

Cecilia B. Sanders, PhD

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🌐 ceciliaandthebedofbones.com

Assistant Professor July 2025 to present

University of Maryland Department of Geology

PI: SAND(er)S OF Time Laboratory

The Sanders Laboratory for the study of Sedimentary processes, biological Activity, and Neogenesis effecting the Destruction and Survival Of Geologic records through Time 🌐 sandersoftimelab.com



Education

- 2018 – 2022 **Ph.D. Geobiology, Caltech** Geological and Planetary Sciences.
Doctoral Thesis: *Geological and Geochemical Explorations of the Salitre Formation Phosphorite, Eastern Brazil.* 🌐 <https://doi.org/10.7907/rd4m-7x08>
- 2016 – 2018 **M.Sc. Planetary Science, Caltech** Geological and Planetary Sciences.
- 2012 – 2016 **B.A. Earth and Planetary Sciences and Astrophysics, Harvard University**
Senior thesis title: *Impact gardening as a mechanism for hydrothermal alteration and atmospheric evolution on Noachian Mars.*
Junior thesis title: *When planets breathe – Models constrain the circumstances for detection of biomarker gases on the terrestrial exoplanets of M Dwarfs.*

Awards

Awards and Achievements

- 2024 – 2025 **Deep Time Peter Buck Postdoctoral Fellowship**, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.
- 2022 – 2024 **Morton K. Blaustein Postdoctoral Fellowship**, Johns Hopkins Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences.
- 2016 – 2022 **NSF Graduate Research Fellowship**, National Science Foundation.
- 2020 **Award for educational outreach**, Caltech Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences.
- 2018 **Ian Campbell Award for outstanding achievement in field geology courses**, Caltech Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences.
- 2015 **Leo Goldberg Prize in Astronomy**, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Junior thesis award.

Research Publications

Journal Articles

- 1 **Sanders, C. B.**, Present, T., Marroquin, S., & Grotzinger, J. (2024). Sulfur geochemistry of the salitre formation phosphorites: Implications for the role of microbial ecology and sulfur cycling in phosphogenesis on an ediacaran carbonate platform. *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*, 367.
🌐 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gca.2023.12.033>

- 2 **Sanders, C. B.**, Eiler, J., & Grotzinger, J. (2023). Paragenesis of an ediacaran carbonate-platform phosphorite: Constraints from optical petrography and texture-specific clumped isotope paleothermometry. *Sedimentary Geology*, 444. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sedgeo.2022.106316>
- 3 **Sanders, C. B.**, & Grotzinger, J. P. (2021). Sedimentological and stratigraphic constraints on depositional environment for Ediacaran carbonate rocks of the São Francisco Craton. *Precambrian Research*, 363. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.precamres.2021.106328>
- 4 Wordsworth, R., Kalugina, Y., Lokshtanov, S., Viagasin, A., Ehlmann, B., Head, J., **Sanders, C. B.**, & Wang, H. (2014). Transient reducing greenhouse warming on early mars. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 44(2), 665–671. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2016GL071766>

