

PRECIOUS METAL ENRICHMENT AT THE MYRA FALLS VMS DEPOSIT, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

D. MARSHALL

Earth Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada
C-A. NICOL

C-A. NICOL

Earth Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada
R. GREENE

R. GREENE

Earth Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada
R. SAWYER

R. SAWYER

Nyrstar Mining, Campbell River, BC, V9W 5E2, Canada

A. STANSELL

Nyrstar Mining, Campbell River, BC, V9W 5E2, Canada

R. EASTERBROOK

Coeur Mining, Chicago, IL 60603, USA

Abstract

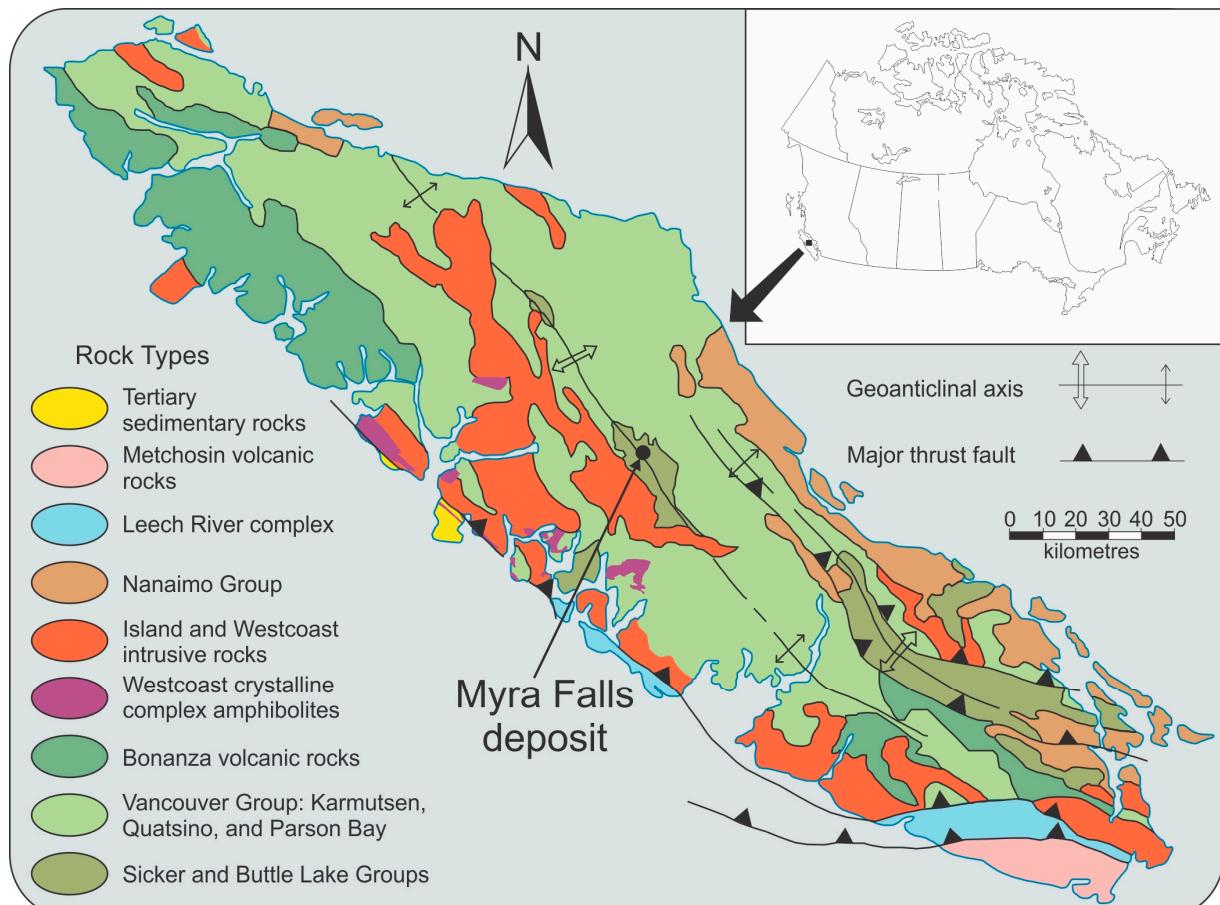
Gold, present as electrum, in the Battle Gap, Ridge North-West, HW, and Price deposits at the Iyra Falls mine, occurs in late veinlets cutting the earlier VMS lithologies. The ore mineral assemblage containing the electrum comprises dominantly galena, tennantite, bornite, sphalerite, chalcopyrite, pyrite and rare stromeyerite is defined as an Au-Zn-Pb-As-Sb association. The gangue is comprised of barite, quartz, and minor feldspathic volcanicogenic sedimentary rocks and ay.

Deposition of gold as electrum in the baritic upper portions of the sulphide lenses occurs at relatively shallow water depths beneath the sea floor. Primary, pseudosecondary, and secondary fluid inclusions, petrographically related to gold, show boiling fluid inclusion assemblages in the range of 123 to 173 °C, with compositions and eutectic melt temperatures consistent with seawater at approximately 3.2 wt% NaCl equivalent. The fluid inclusion homogenization temperatures are consistent with boiling seawater corresponding to water depths ranging from 15

33 to 125 metres. Slightly more dilute brines corresponding to salinities of approximately 1 wt%
34 NaCl indicate that there is input from very low-salinity brines, which could represent a transition
35 from subaqueous VMS to epithermal-like conditions for precious metal enrichment, mixing with
36 re-condensed vapour, or very low-salinity igneous fluids.

37 **INTRODUCTION**

38 The Myra Falls (MF) polymetallic volcanogenic massive sulphide (VMS) deposit is located on
 39 Vancouver Island within a series of middle to late Devonian Sicker group volcanogenic rocks
 40 (Fig. 1). It best fits a Kuroko-type or Bimodal-Felsic model [1]. While parts of the mine average
 41 above 4 grams of gold per metric ton of ore, the overall proven mineral reserves for gold grade
 42 for the entire mining operation may be a bit lower averaging 1.60 and 1.69 g/t for 2017 and 2016
 43 respectively. Precious metal production at Myra Falls is of significant economic importance,
 44 with annual production of approximately 6,000 and 240,000 troy ounces of gold and silver
 45 respectively [2].



