Roberts, E.M., Stevens, N.J., O'Connor, P.M., Dirks, P.H.G.M., Gottfried, M.D., Clyde, W.C., Armstrong, R.A., Kemp, A.I.S., and Hemming, S. (2012) *Initiation of the western branch of the East African Rift coeval with the eastern branch.* Nature Geoscience, 5 (4). pp. 289-294.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/NGEO1432

Initiation of the Western Branch of the East African Rift coeval with the Eastern Branch

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Interpreting the Cenozoic tectonic and topographic history of Africa in the context of the evolution of the East African Rift System is a major current question, with implications for fundamental hypotheses related to continental mantle dynamics, climate, and faunal evolution, including human origins. Key to deciphering these links is accurate determination of the chronology of uplift, volcanism, rifting and sedimentation patterns between the volcanically active, older [Paleogene] Eastern Branch, and the putatively younger (~12-7 Ma), less volcanic Western Branch. Here we show that landscape development and initiation of the Western Branch began >14 million years earlier than previous estimates, contemporaneously with the Eastern Branch. We combine detrital zircon geochronology, tephro- and magneto-stratigraphy, and palaeocurrent analysis of the Rukwa Rift Basin, Tanzania, to constrain the timing of rifting, magmatism, drainage development, and landform dynamics in part of the Western Branch. Our findings demonstrate that rift-related volcanism and lake development began by ~26-25 Ma, preceded by pediment development and major fluvial drainage reversal recording the onset of the African Superswell. This suggests that the uplift of eastern Africa was more widespread and synchronous than previously recognized. These data are integral to interpreting the connections between African Cenozoic climate change and faunal evolution.

The high elevation (>1000 m) plateaus of southern and eastern Africa are outstanding, first order features of the African plate. Despite this, the uplift history and geodynamics of this unique topography remain a subject of debate and continue to challenge traditional plate tectonic concepts[1-11]. The topographic anomaly is referred to as the African Superswell[4] and has been attributed to complex patterns of mantle circulation and plume development that initiated ~30-40 Ma[5-6]. In East Africa, the Superswell is associated with the 4000 km-long East African Rift System (EARS), considerable sections of which are superimposed on large shear zones and sutures within Proterozoic mobile belts, reactivated as rifts during the Paleozoic and Cretaceous[5] (Fig. 1a). The Superswell developed in concert with the onset of Antarctic glaciation, which together fundamentally altered the African climate[7]. Regional uplift and formation of the EARS also rerouted and influenced large river systems, including the Nile, Congo and Zambezi[12-16]. This in turn resulted in complex and dynamic landscape fragmentation and the development of ecological corridors that, together with climatic shifts, set the stage for the evolution of Africa's unique fauna, beginning with faunal interchange with Eurasia in the latest Oligocene, and leading to the appearance of hominoids/hominins and other groups during the Mio-Pliocene[7-9]. Within this broad template, many uncertainties remain regarding the detailed chronology of uplift, volcanism and rifting in eastern Africa, which can be addressed by investigating interior sedimentary basins along the EARS.

Here we examine the sedimentary succession preserved within the Rukwa Rift Basin (RRB) (Fig. 1), a segment of the Western Branch of the EARS, in order to: (1) constrain the depositional age of these deposits; (2) delimit the timing of rifting and volcanism in the Western Branch; and (3) interpret landscape evolution and drainage development in central-east Africa since the breakup of Gondwana. Our analysis integrates U-Pb detrital zircon geochronology with palaeocurrent analysis to reconstruct sedimentary provenance and unroofing patterns in the basin, coupled with tephro- and magnetic-stratigraphy of rift fill deposits, providing a novel test of the African Superswell hypothesis.

Regional Geology of Eastern Africa

Development of the EARS was preceded by earlier volcanism in the Turkana region of southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya between 45-37 Ma[17] that has been linked to mantle plume activity[18-19] (Fig. 1). Widespread volcanism with eruption of the Afar plume commenced in central Ethiopia and Yemen around 30 Ma, depositing up to 2 km of flood basalts and rhyolites[20], accompanied by broad thermal uplift[5,9]. Volcanic activity slowly progressed southward through time[10,21-22]. Extension and uplift of rift shoulders commenced as early as 45-40 Ma in northern Kenya and became more widespread between 30-20 Ma[19,23-24], but may have been more recent (ca. 18 Ma) in southwestern Ethiopia[25]. By 20 Ma much of the Eastern Branch of the EARS was well established[10,26-27]. In contrast, it has been argued that the Western Branch of the EARS is considerably younger, with its development beginning ~12 Ma, based on lake sediment thickness calculations for the Tanganyika basin[28] and dating in the Toro-Ankole, Virunga, South Kivu, Mwenga-Kamituga and Rungwe volcanic provinces[23,29].

