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Comparison with nitrate levels measured by the  
curiosity rover's sample analysis at mars instrument**

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**ABIOTIC INPUT OF FIXED NITROGEN BY BOLIDE IMPACTS IN CH<sub>4</sub>+CO<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub> AND H<sub>2</sub>+CH<sub>4</sub>+CO<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub> ATMOSPHERES. COMPARISON WITH NITRATE LEVELS MEASURED BY THE CURIOSITY ROVER'S SAMPLE ANALYSIS AT MARS INSTRUMENT.** R. Navarro-González<sup>1</sup>, K. F. Navarro<sup>1</sup>, P. Coll<sup>2</sup>, C. P. McKay<sup>3</sup>, B. Sutter<sup>4</sup>, J. C. Stern<sup>5</sup>, P. D. Archer<sup>4</sup>, A. C. McAdam<sup>5</sup>, C. Szopa<sup>6</sup>, C. Freissinet<sup>6</sup>, H. B. Franz<sup>5</sup>, A. Buch<sup>7</sup>, B. D. Prats<sup>8</sup>, M. Millan<sup>9</sup>, J. L. Eigenbrode<sup>5</sup>, D. Coscia<sup>10</sup>, S. Teinturier<sup>5</sup>, J.-Y. Bonnet<sup>10</sup>, D. P. Glavin<sup>5</sup>, A. J. Williams<sup>11</sup>, F. Raulin<sup>2</sup>, M. Cabane<sup>6</sup>, D. W. Ming<sup>12</sup>, C. A. Malespin<sup>5</sup>, P. Mahaffy<sup>5</sup>, F. J. Martín-Torres<sup>13</sup>, M.-P. Zorzano-Mier<sup>13</sup>, S. Atreya<sup>14</sup>, A. Fraeman<sup>15</sup>, and A. R. Vasavada<sup>16</sup>, <sup>1</sup>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (navarro@nucleares.unam.mx), <sup>2</sup>Université Paris-Est Créteil, <sup>3</sup>NASA Ames Research Center, <sup>4</sup>Jacobs, NASA Johnson Space Center, <sup>5</sup>NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, <sup>6</sup>Université Versailles Saint-Quentin, <sup>7</sup>Ecole Centrale Paris, <sup>8</sup>NASA GSFC/eINFORMe, Inc., <sup>9</sup>Georgetown University, <sup>10</sup>Université Paris-Saclay, <sup>11</sup>University of Florida, <sup>12</sup>NASA Johnson Space Center, <sup>13</sup>University of Aberdeen, <sup>14</sup>University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, <sup>15</sup>NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and <sup>16</sup>California Institute of Technology.

**Introduction:** The evidence for liquid water on early Mars implies that the atmosphere was denser and contained greenhouse gases that allowed for a wet and warmer climate with a faint young Sun [1]. A possible solution for the martian climate puzzle is the presence of 10–20% molecular hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>) from volcanic emissions that would have warmed the atmosphere episodically by collision-induced absorption (CIA) with CO<sub>2</sub> [2-6] or N<sub>2</sub> [6-7]. An alternative warming scenario is the presence of methane (CH<sub>4</sub>~10%) or CH<sub>4</sub>-H<sub>2</sub> mixtures due to CO<sub>2</sub>-CH<sub>4</sub> CIA in the 250–500 cm<sup>-1</sup> spectral window [3,7-8]. The N<sub>2</sub>-CH<sub>4</sub> CIA is significantly weaker than with CO<sub>2</sub> [7]. CH<sub>4</sub> could have been outgassed by volcanoes if the mantle was oxygen-poor [9,10]. Additionally, serpentinization of ferromagnesian minerals could have led to localized subsurface sources of CH<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> [11,12] and contributed to episodic outbursts during chaotic transitions of the mean obliquity of the planet leading intermittent excursions to a warm and wet climate [13].