47 *Figure 1: Regional geological map showing the major lithological units at the Myra Falls mine. Inset figure shows the location*
 48 *of the mine within Canada.*

49 Gold has four different occurrences in VMS deposits: i) Au-Zn-Pb-Ag-Sb barite
50 association, ii) Au-Cu-Bi-Co association, iii) Au-enriched, base metal-poor massive pyrite, iv)
51 Au-rich deposits that have been supergene altered [3]. The Au-Zn-Pb-Ag-Sb barite and Au-Cu
52 associations are the most well documented, having been observed in both ancient VMS deposits
53 [4] and active black smoker deposits [5].

54 The Au-Zn-Pb-Ag-Sb barite assemblage is generally found concentrated near the top of
55 massive sulphide lenses, with significant Au concentrations present in the overlying massive
56 barite zones [3], often associated with siliceous cap rocks. Enrichment of Au at the top of the
57 deposit is due to metal zonation refinement by sustained circulation of hydrothermal fluids
58 through the underlying volcanic pile [4]. Gold is leached from the base and center of the
59 massive sulphide lens and then reprecipitated at the top of the deposit. Au located in the massive
60 barite zone often lacks the close association with pyrite [6]. Gold in the upper portions of the
61 deposit is believed to be transported predominantly by thio complexes (especially $\text{Au}(\text{HS})_2^-$) in
62 low temperature (150-250 °C), near-neutral (pH>3.5) hydrothermal fluids, with lesser amounts
63 of transport via gold chloride complexes. Deposition occurs when these fluids mix with
64 seawater, causing oxidation, an increase in pH, and most importantly, a decrease in $a_{\text{H}_2\text{S}}$. The
65 activity of H_2S is mainly reduced by deposition of metallic sulphide minerals and dilution [4].
66 Feldspar-bearing alteration assemblages, possibly containing albite and celsian gangue, are
67 commonly associated with the Au-Zn-Pb-Ag-Sb barite assemblage [3]. Although gold at MF
68 also occurs to a lesser extent in Au-enriched, base metal-poor massive pyrite lenses, the Au-Zn-
69 Pb-Ag-Sb association is the dominant mode of gold occurrence at MF and is the focus of this
70 study.

71

72 **REGIONAL AND LOCAL GEOLOGY**

73 The Myra Falls deposit is located within the Paleozoic Sicker Group, which constitutes
 74 the basement of the Wrangellia terrane and Vancouver Island [7]. The Sicker Group is overlain
 75 unconformably by the Permian Buttle Lake Group limestones and younger rocks. Rocks of the
 76 Wrangellia terrane are generally metamorphosed to greenschist facies, with some amphibolite-
 77 facies contact-metamorphic zones near the Jurassic Island intrusive rocks [8].

78 The Sicker Group volcanic rocks are exposed in several anticlinal zones on Vancouver
 79 Island, such as the Buttle Lake, Cowichan, Nanoose and West Coast uplifts [7,8]. The Sicker
 80 Group is divided into four formations. The Price Formation is stratigraphically lowest and the
 81 footwall of the HW and Battle orebodies (Fig. 2). It consists of andesitic volcanic and
 82 volcaniclastic rocks that were deposited directly on the seafloor. The contact with the overlying
 83 Myra Formation, host to the orebodies, is a transition from andesitic volcanic to rhyolitic
 84 volcaniclastic rocks.



85
 86 *Figure 2. Schematic cross section showing the relative positions of the different ore bodies within the Myra Falls mine (after*
 87 *[9]).*

88 The Myra Formation is a succession of rhyolitic, andesitic and basaltic volcanic and
 89 sedimentary rocks. The HW and battle deposits are found within its basal unit, the HW horizon.
 90 The HW horizon consists of coarse-grained rhyolitic volcaniclastic rocks, sandstones and

91 mudstones overlain by massive porphyries. The HW and Battle orebodies are mostly found in
92 volcaniclastic rocks near the base of the HW horizon. They are massive to semimassive tabular
93 sulphide lenses, with main ores of chalcopyrite, sphalerite, pyrite and galena. Some bornite and
94 tetrahedrite, as well as accessory chalcocite, colusite and gold are also present. The HW horizon
95 also hosts zones of semimassive sulphides above the Battle and HW deposits. These are high in
96 sphalerite, galena and barite, but low in pyrite. The sulphide lenses are zoned vertically and
97 laterally and accompanied with silicification of the host rocks. Overlying the HW horizon are
98 thick hangingwall andesites, which are conformably overlain by a unit of volcaniclastic, felsic
99 volcanic and sedimentary rocks. The Lynx-Myra-Price orebodies are hosted within this unit.

100 The Myra Formation is overlain by the Thelwood Formation, which is a laminated
101 mudstone interbedded with volcaniclastic rocks and mafic sills. The Thelwood Formation is
102 overlain conformably by the Flower Ridge formation, a package of amygdaloidal basaltic flows
103 and volcaniclastic rocks, tuffaceous siltstones, wackes and argillites [8].

104 The Myra Falls area was affected by five separate deformation events, which have
105 influenced the formation and distribution of the orebodies. First, pre-Permian event D₁ caused
106 northwest-trending folding [7]. Early to Mid-Jurassic [7] folding event D₂ resulted in localized
107 shear zones and reactivated F₁ folds [8]. Steep, conjugate strike-slip faults and bedding-parallel
108 thrust faults and shears resulted from event D₃ [7,8], normal faults from event D₄, and large
109 thrust faults and steep, west- to west-northwest-striking sinistral strike-slip faults from event D₅
110 [8].

111 Paleoseafloor reconstructions following the top of the Price andesites showed that the
112 HW and Battle deposits formed in small basins in a northwest-trending ridge. These basins were
113 constrained by growth faults [7,8], which acted as conduits for fluid migration [8].