Rukwa Rift Basin

The RRB is a northwest trending half-graben located along the trend of the Paleoproterozoic Ubendian belt, between the Tanganyika and Malawi rifts (Fig. 1). Seismic profiles indicate >8 km of fill in the RRB, making it one of the thickest continental sedimentary sequences in Africa[30] (Supplemental Fig. 2). Previous tectonic and stratigraphic investigations of the RRB have been controversial. Whereas some workers posited that a Mesozoic rifting event resulted in the deposition of a Jurassic-Cretaceous succession beneath a Plio-Pleistocene to Recent 'Lake Beds' sequence[32], others rejected this notion, and instead argued that the sedimentary package underlying the 'Lake Beds' (above the Permian) is entirely Late Miocene-Pliocene associated with EARS development at ~7-8 Ma[31-32]. Irrespective of this debate (based specifically on sparse palynological data), most interpretations are built on the concept that Cenozoic rifting and volcanism in the RRB, and indeed throughout the Western Branch, began during the late Neogene (~12-7 Ma), well after initiation of the Kenyan and Ethiopian rifts[5,21,29,31-34,]. Suggestions of pre-Neogene volcanic[35] and tectonic activity in the Western Branch have been broadly rejected[23,29]. However, various lines of evidence suggest that the Western Branch may have developed prior to the Neogene. For example, kimberlites, which are important archives of thermal perturbations beneath continents and commonly linked to uplift or rift initiation, have recently been identified in the Western Branch and dated as late Paleogene[36]. In addition, the thermal histories of the Albertine[37], Rukwa, and Malawi Rifts[38] were investigated via low-temperature thermochronology and used to reconstruct the cooling history of the rift flanks as a proxy for estimating the timing of uplift, erosion, and associated rifting events. Results from this work suggest that uplift and erosion began in the Albertine Rift > 20 Ma[37] and that the Malawi and Rukwa rifts experienced a significant episode of accelerated regional cooling and denudation ≤40-50 Ma, with much of this predicted prior to 20 Ma[38]. Thermochronologic investigations in the Zambezi rift also record a synchronous Paleogene uplift/denudation event[39].

Ambiguity concerning the age of stratigraphic sequences in the Rukwa and Malawi rift basins has, until now, prevented a more precise link between these cooling events and onset of rifting and basin development. Our investigations in the RRB unequivocally demonstrate the presence of both a Cretaceous sequence and a previously unrecognized Paleogene sequence[40-43] that correlate well with reported thermochronologic events. These findings greatly improve our understanding of the geologic history of this portion of the Western Branch of the EARS, and lead to a revised interpretation of the timing of rifting and landscape evolution in the Western Branch. A deeper history for the Western Branch has important implications for understanding not only the history of the EARS, but also for documenting environments, flora and fauna preceding the appearance of hominoids in the region.

Rift Stratigraphy, Sedimentation and Palaeontology

Four tectonic phases of basin development and sedimentation in the RRB can now be demonstrated[42] and linked to phases of rapid cooling and denudation recorded by thermochronologic data[36] (see Supplementary Fig 1). Deposition was initiated during the late Paleozoic with widespread Permo-Triassic rifting and infill of the Karoo Supergroup[30]. Overlying the Karoo is a mid-Cretaceous succession, the Galula Formation[42], characterized by a novel fauna that includes non-avian dinosaurs and mammal-like, notosuchian crocodyliforms[43]. A slight angular unconformity separates Cretaceous strata from a previously unrecognized >300 m-thick Paleogene succession, the Nsungwe Formation[42], which is divided into two members: (1) a basal fluvial quartz-pebble conglomerate and quartz arenite that transitions sharply into an immature, debris flow-dominated, alluvial fan complex (Utengule Member [Mbr]); and (2) a fine-grained, volcanic ash-rich wetland succession (Songwe Mbr). Discovery of basal anthropoid primates[40] and other fossils[41] in the latter unit is significant as it represents the only known Oligocene terrestrial/freshwater fauna from subequatorial Africa, providing the last snapshot of endemic African faunas prior to large-scale faunal interchange between Afro-Arabia and Eurasia. The uppermost sedimentary unit in the RRB is the widespread, > 1000 m-thick, Pliocene-Recent 'Lake Beds' sequence.

