Modern water/rock reactions in Oman hyperalkaline peridotite aquifers and implications for microbial habitability

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Abstract:

The Samail ophiolite in Oman is undergoing modern hydration and carbonation of peridotite and may host a deep subsurface biosphere. Previous investigations of hyperalkaline fluids in Oman have focused on fluids released at surface seeps, which quickly lose their reducing character and precipitate carbonates upon contact with the O_2/CO_2–rich atmosphere. In this work, geochemical analysis of rocks and fluids from the subsurface provides new insights into the operative reactions in serpentinizing aquifers. Serpentinite rock and hyperalkaline fluids (pH >10), which exhibit millimolar concentrations of Ca^{2+}, H_2 and CH_4, as well as variable sulfate and nitrate, were accessed from wells situated in mantle peridotite near Ibra and studied to investigate their aqueous geochemistry, gas concentrations, isotopic signatures, mineralogy, Fe speciation and microbial community composition.

The bulk mineralogy of drill cuttings is dominated by olivine, pyroxene, brucite, serpentine and magnetite. At depth, Fe-bearing brucite is commonly intermixed with serpentine, whereas near the surface, olivine and brucite are lost and increased magnetite and serpentine is detected. Micro-Raman spectroscopy reveals at least two distinct generations of serpentine present in drill cuttings recovered from several depths from two wells. Fe K-edge x-ray absorption near-edge spectroscopy (XANES) analysis of the lizardite shows a strong tetrahedral Fe coordination, suggesting a mixture of both Fe(II) and Fe(III) in the serpentine. Magnetite veins are also closely associated with this second generation serpentine, and 2-10μm magnetite grains overprint all minerals in the drill cuttings. Thus we propose that the dissolved H_2 that accumulates in the subsurface hyperalkaline fluids was evolved through low temperature oxidation and hydration of relict olivine, as well as destabilization of pre-existing brucite present in the partially serpentinized dunites and harzburgites. In particular, we hypothesize that Fe-bearing brucite is currently reacting with dissolved silica in the aquifer fluids to generate late-stage magnetite, additional serpentine and dissolved H_2.

Dissolved CH_4 in the fluids exhibits the most isotopically heavy carbon in CH_4 reported in the literature thus far. The CH_4 may have formed through abiotic reduction of dissolved CO_2 or through biogenic pathways under extreme carbon limitation. The methane isotopic composition may have also been modified by significant methane oxidation. 16S rRNA sequencing of DNA recovered from filtered hyperalkaline well fluids reveals an abundance of *Meiothermus, Thermodesulfovibrionaceae* (sulfate-reducers) and *Clostridia* (fermenters). The fluids also contain candidate phyla OP1 and OD1, as well as *Methanobacterium* (methanogen) and *Methylococcus* sp. (methanotroph). The composition of these microbial communities suggests that low-temperature hydrogen and methane generation, coupled with the presence of electron acceptors such as nitrate and sulfate, sustains subsurface microbial life within the Oman ophiolite.

1. Introduction

The Samail ophiolite in the Sultanate of Oman, the largest and best exposed ophiolite sequence on Earth, is well-suited to the study of low temperature serpentinization, which is the aqueous alteration of ultramafic rocks. Over 15,000 km^3 of peridotite is currently undergoing low temperature hydration and oxidation (Barnes et al., 1978; Neal and Stanger, 1983; Neal and Stanger, 1985; Clark and Fontes, 1990; Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Kelemen et al., 2011; Streit et al., 2012; Paukert et al., 2012). Modern serpentinization is inferred from the distribution of hyperalkaline seeps that release hyperalkaline fluids rich in H_2 and CH_4, and poor in dissolved inorganic and organic carbon. However, the water/rock reaction pathways giving rise to H_2 and methane formation at near-surface temperatures are not known. Moreover, no studies have yet explored whether the active hydrogeochemical system hosts a subsurface biosphere.

In Oman, the mantle peridotite consists of olivine, orthopyroxene, and serpentine, with trace amounts of calcic pyroxene, chromite, and Fe-oxides (Hanghøj et al., 2010). The mantle peridotite is 30-70% serpentinized (Boudier et al., 2010) and variably carbonated. Some serpentinization occurred during hydrothermal circulation when the ophiolite was situated at an oceanic spreading ridge, some during thrust emplacement of the ophiolite over pelagic and continental margin sediments, some during late Cretaceous sub-aerial weathering and a subsequent marine transgression, and some during ongoing water/rock reactions (Hanghøj et al., 2010; Kelemen et al., 2011). The proportions and spatial distribution of serpentine and other secondary minerals formed during these different events are unclear. Completely unaltered peridotite is not observed in outcrop in Oman, but the least altered samples are found in deep canyons, whereas the most serpentinized outcrops are in areas of low relief (Kelemen et al., 2011). The peridotite also undergoes carbonation reactions as evidenced by modern carbonate vein and terrace dates (Clark and Fontes, 1990; Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Mervine et al., 2014) which indicate temperatures of formation from 30-60°C (Kelemen et al., 2011; Streit et al., 2012).

An active hydrological system drives present-day serpentinization and other alteration processes occurring in the subsurface. Groundwater circulation in the peridotite aquifer is controlled by fissure and fracture hydraulic conductivity. Near-surface fissures (perhaps extending to ~ 50 meters depth) accommodate most of the groundwater flow with a hydraulic conductivity of 10^{-7} m/s (Dewandel et al., 2005). The origins of this shallow, hydraulically active zone are not clear, but are probably due to meteoric weathering. The peridotite aquifer contains a network of fractures that began to develop when the ophiolite was hydrothermally altered at the mid-ocean ridge, ~95 million years ago during the Middle Cretaceous (Coleman, 1981). The fractures in the peridotite host serpentine and carbonate veins (Dewandel et al., 2005). Hyperalkaline surface seeps generally discharge at the contact between the mantle and overlying crustal rocks, and along the basal thrust plane of the ophiolite sequence. They release high pH fluids (>11) rich in Ca^{2+}, OH^-, H_2, and CH_4. The surrounding mineralogy is dominated by carbonates that precipitated when the carbon deprived fluids mixed with atmospheric CO_2 (Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Kelemen et al., 2011; Paukert et al., 2012; Chavagnac et al., 2013; Chavagnac et al., 2013).

The origin of dissolved H_2 and CH_4 in Oman are enigmatic. Currently, there is no evidence for modern hydrothermal activity at temperature greater than 200°C of water/rock reactions in the peridotite aquifer, which would correspond to a depth of ~8 km based on a geothermal gradient of 25°C/km. Although serpentinization processes have been extensively studied at temperatures >120°C , the mineral assemblages and alteration processes leading to formation of dissolved H_2 and CH_4 during serpentinization at lower temperatures are poorly constrained.

Serpentinization leads to the evolution of hydrogen through hydration and the oxidation of reduced iron species found in olivine and pyroxenes. For typical mantle olivine with molar Mg/(Mg+Fe) = 0.9, a simplified reaction above 200°C might be:

$$Mg_{1.8}Fe_{0.2}SiO_4 + 1.37H_2O = 0.5\ Mg_3Si_2O_5(OH)_4 + 0.3\ Mg(OH)_2 + 0.067Fe_3O_4 + 0.067H_2 \quad (1)$$

(e.g. Equation 1; Frost, 1985; McCollom and Bach, 2009). Such water/rock reactions produce fluids rich in H_2. These fluids also commonly contain abundant dissolved CH_4 , which may form abiogenically as the result of Fischer-Tropsch Type or Sabatier reactions (Horita and Berndt, 1999; Etiope et al., 2013), or biologically via methanogenesis (Balch et al., 1979; Sleep et al., 2004).

Hydrogen generation during serpentinization has been modeled from 8-400°C (McCollom and Bach, 2009; Okland et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2013). Experimentally produced H_2 has been generated from 0-100°C (Stevens and McKinley, 1995; Anderson et al., 1998; Stevens and McKinley, 2000; Neubeck et al., 2011; Okland et al., 2012; Mayhew et al., 2013) Comparisons of model and experimental results often yield conflicting results, perhaps because of assumptions included in models. For example, McCollom and Bach (2009) utilize reaction path models to simulate water-rock reactions and resulting mineral assemblages, but they are constrained by the lack of existing thermodynamic data for Mg:Fe solid solutions, the incorporation of Fe(III) into secondary silicates, and the lack of data on mineral compositions that form at low temperature. Also, models assume the reactions have reached equilibrium, and it is unlikely that low-temperature laboratory experiments are fully equilibrated. Thus, detailed analysis of field samples from low-temperature serpentinizing environments is required to ground-truth modeling efforts.

There is also a lack of data on the detection or characterization of microorganisms in Oman's hyperalkaline aquifers. The high concentrations of H_2 and CH_4 in the hyperalkaline fluids provide electron donors that could be utilized by subsurface chemolithoautotrophic life, which could contribute to carbon cycling in the subsurface (Stevens and McKinley, 1995; Sleep et al., 2004, p.2005; Nealson et al., 2005; Mayhew et al., 2013; Klein et al., 2015). The search for microbial life in other serpentinizing environments has primarily been focused on sequencing the 16S rRNA gene from easily accessible surface springs as windows into the subsurface (Neal and Stanger, 1983; Abrajano et al., 1990; Bruni et al., 2002; Meyer-Dombard et al., 2015; Woycheese et al., 2015), although recent work by Postec et al. (2015) isolated DNA from carbonate chimneys from a low-temperature hydrothermal field. However, all these studies were limited to surface samples collected in oxygenated environments, which allows aerobic

149 organisms to flourish. It is unclear if the microbes inhabiting the surface seeps are similar to
150 those active in the anaerobic subsurface.
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152 This study was designed to assess low temperature serpentinization processes in a peridotite
153 aquifer in Oman and to determine what types of microbial life are hosted in the subsurface. We
154 sampled hyperalkaline, H_2-, CH_4-rich fluids from 10-300 m depth in peridotite and studied their
155 geochemistry, gas concentrations and isotopic signatures. We integrated these data with
156 mineralogical and spectroscopic analysis of mineral chips recovered from depth within two
157 peridotite wells to elucidate the oxidation state, mineralogy, and extent of serpentinization of the
158 rocks in contact with deep subsurface fluids. Magnetic hysteresis analyses on downhole bulk
159 rock samples augment these geochemical and mineralogical analyses by providing the
160 distribution of different rock magnetic properties within drilled sections, thereby suggesting
161 possible zonation in the serpentinization process. Geochemical data were complemented by high
162 throughput 16S rRNA sequencing of DNA recovered from the well fluids to identify microbial
163 organisms present in the fluid. These data provide the first insights into the modern water/rock
164 reactions in a hyperalkaline Oman aquifer, and the potential coupling between geochemical and
165 microbiological processes during low-temperature serpentinization.
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2. Methods

2.1 *Field methods*

The Ministry of Water Resources of the Sultanate of Oman drilled numerous wells into peridotite (~300 meters deep) to investigate water resources for the region. Water samples and drill cuttings were obtained from wells NSHQ14 and NSHQ04 in a peridotite plain in the Samail ophiolite, Oman (Figure 1). NSHQ04 is near a north/south trending fault, with gabbro to the west and mixed dunite and gabbro lenses cut by pyroxenite dikes to the east. NSHQ14 is several kilometers from the crust-mantle boundary; the surrounding rocks are mainly harzburgite with meter-scale dunite bands.

