

# *On Track*

*The Newsletter of the International Fission-Track Community*  
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## Editor's Notes

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January and February in northern Germany is a good time to sit in front of a computer. Despite such a perfect time to produce OnTrack, this issue is rather late and thin. For this, I must apologize. The next issue is due at a much nicer time of year. Please help me publish it in a timely manner by sending your submissions!

A section has been reintroduced that highlights recent PhD theses. Extended abstracts from 5 recent theses have been included. Naturally, submission of such abstracts for upcoming issues of OnTrack are strongly encouraged!

In the near future, most of the back issues of OnTrack will be placed on the web in pdf format.

An email will be sent around notifying you when this has been accomplished.

The past year has seen a large number of post-doc positions advertised for low-temperature thermochronology. Several of these positions have been advertised on the OnTrack mailing list by request. I hope that this hasn't bothered people. I will continue this practise until the next editor for OnTrack takes over; he or she will have to decide their own policy.

If there are issues arising from these articles or if you have general concerns that you want to sound out with the FT community there is the web-based fission-track discussion group [FISSION-TRACK@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:FISSION-TRACK@jiscmail.ac.uk). If you do not already belong to this group you can sign up at: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/FISSION-TRACK.html>

[Ed Sobel]

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## Short Tracks

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**Giulio Viola** has established a fission track lab in Cape Town.

**Paul O'Sullivan** has joined **Ray and Margaret Donelick** in Moscow, Idaho. The company has been renamed Apatite to Zircon, Inc. More details follow in an advertisement.

**Marc Jolivet** (The CRUST Project, University of Glasgow) has been appointed as a Chargé de Recherche (CNRS) at University Montpellier II. Marc will now be running the FT lab and will also be in charge of setting up a new U-Th/He lab in Montpellier together with Patrick Monié (CNRS). Research will still be focussed on surface tectonic with ongoing projects in northern Tibet, Mongolia, the Alps and the Pyrenees. One Master project will be available starting next September for any student willing to work on the Grès d'Annot (southern Alps) (please contact Marc for information; email: [jolivet@dstu.univ-montp2.fr](mailto:jolivet@dstu.univ-montp2.fr)).

**Dennis Arne** left full-time employment at Curtin University of Technology (Australia) late last year to move to the family to the Victorian Alps. He continues to be a Senior Teaching Fellow at Curtin, and has set up a small consultancy to handle contract teaching, report writing and editing, plus whatever else comes along!

**Isabelle Coutand** has finished her postdoc at Potsdam University (Germany). She was hired as an assistant professor in the University of Lille (France) and is building a fission-track lab there.

**Barbara Carrapa** has finished her PhD thesis at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. A summary of her thesis is included in this issue of OnTrack. Following a short postdoc project in Amsterdam on the evolution of the Alps/Apennine knot area, she will move to Potsdam as a postdoc with Manfred Strecker and Ed Sobel. There she will join a project examining the detrital signal of plateau uplift. The study area is the Argentine Puna and northern Sierras Pampeanas.

**Geoffery Ruiz** has finished his PhD in Zurich and moved to Amsterdam for a postdoc. The title of his new project is "Neogene landscape evolution of drainage basins in the Eastern Andean and Subandean Cordilleras, Peru."

#### Research Setting

We want to individually quantify the effects of tectonic and climatic variables onto landscape evolution within two different basins in Peru. Later, the evolution of these variables through time in each basin will be compared, accounting for any similarities or differences or

dominances observed. Two valleys have been selected, these are the Apurimac and Madre de Dios rivers, because their drainage basins have a different tectonic and climatic history and are on opposite side of a major divide in southern Peru, the Cordillera Oriental or Eastern Cordillera.

The aims are (1) Reconstruct denudation histories of the 2 chosen drainage basins (FT and (U-Th)/He), (2) calculate denudation rates for successive down-cutting episodes (cosmogenic nucleides, (U-Th)/He, <sup>3</sup>He, <sup>21</sup>Ne), (3) produce a GIS of the Eastern Cordillera drainage basins of Peru integrating remote sensing and map analyses, quantitative climatic and tectonic analyses, (4) correlate denudation histories with the Miocene to Recent sedimentary sequences located further east, into the Amazon.