Volcanism and Geochronology

The mineralogy and geochemistry of volcanic tuffs in the Songwe Mbr suggests an alkaline magmatic source, probably a carbonatite volcano[39]. Large phenocrysts (≤7mm) and calcite clasts (≤13 mm) suggest a proximal source, possibly linked to the initial phase of the Rungwe volcanics at the southern end of the RRB (Fig. 1). Isotopic dating of three tuffs from the Songwe Mbr, one from along the Songwe River (TZ72504-4)[42] and two from along the Nsungwe River (TZ71008-11, TZ62707-9), provide robust age constraint (Fig. 2; Supplementary Figs. 2-3). To circumvent the controversy associated with previous reports of older volcanics in the Western Branch[23,35], the tuff samples were independently dated at three labs employing two different isotopic systems: (1) U-Pb, LA-ICPMS analysis of titanite for samples TZ72504-4 and TZ71008-11

(Supplementary Fig. 4; Supplementary Table 1), (2) U-Pb, SHRIMP analysis of zircon for TZ72504-4[42] and TZ62707-9 (Supplementary Fig. 5; Supplementary Table 2), and (3) ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar analysis of phlogopite for TZ71008-11 (Supplementary Fig. 6; Supplementary Table 3). The five sets of analyses yielded nearly indistinguishable ages between 25.9-24.6 Ma for the three tuff beds. These ages are corroborated by palaeomagnetic investigations of the Songwe Mbr (Fig. 2). The palaeomagnetic pole calculated for the Songwe Mbr lies closest to the 20 Ma and 30 Ma poles on the synthetic apparent polar wander path for Africa over the last 100 Ma (Supplementary Fig. 8b). Interpretation of magnetic reversal stratigraphy preliminarily indicates that deposition of the anthropoid primate-bearing Songwe Mbr most likely occurred between magnetochrons C8n.2n and C7r, or ~26-24.5 Ma (Fig. 2; for alternative correlations, see Supplementary Figs. 7, 8; Supplementary Table 4; Appendices 1-2). This integrated dating approach is consistent with our biostratigraphy[41], as well as thermochronologic data for denudation during this general time[38]. These data collectively provide strong evidence for late Oligocene volcanism, rifting and sedimentation in the RRB.

Provenance, Drainage Patterns, and Uplift

The uplift of eastern Africa deeply affected continental drainage patterns, directing and rerouting large rivers such as the Palaeo-Rukwa, Congo, Zambezi and Nile systems and creating tectonically forced landscapes that fundamentally and repeatedly changed throughout the Cenozoic. U-Pb detrital zircon geochronology and palaeocurrent analysis were employed and are linked to existing thermochronologic data to reconstruct drainage evolution and landscape dynamics in central-east Africa since Gondwanan breakup and to document the regional unroofing and uplift history. Seven detrital zircon samples collected from fluvial sandstones were analyzed (Fig. 3), including: one sample from the Lower/mid-Cretaceous Mtuka Mbr, Galula Formation (TZ2UT); three from the overlying mid-Cretaceous Namba Mbr, Galula Formation (TZ71706-14; TZ71406-2; TZ7/7); one from the overlying Paleogene Utengule Mbr, Nsungwe Formation (TZ6807-3); one from the latest Paleogene (late Oligocene) Songwe Mbr, Nsungwe Formation (TZ71505-6); and a sand sample from the modern Songwe River (TZ71806-1b), a tributary of Lake Rukwa (see Supplementary Figs. 2-3 for locality data). Although there are potential pitfalls and limitations to detrital zircon based provenance reconstructions, including the potential for complex recycling histories and over representing or missing key grain ages; when combined with additional data sets, it can provide a powerful tool for tectonics and landscape reconstruction. With these limitations in mind, we present a new model for the regional drainage and uplift history of central-east Africa in Figure 4 (see Supplementary Materials for full discussion of uncertainties; Supplementary Table 5 for U-Pb zircon data).