In January 2014, a shallow submersible pump was used to collect water from 18 meters depth in both NSHQ04 and NSHQ14, and a stainless steel bailer was used to collect water from 260 meters in well NSHQ14. Water samples containing dissolved gases were collected in sterile syringes and injected into N_2-purged vials and later used for headspace gas analysis. The vials were acid washed, autoclaved and baked at 400°C in a muffle furnace prior to field work. Samples for ICP-MS analysis were filtered with 0.2µm Millipore filters and acidified in the field with concentrated nitric acid to ~pH 2. The fluid pH, temperature, and conductivity were measured with a conductivity meter (YSI Model#85/10) while pH was measured with a Mettler-Toledo SevenGo2 pH meter calibrated with reference standards of pH 12.46, 10.01, and 7.

Fluids (~5-10L) from the wells were pumped and filtered through 0.2µm Sterivex inline filters to recover biomass for DNA extraction. Filters were transported frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored in a -70°C freezer until extraction.

We also obtained drill cuttings (rock chips recovered during drilling) of the wells from 262, 140, 70, and 17 meters depth at NSHQ14 and from 303, 180, and 120 meters depth at well NSHQ04. These were mounted in epoxy and prepared as 30mm thick polished thin sections for analysis.

2.2 *Laboratory methods*

Major cations (Mn^{2+}, Fe^{2+}, Mg^{2+}, Ca^{2+}, Al^{3+}), SiO_2, and trace elements (Ni, As, Se, Cu, Cd, Zn Co, Cr) were analyzed on field-acidified and filtered well waters using Inductively Coupled Plasma-Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) on a ThermoScientific X Series 2. Major anions (F^-, Cl^-, Br^-, NO_3^-, PO_4^{3-}, SO_4^{2-}) were analyzed using Ion Chromatography (IC) on a Dionex IC25 with an IonPac column and a 9 mM sodium carbonate eluent. Water samples were collected in acid-washed, autoclaved, and ashed organic free vials and sent to NASA Ames Research Center to measure low weight molecular organic acids on a Shimadzu Prominence LC20AT high-performance liquid chromatograph (HPLC) equipped with a SPD-M20A photodiodearray detector and a flow rate of 1mL per minute.

Drill cuttings were powdered with a mortar and pestle and then x-ray diffraction (XRD) data were obtained using CuKα radiation (λ = 1.5418Å) in the range 15-65° 2θ using a Bruker D2 Phaser operated at 30 kV and 10 mA. A Lynxeye 1D detector with a step size of 0.02° and collection time of 1 s per step were employed. The XRD spectra were semi-quantitatively fit using the Bruker DiffracEva program and results were compared to the RRUFF database (Downs 2006).

To determine H_2 and CH_4 concentrations (detection limit of 10ppm and analytical error of 5%) in the gases exsolved from the well fluids, we used a SRI 8610C gas chromatograph (GC) with a 2m by 1mm ID micropacked ShinCarbon ST column with N_2 as the carrier gas. 0.5mL of gas was sampled from the headspace of serum vials sealed with blue rubber stoppers and was injected into a sampling port on the GC. H_2 was measured with a thermal conductivity detector (TCD), and a flame ionization detector (FID) was concurrently used to measure CH_4.

Stable isotope analyses were conducted at the Center for Isotope Geochemistry at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The isotopic compositions of H_2 and CH_4 were analyzed using a Thermo Scientific GC Trace Gas Ultra system connected to a Thermo Scientific Delta V Plus Mass Spectrometer (IRMS). Gas samples were injected into a 6-port valve (the loop size varied from 5L to 250 L depending on the concentration of the analyte in the sample) bypassing the inlet of the GC. After flushing with at least 3 times the volume of the loop, the sample was injected into the GC where the gases were separated chromatographically on an HP-molesieve fused silica capillary column (30 m x 0.320 mm). For H_2, after the samples went through the GC, they were passed through a combustion furnace at room temperature and then into the IRMS. Reproducibility of these analyses is ±2.5‰ (1s), as determined by repeated analyses of a laboratory gas standard. Carbon isotope ratios of CH_4 were analyzed using the same system with with the combustion furnace (a capillary ceramic tube loaded with Ni, Cu, and Pt wires) set at 1030 °C where the CH_4 was converted to CO_2. Produced water was removed, and the carbon isotope ratio of the resulting CO_2 was measured in the IRMS. The reproducibility of these analyses is ±0.2‰. For hydrogen isotopes of CH_4, the sample was passed through a pyrolysis furnace at 1450 °C and the resulting H_2 gas measured with the IRMS. The reproducibility of these analyses is ± 5‰.

Samples with 10-100 micrograms calcite were reacted with 100% H_3PO_4 at 90°C and then used for both carbon and oxygen isotope analyses ($\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{18}O$), which were determined using a GV IsoPrime mass spectrometer with Dual-Inlet and MultiCarb systems in the Center for Stable Isotope Biogeochemistry (CSIB) at Department of Integrative Biology, University of California at Berkeley. Several replicates of one international standard NBS19, and two lab standards $CaCO_3$-I & II were measured along with samples for each run. The overall external analytical precision is about $\pm$0.05‰ for $\delta^{13}C$ and about $\pm$0.07‰ for $\delta^{18}O$.

The isotopic compositions of the water samples were measured using CIG's Los Gatos Research Liquid Water Isotope Analyzer (LWIA). 1 ml of each sample was loaded into 2 ml vials. Using an auto sampler, each sample was injected into the LWIA 8 times where the data for the first 3 injections were discarded and the data for the remaining 5 injections averaged to give the raw isotope values. The data were then compared to a series of 3 standards bracketing the expected isotopic values of the samples analyzed and run multiple times throughout the run. The reproducibility of these analyses based on repeated analyses of the standards is better than ±1‰ for δD and ±0.2‰ for $\delta^{18}O$.

2.3 *Microscale analytical techniques*

Synchrotron-based hard X-ray measurements of Fe K-edge micro-x-ray absorption near edge spectra (μXANES) were conducted at Beamline 2-3 at the Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Lightsource (SSRL). The incident energy was selected with a Si (111) double crystal monochromator with the SPEAR accelerator ring containing ~150-200mA at 3.0 GeV. The beam was focused to approximately 2 by 2 μm using Kirkpatrick Baez mirrors. Data were collected at the Fe K-edge using a Fe^0 foil calibration of 7112 eV with a single-element Vortex detector capable of reading several million counts per second.

Fe K-edge mapping was conducted at 8 energies (7123, 7126, 7128, 7129, 7130, 7131, 7133 keV) chosen to maximize the differences in normalized intensity between representative XANES (Mayhew et al., 2011; Mayhew et al., 2013). These data were coupled with an 11 keV map of trace element distribution to identify unique areas in the sample. Principle Components Analysis (PCA) on these multiple energy XRF maps were used to identify the location of unique Fe species in the map area using Sam's Microprobe Analysis Kit (SMAK). We then collected representative μXANES spectra from those spots and employed PCA to identify key end member μXANES spectrum that represent the unique chemical forms of Fe in each sample. Finally, multiple-energy maps were fit with the fluorescence intensities of each end member mXANES spectra to show the distribution of Fe-bearing minerals in complex reacted and unreacted samples.

XANES were normalized with Sam's Interface for XAS Package (SIXPACK). XANES spectra were collected from a range of 6882-7152eV. To qualitatively determine Fe speciation and mineralogy, spectra were fit from 7110 to 7150 eV using least squares fitting of Fe model compounds (in SIXPACK) calibrated using the first inflection of a Fe^0 foil at 7112 eV (Mayhew et al., 2011). We also collected the pre-edge (7108-7118eV) region with a step size of 0.1eV and dwell time of 3 seconds and analyzed the pre-edge employing protocols by Andreani *et al.* (2013) and Wilke *et al.* (2001) to determine the ratio of Fe^{2+}/Fe^{3+} in the various generations of serpentine.

Beamline 4-1 at SSRL was used to collect bulk Fe K-edge spectra for seven powdered well chip samples. A Si (220) ϕ= 0 monochromator was used and X-ray absorption spectra (XAS) were collected on a Lytle detector. A Fe^0 foil standard was used and calibrated to 7112eV. Duplicate spectra were collected and averaged for XANES scanning from a range of 6882-7082eV with a step size of 10 points, then from 7092 to 7520 with a 0.35 step size.

Quantum Design MPMS Superconducting Quantum Interface Device (SQUID) magnetometer with the magnetic moment resolution of 10^{-8} emu at Department of Physics and Astronomy at Michigan State University was used to analyze bulk rock powder samples to determine magnetic hysteresis parameters. A total of 7 samples with various weights (40-259 mg) are measured over the range of ± 5 T at 300K.

Micro-Raman spectra and hyperspectral maps for well rock chip samples were collected using a Horiba LabRAM HR Evolution Raman spectrometer equipped with a 532nm frequency-doubled Nd:YAG laser (Laser Quantum, Torus 532 + mpc3000) coupled to an Olympus BXFM optical microscope. The laser beam was focused through a 50x objective lens, yielding a spatial resolution of ~2μm. A 600 lines/mm grating and adjustable confocal pinhole (100 μm-200 μm)

was used to give a spectral resolution full width at half maximum (FWHM) of 4.5-8.4 cm^{-1}. Spectra were collected from 20-1200cm^{-1} using a Si-based CCD detector (1024 x 256 pixels). The spectrometer was calibrated using the 520 cm^{-1} Raman peak of Si daily prior to analysis. Spectral data were corrected for instrumental artifacts and baseline-subtracted using a polynomial fitting algorithm in LabSpec 6 (Horiba Scientific). For the Raman microspectroscopy analyses, the drill cuttings from each depth in NSHQ14 and NSHQ04 were analyzed by generating hyperspectral maps of representative areas in the thin sections, using Multivariate Curve Resolution-Alternating Least Squares (MCR-ALS) and non-negativity constraints on scores and loadings to determine the main spectral components present, then collecting spot Raman spectra to verify the components, and fitting the hyperspectral data set with the end member spectra to generate component maps.