114

115 **ANALYTICAL METHODS**

116

117 *Sampling*

118 Given the 4 possible modes of gold/electrum occurrence in VMS deposits, samples were
119 taken from a number of locations within the mine or from drill core where visible gold occurred.
120 These samples were selected to optimize the study of petrographic relationship between gold,
121 other ore, gangue, and alteration minerals. Areas within the mine sampled either from active
122 stopes, existing samples or drill core include: Battle Gap, Ridge Northwest, HW North Slope,
123 HW South Flank, HW stringer zone, Marshall, and Price (Fig. 2).

124 *Electron microprobe mineral composition data*

125 Selected doubly polished plates and polished thin sections containing gold compounds
126 had in-situ electron microprobe analysis of the electrum. Electron microprobe analyses of
127 electrum were performed at Carleton University using an automated 4 spectrometer Camebax
128 MBX electron probe using the wavelength dispersive x-ray analysis method (WDX). Operating
129 conditions were: 15 kilovolts (kv) accelerating potential and a beam current of 20 nano-amperes
130 (nA). Counting times were up to 50 seconds or 40,000 accumulated counts. X-ray lines were
131 chosen to minimize or eliminate possible elemental interferences. Raw x-ray data were
132 converted to elemental weight % via the Cameca PAP matrix correction program. For the
133 elements considered, the following standards, X-ray lines and crystals were used: Au₈₀Ag₂₀, Au
134 La; Ag₈₀Au₂₀, Ag La; Chalcopyrite, Cu K α ; Stibnite, Sb K α ; Cinnabar, Hg K α

135 *Raman spectroscopic analyses*

136 Raman identification of the accidental inclusions (minerals) within fluid inclusions was
137 performed on a Renishaw inVia Raman spectrometer equipped with a 200 mW 785 nm laser and
138 Olympus BX41 optical microscope. Spectra were collected from 500 to 3000 cm^{-1} in non-

139 confocal mode at room temperature. Areas of the individual gas peaks were parsed for gas
140 abundances for CO₂, CH₄, N₂, and H₂S and none of these gases were found in any of the
141 inclusions analysed in this study.

142 *Fluid inclusion microthermometric measurements*

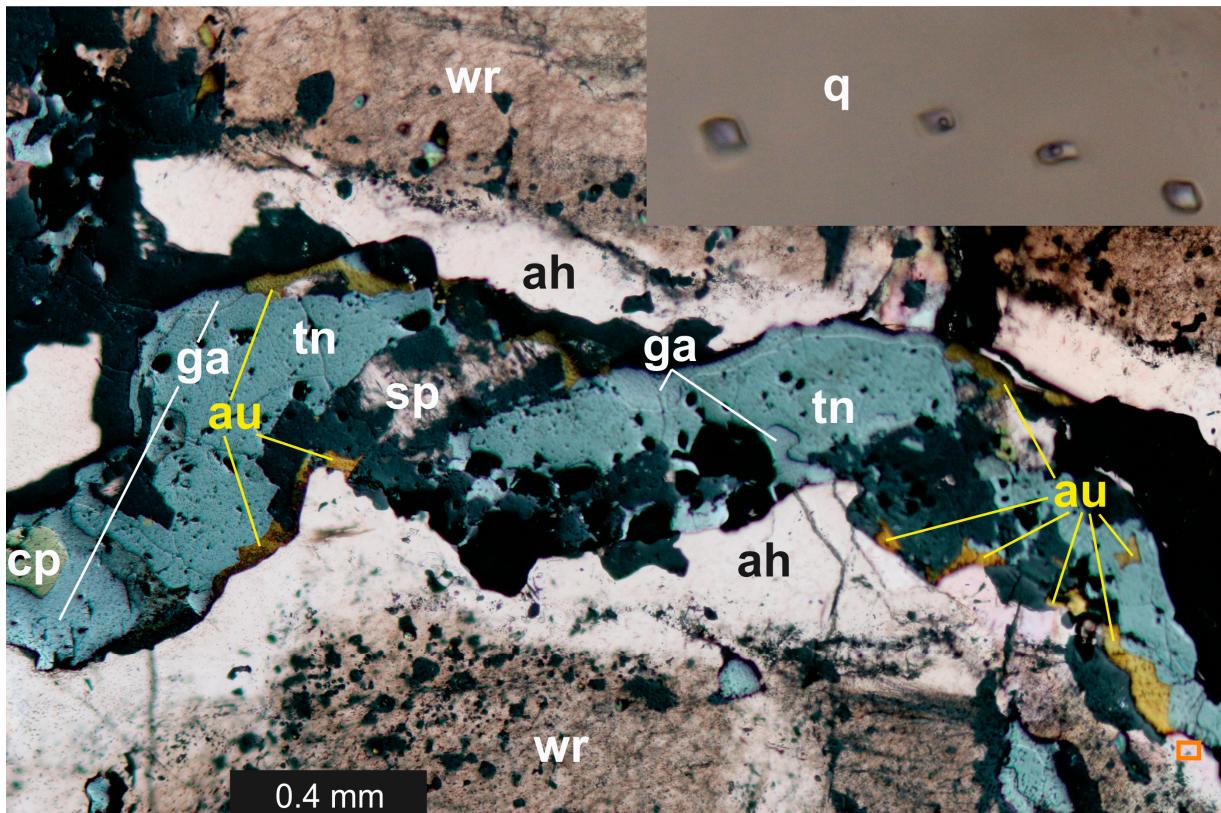
143 For this study, 46 primary fluid inclusions hosted in quartz or barite in textural
144 equilibrium with gold-bearing veins were targeted. Initial petrographic work was completed in
145 order to identify different fluid inclusion assemblages in both quartz and barite. Fluid inclusion
146 measurements were performed with a Linkam THMS-G 600 heating-freezing stage attached to
147 an Olympus BX51 microscope equipped with 5, 10, 50 and 100x long working distance
148 Olympus objectives. The stage is capable of measurements in the range of -190 to +400 °C. Prior
149 to collecting the heating and cooling measurements the stage was calibrated with two synthetic
150 fluid inclusion standards. The first yields phase transitions for pure H₂O at 0.0 and 374.1 °C. The
151 second standard comprises H₂O-CO₂ fluid inclusions and is used to calibrate the stage at -56.6
152 °C to the melting of solid CO₂. The stage was periodically tested against the standards and
153 results were always within ±0.2 °C for the two low temperature phase transitions and within ±
154 2.0 °C for the higher temperature phase transition.

