

QUATERNARY STRATIGRAPHY

By
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2020

INTRODUCTION

The Quaternary Stratigraphy plate shows the unconsolidated materials expected to be encountered between the land surface and bedrock surface in Nobles County (Fig. 1). Cross sections A–E through E–E' are representative of 39 cross sections (Plate 5, *Sand-Distribution Model*, Fig. 1) at 0.6-mile (1-kilometer) spacing that were constructed to create a three-dimensional model of the Quaternary deposits of Nobles County. The Quaternary geologic till units shown on the cross sections were defined from interpretation of new data collected for this study (Table 1 and descriptions below) and from existing data from previous investigations (see Plate 3, *Surficial Geology*, Index to Previous Mapping for adjacent mapping projects). These include rotary-sonic core from two drill holes completed by the Minnesota Geological Survey for this project (NBR-1 and NBR-2; Illustration on Plate 5, *Supplemental Quaternary Stratigraphy*, as Figs. 1 and 2, respectively), and information collected from rotary-sonic core from two drill holes completed by the Minnesota Geological Survey for the Rock County Geologic Atlas (Gowan, 2020), water-well drillers' logs, cuttings set descriptions, bridge boring logs (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2016), exposures, and auger samples (Plate 1, *Distribution Map*).

On the cross sections, drill holes are represented by vertical lines. Rotary-sonic drill holes are labeled with their borehole name and associated unique number (in parentheses). Interpreted logs of two rotary-sonic cores are shown on Plate 5, *Supplemental Quaternary Stratigraphy*, Figures 1 and 2, and their locations are shown on Plate 5, *Sand-Distribution Model*, Figure 1. Water-well drillers' logs and previous rotary-sonic cores collected by the Minnesota Geological Survey in adjacent counties were used for interpretation and provided significant detailed stratigraphic control. Drill hole vertical lines may start above or below the land surface because the data are projected onto the cross section from a distance of up to 0.3 mile (0.5 kilometer), where surface elevation could differ. Vertical exaggeration is 50x for all cross sections.

The availability of data is partially responsible for the spatial extent and complexity of the subsurface units shown on the cross sections. Where data are scarce, units are generally portrayed (modeled) as continuous, with relatively uniform thickness and minimal elevation change. Where there are more data, units appear more discontinuous and variable in thickness and elevation over relatively short distances, which more accurately reflects the complexity of glacial deposits. Fewer data exist for the older, deeper units, but they are more likely to be portrayed as discontinuous and variable because they are more eroded and dissected. These factors should be kept in mind when viewing the cross sections. Distinct units, interpreted to be glacial till, are extended across areas where there is little to no data, but where it seems reasonable that the till units are continuous.

The scarcity of deep water-well data makes it difficult to interpret and delineate the extent of older till units and associated sand layers. Rotary-sonic drill cores provide data for identifying these units; however, the extent of these units is highly uncertain only a short distance beyond the immediate vicinity of the core location. Based on the established stratigraphy for the region (Fig. 1), interpretations have been made using limited information provided by the records of isolated, deeper water wells. Where there are no data available at depth, the general regional stratigraphy has been extended in a schematic fashion in order to illustrate the potential presence of previously recognized glacial units. The surficial units that appear in the cross sections are equivalent to those mapped and described in the *Surficial Geology* (Plate 3).

Subsurface sands are shown on the published cross sections, but are not described as separate units below. Instead, they are referred to within the till unit descriptions. The potential sand unit is shown in the cross sections by open black circles, which were produced by an interpolated sand model (see Plate 5, *Sand-Distribution Model*, for explanation). In Nobles County, most of these circles correspond with mapped surficial outwash units due to the scarcity of deeper aquifers, and therefore, water wells.

