Field and Temperature Induced Magnetic Transition in Gd₅Sn₄:
A Giant Magnetocaloric Material

D. H. Ryan,¹ Miryam Elouneg-Jamróz,¹ J. van Lierop,² Z. Altounian,¹ and H. B. Wang¹

¹Physics Department and Centre for the Physics of Materials, McGill University, 3600 University Street, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2T8, Canada
²Materials Science Department, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York 11973

(Received 8 July 2002; published 18 March 2003)

Gd₅Sn₄ exhibits a giant magnetocaloric effect comparable to that reported in the Gd₅(Si,Ge)₄ system. The giant magnetocaloric effect is associated with a first-order change that occurs at ~82 K in zero field, and can be reversed by the application of an external field of a few Tesla. ¹¹⁹Sn Mössbauer spectroscopy shows that this material is magnetically inhomogeneous over a wide range of temperatures and fields.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.90.117202 PACS numbers: 75.30.Sg, 75.50.Cc, 76.80.+y

I. Introduction.—The discovery of a giant magnetocaloric response in Gd₅Si₂Ge₂ [1] has revived interest in both rare-earth/Si-group alloys [2,3] and various manganese-based compounds [4] in a search for materials for use as magnetic refrigerants. A critical requirement for any potential magnetocaloric material is a large change of magnetic entropy (S_{mag}) in an accessible magnetic field. Assuming that the system remains in equilibrium (or at least quasistatic conditions apply), then the magnetic entropy can be obtained from magnetization data through the Maxwell relation [1,5],

$$\frac{\partial S_{mag}}{\partial B} = \frac{\partial \sigma}{\partial T},$$

where T is the absolute temperature, B is the applied magnetic field, and σ is the magnetization. This implies that a large magnetic entropy change, ΔS_{mag}, requires a strongly temperature dependent magnetization. This in turn leads us to seek first-order magnetic transitions where the magnetization is lost more abruptly than at a more conventional continuous transition. Furthermore, in order to maximize the magnetization change, it is essential to have a large magnetization in the ordered state. Alloys rich in gadolinium or manganese are therefore popular choices.

Following a survey of the Gd₅SiₓSn₄₋ₓ system [6], we identified Gd₅Sn₄ as a candidate giant magnetocaloric material. Unfortunately, the high absorption cross section of natural gadolinium presents a severe barrier to neutron diffraction studies, so that a direct magnetic and structural study is not possible. We have therefore turned to ¹¹⁹Sn Mössbauer spectroscopy to obtain both magnetic and structural information on a local scale.

We present here a combination of magnetization and ¹¹⁹Sn Mössbauer spectroscopy that confirms that Gd₅Sn₄ undergoes a first-order magnetic transition at 82 K (in zero field). An applied field causes the transition to move to higher temperatures at ~3.5 K/T, and the change can be driven by both temperature and field. In addition, the ¹¹⁹Sn Mössbauer spectra provide direct evidence that the system is magnetically inhomogeneous over a wide range of temperatures and fields. Finally, Gd₅Sn₄ exhibits a giant magnetocaloric effect that is comparable to that seen in the Gd₅SiₓSn₄₋ₓ [3].

II. Experimental methods.—Samples were prepared in a triarc furnace with a base pressure of better than 6 × 10⁻⁷ mbar. Stoichiometric amounts of the pure elements [Gd (99.9%) and Sn (99.999%) [7]] were melted several times under pure (less than 1 ppm impurity) argon to ensure homogeneity. The alloy is air sensitive, tending to segregate into metallic tin and gadolinium oxide on exposure to air for a few hours. All sample handling was therefore carried out under argon in a glove box.

Powder x-ray diffraction measurements were made using Cu Kα radiation. Analysis showed that Gd₅Sn₄ adopts the Pnma orthorhombic Sm₅Ge₄-type structure at room temperature, with $a = 8.047(3)$ Å, $b = 15.545(5)$ Å, and $c = 8.199(3)$ Å [6]. Basic magnetic characterization was carried out on a commercial susceptometer/magnetometer at temperatures from 5 to 300 K. ac susceptibility ($χ_{ac}$) measurements were made with a driving field of 1 mT at 137 Hz. Magnetization measurements were made in fields of up to 9 T.