155

156 **GOLD VEINLET PETROLOGY**

157 This study initially comprised the petrographic analysis of 93 samples. From these samples 14
158 containing gold in polished thin section were specifically targeted to determine mineral
159 assemblages pre- and syn-gold mineralization. In the bulk of our samples, gold occurred in thin
160 anastomosing to discontinuous veinlets (Fig. 3). Paragenesis for the deposit is complicated by
161 numerous volcanic depositional events and by numerous deformational and subsequent alteration
162 events [8]. However, the gold-bearing veinlets are very late in the deposit paragenesis and cross

163 cut all of the typical sub- and seafloor sulphide mineralization associated with VMS deposits [1]
164 including barite/silica cap rocks [8,10]. Gold grains, ranging up to 4 mm in size, are commonly
165 visible in the veinlets, and contemporaneous with quartz, barite, sphalerite, galena, bornite,
166 tennantite, chalcopyrite, pyrite and rarely stromeyerite, covellite, chalcocite, acanthite, and native
167 silver. Grain sizes for the veins sulphides, barite, quartz, and tennantite ranged up to 1 cm. The
168 wall rock to the veinlets are typical VMS assemblages comprising variable amounts of feldspars,
169 quartz, sulphides, minor sulphosalts, chlorite, epidote, tremolite, clays, and barite. Barite is very
170 common in the wall rock to the veinlets, and crystals may range up to 2.5 cm. Alteration of the
171 wall rock proximal to the veins is generally silicification and relicts and pseudomorphs of barite
172 are present. Generally, there is an alteration halo of quartz and silicification surrounding the
173 veinlets (Fig. 3). The barites are often growth-zoned and also display relict crack seal trails of fluid
174 inclusions. In some cases, silicification of the barite preserves the growth zones and crack seal
175 textures, while in other samples crack seal textures occur in the silicified wall rock and quartz
176 alteration haloes.



177

178 *Figure 3. Composite photomicrographs of the alteration halo surrounding the gold-bearing veinlets and fluid inclusions. The main*
 179 *image, taken under simultaneous plane-polarized transmitted and reflected light, shows the barite-rich wall-rock (wr) and quartz*
 180 *dominated alteration halo (ah) surrounding the veinlet. The veinlet assemblage comprises tennantite (tn), galena (ga), sphalerite*
 181 *(sp), chalcopyrite (cp), and gold/electrum (au). The inset image shows the magnified region delineated by the orange rectangle,*
 182 *in plane-polarized light, comprising a trail of "boiling" pseudosecondary two-phase (liquid + vapour) fluid inclusions hosted within*
 183 *a quartz (q) crystal lining the walls of the veinlet. The central two fluid inclusions are from population PIL represent the liquid*
 184 *portion of the boiling fluid, while the outer two fluid inclusions are from population PIV and represent the conjugate vapour*
 185 *inclusions of the boiling system. Sample RG14-21B, inset field of view is approximately 50 microns wide.*

186 The gold/electrum at Myra Falls is dominantly Au. Silver contents range throughout the deposit
 187 from approximately 30 to 35 wt% Ag. There are trace amounts of copper, with antimony and
 188 mercury below detection limits (Table 1). Nugget effect greatly dictates local Au grades, with
 189 electrum generally ranging from micron sized to a few millimetres and averaging less than a
 190 millimetre. The electrum is generally inclusion free, with occasional inclusions of quartz, barite,
 191 tennantite, sphalerite, and galena.

192

193 *Table 1. Electron microprobe (wt%) data for electrum*

194

Sample RG14-29	Au	Ag	Cu	105
Spot-1	67.823	31.906	0.028	
-2	69.042	31.43	0.044	
-3	67.345	32.004	0.014	195
-4	65.096	33.832	0.026	197
-5	67.409	33.246	0.009	
-6	67.292	31.762	0.016	
-7	68.237	31.479	0.001	
-8	67.585	32.114	0.017	
-9	68.45	31.001	0.009	
-10	70.383	29.243	0.042	
-11	68.002	31.503	0.028	
-12	70.523	29.176	0.047	

198 **FLUID INCLUSIONS**

199 Thirty-one doubly polished plates were examined in this study. A great deal of effort was
200 expended to produce doubly polished plates with visible gold. Of the 31 samples, only 7 with
201 visible gold survived the grinding and polishing process. This fluid inclusion study concentrated
202 exclusively on the fluid inclusions petrographically related to the gold veinlets and the associated
203 alteration halos. The fluid inclusions measured were hosted in the quartz or barite of the veinlets
204 or their associated alteration haloes. Reconnaissance work on the larger number of samples
205 revealed two populations of fluid inclusions: Population one (P1) is comprised of low-salinity
206 two-phase liquid and vapour (L+V) fluid inclusions (FIs) and a more-rarely observed second
207 population (P2) comprised of three-phase FIs. P2 is represented at room temperature by an
208 aqueous phase, carbonic liquid and vapour phases. Both populations were identified in an earlier
209 study [10], while a later study [8] only reported P1. Our observations for the P2 FIs concur with
210 the earlier study of Barrett and Sherlock [10] that the origin of these inclusions is unclear and
211 they are not representative of the overall hydrothermal system, and definitely not related to the
212 precipitation of gold in the gold-bearing veinlets, thus no further study of the P2 fluids was
213 pursued. Although both earlier studies reported primary, pseudosecondary, secondary, and
214 indeterminate P1 fluid inclusions relative to base-metal VMS-type mineralization, the exact
215 timing of these fluids relative to the late gold-bearing veinlets of this study is unclear. Our study
216 indicates that the gold-bearing veinlets are late in the paragenesis of the deposit, occurring at
217 lower temperatures, thus shallower water depths, than previously reported for the Myra Falls
218 deposit.

