Low-Temperature Hydrous Pyrolysis (LTHP) on Oil-Field Core Samples for Estimating Original In-Place Retained oil in Mature Source Rocks and Tight-oil Reservoirs**

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Abstract

The amount of original-oil-in-place (OOIP) is routinely estimated by conventional core analysis techniques and geochemical tests such as programmed non-isothermal pyrolysis. A relatively new method is low-temperature hydrous pyrolysis (LTHP) that was introduced by Lewan and Sonnenfeld (2017). As they described for mature Niobrara cores, LTHP releases retained oil that is similar to unconventionally produce oil. Quantities of LTHP released oils are not a product of high temperature volatilization or solvent extraction, which includes polar-rich bitumen that is not mobile producible retained oil. LTHP used crushed mature source rock core isothermally heated at 300°C for 24 to 72 hours. These conditions allow hydrocarbon-rich oils to be released from the mature source rock by thermal expansion and water displacement and its dramatic difference in miscibility with polar-rich bitumen in the presence of water (Lewan, 1997), but are not sufficient to generate oil. Chesapeake Energy has been applying the LTHP method in their Reservoir Technology Center hydrous-pyrolysis laboratory with favorable results. The method has also been extended to determine quality and quantities of retained oil in nonsource-rock tight oil reservoirs. Quantities of released oil typically are sufficient to determine API gravities, gas chromatography and biomarker signatures. Examples of LTHP within this presentation include a series of samples that illustrate changes in quantity and quality of retained oil with increasing thermal maturation and the importance of volatile losses from cores. LTHP provides quantities and quality of retained producible oil in maturing source rocks that other methods do not.

References cited:


LOW-TEMPERATURE HYDROUS PYROLYSIS (LTHP) ON OIL-FIELD CORE SAMPLES FOR ESTIMATING ORIGINAL IN-PLACE RETAINED OIL IN MATURE SOURCE ROCKS AND TIGHT RESERVOIRS

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- Lesley Evans for good suggestions on expanding LTHP into non-source-rock intervals.
Show the utility of Low-Temperature Hydrous Pyrolysis (LTHP) in determining retained oil in mature source rocks and tight reservoirs (sandstones and carbonates).

It has previously been shown that LTHP at 300°C for 24 h released retained oil in mature Niobrara cores that was similar in composition and API-gravity to produced oil. (Lewan and Sonnenfeld, 2017)

Other methods currently in use (TRA, Dean Stark, Rock-Eval, and solvent extraction) are problematic in providing products that do not include light and heavy ends of a retained oil, do not differentiate retained oil from polar-rich bitumen, or only produce an electric signal.
Rationale and Methodology of Low-Temperature Hydrous Pyrolysis (LTHP)

Examples of LTHP yields from different rock types (mature source rocks and tight reservoirs)

Sample considerations and precautions prior to LTHP

Conclusions
It has been shown that hydrous pyrolysis of immature source rocks at high temperatures (>320°C for 72h) generates an oil phase that is immiscible in the polar-rich bitumen phase of a source rock.

Rationale of LTHP at 300°C/24 or 72h was to use this immiscibility to differentiate retained oil from the polar-rich bitumen within a mature source rock, which Lewan & Sonnenfeld (2017) showed was possible with mature Niobrara cores.
500g of rushed core (0.5 to 2.0 cm) placed in 1-liter stainless-steel (316) reactor with sufficient water to maintain a submerged rock before, during, and after heating isothermally at 300°C for 72 hours.

Water dissolved in the polar-rich bitumen phase of the rock assists in separating the retained oil from the solid or highly-viscous organic phases. The density differences force released petroleum to collect upon the water-columns surface.

The RTC-Lab has all of the capabilities described in this presentation for characterizing retained oils within oil-field core-samples.
Low-temperature hydrous pyrolysis (LTHP) releases retained oil with increasing uncorrected API gravities with increasing thermal maturity of a source rock.

*Not corrected for evaporative losses.*
GCs can show obvious evaporative losses in the light end of retained oils.

These evaporative losses can be in part attributed to large volume collection vials but are primarily due to storage of the core samples prior to LTHP and not during LTHP.

There are various ways to correct for evaporative losses with comparisons of produced oil as done in this case.

These corrections for pre-LTHP evaporative losses must also be taken into account in determining quantities of retained oil*

* This is even a greater problem with other methods like TRA, Dean Stark, and solvent extractions.
The changes in color, density, molecular and isotopic character and absolute amount of oil in a succession of reservoir levels may allow us to gauge vertical contributions to production through statistical comparisons.

With neatly separated and relatively unaltered petroleum phases, we can also estimate in a reasonably accurate way the contribution of any oil-based mud to oil saturations.