Mössbauer spectra were obtained using a 370 MBq ¹¹⁹⁶Sn BaSnO₃ source. For the zero-field runs, temperatures between 9 K and room temperature were achieved using a vibration-isolated closed-cycle refrigerator. This spectrometer was operated in constant-acceleration mode and calibrated against a 99.99% α-Fe foil using a ⁵⁷Co source. The applied field spectra were obtained using a superconducting split solenoid with the field axis vertical and the γ-beam horizontal. This system was operated in sine mode and was calibrated using a He/Ne laser interferometer. All spectra were fitted using a conventional nonlinear least-squares minimization routine that allowed for a combination of Lorentzian lines from sharp components and a Gaussian field distribution for the disordered component.
III. Results.—The 5 K magnetization curve in Fig. 1 shows that Gd₅Sn₄ is ferromagnetic and yields an average moment of $6.8 \mu_B$/Gd. Two features are apparent in the $\chi_{ac}$ data shown in the inset to Fig. 1: the large step at $\sim 80$ K reflects the transition from the high magnetization ordered form to the nonmagnetic form. The magnetic transition of a monoclinic Gd₅Sn₄ impurity at $\sim 130$ K [6] accounts for the second feature in the $\chi_{ac}$ data. These assignments are confirmed below using $^{119}$Sn Mössbauer spectroscopy.

The spectrum of Gd₅Sn₄ at 9 K [6] is dominated by two well-split magnetic sextets that account for about 86% of the total absorbed area. At 30.99(1) T and 38.55(2) T, the hyperfine fields ($B_{hf}$) are remarkably large, indicating that the tin is coordinated by ferromagnetically ordered Gd moments. There are three tin sites in the orthorhombic structure ($4c_1$, $4c_2$, and $5d$) and analysis of the coordination suggests that the hyperfine fields at the $4c_2$ and $5d$ sites should be similar and smaller than that at the $4c_1$ site [6]. This pairing leads us to expect a 3:1 area ratio, in perfect agreement with the 2.94(8):1 that is observed.

An additional weakly magnetic component, accounting for about 11% of the total area at 9 K, could be fitted as a Gaussian distribution of hyperfine fields ($B_{hf}$) $\sim 16.5$ T. The parameters of this component are close to those of the monoclinic form found in Gd₅SiₓSn₄₋ₓ for $0.6 < x < 1.4$ [6]. Finally, there is a weak, broad singlet ($\sim 3\%$ of the area). The parameters of these three components were found to be stable from sample to sample; however, the relative contributions varied by several percent, perhaps reflecting an incomplete transformation on cooling as a result of stresses, differing cooling rates, or minor compositional variations.

On warming from 9 to 80 K (Fig. 2), the central component becomes more prominent, at the expense of, but coexisting with, the sharp sextets (similar changes are seen later in the applied field spectra), indicating a gradual temperature driven conversion from a magnetic to a nonmagnetic form. This behavior provides direct confirmation that the material is magnetically inhomogeneous, with strongly and weakly magnetic phases coexisting from 9 to $\sim 90$ K, a result that has previously been inferred only indirectly from magnetization studies of the related Gd₅SiₓGe₂₅ [8]. An approximate fit to the temperature dependence of $B_{hf}$ for the two sharp sextets up to 80 K suggests an ordering temperature of about 200 K. However, the gradual decline in hyperfine field is interrupted above 80 K: the sharp magnetic components disappear abruptly, to be replaced by the central nonmagnetic component, as the material transforms to its nonmagnetic form. As Fig. 3 shows, this loss of the magnetic components occurs at a temperature well below that at which the hyperfine fields would extrapolate to zero, confirming that the 82 K feature in the $\chi_{ac}$ data is associated with a significant magnetic transformation. As the spectral parameters of the sharp components below 82 K are identical to those seen for the orthorhombic form found in Gd₅SiₓSn₄₋ₓ for $x > 1.5$ [6], and the x-ray structure at room temperature is also orthorhombic, it appears likely that if the magnetic transition is associated with a change in crystal structure, then that change may be between two closely related orthorhombic forms, as