TILL GEOCHEMICAL ANALYSES

Till geochemical analyses conducted during this project support the unit separations based on core descriptions, intervening lacustrine and sand layers, and textural and lithologic changes. Geochemical analysis was conducted on both rotary-sonic cores (NBR-1 and NBR-2) as part of a broader program of analysis (Thorleifson and others, 2019). In a manner consistent with methods used by Thorleifson and others (2007), the less than 0.2-millimeter fraction of till samples was analyzed by ICP-MS spectrometry following a four-acid, near-total dissolution. Analysis of the data indicated that several elements appear to correlate with proveniences that are characterized by shale, carbonate, crystalline, and Lake Superior-derived sediments (Table 2). Elements appearing to correlate with shale include arsenic, vanadium, iron, antimony, molybdenum, zinc, and cesium. Elements appearing to correlate with carbonate (such as Winnipeg provenience units Qv and Qm) include calcium and magnesium (Plate 5, Fig. 1B). Elements appearing to correlate with crystalline-derived detritus (such as Rainy provenience units Qr and Qm) include aluminum (Plate 5, Fig. 1B), chromium, cobalt, potassium, sodium, antimony, and titanium. Elements appearing to correlate with Lake Superior-derived detritus (such as Superior provenience unit Qs) include aluminum, potassium (both Rainy provenience indicators as well), iron, copper, barium, strontium, and zirconium. Other elements may correlate with provenience or lithologic controls, but the qualitative analysis is weaker and therefore not included in this atlas. Future analysis on these units, and units elsewhere in Minnesota, will allow for comparisons over larger spatial distances.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rotary-sonic drilling was conducted by Tran Drill, Minnesota Geological Survey staff members Anti Ranges, Sonia Eltson, Anne Staley, and Margaret Petre provided essential support during rotary-sonic drilling. Thanks are extended to all landowners who allowed drilling on their property.

DESCRIPTION OF CROSS-SECTION UNITS

Each unit on the cross sections is designated by a letter code, which is described below and placed in one of three categories that designate the origin of the code, as indicated in parentheses after the description: 1. *Surficial Geology* unit—units having an identical description, label, and color as on Plate 3, *Surficial Geology*; see Plate 3 for the detailed descriptions; 2. *New unit*—units that appear only on the cross section and have a unique label and color; and 3. *Modified unit*—multiple units from Plate 3 that are combined into one unit on the cross sections (for example units Qm and Qv are combined into unit Qm). Contact lines that intersect the land surface on the cross sections do not match all contact lines shown on the surficial map because some units shown on Plate 3 are too small or thin to be shown on the cross sections. It should also be noted that all of the till units described below include pebbles, shells, and layers of outwash sand and gravel, and sand, as well as lacustrine sand, silt, and clay. Loess of the Late Wisconsinan Peoria Formation is not shown on the cross sections because it cannot be reliably identified in well logs.

HOLOCENE

Qa Sand, gravel, and sandy loam (*Surficial Geology* unit)—Alluvium.

Ql Silt, clay, and loamy sand (*Surficial Geology* unit)—Lacustrine sediment.

PLEISTOCENE

Late Wisconsinan
New Ulm Formation (Johnson and others, 2016)—Sediment deposited by ice of the Riding Mountain provenience Des Moines lobe (Fig. 1; Plate 3, Fig. 2).

