5 \cdot nH_2O$ , and hewettite,  $CaO \cdot 3V_2O_5 \cdot 9H_2O$ . Corvusite and montroseite occur together, forming compact masses of bluish-black ore, whereas hewettite commonly forms stringers and veinlets along joints and fractures. Recent deeper drilling and mining in the Plateau have indicated that below the zone of oxidation black oxides of uranium and vanadium, accompanied by pyrite and perhaps other sulfides, are more abundant, and uranyl vanadates are scarce or absent.

### Ore bodies

The ore consists mostly of sandstone selectively impregnated and in part replaced by uranium and vanadium minerals; but rich concentrations of carnotite and the micaceous vanadium clay mineral are also associated with thin mudstone partings, beds of mudstone pebbles, and carbonized fossil plant material. Many fossil logs replaced by nearly pure carnotite have been found. In general the ore minerals were

deposited in irregular layers that roughly followed the sandstone beds. In most deposits the highest-grade concentrations of ore minerals occur in sharply bounded, elongate concretionary structures, called "rolls" by the miners. These rolls are encompassed by rich, veinlike concentrations of the micaceous vanadium-bearing clay mineral that curve across bedding planes. Within these rolls this mineral generally is distributed as diffusion layers, the richer layers commonly lying nearer the margins of the rolls; the distribution of carnotite in the rolls is less systematic.

The ore bodies range from small irregular masses containing only a few tons of ore to large tabular masses containing many thousands of tons of ore. Margins of ore bodies may be vaguely or sharply defined. Vaguely defined margins may have mineralized sandstone extending well beyond the limits of commercial ore; on the other hand, sharply defined margins, such as occur along the surfaces of rolls, ordinarily mark the limits of both the mineralized sandstone and the commercial ore.

Although many rolls are small and irregular, the larger ones are elongate and may extend with little change of directions for more than 100 feet. The elongate rolls in an ore body or group of ore bodies in a given area generally have a common orientation. This orientation is roughly parallel to the elongation of the ore bodies.

#### Origin of ore

The origin of the uranium-vanadium ores in the Morrison formation is uncertain and controversial. In some respects the deposits are unique, and much of the evidence concerning the genesis of the ore is either not conclusive or appears to be contradictory. In this brief account only a

small amount of evidence can be presented and the hypotheses can only be summarized.

Most of the deposits are closely associated with certain sedimentary features. Layers of ore lie essentially parallel to the bedding; most of the deposits occur in the thicker parts and commonly near the base of the sandstone lenses; the trend of the long direction of the deposits and the trend of the ore rolls in the sandstone are roughly parallel to the trend of the fossil logs in the sandstone and to the average or resultant dip of the cross-bedding in the sandstone. These relations strongly suggest that primary structures in the sediments were instrumental in localizing most of the ore deposits.

Recent investigations have revealed new data bearing on the origin of the ores (Waters and Granger, 1953). Below the zone of oxidation some of the ore consists chiefly of oxides, such as pitchblende and low-valent oxides of vanadium, and small quantities of sulfides such as pyrite, bornite, galena, and chalcopyrite; fully oxidized and fully hydrated minerals are either rare or nonexistent. A hard variety of uraninite, previously reported only from hydrothermal deposits, has been found in the Gray Daun mine in San Juan County, Utah (Rasor, 1952), and in the Happy Jack mine in White Canyon, Utah. Studies of lead-uranium ratios in ores from the Colorado Plateau indicate that, regardless of where or in what formation found, all the the ores are of roughly the same age, and this age is no older than latest Cretaceous (Stieff and Stern, 1952). Some geologists believe field relations in pre-Morrison formations at White Canyon (Benson and others, 1952) and Temple Mountain in Utah, indicate that the deposits may be genetically related to faults and fractures.

At the Rajah mine near Roc Creek, in Colorado ore occurs along a fault and horsetails out into the wall rock.

Two main hypotheses have arisen to explain the origin of the ores. The oldest and probably the most widely held is the hypothesis that the ores are penesynthetic and were formed soon after the enclosing rocks were deposited (Coffin, 1921; Hess, 1933; Fischer, 1937, 1942, 1950; and Fischer and Hilpert, 1952). Later movements of ground water may have dissolved and reprecipitated the ore constituents, but the essential materials were already present in the host rocks or in the waters permeating them. Although this hypothesis offers a reasonable explanation for the relation of ores to sedimentary features, it faces some difficulty in explaining: (1) the discrepancy between the age of the uranium and the age of the enclosing rock; (2) the broad stratigraphic distribution of uranium occurrences and association of ores with fractures in a few localities; and (3) the hydrothermal aspect of the mineral suites in some ores. The second hypothesis, and the one the author favors, is essentially a telethermal hypothesis and assumes the ore to have originated from a hypogene source. Proponents of this hypothesis believe that the ore-bearing solutions, originating at depth from an igneous source, ascended along fractures. After these solutions mingled with circulating ground waters the minerals were precipitated in favorable beds as much as several miles from the fractures. This hypothesis explains more readily the difficulties inherent in the penesynthetic hypothesis, but poses two other difficulties, namely, the hypothetical location of igneous source rocks, and the difficulty of proving the connection between fractures and faults and the ore deposits. A third hypothesis, advanced by some geologists,