Quantitative chemical analysis of serpentine was performed using the electron microprobe laboratory at the University of Colorado at Boulder on the JEOL JXA-8600 equipped with 4 wavelength-dispersive spectrometers, and a PGT energy-dispersive spectrometer. Spot analyses of polished thin sections were performed at a current of 10 nA, accelerating voltage of 15 keV, and beam diameter of 10 μm to avoid destroying the hydrated serpentine sample to analyze the major element compositions of Si, Al, Mg, Na, Ca, Cr, K, Fe, Mn, and Ti, using natural standards.

TGA measurements were taken in a NETZSCH STA 449 F1 Jupiter. Between 60 and 110 mg of sample in an alumina crucible and a blank alumina crucible were heated in Argon up to 1000°C at a ramp rate of 10 Kelvin per minute. The crucibles were then held at 1000°C for one hour, at which point data collection stopped and the furnace cooled. The derivatives of the data were determined using NETZSCH Proteus.

2.4 *16S rRNA sequencing*

The microbial analyses were conducted as described previously (Bowers et al., 2013; Emerson et al., 2015). DNA was extracted from one quarter of each of the filter samples using the MoBio PowerSoil kit. The V4-V5 region of the 16S rRNA gene was PCR amplified in triplicate reactions using the 515f/806r primer pair. The primers contained the appropriate Illumina adapters and the reverse primer contains a 12-bp error-correcting barcode unique to each sample. The triplicate reactions were composited, amplicon concentrations were determined using the PicoGreen dsDNA assay, and the amplicons from all samples were pooled together in equimolar concentrations. Sequencing was conducted on an Illumina MiSeq at the University of Colorado Genomics Core Facility following the 2 × 250 bp paired-end protocol. Quality filtering of reads and processing of the reads was conducted as described in Barberán et al. (2015). After demultiplexing, reads were quality filtered at an equivalent sequencing depth (6000 reads per sample) and clustered into phylotypes using the UPARSE pipeline (Edgar, 2013). Reads were assigned to phylotypes at the ≥97% sequence similarity threshold and phylotype taxonomy was determined using the RDP classifier with a confidence threshold of 0.5 (Wang et al., 2007) trained on the Greengenes 13_8 database (McDonald et al., 2012). Multivariate statistical analysis was performed in R, a software environment for statistical computing and graphics (R Development Core Team, 2008).

3. Results

3.1 *Aqueous geochemistry of wells*

Fluids were collected from two wells drilled into peridotite, NSHQ14 (up to a depth of 260m) and NSHQ04 (up to a depth of 50m, below which the well is collapsed). Minimum concentrations of dissolved H_2 and CH_4 were determined by GC. For NSHQ14 at 262m, some gas was lost from the fluids during the transfer from the bailer sampler to gas-tight vials due to rapid exsolution. The calculated dissolved H_2 concentrations range from 0.18 to 0.67 mM H_2, and the methane concentrations range from 0.17 to 1.44 mM (Table 1).

The fluids in both wells are hyperalkaline: NSHQ14 has a pH of 11.5 and NSHQ04 has a pH of 10.6. Major cation and anion analysis for fluids reveals >6mM Ca^{2+}, ≥0.005mM Mg^{2+}, and 6.75-12.30mM Na^{+} (Table 1). Low molecular weight organic acids (lactate, acetate, formate, propionate, butyrate and valerate) are below detection limits of ~5.0 μM; thus, there is low dissolved organic carbon in the fluid. Dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) levels for samples collected from these wells in 2012 were 0.078-0.391 mM (Paukert et al., 2012). Both wells contain high concentrations of Cl^- (>20 mM), which are almost two orders of magnitude higher than the 0.35 mM Cl^- present in Oman rainwater (Weyhenmeyer, 2000; Paukert et al., 2012). The well fluids contain 0.05-0.48 mM SO_4^{2-} and 0.012-0.022 mM NO_3^-. The trace element chemistry of the wells is similar; Ni and Cr are the most abundant metals (average of 0.15 and 0.18 μM, respectively. The only notable difference is NSHQ14 at 262m has more Zn (0.139 μM versus ~0.03 μM) than the other depths.

The fluids in the peridotite wells exhibit similar pH and aqueous geochemistry to surface alkaline springs previously sampled in Oman (Paukert et al., 2012); however, the NSHQ14 and NSHQ04 well fluids contain more Ca^{2+}, Cl^-, NO_3^- and generally SO_4^{2-}. The dissolved silica concentrations are ~0.01mM $SiO_{2(aq)}$ versus the 0.04mM found in the surface seeps.

Oxidation-reduction potential (ORP) values were measured during the January 2012 field season. NSHQ14 fluids exhibit much higher ORP values (-31.6 mV) near the surface at 18 meter, whereas the fluids at 260m are highly reducing (-597.3 mV). The ORP value for fluids collected from NSHQ04 at 70 meters was -103.4 mV.

3.2 *Isotopic composition of fluids, dissolved gases, and carbonates*

The δD values of dissolved H_2 are very low (-680‰ and -686‰ for NSHQ04 and NSHQ14 respectively, Table 2). The $\delta^{18}O$ of the well waters are -3.0‰ and 0.7‰ and the δD values are -15‰ for NSHQ04 and 2‰ for NSHQ14. If the dissolved H_2 formed in isotopic equilibrium with the water, we calculate a temperature of formation of ~50°C using the theoretical geothermometer developed by Bottinga (1969). The δD values of CH_4 are also low, -205‰ and -232‰ for NSHQ04_18m and NSHQ14_262m, respectively. In contrast, the CH_4 is strongly enriched in ^{13}C ($\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 for NSHQ04_18m is +2.4‰; NSHQ14_262m is +3‰) (Table 2). These $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 and δD CH_4 values from Oman subsurface fluids are notably higher than previously defined isotopic fields for thermogenic, biogenic, and abiotic methane (Figure 2). The carbonate found in the drill cuttings $\delta^{13}C_{VPDB}$ ranges from -1.48 to -7.05‰ while the $\delta^{18}O_{VPDB}$ ranges from -7.73 to -11.49‰ (Table 3). The carbonate concentrations in the rock were low and not quantified.

3.3 *Mineralogy of drill cuttings*

Bulk powder XRD spectra are similar between the two wells. They are dominated by lizardite and enstatite and contain magnetite near the surface (Figure 3A,B). In the drill cuttings at 70, 140, and 262m from NSHQ14, there is a brucite peak at 18.8 2θ, but not at the shallow 17m. NSHQ04 drill cutting XRD spectra also contain a brucite peak at depth (180 and 303m), but not at 120m. There is a magnetite peak at 35.5 2θ in the NSHQ14 drill cuttings at 17 and 70m and in the NSHQ04 drill cuttings at 120 and 180m.

Microscale mineralogical structure and chemistry of drill cuttings were determined by a combination of petrologic observations, Raman microspectroscopy, Fe K-edge XANES spectroscopy and electron microprobe analyses. Olivine, diopside, enstatite, chromite, magnetite, brucite, and two-three different generations of serpentine, both chrysotile and lizardite, were detected in the drill cuttings of both wells using Raman microspectroscopy (Figure 4). Brucite and olivine are not detected in the drill cuttings closer to the surface, approximately <120 m. The NSHQ14 drill cuttings become increasingly serpentinized as they approach the surface, showing decreasing relict olivine with proximity to the surface and increasing serpentine (Figure 5). The NSHQ04 drill cuttings also show increased serpentine closer to the surface. There are visually more pyroxenes present in NSHQ04, both diopside and enstatite (Figure 6), and they appear to be partially fractured and altered (lower left corner of Figure 5). Drill cuttings from both wells have magnetite veins and grains (~5 μm) between 17-120 meters deep.

The Raman maps demonstrate that the drill cutting mineralogy is dominated by two to three generations of serpentine. Although chrysotile, lizardite, and antigorite can be identified by Raman spectroscopy from their varying peak positions (Rinaudo et al., 2003; Groppo et al., 2006; Petriglieri et al., 2015), differences in peak position are relatively small and can be obscured by large crystal orientation effects on the relative peak intensities. Furthermore, the effects of varying Mg/(Mg+Fe) and Fe^{3+}/Fe_T on the Raman spectra for the serpentine polytypes are not yet well quantified. Thus, it is difficult to determine the polymorphs of serpentine with certainty when just looking at the fingerprint region from 90-1600cm^{-1}. By mapping the serpentine in both the fingerprint region of 90-1600cm^{-1} and in the more diagnostic O-H stretching region of 3400-3800cm^{-1}, different regions of serpentine have been identified as chrysotile and lizardite (Figure 7C).

Crosscutting relationships reveal distinct generations of serpentine. NSHQ14 at 262 meters contains two generations of lizardite with an older lizardite (14-gen1) crosscut by a younger lizardite (14-gen2) (Figure 4). NSHQ04 at 180 meters has a complex alteration history with a first generation of chrysotile (04-gen1) overprinted by a younger second generation of chrysotile (04-gen2). Brucite is intermixed with third generation lizardite (04-gen3). The intermixed lizardite and brucite are visually apparent in plane polarized light as brown veins (Figure 7). All depths contain multiple generations of serpentine with chrysotile overprinted by lizardite that is variably intermixed with brucite. The drill cuttings closer to the surface contain less chrysotile and more lizardite. There is more brucite at depth than closer to the surface, as evidenced by powder XRD and Raman spectroscopy. Brucite is visually associated with brown serpentine as seen in Figure 7.

Both NSHQ14 and NSHQ04 drill cuttings contain widespread magnetite (Figure 8) as identified by Raman microscopy. The magnetite forms both veins and 2-10μm specks, in some cases in

elongate patches or veins cross-cutting all generations of serpentine. Some magnetite is associated in veins with lizardite, but we can use cross-cutting relationships to infer that some of the magnetite postdates formation of all other alteration minerals in these drill cuttings. There is more magnetite observed closer to the surface.

The chemical variation between generations of serpentine in well chip NSHQ04_180m was quantified with electron microprobe (Table 4). Generations 04gen1 and 04-gen2 chrysotile are chemically identical and contain high amounts of trace metals, notably an average of 0.67 wt% Al_2O_3, 0.22 wt% MnO and 0.33 weight% Cr_2O_3 whereas generation 04-gen3 lizardite has less than 0.07 wt% of those elements. Generation 04-gen3 lizardite has more MgO (40.90 wt% versus 36.06 wt%) and less SiO_2 (34.60 wt% versus 36.87 wt%) than the chrysotile. The totals are low for the serpentine, possibly due to the presence of brucite intermixed with serpentine as well as due to structural water.