In tight reservoirs it is challenging to acquire fluid samples. LTHP provides a way of at least being able to recover a stock-tank oil phase from core samples that would be otherwise very expensive or impossible to obtain.
RELEASED OILS HAVE SIMILAR SARA COMPOSITIONS TO PRODUCED OILS

Low Temperature Hydrous Pyrolysis on Oil Field Core Samples…; Hedberg Research Conference, Houston, TX 03-04-2019
LTHP at 300°C for 72 h releases retained oils and does not generate oil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kerogen Atomic H/C Ratio</th>
<th>Pre-LTHP</th>
<th>Post-LTHHP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
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At time of sample selection the whole interval fluoresced.

By the time the core was slabbed and the photos taken certain portions of that interval had apparently lost their fluorescence.

Highlights the importance in mD-scale rock to take samples intended for saturation measurements as quickly as possible.
The LTHP oil indicates loss of the light ends as a result of evaporation from the core prior to LTHP, and demonstrates the importance of subjecting relatively high permeability samples to LTHP as soon as possible.
The GCMS data from the LT-HP fluid are very similar to the produced oil.
EXAMPLE COMPOSITE FROM A TIGHT-OIL LIMESTONE UNIT — NON-SOURCE ROCK

White-Light 1/3 Section Photograph

UV-Light 1/3 Section Photograph
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN QUALITY AND QUANTITIES OF LTHP RETAINED OIL RELEASED FROM DIFFERENT BENCHES

Stock-Tank-Oil Resource Density Scale

Offset Wireline Log Suite

Steadily increasing gas-crossover effect

1st Bench  2nd Bench  3rd Bench

*64 bbl/acre*ft  *84 bbl/acre*ft  *191 bbl/acre*ft

*Totally uncorrected yields—as received free oil resource densities. Final yields and expected producing API will increase a certain amount with corrections.

Low Temperature Hydrous Pyrolysis on Oil Field Core Samples…; Hedberg Research Conference, Houston, TX 03-04-2019
THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME AND PERMEABILITY: 1000S OF NANO-D ROCK

- Major evaporation loss occurred here in a sandstone core sample after only 13 hours had elapsed between arrival at the laboratory and sealing within the HP reactor.

- At 1000s of nDs if we do not have the rock sealed or aggressively refrigerated, chances of recovering a good petroleum phase go down after the first 24 hours of exposure.

- Getting samples in the reactor as soon as possible becomes more critical with increasing permeability of a rock and increasing API gravity of retained oil. A common problem for all analyses.
When oil-based muds (OBM) are largely diesel based, released oils provide a relatively straightforward means of estimating the amount of contamination of retained oils by the non-native product.

Since diesel has a relatively-narrow-range of compounds compared with natural oils, significant contamination is manifest by a secondary mode of peaks in the n-C_{10} to n-C_{24} paraffins.

By quantitatively comparing LTHP oils with field-produced oils, or other oils considered characteristic of the system, the amount of contamination can be estimated.
CONCLUSIONS

- LTHP releases retained oil in mature source rocks and tight reservoirs (sandstones and carbonates) that is similar in character to producible oil.

- The retained oil released by LTHP is more representative of producible oil in quantity and quality than current methods that require volatilization or solvent extraction.

- LTHP provides a means of differentiating retained oil from polar-rich bitumen, which is not producible within a mature source rock or readably distinguished by other methods.

- As with other methods, it is critical to minimize the time between sample collection and analyses. This practice becomes increasingly important with increasing permeability of the rock and increasing API gravity of the retained oil.

- LTHP reveals the presence of oil-based mud contamination and provides a means to evaluate its impact on the quality and quantity of retained oil.

- LTHP provides insights on geochemical signatures (e.g., biomarkers) that may be diagnostic to different zones within a targeted interval(s), and has the potential to provide information regarding the storage contribution relating to those intervals.

- The RTC-Lab has developed complete capability to characterize retained oils in core samples by LTHP.
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PRE-EXISTING TECHNIQUES PROVIDE LIMITED COMPOSITIONAL INFORMATION

Open-System Anhydrous Pyrolysis

TRA gives a measurement of water types and oil, and gives the condensed volatilized oil collected. However, the TRA oil does not resemble the produced retained oil.

- TRA produces a physically collectable fluid, but appears more like a refined product rather than natural fluid.
- Rock Eval and those of its ilk may give general quantification of light petroleum components but compositional insight is very generalized.
- **Useful to have a technique that produces a physically collectable fluid closely resembling natural products.**
In very low permeability mudstones we can recover a better preserved oil phase from 1-month-old slabbed core than from the stock tank.

The permeability of the rock is of course in the 10s of nD, though. Somewhat less permeable than tombstone.