The fluvial drainage history of the RRB is characterized by a long-lived, major Cretaceous river system that flowed >1000 km northwestward along the axis of the Northern Malawi and Rukwa rifts towards the Congo Basin, with headwaters in the highlands of northern Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (Fig. 4a). This Cretaceous 'Palaeo-Rukwa' river likely flowed across the present day position of Lake Tanganyika via the Luama Trough, and emptied into the Congo Basin where an extensive Cretaceous sedimentary sequence is preserved. A widespread Cretaceous lacustrine succession is known from the Congo Basin, and may have formed the local-base level and drainage outlet to the Palaeo-Rukwa river system. Detrital zircon age spectra and palaeocurrent data reveal that the Early to mid-Cretaceous river system was sourced from proximal Ubendian (2000-1750 Ma) basement gneiss (rift margin), along with southerly derived Neoproterozoic-earliest Paleozoic Zambezi-Mozambique Belt (800-450 Ma) sources that would have formed palaeo-highlands in northern Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia (Figs. 3-4). Later in the Cretaceous [during deposition of the Namba Mbr], flank uplift and basin subsidence slowed and sediment input from proximal Ubendian sources largely ceased as the local topographic highs (rift shoulders) were eroded. Nearby sediment sources were replaced by Mozambique belt and distal Irumide belt (1100-950 Ma) sources to the south. Minor Mesoproterozoic (1600-1200) grains in both members are likely recycled from minor, localized sources, such as the Muva Group, in the northern Irumide belt. Statistical treatment of the Cretaceous detrital zircon populations using Kolmogorov-Smirnoff tests (K-S) confirms a provenance shift between the Mtuka and Namba Mbrs (Supplementary Table 6). A large palaeocurrent data set (n = 278) collected from all Cretaceous deposits in the Rukwa and northern Malawi rifts[42] support this model of a northwest flowing Cretaceous Palaeo-Rukwa river system (Fig. 4a). Significantly, this finding refutes the hypothesis of a Cretaceous ‘Palaeo-Congo’ river system flowing southeastward out of the Congo Basin, across the Rukwa Rift and into the Indian Ocean at the Rufiji Delta[15]. Our model posits that Cretaceous flow across central Africa funneled into, not out of, the Congo Basin. This is consistent with the presence of a long-lived lake system, ‘Palaeo-Lake Congo’, or purported marine embayment[45]. Alternatively, it is possible that the Palaeo-Rukwa river system was a tributary to a larger

'Palaeo-Congo' river system that continued flowing northwestward into the Central African Shear Zone.

A slight angular unconformity separates the Galula Formation from the Utengule Mbr, as well as a major change in sandstone provenance from sub-mature arkose at the top of the Galula Formation, to a thin, super mature quartz arenite at the bottom of the Utengule Mbr[42], which we interpret as a major fluvial pediment and erosion surface that developed in response to regional uplift. Detrital zircons support this assertion and indicate that a major drainage reversal occurred in the RRB sometime between the Late Cretaceous and the late Paleogene (pre-25 Ma). This drainage reversal is defined by a provenance shift from south-derived Irumide and Mozambique belt dominated sources to distal, northwest-derived, Mesoproterozoic Kibaran/Karagwe-Ankole belt (1300-1450 Ma) sources (Fig. 3b-c). Increased input of 2000-1750 Ma appear at this time, likely sourced from the northern part of the Ubendian belt, or possibly from minor Ruzvian terranes within the Kibaran Belt. The smattering of 1000-600 Ma grains are likely recycled through erosion of underlying Cretaceous strata, but may also derive from minor point sources within the Kibaran Belt. We interpret the coincidence between thermochronologic data indicating a Paleogene episode of rapid cooling/denudation, an angular unconformity above the Cretaceous succession, and an overlying pediment surface characterized by a change in both sandstone maturity and detrital zircon provenance, as evidence of topographic uplift heralding the onset of the EARS. Although these data do not indicate a precise origin or the extent of this uplift, they suggest southward tilting of the Oligocene land surface by uplift somewhere within or beyond the Mesoproterozoic Kibaran Belt.

Above the pediment at the base of the Utengule Mbr, rapid facies change occurs; from super mature fluvial quartz arenites to immature matrix-supported alluvial fans, and then to wetland lakes and rivers in the Songwe Mbr[42]. A final detrital zircon provenance shift is observed in the Songwe Mbr (Fig. 3d-e) and supported by paleocurrent data and K-S tests (Supplementary Table 6). North-derived Kibaran sources are completely shut off from the RRB by ~26 Ma due to rifting and associated flexural uplift of the rift shoulders. This resulted in nearly exclusive sediment input from the Ubendian belt (2000-1750 Ma) rift shoulders, along with a small, but diagnostic population (n = 7) of synorogenic volcanic grains (Fig. 3d). A mean age of 25.3 Ma for the latter is consistent with the radio-isotopic ages derived from the intercalated tuff beds (Supplementary Figure 9). Considered together with thermochronologic data for denudation and sedimentological evidence for a shift from rivers and alluvial fans (Utengule Mbr) to shallow lake environments (Songwe Mbr) with a large scatter in palaeocurrent orientations (Figs. 2-3), we suggest that by 26-25 Ma, the RRB had developed into an internally draining basin with border faults, uplifted rift shoulders, and an active volcanic system (Fig. 4c). Detrital zircons from the modern Songwe River reveal a provenance pattern generally similar to that of the late Oligocene sequence, but lacking young volcanic grains (Fig. 3e), indicating that the volcanic edifice has been eroded or buried and that there is minimal reworking from the Nsungwe Formation (which has limited exposure).