We tried to quantify the amount of brucite and serpentine in the drill cuttings with TGA analysis (e.g. Lafay et al., 2012). We first measured known amounts of serpentine and brucite separately, and then mixed the two minerals to verify the method (Supplementary Figure 1). The resulting spectra and mass estimates are found in supplemental information. From this test, we see that mixtures of serpentine and brucite are not reliable for determining the mass of both minerals. Thus, we did not utilize TGA as a technique for quantifying the mass of serpentine and brucite.

3.4 *Fe speciation within the drill cuttings*

When comparing bulk Fe-XANES of the drill cuttings to the bulk spectra of a partially serpentinized dunite (OM95-35) from Oman, the drill cutting spectra are more oxidized as noted by the shift in the spectral features to higher energies (Figure 9). Also, the drill cutting spectra are more oxidized than San Carlos olivine, the type specimen characteristic of unaltered olivine. However, it is difficult to discern differences in the Fe-XANES spectra and Fe-speciation (i.e. average oxidation states and mineralogy) between well depths (Figure 9).

The bulk Fe-XANES spectra of the drill cutting samples were fit by Fe XANES model spectra (e.g. Mayhew et al., 2011) of known minerals in the sample: olivine, pyroxene, brucite, magnetite, and serpentine. The linear-combination fits to the data show that serpentine increases in the higher drill cuttings, and olivine and brucite decreases, while pyroxene remains relatively constant (Supplementary Table 3). The changes in bulk Fe speciation are small and due to the number of Fe-bearing phases present, the bulk Fe XANES data is relatively insensitive to noted mineralogical changes such as increased magnetite. We did not collect a highly resolved pre-edge for the bulk XANES data; thus, it was not possible to quantify a shift in Fe(II)/Fe(III) with depth.

We obtained Fe K-edge μXANES spectra from the multiple generations of serpentine (as identified from Raman spectroscopy) to determine variations in Fe-oxidation state and coordination within serpentines across samples. Three distinct Fe K-edge serpentine spectra with varying oxidation states are shown in Figure 10. Focusing on the pre-edge (7108-7118eV) reveals the unoccupied states of the Fe 2p orbital, giving insight into both oxidation state and coordination (Wilke et al., 2001; Andreani et al., 2013a). The serpentine spectra have a shift in the centroid position in the pre-edge to higher energy, which reveals that there is a significant Fe(III) component. In addition, the increase in the fluorescence intensity at higher energy

indicates that some of this Fe(III) is tetrahedrally coordinated. The spectra with the prominent second peak at 7130eV most closely aligns with the lizardite generation identified by Raman, whereas the most shifted spectrum (prominent peak ~7130

.5eV) is associated with the chrysotile. The spectrum most shifted to lower energy is San Carlos olivine - a reduced spectrum that contains only Fe^{2+} (Figure 10). The ferric to ferrous iron ratio could not be quantitatively calculated using the method of Wilke et al. (2001), Muñoz et al. (2013), and Andreani et al. (2013a) because these data were collected on a Beamline 2-3 at SSRL using a Si 110 vs. 311 monochromator, resulting in poorer energy resolution shifts and broadens the pre-edge features relative to published standards. However, such quantification will be possible in the future by measuring the same standards across multiple beamlines through inter-laboratory exchange.

3.5 *Magnetic hysteresis analysis of the drill cuttings*

The drill cuttings exhibit two distinctive types of hysteresis behavior. Drill cuttings deeper than 120m are paramagnetic while those shallower than 120m are ferromagnetic (Table 5). The ferromagnetic samples (NSHQ14_17m, NSHQ14_70m, and NSHQ04_120m) also show superparamagnetic behavior, indicating that a population of the magnetic minerals in the samples are single-domain size particles, likely < 20 nm (Dunlop, 1973; Butler and Banerjee, 1975; Worm, 1998). We also note a large increase in the saturation magnetization values in the drill cuttings closer to the surface than at depth in both NSHQ04 and NSHQ14 samples (Table 5).

The measured changes in magnetic character augment the petrological observation of increased magnetite closer to the surface. It is possible to calculate an approximate mass of magnetite in the sample if we used a proportionality constant of 92 $A.m^2/kg$ to empirically correlate the saturation magnetization to the amount of magnetite, as conducted by Malvoisin et al. (2012). However, such a quantification of magnetite would assume that the sole magnetic carrier in the sample is magnetite. This assumption may be false in our samples due to the prevalence of FeII/III-bearing serpentine grains also mixed within the matrix. In addition, the magnetite grains are present across a large size distribution – both nanoscale and microscale – which affects the hysteresis parameters that should be applied. For example, we note that the upper drill cuttings exhibit superparamagnetic behavior, yet the saturation magnetization values used to calculate the amount of magnetite will only take into account the larger, microscale magnetite grains that contribute to the non-superparamagnetic components of the data. Thus such a calculation would be an underestimate of the amount of magnetite present in the drill cuttings; instead, we simply utilize the suite of magnetic data to show several lines of evidence indicating increased magnetite formation at shallow depths.

3.6 *16S rRNA analysis of DNA collected from well fluids*

We sequenced the hypervariable V4-V5 region of the 16S rRNA gene from DNA extracted from filters that were loaded with biomass by pumping fluids from each well. Analysis of the 16S rRNA data shows that the NSHQ14 16S sequences were 99.5% bacteria and 0.05% archaea. Similar dominance of bacterial sequences was observed in NSHQ04 (99.4% bacteria and 0.06%

515 archaea). The Bacteria are dominated by members of the Deinococcus-Thermus, Nitrospirae,
516 Firmicutes, Chloroflexi, and Proteobacteria phyla. Fluids from both wells contain candidate
517 phylum OP1 (1.1 and 2.8%, respectively), and NSHQ04 additionally has candidate phylum OD1.
518 The species richness, as determined by the number of OTUs from each well, is 1737 for
519 NSHQ04 fluids vs. 710 for NSHQ14. NSHQ04 is more diverse than NSHQ14.

520 We found that *Meiothermus* (phylum Deinococcus-Thermus, class Deinococci) comprises 8.6%
521 (NSHQ04) and 46.1% (NSQH14) of the operational taxonomic units (OTUs) in both wells.
522 *Thermodesulfovibrionaceaea* (phylum Nitrospirae), a sulfate-reducer, comprises 21.6% of
523 NSHQ14 and 1.4% of NSHQ04. Chloroflexi is prominent in NSHQ04, 5.3%, but only 0.1% in
524 NSHQ14 (Table 6). Both wells contain Firmicutes (class Clostridia family Anaerobrancaceae),
525 fermentative microorganisms, and Proteobacteria (genus Hydrogenophaga), hydrogen-oxidizing
526 bacteria found in other serpentinizing systems (Brazelton et al., 2013; Suzuki et al., 2013). The
527 fluids from both wells notably contain methanogen *Methanobacterium*, which can utilize
528 hydrogen and variable carbon sources such as formate to produce methane. *Methylococcus*, a
529 methanotroph, is also present.

4. Discussion

This study explores the mineralogy and aqueous geochemistry of modern water/rock reactions associated with low temperature serpentinization and hydrogen production in Oman and how these processes may give rise to habitable conditions for microbial life in the peridotite aquifer. We then use 16S rRNA sequencing of DNA extracted from subsurface fluids to investigate the phylogenetic diversity of the fluid microbial communities and infer potential microbial metabolisms sustained in-situ.

4.1 *Fluid chemistry of low temperature serpentinization*

Modern alteration of primary minerals in the aquifer is evident from the abundant Ca^{2+} and OH^- in peridotite hosted well waters NSHQ04 and NSHQ14 (Neal and Stanger, 1983; Neal and Stanger, 1984; Neal and Stanger, 1985). Neal and Stanger (1983, 1984,1985) extensively studied the hydrogeology of Oman's fluids and coined these hyperalkaline waters (pH > 11) containing Ca^{2+}-$2OH^-$ as Type II fluids, following the initial observation of Barnes and O'Neil (1969). They are situated in serpentinized dunite and harzburgite and are derived from serpentinization reactions with subsurface fluids that are isolated from the atmosphere. The hydration of olivine and pyroxene causes the water to become enriched in Ca^{2+}-OH^- (Barnes and O'Neil, 1969; Neal and Stanger, 1984; Bruni et al., 2002; Kelemen et al., 2011):

$$4Mg_2SiO_4 + CaMgSi_2O_6 + 7H_2O = 3Mg_3Si_2O_5(OH)_4 + Ca^{2+} + 2OH^- \quad (2)$$

The Ca^{2+} is released from diopside (present in all drill cuttings), and then accumulates in the water because Ca^{2+} is not incorporated into serpentine minerals (Barnes et al., 1967). These Type II fluids are carbon-depleted and when they emerge at surface springs, they rapidly mix with atmospheric carbon dioxide to precipitate carbonate minerals (Stanger, 1986; Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Kelemen et al., 2011; Paukert et al., 2012; Mervine et al., 2014). The Ca^{2+} values we measure in the deeper subsurface fluids are ~1mM higher than those reported from hyperalkaline springs, presumably because Ca^{2+} in the subsurface has not been depleted through the precipitation of carbonate minerals. Thus, sampling the Type II fluids in wells before they interact with atmospheric CO_2 in the unsaturated zone or on the surface provides a more direct assessment of the water composition in the aquifer.

The subsurface well water contains more Cl^- than found in Oman rainwater and hyperalkaline surface seeps (Paukert et al., 2012) which provides additional proof that modern water/rock interaction is occurring. We infer that the high Cl^- concentrations are due to the presence of Cl^- that was incorporated in the Oman peridotite during initial, high-temperature serpentinization near an oceanic spreading ridge, and dissolved in groundwater during ongoing weathering (Stanger, 1986). The Cl^- is presumably at lower concentrations at the surface seeps than in the wells because it is precipitating with carbonates in salt.