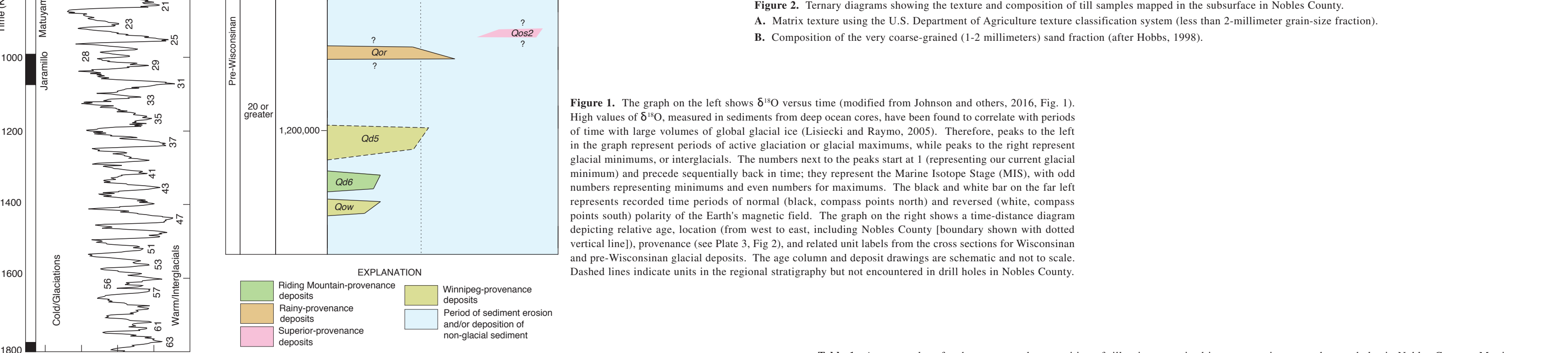
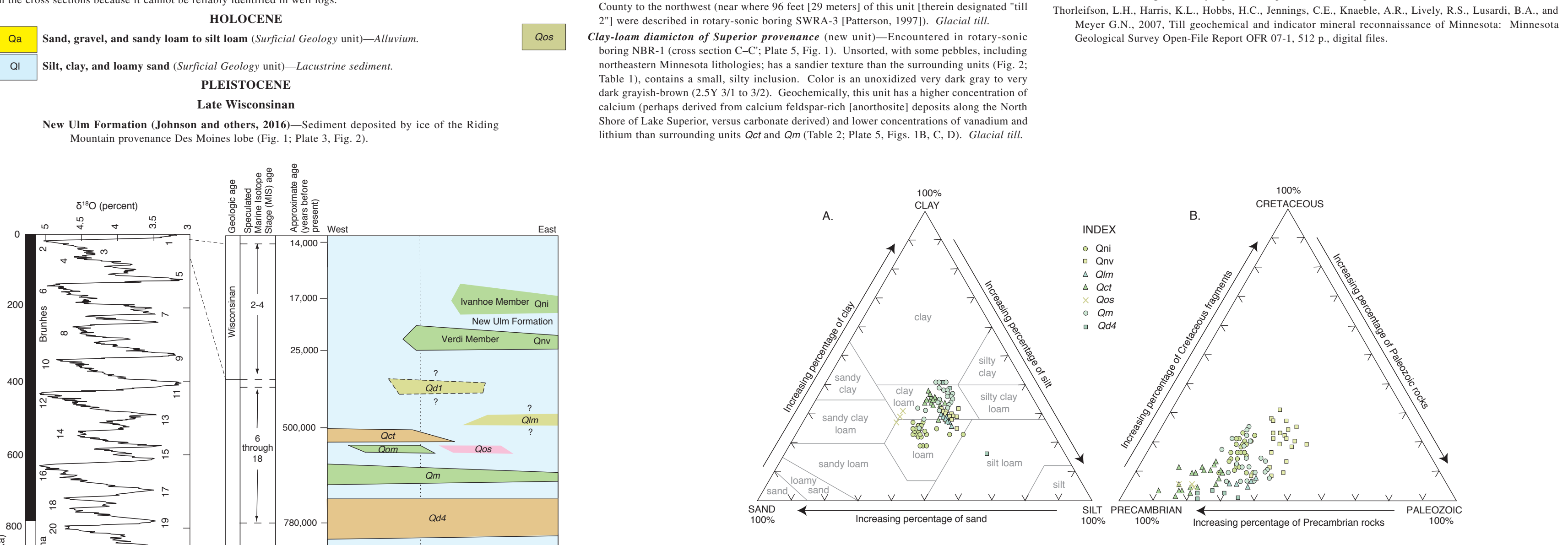


Table 1. Average values for the texture and composition of till units recognized in rotary-sonic core and auger holes in Nobles County. Matrix texture (the less than 2-millimeter grain-size fraction) is expressed as relative proportions of sand, silt, and clay in percent. The lithologic composition of the very coarse-grained sand fraction (>2 millimeters) is expressed in percent as relative proportions of Precambrian rocks, Paleozoic rocks, and Cretaceous rocks, with the total black percentage in Cretaceous rocks in parentheses. The Precambrian fraction is further subdivided by crystalline rock type—light granite and gneiss; dark mafic-rich igneous (such as andesite) and metamorphic rocks; red (rhynolite, quartz), and clear quartz. These lithologic distinctions are some of the tools used to distinguish between glacial sediments and identify provenience (Hobbs, 1998).