219 P1 has been studied as Fluid Inclusion Assemblage (FIAs) permitting the interpretation of
220 individual FIAs as contemporaneous [11]. Additionally, P1 is subdivided into mixtures of a two
221 end member system ranging from vapour-dominant (P1V) FIs to the more prevalent liquid-

222 dominant (P1L) FIs. FI sizes range up to 12 microns in length, but average 4 microns. Due to the
223 small size of the FIs, it was not possible to measure ice melting or liquid homogenization
224 temperatures in the P1V end members. The presence of both liquid- and vapour-rich FIs within
225 the same FIA is strong, but not conclusive evidence, of boiling. Further evidence to support our
226 interpretation of boiling is presented below based on fluid compositions and specific formation
227 models for VMS deposits. Phase observations in the P1L FIs are shown in Table 2. In general,
228 the freezing behaviour upon cooling from room temperature results in the nucleation of ice
229 between -42.3 to -28.3 °C. No further phase changes are observed upon cooling to -140 °C. In
230 most cases the bubble disappears upon ice nucleation, with the vapour likely residing in the
231 many cracks within the ice, occasionally, some vestiges of the bubble remain visible in the ice.
232 Ice nucleation generally imparts a darkening to the FIs, and this is interpreted as light refraction
233 at ice-vapour interfaces within the inclusion. Heating of the FIs from -140 °C results in first
234 melting temperatures over the range -28.1 to -21.5 °C. This is marked by the disappearance of
235 the darkening due to liquid replacing vapour in the cracks within the ice. Further heating results
236 in final ice melting temperatures over the range -3.4 to -0.7 °C. Continued heating results in a
237 gradual decrease in the vapour bubble volume until total homogenization into the vapour over
238 the temperature range 119.5 to 172.8 °C. The microthermometric data for all the FIAs hosted in
239 barite and quartz are shown in figure 4. Measurement of the ice melting temperatures was
240 complicated by the presence of hydrohalite ($\text{NaCl} \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$), which is metastable above the melting
241 temperature and prevents reappearance of the vapour bubble. The vapour phase was commonly
242 metastably absent and difficult to impossible to nucleate in a number of fluid inclusions despite
243 extended periods of freezing in liquid nitrogen or cooling in a refrigerator for days.
244 Femtosecond-laser excitation has proven useful in nucleating meta-stable vapour bubbles in
245 some fluid inclusions [12], but was deemed beyond the scope of this study as the ice melting

246 temperatures could be measured in the absence of the vapour phase in some of our larger fluid
247 inclusions, and was consistent with fluid inclusions within the same FIAs, that were able to
248 nucleate vapour bubbles. Fluid inclusions in barite were especially affected by the absence of the
249 vapour bubble, as it hinders ice melting measurements in small fluid inclusions where the ice
250 itself is not readily visible.

251

252

Table 2: Microthermometric measurements on the pseudosecondary and secondary fluid inclusions in quartz and barite

253

Chip / Flinc#	eutectic	Tm ice	Th total
RG14-21B-1-1-1	nv	-2.0	158.2
RG14-21B-1-2-1	nv	-2.0	169.6
-2	nv	-2.0	167.8
RG14-21B-1-3-1	nv	-2.2	145.3
-2	nv	-2.2	164.7
RG14-21B-1-4-1	nv	-1.9	152.0
-2	nv	-1.9	145.2
RG14-21B-1-5-1	-21.5	-1.8	158.7
-2	nv	-0.7	172.8
-4	-21.6	-2.3	148.9
-5	-25.2	-1.5	155.4
-6	-24.7	-1.7	157.2
RG14-21B-1-6-1	nv	-2.4	145.7
-2	nv	-2.4	156.1
-4	nv	-3.4	143.6
-5	nv	-3.4	150.5
-7	nv	-2.5	169.9
-8	nv	-2.4	159.8
RG14-21B-1-7-2	nv	-2.5	123.1
-3	-28.1	-3.3	127.2
-4	nv	-2.5	119.5
RG14-21B-2-1-1	-25.6	-2.0	130.5
RG14-21B-2-2-1	-24.0	-2.5	140.8
RG14-21B-2-3-1	nv	-1.2	144.5
-3	nv	-2.2	142.0
-6	nv	-1.1	145.9
RG14-21B-2-4-4	-22.6	-2.0	127.8
RG14-21B-2-5-1	nv	-2.3	123.8
-2	-23.5	-2.1	134.3
-3	nv	-2.3	135.1
RG14-21B-2-6-1	-22.5	-2.6	138.0
-2	nv	-2.6	141.0
<i>RG14-33B-5-1-1</i>	nv	-1.9	150.9

254

All temperatures reported in degrees Celsius,

255 eutectic=ice melting eutectic temperature, Tm

256 ice=Ice melting temperature, Tm ha=halite

257 melting/dissolution temperature, Th total=vapour

258 homogenization temperature into the liquid,

259 nv=not visible, *italics* = barite hosted fluid260 inclusion, **bold** = pseudosecondary fluid inclusion,261 ***bold-italics*** = primary fluid inclusion

262

263

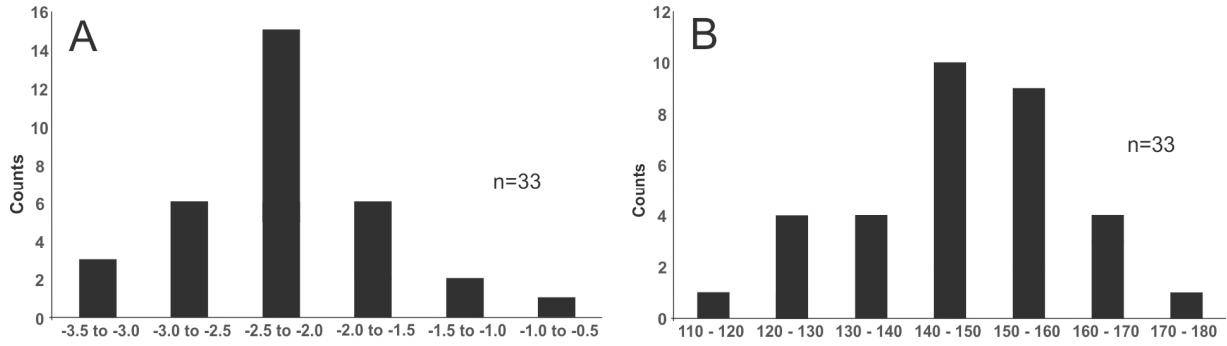


Figure 4. Histograms of the ice-melting (A) and total homogenisation (B) temperatures for the primary, secondary, and pseudosecondary two-phase (liquid + vapour) fluid inclusions (Table 2).