The wells only contain Type II fluids; however, the shallow peridotite aquifer in Oman also hosts Mg^{2+}-$2HCO_3^-$ as observed by Barnes and O'Neil (1969). These are termed Type I fluids (Neal and Stanger, 1983; Kelemen et al., 2011) and are moderately alkaline fluids of a Mg^{2+}-$2HCO_3^-$ composition found in the shallow groundwater (~pH 8-9). In Oman, Type I fluids are typically found in wadi (channel that is dry except during rainy seasons) pools, ultramafic wadi gravels,

and water wells (e.g., Neal and Stanger, 1985; Paukert et al., 2012) and form through the following simplified reaction (e.g. Kelemen et al., 2011):

$$Mg_2SiO_4 + 4CO_2 + 2H_2O = 2Mg^{2+} + 4HCO_3^- + SiO_2 \quad (3)$$

Atmospheric carbon dioxide dissolves in the water and forms bicarbonate as olivine and serpentine minerals in the near-surface react with the waters and release magnesium ions and silica. Although we did not observe Type I fluids in this study, their mixing and interaction with Type II fluids may be influencing water/rock reactions and microbial diversity in the subsurface. In particular, the presence of oxygenated Type I fluids in the highly fractured upper portion of the aquifer may explain the aerobic organisms detected by 16S rRNA sequencing.

4.2 *Mineral assemblages associated with low temperature hydrogen production*

We investigated the mineralogy of the subsurface aquifer to see if the mineral assemblages give insight into the water/rock reactions and mechanisms that produce hydrogen at low-temperature. The drill cuttings contain serpentine, brucite, and magnetite, as is common in partially serpentinized peridotites. Although the drill cuttings are heavily serpentinized, they still contain relict olivine at depth that diminishes towards the surface, which suggests olivine may be the dominant mineral reacting with the in-situ fluids. There is a significant portion of unaltered pyroxene that could also be reacting; however, few zones of pyroxene alteration have been observed. Pyroxene alteration can be a dominant reaction in other serpentinizing sites (Klein et al., 2009; Marcaillou et al., 2011; Andreani et al., 2013a). A common alteration product of pyroxene is talc [$Mg_3Si_4O_{10}(OH)_2$] under conditions of high silica activity (Frost and Beard, 2007; McCollom and Bach, 2009; Klein et al., 2013). We do not observe any talc formation; thus, we do not believe pyroxene alteration is dominating the water/rock reactions, although the high concentrations of Ca^{2+} in the fluids do suggest that at least some pyroxene dissolution is occurring in the hyperalkaline aquifer.

The multiple generations of serpentine observed in the drill cuttings reveal that the mantle peridotite experienced multiple periods of water/rock alteration. The mantle section of the ophiolite was first serpentinized near an oceanic spreading ridge, during emplacement of the ophiolite onto the Arabian continental margin, and/or during subaerial erosion and a subsequent marine transgression in the late Cretaceous (Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Hanghøj et al., 2010; Mervine et al., 2014). These events may have caused formation of the extensive chrysotile matrix seen in the drill cuttings. The chrysotile is overprinted by lizardite veins; however, we cannot infer a formation temperature due to the fact that chrysotile is metastable relative to lizardite (Evans, 2004).

We characterized the Fe content and speciation of the serpentine to investigate reservoirs of Fe in the system. Both the lizardite and chrysotile contain ~7-8 wt.% FeO_T (considering all Fe as Fe^{2+}). In average natural samples, chrysotile contains 3 wt.% FeO_T, while lizardite ranges from 2-8 mol.% Fe (Evans et al., 2009; Streit et al., 2012). Thus, the chrysotile in Oman is Fe-rich while the lizardite is average. Characterization of serpentine in our samples with electron microprobe and XANES confirms the presence both Fe(II) and Fe(III) in the serpentine. Fe(III) can substitute into both the octahedral and tetrahedral sites, replacing Si^{4+}, to form cronstedtite, $(Mg_2,Fe^{3+})_3(Fe^{3+},Si)_2O_5(OH)_4$ (Frost and Beard, 2007; Klein et al., 2009; Evans, 2010; Streit et al., 2012). The formula for chrysotile inferred during early alteration of the peridotite is

$(Mg_{2.79}Fe^{II}_{0.10}Fe^{III}_{0.11})(Si_{1.89}Fe^{III}_{0.11})O_5(OH)_4$ while the younger lizardite formula is difficult to determine because it is intermixed with brucite. It contains less Si (perhaps due to intergrown brucite) than the chrysotile, but has high Fe concentrations (6-8 wt% FeO_T), with Fe occupying both tetrahedral and octahedral sites.

Fe(III) rich serpentine forms at low temperatures (<200°C) (Streit et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2013) and may have played an important role in hydrogen generation in Oman because it is another reservoir of oxidized Fe (besides magnetite), that can form during Fe(II)-driven reduction of water to form hydrogen. Generally, the oxidized Fe(III) is assumed to partition into magnetite (equation 1). However, at lower temperatures, there is a decreasing thermodynamic drive for magnetite formation (Klein et al., 2013), and indeed magnetite may redissolve into serpentine at low temperature (Streit et al. 2012). Thus, Fe(III)-rich serpentine becomes an important mineral to consider as an indicator of hydrogen production during serpentinization (Klein et al., 2009; Marcaillou et al., 2011; Andreani et al., 2013b). The average oxidation state of Fe in the drill cuttings is greater than that of partially serpentinized dunite from Oman and San Carlos olivine (Figure 9). This reveals rocks interacting with hyperalkaline fluids have been altered after their initial formation when they contained mostly Fe(II). Moreover, spatially-resolved Fe K-edge XANES data on drill cuttings reveal the presence of Fe(III)-rich serpentine. Our observation of Fe(III) rich serpentine is consistent with observations from Streit et al. (2012) of Fe(III)-rich serpentine in Oman rocks undergoing low-temperature alteration processes, and from Andreani et al. (2013) during serpentinization at mid-ocean ridges (<150-200°C).

We find that in addition to Fe(III)-rich serpentine, magnetite is also formed during low-temperature serpentinization in Oman in the upper portions of the two wells studied. The simplified unbalanced equation (6) presented in Klein et al. (2013b) shows how magnetite and Fe(III)-rich serpentine can accommodate hydrogen production:

$$(MgFe)_2SiO_4 + vH_2O = w(MgFe^{II})OH_2 + x(MgFe^{II/III})_3(SiFe^{III})_2O_5(OH)_4 + yFe_3O_4 + zH_2 \quad (4)$$

Such reactions may contribute to the high levels of H_2 found in the subsurface fluids. As noted above, and demonstrated in Figure 8, there is extensive magnetite in our samples, with some of it forming veins that cross-cut all of the serpentine assemblages.

Downhole bulk sample magnetic hysteresis analyses indicate that the drill cuttings above 70 and 120 meters in NSHQ14 and NSHQ04 wells (respectively) are ferromagnetic (i.e. minerals that retain remnant magnetization) and have superparamagnetic grain sizes, further confirming that there is increased magnetite in drill cuttings closer to the surface. The drill cuttings at depth, on the other hand, have a paramagnetic signature (i.e. no retainable magnetic properties without applied field). The nanometer size calculation of the magnetite particles based on hysteresis behavior (Tauxe et al., 2014) shows there are multiple populations of magnetite in these rocks (micron-scale and nanoscale magnetite), or the visible magnetite particles must consist of aggregations of nano-scale magnetite.

Brucite can accommodate Fe(II) in its structure that can then be oxidized during subsequent alteration to produce hydrogen at low temperatures (Klein et al., 2013). Typically, brucite forms mesh rims around olivine and traps Fe(II) in a stable mineral structure and prevents hydrogen generation (Klein et al., 2009; Evans, 2010). However, in our drill cutting samples, and in our comparison Oman dunite sample, we observe brucite intimately intermixed with lizardite. It is not possible to determine an iron content for the brucite due to the fact that it is not present in large enough, serpentine-free areas for analysis. Electron microprobe measurements were not used to constrain Fe-contents of brucite intermixed with serpentine because Fe can substitute into Si sites in serpentine (particularly in Fe(III) rich serpentine) as well as Mg sites in brucite, thus an estimate of brucite calculated from electron microprobe would be inaccurate. However, Raman analysis shows a distinct change in the brucite spectrum from that of the pure $Mg(OH)_2$ endmember. Additionally, brucite in serpentinizing systems commonly contains iron; brucite can include greater than 10 wt% FeO_T, with increasing Fe content at lower temperatures in the same bulk composition (Moody, 1976; Klein et al., 2009). Yet brucite is not thermodynamically stable at the silica activities measured in our fluid samples (Table 1). Thus, we propose that brucite should react with silica-rich fluids in the aquifer (Bach et al., 2006), driving Fe(II) to undergo oxidation to form Fe(III)-rich serpentine and/or magnetite while concurrently reducing H_2O to make H_2 (see equation 7 below).

There are several possible reasons for the high silica activity in our fluid samples. First, the fluids in the wells are high in Ca^{2+}. Well NSHQ04 is close to the Moho, the zone of contact between peridotite and gabbro. Thus, it is possible gabbro-equilibrated fluids are interacting with the peridotite aquifer. Fluid that has equilibrated with gabbro has higher silica activity, and it will destabilize and consume brucite (Frost and Beard, 2007). However, there is insufficient hydrological information about the region surrounding the wells to test this hypothesis, and the similarity of fluids in wells NSHQ04 (near the Moho) and NSHQ14 (kilometers from the Moho) seems inconsistent with this hypothesis.

Bach et al. (2006) suggest that high Si fluids are generated when olivine nears exhaustion in the host rock and pyroxene alteration becomes a more important control on fluid chemistry. This is plausible given the low amount of relict olivine remaining in the drill cuttings.

A third possibility, as shown in equation 3, is that the generation of Type I waters in the shorter residence fluid-flow pathways can lead to fluids with high silica activities. Subsequently, we may be observing the destabilization of brucite in the host rock when Type I waters mix with Type II fluids within the shallow subsurface. This is supported by the observation of decreasing brucite in the highly serpentinized samples near the surface where Type I waters may be present.

There is increased extent of serpentinization in the drill cuttings near the surface as opposed to at depth, which suggests varying hydrological pathways in the subsurface. The top tens of meters below the surface could be subject to more variable conditions with higher water/rock ratios and/or interaction with Type I fluids than rock at depth due to rainwater recharge. This can lead to increased fracture permeability (e.g., Kelemen and Hirth, 2012) and periodic exposure to oxygen, as well as shorter fluid residence times. Thus, the fluids will not be equilibrated with the mineral assemblages, leading to more rapid destabilization and alteration, as well as increased oxidation and drive to form magnetite.