In addition to its greenhouse effect, CH<sub>4</sub> may have had a role in nitrogen (N) fixation in the martian atmosphere, *e.g.*, the conversion of N<sub>2</sub> into fixed and reactive forms of N, such as nitric oxide (NO) and hydrogen cyanide (HCN) by high energy processes. The key parameters determining the type of N species formed and their rates of fixation are the ratios of carbon (C), oxygen (O), and hydrogen (H) atoms in the atmosphere [14-17]; for example, a CH<sub>4</sub>-H<sub>2</sub>-rich atmosphere (high C and H) produces reduced forms of fixed N, such as HCN [14,15], while neutral (CO<sub>2</sub>) or oxidized atmospheres (O<sub>2</sub>) generate oxidized forms of fixed N, such as NO [16]. We have previously investigated the efficiency of N fixation by bolide impacts in CO<sub>2</sub>-N<sub>2</sub> martian atmospheres with or without H<sub>2</sub>. Surprisingly, NO was produced more efficiently in 20% H<sub>2</sub> in spite of it being a reducing agent and not likely to increase the rate of nitrogen oxidation [17]. Here we present experimental data and

theoretical calculations that investigate the efficiency of N-fixation by bolide impacts in 10% CH<sub>4</sub> and 5% CH<sub>4</sub>-5% H<sub>2</sub> in CO<sub>2</sub>-N<sub>2</sub> atmospheres. In addition, we compare the N-fixation rate by bolide impacts with the levels of nitrates present in the rocks examined by the Curiosity rover along the stratigraphic column from John Klein to Mary Anning.

**Laboratory simulations:** Simulated atmospheres were prepared with a mixture composed of CH<sub>4</sub> (10%) or CH<sub>4</sub> (5%)-H<sub>2</sub> (5%) in CO<sub>2</sub> (0-100%) and N<sub>2</sub> (0-100%) using a computerized gas-blending system [17]. Bolide impacts were simulated in the laboratory using a pulsed laser Nd-YAG beam at 1 bar [18]. The gases were analyzed by gas chromatography (GC) coupled to mass spectrometry (MS) using electron impact [17].

**Theoretical modeling:** The energy yield for the production of NO generated by bolide impacts was estimated following the model of Chameides *et al.* [19] according to the following equation [17]:

$$E_{NO} = \frac{0.5 \times N_A \times f_{NO}(T_F)}{T_F \times (n_{CO_2} C_p_{CO_2} + n_{N_2} C_p_{N_2} + n_{CH_4} C_p_{CH_4} + n_{H_2} C_p_{H_2})}$$

Where,  $E_{NO}$  is the number of NO molecules produced per joule;  $N_A$  is the Avogadro constant;  $f_{NO}(T_F)$  is the nitric oxide equilibrium mixing ratio at the freeze-out temperature ( $T_F$ );  $n$  is the mole fraction of the gas in the mixture; and  $C_p$  is the specific heat at constant pressure.  $f_{NO}(T_F)$  was computed using FactSage, a thermodynamic-based equilibrium speciation program [20].

**Martian samples:** Evolved gas analyses of the drilled rock samples by the Sample Analysis at Mars Instrument were conducted from 40°C to ~860°C with a ramp rate of 35°C/min under reduced pressure (~25 mbar) using a He flow of ~0.8 cm<sup>3</sup>/min, and the evolved gases were analyzed by electron impact MS.

**Results and Discussion:** Figure 1 shows the experimental and predicted  $E_{NO}$  values as a function of CO<sub>2</sub>/(CO<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio by shockwaves in simulated

primitive martian atmospheres in the absence and presence of CH<sub>4</sub> and/or H<sub>2</sub>.

