AN UNUSUAL DEPOSIT OF RED OCHRE AT USSANGODA

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An unusual deposit of red ochre located at Ussangoda in the Hambantota district has been investigated. The red ochre is at present being used as a colour pigment in the ceramic industry. Observations reveal that this deposit which is localized, extends in depth at some points to about a metre. There is however a considerable variation in the depth of the formation. The deposit is to a large extent caused by the weathering of a serpentinite rock which has resulted in earthy iron oxides of extremely fine particle size being accumulated on the surface as residual products. X-ray diffraction studies have shown that a fair amount of the silica has passed into colloidal solution. The presence of chert within this deposit is the outcome of the segregation of colloidal siliceous material. Bulk samples examined by x-ray diffraction methods, simultaneous thermal analysis (STA), chemical and heavy liquid separation recorded the presence of hematite, magnetite, goethite, quartz, rutile and disordered kaolinite. The less than 0.6 micron fraction, about 20 percent in bulk samples, included hematite, magnetite, silica in amorphous form and disordered kaolinite. Chromite (iron, chromium, aluminium oxide) has been identified by x-ray methods.