4.3 *Hydrogen generating reactions*

Based on our observations, we infer that three different hydrogen generating reactions have occurred in the subsurface. An initial serpentinization stage prior to modern water/rock reactions produced hydrogen from alteration of olivine and led to the production of Fe(II)-bearing brucite and Fe(III) rich serpentine (chrysotile generation):

$$(MgFe)_2SiO_4 + H_2O = x(MgFe^{II})(OH)_2 + y(MgFe^{II/III})_3(SiFe^{III})_2O_5(OH)_4 + zH_2 \quad (5)$$

There is relict olivine in the deep drill cuttings that is replaced by serpentine at shallower depths, so similar H_2 generating reactions could occur today. Moreover, less brucite might form because modern silica activities in the fluids are too high for brucite stability. Thus we suggest that relict olivine is now reacting to form new Fe(III)-bearing lizardite and hydrogen at low temperatures:

$$(MgFe)_2SiO_4 + H_2O = x(MgFe^{II/III})_3(SiFe^{III})_2O_5(OH)_4 + yH_2 \quad (6)$$

Currently, a high silica fluid is interacting with the rock, destabilizing the Fe(II)-bearing brucite (as modeled in Geochemist Workbench). This leads to the formation of magnetite and lizardite, with the production of hydrogen:

$$(MgFe^{II})(OH)_2 + SiO_2 = x(Fe^{II}Fe^{III}_2)O_4 + y(MgFe^{II/III})_3(SiFe^{III})_2O_5(OH)_4 + zH_2 \quad (7)$$

The destabilization of Fe(II)-bearing brucite to form magnetite and serpentine, and the alteration of olivine to Fe(III) rich serpentine, should both produce hydrogen at low temperatures. This model of alteration and hydrogen generation is consistent with observations by Andreani et al. (2013b) that serpentinites from mid-ocean ridges contain both Fe(III)-serpentine and more magnetite as the degree of serpentinization increases.

4.4 *Isotopic signature of hydrogen and methane*

The isotopic signature of the H_2 serves as a valuable indicator of formation temperature, which complements mineralogical observations of serpentinization leading to hydrogen production. (Neal and Stanger, 1983) collected gas samples from surface hyperalkaline seeps and observed low δD H_2 values (-697‰ and -714‰) similar to those measured from our well samples (-680‰ and -686‰). They noted that H_2- and CH_4-rich gases (H_2 as high as 99% and CH_4 as high as 4.3%) emerge at hyperalkaline surface seeps, whereas the well fluids provide access to dissolved gases in the host rock itself. Sherwood Lollar et al. (1993), Proskurowski et al. (2006), and Abrajano et al. (1990) also found negative δD gases that formed at low temperatures (<200°C) at other serpentinizing sites (both continental and oceanic), as shown in Table 4.

The dissolved gases from Oman subsurface wells uniformly contain some of the most negative δD hydrogen gas found in nature. We calculate a formation temperature of ~50°C by applying the geothermometer of Bottinga (1969) to the coupled δD H_2 and δD H_2O in the well fluids. Assuming the geothermal gradient at NSHQ14 is approximately 25°C/km (Paukert et al., 2012), the gases are hypothesized to form at a depth of less than 2km. A formation temperature of

751 ~50°C supports the hypothesis that low-temperature serpentinization and hydrogen formation is
752 occurring in the Oman aquifer, rather than H_2 being physically released from hydrogen
753 inclusions that formed during higher temperature serpentinization events (McCollom and
754 Seewald, 2001). We verified the lack of gas-rich inclusions in relict olivine by extensively
755 probing the olivine grains by confocal Raman spectroscopy. However, the mantle section of the
756 ophiolite is up to 8 km thick (Ravaut et al., 1997); thus, the H_2 could be generated at
757 temperatures as high as 200°C and then migrate upwards to the surface. In this case, the current
758 negative δD of the H_2 could instead represent isotopic exchange and re-equilibration between the
759 H_2 and H_2O after formation of the H_2 as the waters circulate to shallower, cooler depths.

760 NSHQ04 fluids contain millimolar amounts of CH_4, which may be produced abiotically due to
761 the highly reducing conditions reflected in the abundant H_2 in the system. In olivine dissolution
762 reactions at 30+°C, (Neubeck et al., 2011) observed measureable CH_4, potentially through the
763 oxidation of H_2 and reduction of CO_2 (Sleep et al., 2004). However, the CH_4 detected by
764 Neubeck et al. (2011) could have been released from fluid inclusions, or produced by reaction of
765 fluid with the experimental reaction vessel. At higher temperature (>120°C), CH_4 production can
766 occur abiotically through Fischer-Tropsch-type or Sabatier reactions, through catalysis by
767 magnetite and awaruite (Ni-Fe alloy) commonly found in serpentinites (Frost, 1985; Lorand,
768 1987; Horita and Berndt, 1999). Etiope et al. (2013) suggested catalysts such as ruthenium or
769 chromite produce methane at temperatures <50°C. Such low temperature methane production
770 may be possible in Oman due to the abundance of magnetite, chromite and awaruite found in the
771 partially serpentinized mantle peridotites. Alternatively, methane formation could be biologically
772 mediated by methanogens.

773

774 The $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 signatures are the highest values reported in the literature thus far despite the wide
775 range of methane isotopic compositions compiled in the past 30+ years. Plots comparing the
776 ranges of $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 and δD CH_4 found in various geologic environments (Whiticar, 1990; Etiope
777 et al., 2013) give context to methane isotopic compositions measured in the peridotite-hosted
778 wells in Oman. Thermogenic natural gas has been extensively studied, as have gases from
779 extreme environments like hyperalkaline lakes and Antarctic ice sheets (Whiticar, 1990). The
780 previously highest documented $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 values (-1.6‰) were found from the Ilimaussaq
781 inclusions Greenland (Laier and Nytoft, 2012; Etiope et al., 2013). That methane was
782 hypothesized to have a biological origin, and subsequent sediment burial and partial loss by
783 diffusion during uplift and erosion enriched the gas in isotopically heavy methane (Laier and
784 Nytoft, 2012). A similar explanation is plausible for the enriched $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 values in Oman.
785 Alternatively, if the methane we observe in Oman formed abiotically at 50°C at a depth of ~2km,
786 similar to the H_2, slow diffusion upwards from depth could fractionate and enrich the remaining
787 methane in isotopically heavy carbon after the lighter ^{12}C CH_4 has diffused away. However, this
788 should have a similar effect on the hydrogen isotopic composition of the methane as well, which
789 we did not observe. The methane-hydrogen D/H fractionation can be used to estimate
790 temperature of formation of methane (Horibe and Craig, 1995) at ~70° +/- 3°C.

791 The isotopic composition of methane collected from wells in Oman falls near the traditionally
792 defined abiotic range. Abiotic methane tends to have $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 values greater than -50‰ and δD
793 of CH_4 can range from -450 to -50‰ (Etiope and Sherwood Lollar, 2013; Etiope et al., 2013).
794 Bacterial reduction of CO_2 to methane gives negative $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 values as low as -110‰ and δD

CH_4 down to -531‰ (Whiticar, 1999); thus, methane from Oman does not have a traditional bacterial signature. Low temperature CH_4 production has been experimentally demonstrated with ruthenium and rhodium catalysts (Jacquemin et al., 2010). Platinum group metal inclusions, including Ru and Rh, are found in chromites (e.g, Jacquemin et al., 2010). Platinum group metals in chromites in Oman could be catalyzing low temperature methane formation and leading to a heavy $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 signature, but there are no experimental data to confirm this hypothesis. $\delta^{13}C$ enriched CH_4 can also be produced by extensive biological oxidation of biogenic or abiogenic methane that enriches the residual methane in ^{13}C (Whiticar and Faber, 1986; Whiticar, 1999). Thus, if methane cycling is active in the subsurface aquifer, the isotopic signature of CH_4 may not be an unequivocal marker of the methane formation pathway (Whiticar and Faber, 1986; Templeton et al., 2006).

The processes giving rise to the heavy $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 in Oman cannot be elucidated without further investigation of the microbial and low-temperature abiotic pathways that are giving rise to the production of mM concentrations of CH_4. First, the source of carbon must be assessed. The $\delta^{13}C$ signature of carbonates mineralized in Oman peridotites provide some insights into the isotopic signature of the carbon pool. The carbonate found in the drill cuttings $\delta^{13}C$ ranges from -1.48 to -7.05‰ while the $\delta^{18}O$ is -7.73 to -11.49‰. These values are similar to the Mg-rich carbonate veins from outcrops and roadcuts that have $\delta^{13}C$ ranging from -25.98 to 0.98‰ and $\delta^{18}O$ from -7.04 to 5.56‰ (Clark and Fontes, 1990; Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Kelemen et al., 2011; Mervine et al., 2014). The negative $\delta^{13}C$ values as low as -26‰ probably formed through a mechanism dominated by kinetic isotope fractionation during carbonate precipitation. Both the values from the drill cuttings and outcrops are still lighter than $\delta^{13}C$ in the CH_4, suggesting that even if the entire DIC pool was converted to methane under extreme carbon limitation, processes such as further $\delta^{13}C$ enrichment by diffusion or partial oxidation of the methane must be invoked.

4.5 *Potential metabolic pathways supported by hyperalkaline fluids*

The hyperalkaline fluids in Oman contain electron donors and acceptors to sustain anaerobic microbial metabolisms. There are millimolar amounts of H_2 and CH_4 to serve as electron donors, but dissolved organic acids were not detected at the micromolar detection limit. NSHQ04 notably contains high levels of SO_4^{2-}, which may be a source of critical electron acceptors for microorganisms (ex. sulfate reducers). Nitrate found in both wells is another potential electron acceptor that can be coupled with oxidation of H_2, CH_4 and Fe(II).