These data demonstrate that portions of the Western Branch of the EARS developed during the Paleogene, with rifting and volcanism commencing >14 Ma earlier than previously estimated. Based on similar structural, stratigraphic and thermochronologic patterns, we predict similar rifting histories for other portions of the Western Branch, particularly the northern Malawi rift and central Tanganyika rift. This implies contemporaneous development of portions of the Western and Eastern branches of the EARS, in contrast to existing models that propose a progressive pattern of south-southwest rift propagation and volcanism in the EARS[6,21,34]. We attribute this more synchronous model of rifting, volcanism and basin development between the two rift branches to extensional stresses associated with either more widespread plume(s) related uplift or to broad epiorogenic uplift associated with major plate boundary reorganization. It is possible that rifting in the Western Branch was initially limited to areas, such as the Rukwa and Northern Malawi rifts, that sit along major pre-existing structural weaknesses (e.g., Ubendian Belt). Studies of primitive Pleistocene-Recent alkaline volcanics in the Toro-Ankole field from the Western Branch in Uganda suggest that incipient melting began long before the first known volcanism at 12 Ma[46] and helium isotopes from the Rungwe Volcanics in the southern RRB provides evidence of plume-like ratios south of the Turkana Depression[47], strengthening a Superswell uplift model.

The strong similarities in drainage patterns, provenance and palaeoenvironments in the RRB at 25 Ma, compared with those observed in the rift today suggest that the topography of southwestern Tanzania may be a relatively mature feature. This is inconsistent with morphotectonic models[8] that argue for rapid onset of uplift in the Kenyan rift and Western rifts during the Plio-Pleistocene[16], which have been proposed to act as triggers for rapid climate and environmental changes in eastern Africa[7-8]. Our data support an alternative interpretation of prolonged, widespread rifting and uplift of the East African Plateau throughout the Neogene[9], with a deeper history extending back at least to the latest Oligocene and linked to the gradual development of the African Superswell[4] or possibly epiorogenic uplift associated with plate reorganization[4]. The Rukwa Rift, with its emerging fauna composed of early anthropoid primates and other important endemic African clades (e.g., phiomorphs, hyracoids, sengis, etc) provides a critical new glimpse into the tectonic evolution of the EARS and the resultant landscape changes that influenced the evolution of Africa's unique flora and fauna.

Methods

Standard methodologies for detrital zircon sample assessment and sorting were employed. Detrital zircon ages for all samples were obtained by SHRIMP (Sensitive High Resolution Ion Microprobe) U-Pb dating at the Australian National University. Statistical analyses of the detrital zircons were conducted using the unpublished Excel Macro of J. Guynn, available on the Arizona LaserChron center website (http://www.geo.arizona.edu/alc/Analysis%20Tools.htm). The carbonatite tuff samples were independently dated at three laboratories on three different minerals, resulting in concordant ages. Single crystal, laser fusion Ar/Ar dating of phlogopite was performed in the Argon Geochronology for the Earth Sciences (AGES) lab at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory. U-Pb dating of zircon was conducted on the SHRIMP at the Australian National University, and U-Pb dating of titanite was performed on the LA-ICPMS at James Cook University. Oriented palaeomagnetic samples were collected by the senior author and analyzed at the University of New Hampshire Paleomagnetism Laboratory.