264
265
266

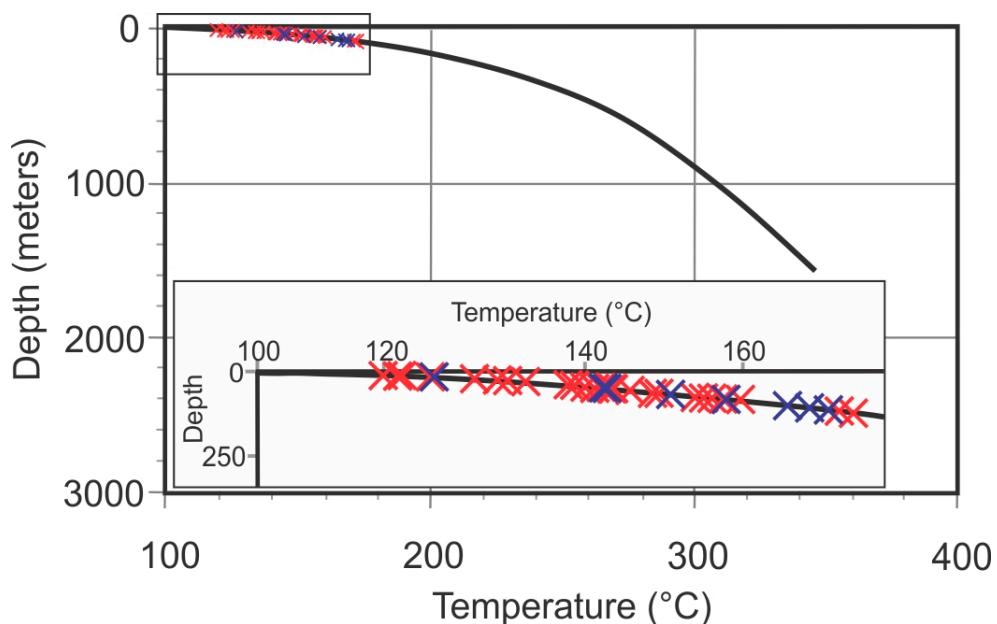
267

268

269

270 **MODEL FOR PRECIOUS METAL DEPOSITION**

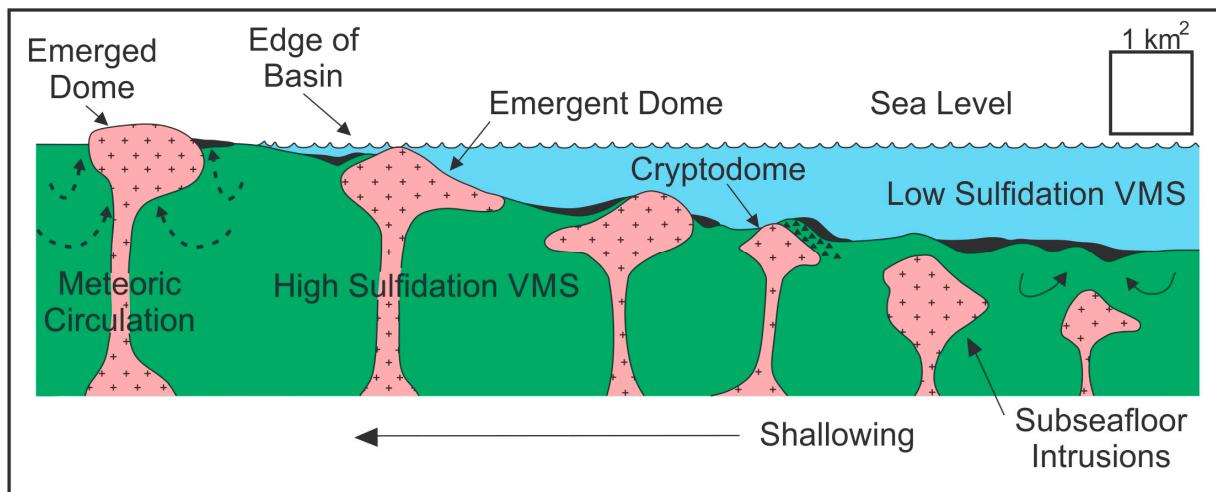
271 The primary, pseudosecondary, and secondary FIs related to the gold veinlets and associated
272 alteration haloes (Fig. 3) yield salinities in the range -3.4 to -0.7 °C, corresponding to salinities of
273 1.2 to 5.6 wt % NaCl equivalent [13]. These salinities overlap with the theoretical salinities for
274 seawater at approximately 3.2 wt % NaCl equivalent and eutectic temperatures (Table 2) are also
275 consistent with published seawater compositions and microthermometric data [14,15].
276 Homogenization temperature range from 119.5 to 172.8 °C and have been plotted on the depth vs.
277 boiling curve (Fig. 5) for seawater [16]. We reiterate that the FIAs show strong petrographic
278 evidence of boiling and thus the measured FIs are consistent with seawater boiling at water depths
279 of 15 to 125 metres. This model of gold precipitation at very moderate depths and pressures is
280 consistent with the gold-bearing veinlets being one of the last events in the VMS formation, as the
281 thicknesses of the volcanic sequences increase, bringing the sea-water volcanic rock interface to
282 shallower and shallower water depths. Interestingly, the gold-bearing veinlets and associated
283 alteration haloes, although generated by boiling seawater at shallow water depths, could occur at
284 the seawater-rock interface or below to a maximum hydrostatic pressure corresponding to water
285 depths listed above. Additionally, there is no reason that the gold-bearing veinlets could not occur
286 in the near-shore terrestrial environment at depth within heated saltwater intrusions into the
287 terrestrial meteoric water table (Fig. 6), as the volcanic system emerges from the sub-aqueous to
288 the sub-aerial environment and show transitional features, such as fluid inclusion salinities slightly
289 less than seawater salinities. This mixing of seawater with non-saline meteoric groundwater would
290 produce diluted seawater brines and mark the transition from a VMS to an epithermal environment
291 [18].