The aqueous geochemistry of the well fluids can support several potential metabolic pathways. Well fluids contain more sulfate and nitrate than samples from hyperalkaline seeps with comparable pH, and elevated H_2 and CH_4 (Paukert et al., 2012). Thus, nitrate and sulfate reduction at depth, tied to hydrogen oxidation, is likely. The high methane concentrations in NSHQ04 can support anaerobic oxidation of methane (AOM) (Hoehler et al., 1994; Joye et al., 2004), especially considering AOM consortia are often syntropically associated with sulfate-reducing microorganisms. The following reactions are often invoked for serpentinizing systems and may be relevant metabolisms for microbial life in the subsurface of Oman:

a. $CO_{2(aq)} + 4H_{2(aq)} = CH_{4(aq)} + 2H_2O_{(l)}$
b. $2NO_3^- + 10Fe^{2+} + 24H_2O_{(l)} = 10Fe(OH)_3 + N_2 + 18H^+$

c. $NO_3^- + 2.5H_{2(aq)} + H^+ = 0.5N_{2(aq)} + 3H_2O_{(l)}$

d. $SO_4^{2-} + 4H_{2(aq)} + 2H^+ = H_2S_{(aq)} + 4H_2O_{(l)}$

e. $CH_4 + SO_4^{2-} = HCO_3^- + HS^- + H_2O_{(l)}$

f. $CH_4 + 4NO_3^- = CO_2 + 4NO_2^- + 2\ H_2O_{(l)}$

(Hoehler et al., 1994; Nielsen and Nielsen, 1998; Chapelle et al., 2002; Cardace and Hoehler, 2009; Haroon et al., 2013; Cardace et al., 2015). These metabolic strategies provide the energy to generate an electrochemical gradient to produce ATP. However, it is energetically taxing to generate a traditional hydrogen pump at high pH (Hicks et al., 2010; Suzuki et al., 2014). Microorganisms in Oman may be employing a sodium or calcium motive force to generate ATP instead of a proton pump. Many microorganisms pump H^+ ions outside the cell to create an energy gradient, but in a high pH environment, this H^+ quickly combines with abundant OH^- in the environment and cannot be utilized by the cell. Microorganisms can adapt to hyperalkaline conditions by generating a sodium motive force instead of pumping protons onto the surface of a cell inundated with OH^-. There is ample Na^+ in the fluids, so organisms in Oman may use a sodium motive force to cope with high pH environments. Alternatively, recent work has shown that some organisms can utilize a proton motive force, even under alkaline conditions (Mulkidjanian et al., 2008; Hicks et al., 2010; Suzuki et al., 2014). The pH in NSHQ04 is slightly lower than in NSHQ14, potentially making it more habitable for microorganisms. NSHQ04 also has more abundant electron donors, nitrate and sulfate, than NSHQ14, further increasing its habitability.

4.6 *Organisms detected in fluids from 16S rRNA sequencing*

Predictions about potential metabolic pathways in serpentinizing systems aid in interpreting 16S rRNA data from the fluids and allow us to place the phylogeny of the organisms detected in the subsurface fluids within a context of potential functional activities. There is a curious mixture of both aerobic and strictly anaerobic microorganisms in the subsurface. DNA extracted from well fluids shows the presence of aerobic organisms *Meiothermus* and *Hydrogenophaga* that require oxygen as an electron acceptor. *Meiothermus* is considered to be obligately aerobic and chemoorganotrophic, capable of utilizing a range of carbon sources from glucose to acetate (Tindall et al., 2010). *Hydrogenophaga* is chemoorganotrophic or chemolithoautotrophic, and it oxidizes hydrogen and reduces organic material or heterotrophically denitrifies nitrate (Willems et al., 1989). We also found members of the Clostridia class and *Methanobacterium* genera, which are strict anaerobic fermenters and methanogens, respectively. Anaerobes *Thermodesulfovibrionaceaea* are also present, which are sulfate reducing bacteria that use hydrogen as electron donors and ferment pyruvate or other organics (Haouari et al., 2008). We likely significantly mixed the deep and shallow well fluids during pumping, so there may be internal variation in the fluid Eh as a function of depth, and intervals of variable permeability, that affect microbial community composition and function in ways that we cannot yet identify. The near-surface fluids probably have a shorter residence time and more recent interaction with ambient atmospheric oxygen. The mixture of organisms may point to an upper zone of more oxidized fluids in the wells (e.g. Type I fluids), leading to an interesting geochemical interfaces that microorganisms can exploit.

Methanobacterium, a methanogen, is present in NSHQ04 and NSHQ14. This may explain the abundant CH_4 in the wells. It is a strict anaerobe that oxidizes H_2 and reduces formate, CO, or

CO_2 to produce methane (Balch et al., 1979). Similar *Methanobacterium* sequences have also been observed in the Zambales ophiolite seeps (Woycheese et al., 2015). Methanogenesis is oftentimes invoked as a metabolic pathway in serpentinizing environments due to the abundant hydrogen and methane in the fluids (Chapelle et al., 2002; Cardace and Hoehler, 2009; Cardace et al., 2015). In order to determine *Methanobacterium*'s contribution to the CH_4 in the wells, it will be necessary to investigate the abundance and activity of the methanogens along with the isotopic signature of the CH_4 that they produce.

Candidate phylum OP1 was first detected in hot springs, but curiously it is present in the mesophilic, hyperalkaline conditions of the Oman subsurface. OP1 was first found in a neutral hot spring (75-95°C) in Yellowstone rich in iron, sulfide, carbon dioxide, and hydrogen (Kumar and Saravanan, 2011). There is a nearly complete genome for the OP1 *Candidatus* 'Acetothermus autotrophicum' that suggests it is one of the earliest bacteria to branch from the last universal common ancestor (Takami et al., 2012). 13 of the OTUs from NSHQ14 have 100% identity to this genome, whereas the other 250 OTUs are other species from candidate phylum OP1. The genome for *Candidatus* 'Acetothermus autotrophicum' has a high GC content (61.9%), and this organism is estimated to have an ideal growth temperature of 84.7°C. It also is phylogenetically similar to the members of the Deinococcus-Thermus clade, which is interesting giving the high concentrations of *Meiothermus,* a similar genera, in the wells. The proposed metabolism of 'A. autotrophicum' is acetogenesis through the acteyl CoA pathway utilizing CO_2 and H_2, which is an ancient C-fixation pathway (Takami et al., 2012). Candidate phyla by definition are phyla with no cultured and formally described representative strains, so little to nothing is known about their metabolic requirements and physiology. Future microbiological studies of Oman subsurface fluids may provide more insight into the function of these organisms, particularly if they can be cultured and studied in the laboratory.

A diverse range of phyla were identified from the well fluids. Clostridia and *Hydrogenophaga* are abundant in the fluids, supporting the idea that previous studies probing hyperalkaline seeps were identifying organisms that are indeed present in the subsurface (Brazelton et al., 2013; Suzuki et al., 2013). The *Hydrogenophaga* sequences detected here were 100% identical to *Serpentinomonas* (Suzuki et al., 2014), a bacterium cultured and characterized from the Cedars ophiolite. This organism is an obligate alkaliphile with an optimum growth pH of 11. It utilizes H_2, $CaCO_3$, and O_2 for growth. Clostridia, specifically members of the *Erysipelothrix* group, found in these samples were also found in the Tablelands Ophiolite, and this group is known to contain abundant fermentation-associated hydrogenases, suggesting that it uses organic compounds to survive (Brazelton et al., 2013). Lipids extracted from brucite-calcite veins at the Iberia margin, a Lost-City type hydrothermal field, are also hypothesized to correspond to *Desulfotomaculum* and *Clostridium* (Klein et al., 2015); thus, Clostridia are widespread in serpentinizing systems. Additionally, these anaerobic organisms contain [FeFe]-hydrogenases that can catalyze hydrogen production from the reduction of organic materials like acetate and formate (Brazelton et al., 2012). Clostridia are also endspore-forming, which may allow them to persist in these fluids during nutrient-poor periods (Madigan, 2012).

The metabolic pathways of the 16S rRNA correspond to predictions of potential metabolisms in the fluids that are derived from the in-situ geochemistry. Chloroflexi have a range of metabolic strategies which include fermentation, CO_2 fixation, and acetogenesis (Hug et al., 2013). *Thermodesulfovibrionaceaea* is a sulfate-reducer, and some species of Clostridia may also be

capable of sulfate reduction (Madigan, 2012). There are several Gammaproteobacteria in the fluids that may be denitrifiers (e.g. the extensively studied *Psuedomonoas stutzeri*) (Madigan, 2012). The other predicted metabolisms, such as methane oxidation and sulfate reduction, may be facilitated by Methylococcales and Desulfovibrionales.

The two wells host different microbial communities. This is most likely dictated by the varying geochemistry and pH between the subsurface systems. NSHQ04 has a lower pH (10.5) and more electron acceptors such as nitrate and sulfate to make it more habitable and diverse. NSHQ04 also has higher concentrations of CH_4 than NSHQ14, which is reflected in the fact it contains methane oxidizers. Although our method of 16S rRNA amplicon sequencing does not reflect the quantity of organisms in the system, it does reveal that geochemistry strongly modulates microbial ecology in hyperalkaline subsurface fluids.

4.7 *Carbon sources in hyperalkaline fluids*

The well fluids from 2012 are carbon-poor with DIC concentrations that vary from 0.078-0.391mM. It is possible that the highly reducing conditions produced by high levels of H_2 in serpentinizing environments lead to the abiogenic formation of low weight molecular acids (Lang et al., 2010; Schrenk et al., 2013). McCollom and Seewald (2001) observed formation of formate during 300°C olivine serpentinization experiments:

$$CO_2 + H_2 = HCOOH \quad (8)$$

High concentrations of formate (36-158 μm/kg) are observed at the Lost City Hydrothermal Field, and isotopic data suggest that the formate formed abiotically (Proskurowski et al., 2006; Lang et al., 2010). However, low molecular weight organic acids were not detected above the micromolar detection limit for the species measured in our samples, suggesting that they are not extensively produced under in-situ conditions. Alternatively, the absence of formate and other organic acids could be due to their rapid consumption by subsurface microorganisms.

We searched for complex organic carbon in the Oman drill cuttings as a potential carbon source and indicator of microbial life, but no accumulations of macromolecular carbon were detected in the well chips by Raman spectroscopy. Raman spectroscopic mapping has successfully been used to search for signs of life within serpentinized peridotites from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where complex organic carbon has been found in association with cavities in hydroandraditic garnets (Ménez et al., 2012). These hollow cavities are thought to host cryptoendolithic microbes, metabolizing H_2 generated through serpentinization or using Fe(III) in garnets as an oxidant for H_2. Complex organic molecules from these organisms might then migrate into the surrounding serpentines and ocean, providing a source of carbon for other microbial life (Pasini et al., 2013).

We also measured total organic carbon (TOC) in the drill cuttings through combustion techniques, but the results are likely overestimates because residual magnesite may be present (Supplementary Table 1). Organic carbon could derive from a rock-hosted biome, but these concentrations of organic carbon could also be a relic of drilling contamination or abiotic reduction of CO_2. Further information about molecular structure and distribution of organic carbon are necessary to characterize its source.

Heavily altered Oman peridotites contain extensive carbonate vein networks (Kelemen and Matter, 2008; Kelemen et al., 2011; Streit et al., 2012; Paukert et al., 2012; Mervine et al., 2014) which may provide an unconventional carbon source to microorganisms in the subsurface. Previous work by Suzuki et al. (2014) shows the *Serpentinomonas* can utilize $CaCO_3$ as a carbon source. However, we do not detect the presence of carbonate veins in the drill cuttings, but they are most likely a small component (aqueous carbonic acid was not measured) so would not be easily detected by bulk powder XRD. We did a simple test for carbonate by adding HCl and measuring change in mass and observe about 1% carbonate in the drill cuttings; this is also a low estimate, since the analysis is neglecting to measure magnesite. Thus, carbonate veins in the rocks may be a carbon source for organisms in the subsurface.