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Additional Information

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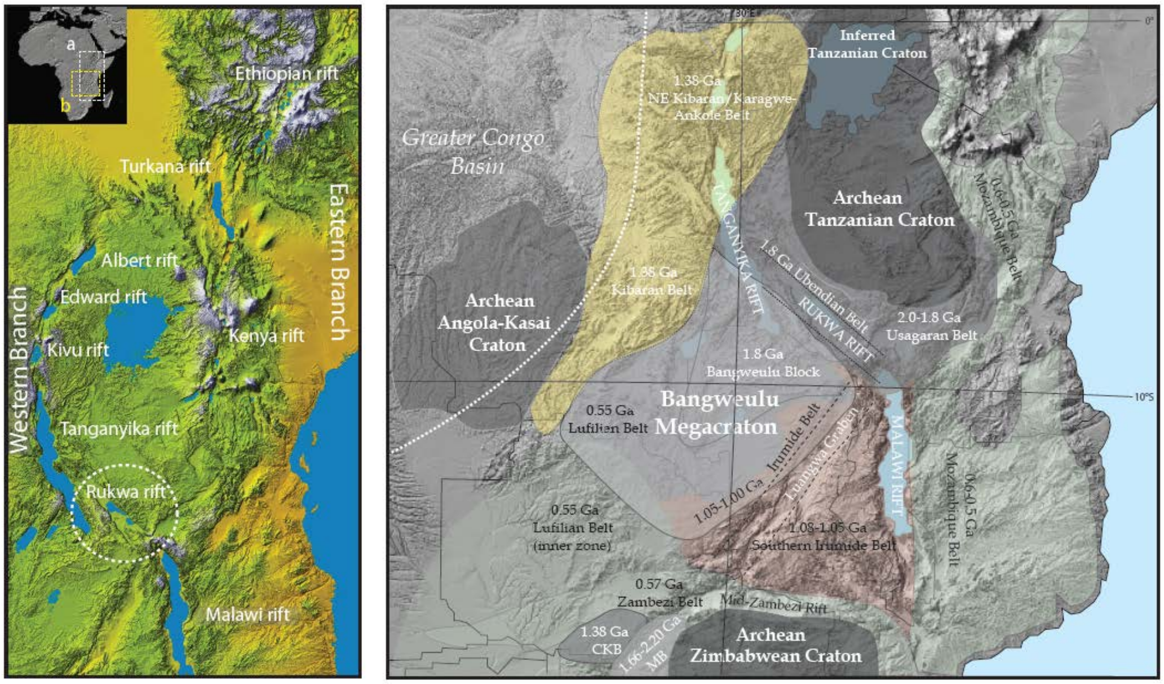
Acknowledgements

Funding provided by the National Science Foundation (EAR-0617561), LSB Leakey Foundation, National Geographic Society (CRE), James Cook University, Ohio University, Michigan State University, and University of the Witwatersrand. We thank T. Blenkinsop and five reviewers for constructive reviews; Z. Jinnah, S. Ngasala, E. Johansen, and J. Temba for field assistance; the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology and the Tanzanian Antiquities Unit for logistical support.

Author Contributions

E.M.R., P.M.O., N.J.S. and M.D.G. developed the project and collected the field data. E.M.R., P.M.O., N.J.S., P.G.H.M., M.D.G., and W.C.C. developed the scientific concepts, interpreted the data, and wrote the paper. R.A.A., A.I.S.K., S.H. and E.M.R. performed the radio-isotopic dating. W.C.C. performed palaeomagnetic analyses.



a b

Figure 1 | East African Rift System. a, Image of the East African Rift System modified from the NASA SRTM (Shuttle Radar Topography Mission) collection. Inset map indicates location of the Rukwa Rift Basin study area within eastern Africa; **b,** Generalized tectonic/structural map of eastern-central Africa illustrating tectonic elements and their broad ages (age data adapted from refs. 48-49). Note that colours for tectonic terranes used in this map correspond with Figures 3-4. CKB, Choma-Kalambo Block; MB, Magondi Belt.