292

293 *Figure 5. Temperature versus water depth boiling curve for seawater. Fluid inclusion homogenisation temperatures (Table 2)*
 294 *superimposed on the seawater boiling curve data from [16]. The expanded inset shows homogenization temperatures are consistent*
 295 *with boiling*

296



297

298 *Figure 6. Schematic of volcanic rocks (green), subvolcanic intrusions (pink) and massive sulphides (black) of a VMS system*
 299 *evolving from seawater dominated circulation cells in the sub-aqueous environment to the epithermal environment dominated by*
 300 *meteoric water circulation cells (dashed curves). Modified from [17]. water*

301

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

302 This model of seafloor or sub-seafloor boiling, veining and gold deposition is consistent with
 303 previous research into gold in VMS systems [5,19,20], with gold concentration occurring via a

304 process of seawater interacting with thick volcanic sequences of massive sulphides via cooling
305 and/or boiling, increasing the relative solubility of gold in the fluid until reaching saturation and
306 precipitation as per Hannington and Scott [5]. This is also consistent with the mineralogy observed
307 within the veinlets and associated alteration haloes being enriched in tennantite, bornite, and barite
308 typical of more sulphur-poor or oxygen-rich fluids.

309 This shallow-water model for gold precipitation may initially seem contradictory to the greater
310 water depths formerly proposed for the Myra Falls VMS deposit [7,8,10]. However, we deem the
311 two interpretations complementary, as the initial volcanic sequences, that later become host-rock
312 to the gold-bearing veinlets are deposited earlier at greater water depths, with gold precipitation
313 occurring later in the sequence, as the system is uplifted via tectonics related to arc formation in
314 an emergent arc system similar to Kuroko and other Japanese deposits. This may also explain the
315 dichotomy of proposed water depths for some other deposits such as Eskay Creek ranging from
316 shallow to sub-aerial [21] to over 1500 meters [22].

317 As discussed previously, there is also some gold enrichment in pyrite-rich horizons in the Myra
318 Falls system. It is presently unclear as to whether a model of nascent gold-bearing veinlet fluids,
319 perhaps active along grain boundaries with fluid flow rates insufficient to generate specific veinlets
320 and alteration, may be responsible for gold enrichment in the pyrite horizons. However, the lack
321 of visible gold, barite, tennantite, bornite and silica in these horizons favours a model for the Myra
322 Falls pyrite-rich horizons other than our proposed veinlet model for gold enrichment.

323 The proposed model of gold-bearing veinlets in emergent VMS systems has some implications
324 for exploration as there may be subtle gold enrichments not yet identified in VMS systems that
325 display continued development into shallower and shallower water systems, especially those with
326 evidence of the sub-aqueous to sub-aerial transition.

327

328 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

329

330 Financial support for part of this project was provided by NSERC and Nyrstar grants to DM.

331 Thanks are due Nyrstar staff, especially Lorri Cummings, for invaluable assistance with
332 underground and drill core sampling, and access to the mine's geochemical database. Two very
333 thorough reviews by ?? and ?? greatly improved an earlier version of this manuscript.

334

335

336 **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

337

338 Conceptualization, Daniel Marshall and Rick Sawyer; Data curation, Daniel Marshall, Carol-
339 Anne Nicol, Robert Greene, Armond Stansell and Ross Easterbrook; Formal analysis, Daniel
340 Marshall, Carol-Anne Nicol and Robert Greene; Funding acquisition, Daniel Marshall and Rick
341 Sawyer; Investigation, Daniel Marshall, Carol-Anne Nicol, Armond Stansell and Ross
342 Easterbrook; Methodology, Daniel Marshall, Carol-Anne Nicol, Robert Greene and Armond
343 Stansell; Project administration, Daniel Marshall and Rick Sawyer; Resources, Ross
344 Easterbrook; Supervision, Daniel Marshall; Validation, Robert Greene, Armond Stansell and
345 Ross Easterbrook; Writing – original draft, Daniel Marshall; Writing – review & editing, Daniel
346 Marshall, Carol-Anne Nicol and Armond Stansell.

347

348 **REFERENCES**349 1. Galley, A.G.; Hannington, M.D.; Jonasson, I.R. Volcanogenic massive sulphide deposits. In
350 *Mineral Deposits of Canada: A Synthesis of Major Deposit-Types, District Metallogeny, the*
351 *Evolution of Geological Provinces, and Exploration Methods*, Goodfellow, W.D., Ed.;
352 Geological Association of Canada, Mineral Deposits Division: St. John's, NL, Canada, 2007;
353 Special Publication No. 5, pp. 141-161.

354 2. Nyrstar Annual Report 2016. Available online:

355 <https://www.nyrstar.com/~/media/Files/N/Nyrstar/shareholder-meetings/english/2017/10-nyrstar-2016-annual-report-english-.pdf> (accessed on 07 September 2018).

357 3. Huston, D.L. Gold in volcanic-hosted massive sulfide deposits: distribution, genesis, and

358 exploration. *Rev. Econ. Geol.* **2000**, *13*, pp. 401-426.

359 4. Huston, D.L.; Large, R. A chemical model for the concentration of gold in volcanogenic

360 massive sulphide deposits. *Ore Geol. Rev.* **1989**, *4*, pp. 171-200; DOI: 10.1016/0169-

361 1368(89)90017-6.

