NBMG OFR 83-11 03500001 Nye Co.-general
See also 83-12 for geochemical results. Item 38

ASH MEADOWS DISTRICT

The Ash Meadows district covers a sink and meadow area in the Amargosa Desert approximately 15 miles south of Lathrop Wells in extreme southern Nye County, Nevada. Access to the district is along good dirt roads east from Nevada State Highway 29.

The extraction of fuller's earth and montmorillonite clays from the district began about 1918 and continued into the 1930's (Kral, 1951). The district was relatively inactive until the late 1970's when the rapid rise in oil prices generated exploration in the oil industry and the district was reactivated. While no activity was directly observed at the time of inspection (Spring, 1982), freshly exposed faces of the deposit coupled with the amount of equipment left on site, indicated that the district had recently been producing. Ash Meadows is the largest producer of clays in Nevada with a past production exceeding an estimated $3 million. The CAT claim block, owned by Placer Amargosa Ventures, covers several square miles including the main part of the district. The older surface and underground workings have been destroyed by the current open pit operation. The main pit extends below the water table, which causes problems in extraction and requires that the clays be dried up to two months before processing (Kral, 1951). Five miles northeast of the main district are smaller montmorillonite deposits, similar to those found at Ash Meadows. Production from these deposits has been small, mainly from surface workings.

The Ash Meadows district is an area of horizontal to gently dipping Pleistocene playa deposits overlain by Recent alluvium. The deposits are generally lenticular to circular in shape and vary in thickness, thinning to the edges. The clays are probably the result of ground water alteration of the tuffaceous playa lake beds to calcium and manganese montmorillonite and fuller's earth deposits. Locally, the residual tuff textures are preserved. Minor iron oxides stain the deposits (Kral, 1951; Papke, 1970).

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