suggests that the source of the ore metals was the volcanic material in the beds overlying the ore-bearing sandstones and that these metals were subsequently leached and redeposited in the beds that now contain the ore. This hypothesis encounters not only most of the difficulties in the penesynthetic hypothesis, but it presents some additional ones of its own.

#### Suggestions for prospecting

Regardless of the actual origin of the deposits, certain habits of the deposits--habits that have been recognized through geologic mapping and exploration experience--are useful as guides for finding ore (Weir, 1952). In southwestern Colorado most of the deposits are in the uppermost sandstone stratum in the Salt Wash member of the Morrison formation. Generally the central or thicker parts of the sandstone lenses are more favorable--many deposits are in sandstone that is 40 feet or more thick, few deposits are in sandstone less than 20 feet thick. Cross-bedded, relatively coarse-grained sandstone is more favorable than thinly or evenly bedded, fine-grained sandstone. Light-yellow-brown sandstone speckled with limonite stain is more favorable than red or reddish-brown sandstone. Sandstone that contains or is underlain by a considerable amount of gray, altered mudstone is more favorable than sandstone containing and underlain by red, unaltered mudstone-- this guide is perhaps the most useful in diamond-drill exploration.

If the deposits have a hypogene origin, then localities where favorable host rocks are near or coextensive with areas of more intense deformation may be especially favorable for finding ore. The distribution of deposits in the Anderson Mesa quadrangle lends some strength to

this hypothesis, for most of the deposits in the quadrangle are confined to the deformed rocks in the collapsed area overlying the intrusive salt mass. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that the Morrison formation thickens abruptly over the salt mass, and the development of lithologic features favorable to localization of ore may have been correspondingly influenced. In any event, the most likely areas in which to search for new deposits, because of the presence of favorable host rocks, are Little Gypsum Valley, Silveys Pocket, and Wray Mesa. The favorability of these areas may be fortified by the presence of faults and fractures.

### The mines

by C. F. Withington

Most of the ore deposits in the Anderson Mesa quadrangle are in or near the collapsed part of the Gypsum Valley salt anticline, and the larger bodies appear to lie near the axis of the anticline. Although most of the mines are in the middle or lower units of the Salt Wash member, a few deposits are in the upper sandstone stratum, and in the lowest conglomerate layer of the Brushy Basin member. The ore minerals are the micaceous vanadium clay and carnotite; copper stains are common.

### Gyp mine

The Gyp mine consists essentially of an elongate northwest-trending roll about 900 feet long and from 5 to 60 feet wide. The body ranges in thickness from a few inches to more than 12 feet. The ore minerals are

carnotite and the micaceous vanadium mineral. The sandstone lens which contains the ore dips as much as  $22^{\circ}$  to the southwest. Smaller rolls parallel to the main roll have been found. No mineralized layers connect the various rolls. Additional prospecting in the vicinity of the Gyp mine would probably find additional deposits.

#### Raven mine

The Raven mine is in a sandstone lens which lies between the upper and middle sandstone strata of the Salt Wash member. The deposit consists of parallel, northwestward trending rolls and flat tabular masses containing disseminated carnotite and the micaceous vanadium clay mineral. Some additional ore might be found by prospecting for rolls parallel to those in the mine.

#### Mines in Silveys Pocket

The mines and prospects in the Silveys Pocket area consist, in general, of small tabular masses of mineralized material. Rolls and fossil logs are uncommon. The bodies range in size from a few tons to about 200 tons of ore-grade material. The ore minerals are carnotite and the micaceous vanadium clay. Additional small deposits can possibly be found in Silveys Pocket by exploring the ground in the vicinity of the existing deposits. Exploration will be hampered somewhat by badly faulted ground.

## Other mines and prospects

Other small mines and prospects are scattered over Little Gypsum Valley, on the slopes of Island Mesa, and at the head of Leach Creek. In most respects these resemble the larger deposits. Additional deposits probably could be found by extensive prospecting in the down-faulted blocks of the Salt Wash member in the bottom of Little Gypsum Valley. The Salt Wash on the rim of Little Gypsum Valley appears unfavorable for ore deposition, although a few small deposits have been mined from this area.

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