Finally, Type I, Mg-HCO_3-rich waters are abundant in Oman, and contain 1-10 mM total carbon (e.g., compiled data in Supplement of Kelemen and Matter, 2008). Type I waters could supply carbon for growth of micro-organisms by infiltration into more heavily reacted rocks hosting Type II waters.

5. Conclusions

Subsurface mantle peridotites from the Samail Ophiolite in Oman are highly serpentinized and oxidized, and are in contact with hyperalkaline (>pH 10) fluids high in Ca^{2+}, OH^-, dissolved H_2 and CH_4. High concentrations of very negative δD H_2 values are inferred to have formed or equilibrated at ~50°C. The coupled δD and positive $\delta^{13}C$ of the dissolved CH_4 would traditionally be interpreted as abiotic, and dissolved CH_4 has the most isotopically heavy $\delta^{13}C$ CH_4 reported in the literature thus far. We suggest that the methane isotopic signature is in part modulated by significant oxidation, whether it was produced through biotic or abiotic pathways.

We hypothesize that these gas-rich hyperalkaline fluids have evolved through an ongoing stage of low temperature serpentinization in the peridotite. Olivine hydration during early hydrothermal alteration and obduction formed Fe(II,III) serpentine, Fe(II) brucite and hydrogen. During the current phase of low temperature water/rock interaction, brucite is destabilized in the fluids with high SiO_2 activity, generating H_2 when it is converted to magnetite and additional Fe(III)-rich serpentine. The relict olivine is also further reacting to form Fe(III)-rich serpentine and hydrogen. The formation mechanism for methane remains enigmatic, and could involve low temperature abiotic CO_2 reduction by mineral catalysts, or in-situ biological activity.

Our study of drill cuttings and fluids reveals that the timing and extent of various stages of serpentinization in Oman remain unconstrained. It is difficult to tease apart mineral parageneses formed during hydrothermal alteration near an oceanic spreading ridge, emplacement of the ophiolite, Late Cretaceous weathering, and modern water/rock reactions. Future studies that can connect rock alteration histories along reaction paths with varying fluid sources and residence times will be a valuable next step in assessing the mechanisms and extent of modern, low-temperature H_2 and CH_4 generation. Continuous physical and magnetic properties measurements downhole and on bulk core samples will help delineating sections with hydrology in situ where serpentinization has been extensive.

16s rRNA data of DNA extracted from the hyperalkaline fluid microbial communities indicate an abundance of both aerobic and anaerobic organisms, including abundant *Meiothermus, Thermodesulfovibrionaceae* (sulfate-reducers), Clostridia (fermentors), and *Hydrogenophaga* (H_2-oxidizers). Although not abundant, methanogen *Methanobacterium* and candidate phylum OP1 are also notably present. We hypothesize that the subsurface microbial communities are harnessing the H_2 produced by water/rock reactions, and coupling the oxidation of H_2 to electron acceptors such as SO_4^{2-}, CO_2 and Fe(III)-bearing phases at depth, and episodically with O_2 and nitrate in the upper fractured part of the aquifer.

Probing the microbial community composition in these fluids provides a first glimpse into the complex subsurface peridotite-hosted microbiome. The rock-hosted communities may be quite different than those established in the fluids, due to strong gradients in redox potential, electron acceptor and donor availability, porosity, permeability, fluid residence times, and mineral reactivity. Moreover, this initial 16S rRNA gene sequence data are just an initial perspective within the broader efforts to fully understand feedbacks between microbial activity, aqueous geochemistry and mineralogy. Isolating and culturing the peridotite-hosted organisms will be an important step in understanding their true metabolic activities and how they adapt to the carbon-depleted, hyperalkaline fluid environment. The microorganisms may be utilizing carbonate veins as a carbon source, leading to mineral dissolution and potential methane production.

Additionally, microbial consumption of hydrogen from water/rock reactions may increase the rate of hydrogen-producing reactions. Furthermore, in-situ microbes may be generating distinct organic, mineral and/or isotopic biosignatures in serpentinizing environments that can be used to identify microbial activity remotely.

Examining the functional activity of microbial life in the subsurface will be important to fully understand the coupling between the water/rock reactions, production of reduced gases, and changes in aquifer chemistry and hydrology. A next step for studying the coupling between the hydrological and geochemical processes and the distribution and activity of subsurface microbial life will be to focus on process rate measurements of in-situ hydrogen generation and consumption, pathways of C assimilation and uptake, and rates of methanogenesis, sulfate reduction, and nitrate reduction. Intensive culturing of peridotite-adapted microorganisms in the laboratory will also be necessary to elucidate the operative metabolic pathways. All of these efforts will be greatly facilitated by the International Continental Drilling Program (ICDP) project in Oman (https://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/gpg/projects/icdp-workshop-oman-drilling-project). The results from this scientific endeavor will give further insight into predicted mineralogy, microbiology, gas generation and C cycling of planetary systems undergoing active alteration of peridotite in the shallow subsurface.

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Table 1. Major and minor elements in wells along with pH, temperature, and conductivity. Oman hyperalkaline spring data is from Paukert et al. (2012) sampling Type II surface waters. Oxidation-reduction potential (ORP) data is from sampling the wells in 2012. Gas concentrations were determined by measuring the headspace of anaerobic vials purged with N_2 filled with site water.

	NSHQ04 18meters	**NSHQ14 18meters**	**NSHQ14 260meters**	**Misbit - Oman hyperalkaline spring**
pH	10.6	11.1	11.5	11.2
Temperature (°C)	33.3	34.3	31.5	31.6
Conductivity (µS/m)	2386	2430	4300	1640
ORP (mV)	-103.4 (70m)	-31.6	-597.3	-
Na^+ (mM)	12.136	12.302	6.747	2.120
Ca^{2+} (mM)	6.424	7.604	9.001	0.017
Mg^{2+} (mM)	0.005	0.060	0.655	6.540
K^+ (mM)	0.409	0.422	0.361	-
$SiO_{2(aq)}$ (mM)	0.011	0.007	0.016	0.040
Cl^- (mM)	24.942	25.932	21.848	6.970
SO_4^{2-} (mM)	0.483	0.190	0.050	0.070
NO_3^- (mM)	0.012	0.022	0.016	<0.01
Br^- (mM)	0.001	<0.001	0.001	-
Al^{3+} (mM)	0.098	0.086	0.045	0.023
Fe^{2+} (mM)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
DIC (mM)	0.091	0.078	0.391	-
H_2 (mM)	0.18	0.67	0.17	-
CH_4 (mM)	1.44	0.17	0.04	-
Ni (µM)	0.147	0.137	0.156	-
As (µM)	0.042	0.04	0.047	-
Se (µM)	0.094	0.144	0.166	-
Cu (µM)	0.032	0.04	0.045	-
Cd (µM)	<8.90E-05	<8.90E-05	<8.90E-05	-
Zn (µM)	0.028	0.056	0.139	-
Co (µM)	0.006	0.005	0.007	-
Cr (µM)	0.163	0.17	0.19	-

Table 2. $\delta D\ H_2$, $\delta^{13}C\ CH_4$, and $\delta D\ CH_4$ values for subsurface well water in Oman (NSHQ04 and NSHQ14), as well as hyperalkaline surface springs in Oman (Neal and Stanger, 1983), Zambales Ophiolite in the Philippines (Abrajano et al., 1990), Lost City Hydrothermal Vents (Proskurowski et al., 2006), the Precambrian Canadian Shield (Sherwood Lollar et al., 1993), and the Cedars Ophiolite in California (Morrill et al., 2013).

	$\delta D\ H_2$ ‰	$\delta D\ CH_4$ ‰	$\delta^{13}C\ CH_4$ ‰
NSHQ04_18m	-680	-205	2.4
NSHQ14_262m	-685	-232	3
Nizwa, Oman	-697		
Bahla, Oman	-699		
Huwayl Qufays, Oman	-699		
B'lad, Oman	-714		
Zambales Ophiolite	-581	-122	-7.34
Lost City Hydrothermal Vents	-609	-127	-10
Precambrian Canadian Shield	-619	-284	-29
Cedars ophiolite	-40 to -50		-68

Table 3. $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{18}O$ values from carbonate found in drill cuttings. The unreported values are due to low carbonate concentrations.

	$\delta^{13}C_{VPDB}$	$\delta^{18}O_{VPDB}$
NSHQ14_17m	-7.05	-7.73
NSHQ14_70m	--	--
NSHQ14_140m	-4.75	-11.07
NSHQ14_262m	-4.69	-11.49
NSHQ04_120m	--	--
NSHQ04_180m	--	--
NSHQ04_303m	-1.48	-10.99

Table 4. Electron microprobe weight % data for serpentine generations from well chip NSHQ04_180m corresponding to varying generations of serpentine identified with Raman spectroscopy. Numbers refer to various analysis spots on the well chip thin section.

Generation 1 and 2 chrysotile (04-gen1,2)						
Sample	**3**	**5**	**6**	**9**	**10**	**average**
Na_2O	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.01
MgO	36.41	35.22	36.17	36.86	35.63	36.06
Al_2O_3	0.40	0.99	0.82	0.31	0.85	0.67
SiO_2	38.21	35.97	36.40	36.70	37.05	36.87
CaO	0.40	0.54	0.44	0.30	0.47	0.43
FeO	7.29	8.50	7.51	8.12	8.20	7.92
MnO	0.20	0.26	0.18	0.14	0.32	0.22
TiO_2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cr_2O_3	0.09	0.61	0.51	0.00	0.42	0.33
Total	82.99	82.09	82.03	82.43	82.99	82.51
Mg #	0.83	0.81	0.83	0.82	0.81	0.82
Generation 3 lizardite intermixed with brucite (04-gen3)						
Sample	**7**	**8**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**average**
Na_2O	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
MgO	41.00	41.01	40.93	40.74	40.84	40.90
Al_2O_3	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.14	0.03	0.05
SiO_2	33.58	34.51	35.74	34.63	34.54	34.60
CaO	0.06	0.07	0.12	0.15	0.12	0.10
FeO	8.12	7.41	6.07	6.13	7.24	6.99
MnO	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.09	0.15	0.07
TiO_2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cr_2O_3	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	82.76	83.00	83.05	81.88	82.93	82.72
Mg #	0.83	0.85	0.87	0.87	0.85	0.85