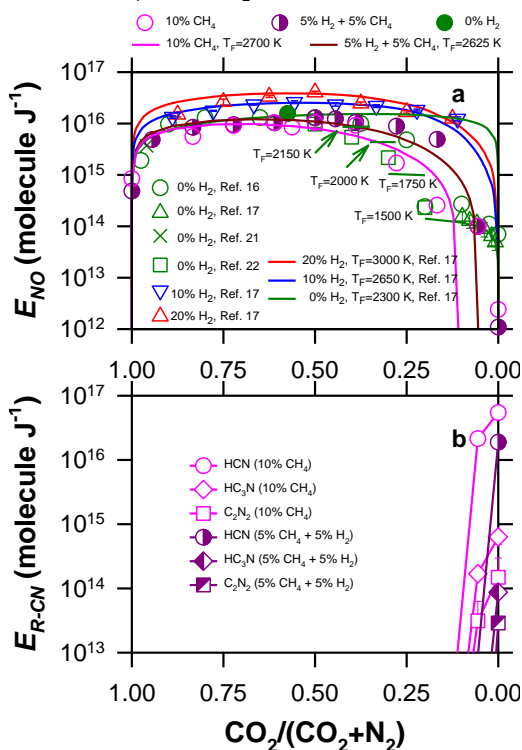


Fig. 1. The efficiency in the energy yield ( $E$ ) of production of fixed N by shockwaves in simulated primitive martian atmosphere. Panel (a) shows the production of NO combining experimental data (symbols) as well as predictions (lines) derived in this and previous studies. Panel (b) shows the experimental production of cyano compounds (R-CN) consisting of HCN, C<sub>2</sub>N<sub>2</sub> and HC<sub>3</sub>N.

NO was the main form of fixed N in CH<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>-CH<sub>4</sub> mixtures; HCN, cyanogen (C<sub>2</sub>N<sub>2</sub>), and cyanoacetylene (HC<sub>3</sub>N) were produced only when the CO<sub>2</sub>/(CO<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio was ≤0.06. E<sub>NO</sub> (10<sup>16</sup> molecules/J) increased from ~1.0 in 10% CH<sub>4</sub>, to ~1.3 in 5% H<sub>2</sub> + 5% CH<sub>4</sub>, to ~1.5 in 0% H<sub>2</sub>, to 2.5 in 10% H<sub>2</sub> and finally to 3.8 in 20% H<sub>2</sub> at CO<sub>2</sub>/(CO<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub>)=0.5. E<sub>NO</sub> increased in H<sub>2</sub> rich atmospheres because the shockwave cooled faster, trapping NO at higher mixing ratios at T<sub>F</sub> ≥2600K. T<sub>F</sub> in CH<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>-CH<sub>4</sub> mixtures was similar than in H<sub>2</sub> mixtures (Fig. 1); however E<sub>NO</sub> was lower because atomic oxygen (O), produced by the dissociation of CO<sub>2</sub>, was consumed in the oxidation of CH<sub>4</sub> (reaction 1) rather than in N<sub>2</sub> (reaction 2) that led to NO:

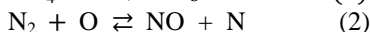
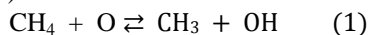


Figure 2 shows the variation of amount of fixed nitrogen present in the form of nitrites and nitrates in the sedimentary rocks surveyed by Curiosity to date, and the estimated N accumulation ( $N_A$ ) rate from the lowest to the highest stratigraphic column. Figure 2 also shows the N deposition ( $N_D$ ) by bolide impacts

and UV irradiation under various conditions. A possible explanation to account for the variation of fixed N is a change in the rate of  $N_D$  by fluctuations in the type and amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere although leaching of fixed nitrogen is also likely [17, 23]. Perchlorate on Mars roughly tracks nitrate [24], and if the hypothesis suggested here is correct, this may point to an atmospheric chemistry source for perchlorate as well.

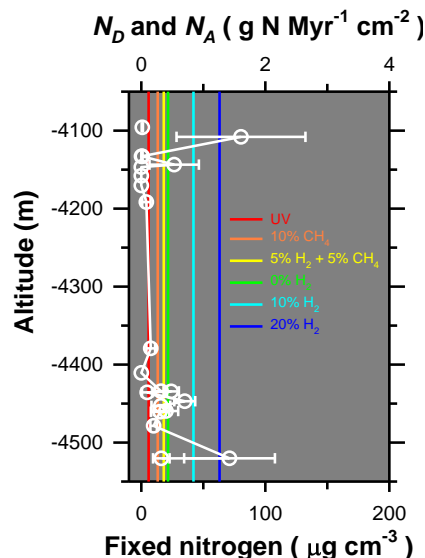


Fig. 2. Variation of fixed N evolved as NO in the sedimentary record of Gale crater.  $N_D$  and  $N_A$  are the rates of fixed N deposited over the entire surface of Gale crater that was transported into the lake [17].

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