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**FIG. 1.** Magnetization of Gd₅Sn₄ at 5 K. Inset: $\chi_{ac}$ vs $T$ data showing two features at $\sim 80$ and $\sim 130$ K.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**FIG. 2.** $^{119}$Sn Mössbauer spectra of Gd₅Sn₄ at several temperatures. This sample shows an abrupt transition to a nonmagnetic state above 80 K as the sharp sextets disappear.
seen for Gd$_5$Si$_x$Ge$_{4-x}$ [9]. The Gaussian-broadened spectral component is unaffected by the 82 K event, and continues to exhibit a hyperfine field up to $\sim$130 K. This component accounts for the upper feature in the $\Delta S$ ac data in Fig. 1.

Magnetization curves obtained above the magnetic transition of 82 K (Fig. 4) show that even here a large magnetization is obtained, but that it appears abruptly above a minimum field that increases with temperature. Similar behavior has been seen in the Gd$_5$(Si, Ge)$_4$ system [10,11]; however, there are two important differences: (i) the saturated magnetization in Gd$_5$Sn$_4$ appears to fall more slowly with temperature, and (ii) the magnetization in the nonmagnetic state is significantly lower here than in the Gd$_5$(Si, Ge)$_4$ system. These differences combine to yield a much larger change in magnetization between the two states at a given temperature, and thus we expect a larger magnetocaloric response.

In order to demonstrate that the step in the magnetization curves evident in Fig. 4 which leads to the large magnetocaloric signal in Fig. 5 is indeed associated with the magnetic transformation observed on heating, we need to show that an externally applied field can reverse the collapse of the magnetic component seen in the spectra in Fig. 2.

This reversal is shown in Fig. 6. At 90 K, the transformation to the nonmagnetic state is essentially complete and the spectrum is dominated by the central, nonmagnetic feature, with a small ($\sim 15\%$) contribution from the disordered, weakly magnetic monoclinic phase. By 3.25 T the presence of the sharp well-split pair of sextets is clearly evident, and their area increases rapidly at the expense of the central feature as the field increases. This behavior is the exact reverse of the collapse seen on heating through 80 K in Fig. 2. Furthermore, when the magnetic fraction in the Mössbauer spectra is plotted vs...
the applied field (Fig. 7), it closely follows the magnetization obtained at the same temperature. As with the temperature driven transformation, the field driven conversion is associated with a broad, magnetically inhomogeneous coexistence region, which at 90 K spans fields from 0.0024 \text{T} to 0.0024 \text{T}.

Finally, if we plot the hyperfine fields of the two sextets vs. the applied field we obtain a slope of 0.0255 ± 0.0006 T, consistent with ferromagnetic order in the highly magnetic phase. When these fields are extrapolated back to zero applied field they are nicely consistent with the temperature dependence observed below the transformation in zero field (solid points in Fig. 3), confirming that the applied field does indeed reverse the thermally driven magnetic transformation, and it restores the low-temperature ferromagnetic form.

IV. Conclusions.—Gd5Sn4 exhibits a large magneto-caloric effect associated with a first-order magnetic transformation at 82 K. 119Sn Mössbauer spectroscopy confirms that there is a first-order transition between 80 and 85 K and that the step in the magnetization curves observed above the transition is due to a reversal of the change by the applied field. The data also provide direct confirmation that this material is magnetically inhomogeneous over a wide range of temperatures (9–130 K) and fields (2–4 T at 90 K). Low-temperature x-ray diffraction data are now needed to determine whether there is a change in structure associated with the magnetic transition.

This work was supported by grants from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l’aide à la recherche, Québec.