Till unit	MATRIX TEXTURE										CLAST TYPE													
	Sand	Silt	Clay	Percentage of the less than 2-millimeter grain-size fraction							Percentage of total grains counted of the 2-millimeter fraction			Percentage of total crystalline grains counted										
	%	%	%	Granite	Gneiss	Andesite	Metamorphic	Quartz	Other	Light	Dark	Clear	Light	Dark	Clear	Light	Dark	Clear						
Qa	0.12	5.26	10.70	483.67	1.17	0.22	7.40	0.84	75.46	8.71	63.17	4.14	20.05	2.65	12.97	0.10	3.16	0.05	1.40	34.81	31.04	2.12	655.57	3.29
Qm	0.12	4.70	9.44	464.00	1.29	0.23	8.82	0.50	59.25	9.41	44.40	3.42	21.51	2.33	11.75	0.15	2.92	0.04	1.44	29.19	34.68	3.12	722.13	4.12
Qm	0.11	5.20	10.46	498.00	1.22	0.20	7.42	0.34	70.42	6.82	50.40	3.64	21.74	2.28	11.09	0.10	3.16	0.04	1.31	37.02	22.46	2.19	607.80	0.86
Qm	0.11	5.80	15.72	428.70	2.02	0.31	3.87	0.48	89.82	12.84	68.04	5.82	24.37	3.71	17.05	0.15	3.75	0.07	1.71	43.08	55.59	1.03	454.17	4.85
Qm	0.11	5.80	17.13	473.30	1.62	0.35	3.37	0.46	79.30	10.43	58.23	3.72	24.27	2.68	14.06	0.14	4.00	0.05	1.64	38.33	37.87	1.28	656.67	14.50
Qm	0.12	6.38	13.64	384.27	1.80	0.32	3.35	0.45	87.13	11.46	64.47	5.19	22.89	3.87	15.04	0.17	3.75	0.07	1.62	42.20	52.32	1.33	584.58	5.46
Qm	0.11	6.69	9.00	424.00	1.78	0.25	3.77	0.47	96.70	10.34	70.80	3.27	22.90	2.86	17.62	0.15	4.00	0.05	1.64	45.02	56.60	0.85	491.20	2.80

Table 2. Average concentrations of elements from the till samples. Provenience sources for the till elements that are diagnostic for the provenience are highlighted. Bold text and italic text show highest and lowest average values for each element, respectively. If there is no apparent difference in the concentrations, no distinctions are made.

Till Unit	Element														
	Ag	As	Au	Ba	Be	Bi	Br	Ca	Cl	Co	Cr	Cu	Hf	In	K
Qa	0.12	5.26	10.70	483.67	1.17	0.22	7.40	0.84	75.46	8.71	63.17	4.14	20.05	2.65	12.97
Qm	0.12	4.70	9.44	464.00	1.29	0.23	8.82	0.50	59.25	9.41	44.40	3.42	21.51	2.33	11.75
Qm	0.11	5.20	10.46	498.00	1.22	0.20	7.42	0.34	70.42	6.82	50.40	3.64	21.74	2.28	11.09
Qm	0.11	5.80	15.72	428.70	2.02	0.31	3.87	0.48	89.82	12.84	68.04	5.82	24.37	3.71	17.05
Qm	0.11	5.80	17.13	473.30	1.62	0.35	3.37	0.46	79.30	10.43	58.23	3.72	24.27	2.68	14.06
Qm	0.12	6.38	13.64	384.27	1.80	0.32	3.35	0.45	87.13	11.46	64.47	5.19	22.89	3.87	15.04
Qm	0.11	6.69	9.00	424.00	1.78	0.25	3.77	0.47	96.70	10.34	70.80	3.27	22.90	2.86	17.62