Conference Proceedings

- 1 **Sanders, C. B.** (2026). Invited oral presentation: Raman and fluorescence spectroscopy of bio-mediated and biomineralized apatite: Insights into paleoredox conditions in micro-taphonomic windows across geologic time, In *Gordon research conference, geobiology and planetary change: Understanding earth and life's progression*, Ventura, CA.
- 2 **Sanders, C. B.**, Smith, E., Mustapayeva, S., Khan, S., Mamanov, Y., & Talgatbeck, A. (2025). Oral presentation: Problematic cylindrical microbially-influenced sedimentary structures of the Tonian Chichkan Formation, Kishi (Lesser) Karatau, Kazakhstan, In *Geological Society of America Connects 2025*, San Antonio, TX.
- 3 **Sanders, C. B.**, Smith, E., Lonsdale, M., Moore, K., Mustapayeva, S., Mamanov, Y., & Talgatbeck, A. (2024). Invited oral presentation: Comparative analysis of two Lower Cambrian phosphorites in Central Asia: Relating paleoenvironment, paleoecology, and phosphorite formation in deep time, In *Geological Society of America Connects 2024*, Anaheim, CA.
- 4 **Sanders, C. B.** (2023). Oral presentation: Interrogating the role of microorganisms in the genesis of sedimentary phosphorite deposits at the Precambrian-Cambrian boundary, In *Mid-Atlantic Geobiology Symposium*, Newark, DE.
- 5 **Sanders, C. B.**, & Grotzinger, J. (2020). Invited oral presentation: Sedimentary context and diagenetic history of phosphatic microbialites, Ediacaran Una-Bambuí carbonate platform, Eastern Brazil, In *American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting (ICEE 2020)*, Virtual.
- 6 **Sanders, C. B.**, Orphan, V. J., Ehlmann, B. L., & Grotzinger, J. P. (2019). Oral presentation: Sweet Honey in the Rock – Cultivating and characterizing the biosignatures of chemolithotrophic microorganisms on Mars analog substrates, In *16th Annual Southern California Geobiology Symposium*, Pasadena, CA.
- 7 **Sanders, C. B.**, Orphan, V. J., Ehlmann, B. L., & Grotzinger, J. P. (2018a). Poster: Sweet Honey in the Rock – Cultivating and characterizing the biosignatures of chemolithotrophic microorganisms on Mars analog substrates, In *American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting 2018*, Washington, DC.
- 8 **Sanders, C. B.**, Orphan, V. J., Ehlmann, B. L., & Grotzinger, J. P. (2018b). Poster: Sweet Honey in the Rock – Cultivating and characterizing the biosignatures of chemolithotrophic microorganisms on Mars analog substrates, In *Simons Collaboration on the Origins of Life*, New York, NY.
- 9 **Sanders, C. B.**, & Wordsworth, R. (2016). Oral presentation: Impact gardening as a mechanism for hydrothermal alteration and atmospheric evolution on Noachian Mars (ABSTRACT 2634), In *47th lunar and planetary science conference*, The Woodlands, TX.
- 10 **Sanders, C. B.**, & Ciesla, F. (2014). Poster: Explaining the noble gas content of the planets – Theoretical models for argon-trapping by amorphous ices in the solar nebula, In *American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting (ICEE 2014)*, San Francisco, CA.

Teaching, Outreach, and Science Communication

- 2024 – 2025
- **Invited Colloquium Lecturer.** *University of Maryland Geology Colloquium, Johns Hopkins Bromery Seminar Series, Carnegie Science Earth & Planets Laboratory, Pennsylvania State University Geochemistry Forum, New Mexico State University, Denison University, Stanford University, Whitman College, Wesleyan University, Geological Society of Washington DC, and multiple depts. within Smithsonian NMNH.*
 - **Deep Time Peter Buck Postdoctoral Fellowship.** *The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.* As part of official Deep Time Postdoc duties: live interface with museum visitors (Pr-K through 12 and guardians), touring secondary school students and undergraduates.
- 2023 – 2024
- **Instructor.** *The Johns Hopkins University Dept. of Earth & Planetary Sciences.* Curriculum design, lecture, and lab instruction for graduate/undergraduate course, *How to Live Forever: The Making of the Geologic Record of Life.*
- 2022 – 2023
- **Instructor.** *The Johns Hopkins University Dept. of Earth & Planetary Sciences.* Curriculum design, lecture, and lab instruction for Special Opportunities in Undergraduate Learning (SOUL) Course 23, *Beyond Bones: Microorganisms in the Rock Record.*
- Oct. 2023
- **Content Consultant and Interviewee for PBS NOVA.** *PBS NOVA and The BBC.* Scientist appearing in *Ancient Earth: Frozen* television episode.
- 2022 – 2023
- **Diversity Postdoctoral Alliance Committee (DPAC) HBCU Mentoring Program.** *The Johns Hopkins Postdoctoral Association.* Mentoring/advising for undergraduate students at Mid-Atlantic HBCUs
- 2017 – 2021
- **Visiting Scientist Program.** *Caltech Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach (CTLO) and Pasadena Unified School System (PUSD).* Science curriculum design and both in-person and virtual in-class teaching experience with Grades K-5.
- 2017 – 2020
- **Science Night Exhibitions.** *Caltech Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach (CTLO) and Pasadena Unified School System (PUSD).* Series of extra-curricular STEM expos for K-12 students and families in Pasadena.
- 2018 – 2019
- **Teaching Assistant.** *Caltech Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences.* Ge 11b/104: Introduction to Geobiology.
- 2017 – 2018
- **Teaching Assistant.** *Caltech Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences.* Ge 116: Analytical Methods.
- Jul. 2019
- **Caltech Astro Virtual Lecture Series.** *Caltech Astronomy.* Virtual public lecture. *You'll know it when you see it: Defining, describing, and detecting life in the universe.* <https://youtu.be/VyzQpk2m5Hk>
- Jun. 2019
- **Real Science.** CaltechLive! virtual public talk, discussion mediation for Grades 3-8. *Beyond Bones: Interrogating the fossil record of small, soft, profoundly Earth-shaping organisms in the Precambrian.*
- Nov. 2019
- **Southern California Paleontological Society Lecture Series.** Public lecture for all ages. *Micropaleontology: Interrogating the fossil record of small, soft, profoundly Earth-shaping organisms in the Precambrian.*
- May 2019
- **Astronomy On Tap – Los Angeles.** Public talk. *Pebbles on the shore: Reconstructing ancient alien habitats on Earth and Mars.*
- Apr. 2019
- **Science Symposium Talk.** Lecture at Sequoyah High School Science Symposium. *Geomicrobiology.*
 - **Reel Science.** CaltechLive! Public talk, discussion mediation for Grades 3-8. *Galapagos: The islands that changed the world.*
- Feb. 2017
- **Caltech Astro Lecture Series.** *Caltech Astronomy.* Panelist, facilitating discussion after public lecture. *The Science of Star Trek – Michael Wong, Ph.D.*