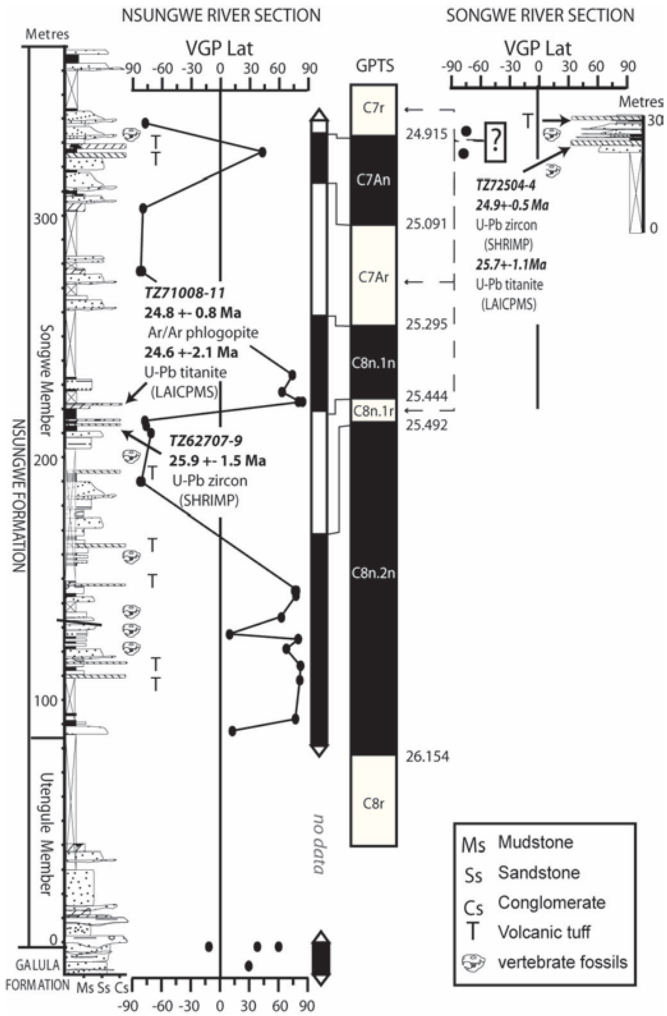


Figure 2 | Paleogene stratigraphy of fluvio-lacustrine deposits in the Rukwa Rift Basin. Late Oligocene vertebrate fossil localities and intercalated carbonatite tuffs are shown, including $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages (1-σ error) and $^{206}Pb/^{238}U$ SHRIMP and LA-ICPMS ages (weighted mean common lead; 2-σ errors) (see Supplementary Figures 4-6). In the center is the interpreted palaeomagnetic reversal stratigraphy (see Supplementary Figure 7 for alternative potential correlations). Ages shown to right of the Global Polarity Time Scale[50] (GPTS). VGP lat, virtual geomagnetic pole latitude for palaeomagnetic samples. Black bars, normal polarity; white bars, reverse polarity (see Supplementary Figure 8; Supplementary Table 4; Appendicies 1-2).

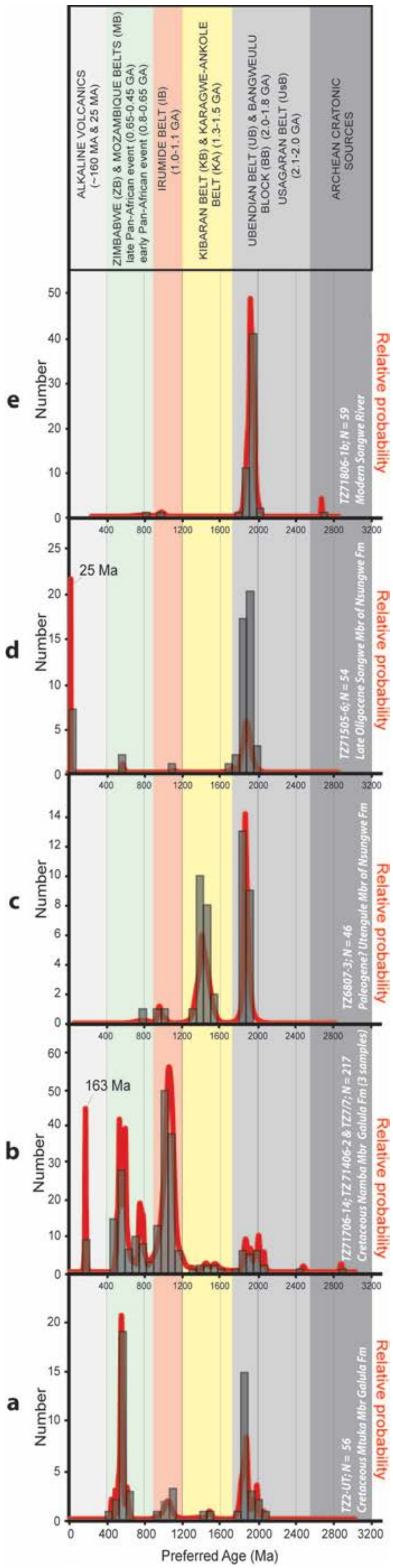

ALKALINE VOLCANICS (~160 MA & 25 MA)
ZIMBABWE (ZB) & MOZAMBIQUE BELTS (MB) late Pan-African event (0.65-0.45 GA) early Pan-African event (0.8-0.65 GA)
IRUMIDE BELT (IB) (1.0-1.1 GA)
KIBARAN BELT (KB) & KARAGWE-ANKOLE BELT (KA) (1.3-1.5 GA)
UBENDIAN BELT (UB) & BANGWEULU BLOCK (BB) (2.0-1.8 GA)
USAGARAN BELT (UsB) (2.1-2.0 GA)
ARCHEAN CRATONIC SOURCES
e
TZ71806-1b; N = 59
Modern Songwe River
d
25 Ma
TZ71505-6; N = 54
Late Oligocene Songwe Mbr of Nsungwe Fm
c
TZ6807-3; N = 46
Paleogene? Utengule Mbr of Nsungwe Fm
b
163 Ma
TZ71706-14; TZ 71406-2 & TZ7/7; N = 217
Cretaceous Namba Mbr Galula Fm (3 samples)
a
TZ2-UT; N = 56
Cretaceous Mtuka Mbr Galula Fm
Number
Relative probability
Preferred Age (Ma)

Figure 3 | Detrital zircon provenance of the Rukwa Rift Basin and unroofing history of the Western Branch. Histograms and frequency distribution curves for detrital zircon populations from **a,** Cretaceous Mtuka Mbr; **b,** Cretaceous Namba Mbr (note that three statistically identical samples from three different stratigraphic locations in the Namba Mbr are plotted together); **c,** Paleogene (?) Utengule Mbr; **d,** late Oligocene Songwe Mbr; and **e,** the modern Songwe River. Colours represent the ages of key tectonic sources and correspond with maps in Figures 1b and 3. See Supplementary Fig. 2-3 and Supplementary Table 5 for data and locality information.