362 5. Hannington, M.D.; Scott, S. Sulfidation equilibria as guides to gold mineralization in

363 volcanogenic massive sulfides: evidence from sulfide mineralogy and the composition of

364 sphalerite. *Econ. Geol. Bull. Soc.* **1989**, *84*, pp. 1978-1995; DOI: 10.2113/gsecongeo.84.7.1978.

365 6. Huston, D.L.; Bottrill, R.S.; Creelman, R.A.; Zaw, K.; Ramsden, T.R.; Rand, S.W.; Gemmell,

366 J.B.; Jablonski, W.; Sie, S.H.; Large, R.R. Geologic and geochemical controls on the mineralogy

367 and grain size of gold-bearing phases, eastern Australian volcanic-hosted massive sulfide

368 deposits. *Econ. Geol.* **1992**, *87*, pp. 542-563; DOI: 10.2113/gsecongeo.87.3.542.

369 7. Jones, S.; Gemmell, J.B.; Davidson, G.J.; Petrographic, geochemical, and fluid inclusion

370 evidence for the origin of siliceous cap rocks above volcanic-hosted massive sulfide deposits at

371 Myra Falls, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. *Econ. Geol. Bull. Soc.* **2006**, *101*, pp.

372 555-584; DOI: 10.2113/gsecongeo.101.3.555.

373 8. Jones, S.; Berry, R.; Sinclair, B. Multiple deformation episodes at Myra Falls volcanic-hosted

374 massive sulfide camp, central Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. *Can. J. Earth Sci.*

375 **2006**, *43*, pp. 1711-1732; DOI: 10.1139/E06-050.

376 9. Chong, A.; Becherer, M.; Sawyer, R.; Wastenays, H.; Baldwin, R.; Bakker, F.; McWilliams, I.

377 *Massive sulphide deposits at Myra Falls operations, Vancouver Island, British Columbia.* BC

378 Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources; 2005; GeoFile 2006-7.

379 10. Barrett, T.J.; Sherlock, R.L. Volcanic stratigraphy, lithogeochemistry and seafloor setting of

380 the H-W massive sulfide deposit, Myra Falls, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. *Explor. Min.*

381 *Geol.* **1996**, 5, pp. 421-458.

382 11. Goldstein, R. Petrographic analysis of fluid inclusions. In *Fluid Inclusions: Analysis and*

383 *Interpretation*; Samson, I., Anderson, A., Marshall, D., Eds.; Mineralogical Association of

384 Canada: Ottawa, ON, Canada, 2003; Volume 32, pp. 9-53, ISBN 0921294328.

385 12. Kruger, Y.; Stoller, P.; Ricka, J.; Frenz, M. Femtosecond lasers in fluid-inclusion analysis:

386 overcoming metastable phase states. *Eur. J. Mineral.* **2007**, 19, pp. 693-706; DOI: 10.1127/0935-

387 1221/2007/0019-1762.

388 13. Bodnar, R.J. Introduction to aqueous-electrolyte fluid inclusions. In *Fluid Inclusions:*

389 *Analysis and Interpretation*; Samson, I.; Anderson, A., Marshall, D., Eds.; Mineralogical

390 Association of Canada: Ottawa, ON, Canada, 2003; Volume 32, pp. 81-100; ISBN 0921294328.

391 14. Nelson, K.H.; Thompson, T.G. Deposition of salts from seawater by frigid concentration. *J.*

392 *Marine Res.* **1954**, 13, pp. 165-182.

393 15. Crawford, M.L. Phase equilibria in aqueous fluid inclusions. In *Fluid Inclusions:*

394 *Applications to Petrology*; Hollister, L.S., Crawford, M.L., Eds.; Mineral Association of Canada:

395 Ottawa, Canada, 1981; Volume 6, pp. 75-100.

396 16. Butterfield, D.A.; Massoth, G.J.; McDuff, R.E.; Lupton, J.E.; Lilley, M.D. Geochemistry

397 from hydrothermal fluids from Axial Seamount Hydrothermal Emissions Study vent field, Juan

398 de Fuca Ridge: subseafloor boiling and subsequent fluid-rock interaction. *J. Geophys. Res.* **1990**,
399 95, pp. 12895-12921; DOI: 10.1029/JB095iB08p12895.

400 17. Hannington, M.D.; Bleeker, W.; Kjarsgaard, I. Sulfide mineralogy, geochemistry and ore
401 genesis of the Kidd Creek deposit: part II. The bornite zone. In *The Giant Kidd Creek*
402 *Volcanogenic Massive Sulfide Deposit, Western Abitibi Subprovince, Canada*, Hannington,
403 M.D., Barrie, C.T., Eds.; Economic Geology Monograph **1999**, 10, pp. 225-266.

404 18. Hannington, M.D.; Poulsen, K.H.; Thompson, J.F.H.; Sillitoe, R.H. Volcanogenic gold in the
405 massive sulfide environment. *Rev. Econ. Geol.* **1997**, 8, pp. 325-356.

406 19. Heinrich, C.A.; Driesner, T.; Stefánsson, A.; Seward, T.M. Magmatic vapour contraction and
407 transport of gold from the porphyry environment to epithermal ore deposits. *Geology* **2004**, 32,
408 pp. 761–764; DOI: 10.1130/G20629.1.

409 20. Monecke, T.; Petersen, S.; Hannington, M.D. Constraints on water depth of massive sulfide
410 formation: evidence from modern seafloor hydrothermal systems in arc-related settings. *Econ.*
411 *Geol.* **2014**, 109, pp. 2079–2101; DOI: 10.2113/econgeo.109.8.2079.

412 21. Nadaraju, G. Triassic-Jurassic biochronology of the Iskut River map areas, northwestern
413 British Columbia. Unpublished M.Sc. thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver,
414 Canada, 1993.

415 22. Sherlock, R.; Roth, T.; Spooner, E.; Bray, C. Origin of the Eskay Creek precious metal-rich
416 volcanic massive sulfide deposit: fluid inclusion and stable isotope evidence. *Econ. Geol.*
417 **1999**, 94, pp. 803-824; DOI: 10.2113/gsecongeo.94.6.803.