Reviewer Experience

2022 – present  *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (3 articles), *Precambrian Research* (1 article), *Sedimentary Geology* (1 article), *Geology* (1 article), *Global and Planetary Change* (1 article), *Acta Geochimica* (1 article)

Skills

Analytical Methods  SEM/EDS/EBSD; XRF; XRD; Raman Spectroscopy; micro CT; SIMS/nanoSIMS; IRMS for Δ_{47} , $\delta^{13}C$, and $\delta^{18}O$ of carbonate in calcite, dolomite, and francolite, $\delta^{34}S$ of sulfate in calcite, dolomite, and francolite, and $\delta^{34}S$ of sulfide in pyrite and extracted chromium-reducible sulfur; optical imaging and characterization of petrographic thin sections; chemical assays for sulfur and iron species, maintenance of microbial cultures; preparation of mineralogical and biological samples for any of the previously listed methods; field geology (campaign logistics, mapping, description, measurement, geological sample collection and archiving); CRS extraction; bulk CAS and PAS extraction and purification; and trace CAS extraction and purification.

Coding  Python, Matlab, \LaTeX

Misc.  Scientific writing, hand and digital illustration, graphic design (logos, posters, documents, infographics), public speaking, in-classroom teaching (K-12, undergraduate, and graduate-level courses)

References

- **Kay Behrensmeyer**, *Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology*
Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) Department of Paleobiology
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Relationship: Postdoctoral Fellowship Adviser
- **Gabriela Farfan**, *Coralyn W. Whitney Curator of Gems and Minerals*
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PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013
E-mail: farfang@si.edu
Phone: +1 (608) 334 1244
Relationship: Postdoctoral Fellowship Adviser
- **Emmy Smith**, *Associate Professor*
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Phone: +1 (214) 384 8884
Relationship: Postdoctoral Fellowship Adviser
- **John P. Grotzinger**, *Harold Brown Professor of Geology, Ted and Ginger Jenkins Leadership Chair*
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E-mail: grotz@gps.caltech.edu
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Relationship: Doctoral Thesis Adviser, Collaborator
- **John Eiler**, *Robert P. Sharp Professor of Geology and Geochemistry*
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1200 E California Blvd, MC 100-23
Pasadena, CA 91125
E-mail: eiler@gps.caltech.edu
Phone: +1 (626) 395 6942
Relationship: Doctoral Thesis Committee Member, Collaborator
- **Kathryn "Kitty" Cahalan**, *Outreach Program Manager*
Caltech Center for Teaching, Learning, & Outreach
1200 E California Blvd, MC 369-86
Pasadena, CA 91125
E-mail: kcahalan@caltech.edu
Phone: +1 (626) 395 2468
Relationship: Coordinator/Advisor for Education/Outreach Volunteer Work