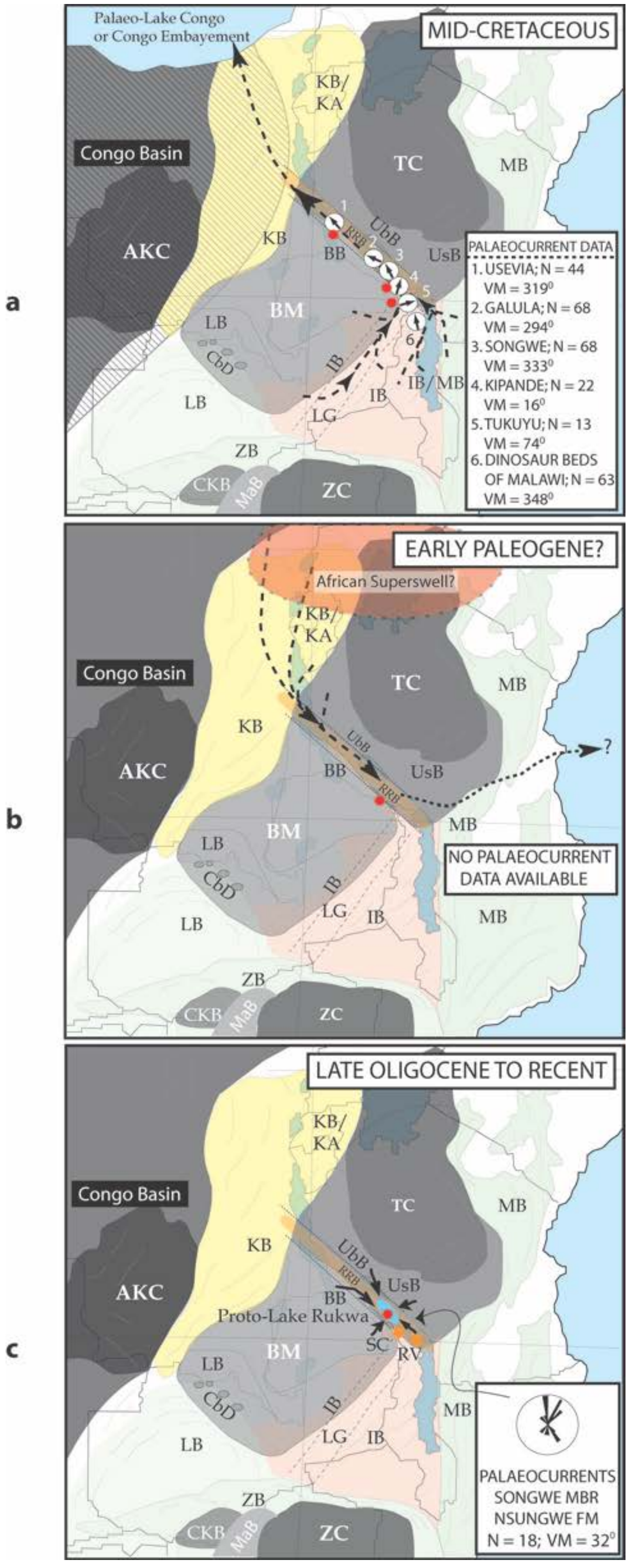


Figure 4 | Post-Gondwanan drainage evolution model for central-east Africa. a,

Cretaceous units characterized by long lived, northwest flowing rivers with cosmopolitan sources in the Irumide and Mozambique belts and minor Ubendian basement input; **b,** Post-Cretaceous Utengule Mbr characterized by input from Kibaran/Karagwe-Ankole Belt to the north, implying a major drainage reversal after the Cretaceous due to onset of the African Superswell; **c,** late Oligocene-Recent development of internally draining shallow wetland/lake basin ~26-25 Ma sourced from proximal, uplifted Ubendian rift shoulders. Carbonatite volcanoes developed ~26-25 Ma, but are now eroded or buried. Red stars, volcanic centers; red circles, sample localities.