The results will be fully integrated with another project looking towards climate reconstructions based on chemical proxies from ostracods and molluscan bivalve faunas within the same regions/sections (postdoc position: Karin Boessenkool)

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## Meetings

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The 32<sup>ND</sup> INTERNATIONAL GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS will be held from August 20 to 28, 2004 in Florence, Italy. Details can be found at: <http://www.32igc.org/home.htm>

We would like to draw the attention of the FT community to Topical Session T05 entitled "**Exhumation of Orogenic Belts.**" Topics covered in this Topical Session include the crustal response to tectonism and exhumation, erosion and sedimentation in flanking basins, thermochronology in orogenic belts, and the long- and short-term rates of uplift and exhumation. T05 contains two sessions:

**T05.1 Exhumation processes** This session will focus on observation, theory, and modeling of the relationship of tectonic and erosional exhumation to orogenesis. Topics might include new information about rates and patterns of exhumation, the relative contribution of different exhumation processes, or the tectonic and climatic conditions needed for deep exhumation. Conveners:

Dr. Sean Willett Earth and Space Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle WA USA <[swillett@u.washington.edu](mailto:swillett@u.washington.edu)>

Dr. Mark T. Brandon, Geology and Geophysics, Yale University, New Haven, CT USA <[mark.brandon@yale.edu](mailto:mark.brandon@yale.edu)>

**T05.2 Sedimentary record of exhumation** This session addresses sedimentary record of exhumation in orogenic belts. This focus includes understanding the provenance, stratigraphy, and sedimentary systems that record exhumation, including isotopic tracers in the sedimentary system and thermochronologic studies. Conveners:

Dr. John I. Garver Geology Department, Union College Schenectady NY, USA <[garverj@union.edu](mailto:garverj@union.edu)>

Dr. Massimiliano Zattin, University of Bologna, Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra e Geologico - Ambientali, Bologna, ITALY <[zattin@geomin.unibo.it](mailto:zattin@geomin.unibo.it)>

These topical sessions include both invited and volunteered presentations. Abstracts may be accepted for oral or poster presentation. We hope that you consider attending the Congress, and we look forward to an exciting session. Note that FT 2004 will be in Europe at about this time, and we are hopeful that participants can attend both meetings.

[John I. Garver]

First announcement

As decided in Cadiz, Spain, the next EUROPEAN FISSION TRACK MEETING will be held in August 2006 in Bremen Germany.

The meeting will be organized by Prof. M. Olesch (University Bremen) and Dr. U. A.

Glasmacher (Forschungsstelle Archaeometry, Max-Planck-Institut für Kernphysik, Heidelberg).

[Ulrich A. Glasmacher]

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## RECENT PhD Dissertations

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### THERMOTECTONIC EVOLUTION OF KRAISHTE, WESTERN BULGARIA

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The Kraishite zone of western Bulgaria, represents part of the South European margin which was involved in the Alpine orogeny. This zone is bounded to the northeast by the upper Cretaceous Srednogorie volcanic arc. To the southwest is the high-grade metamorphic unit of the Serbo-Macedonian crystalline "massif", deemed to be part of the Rhodope.

The aim of this work was to constrain the tectonic evolution of the region using U-Pb SHRIMP (zircon),  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  (mica and hornblende) and fission-track analysis (zircon and apatite), combined with structural and sedimentological observations.

The Kraishite zone is composed of two main tectonic units, the Morava and the Struma. The Morava unit, with a presumed continental basement and an Ordovician to Devonian sedimentary cover, was thrust upon the Struma during the early Cretaceous. The Struma unit consists of a heterogeneous assemblage of variably deformed and metamorphosed continent- and ocean-derived rocks of lower Cambrian age together with a Permian to lower Cretaceous sedimentary cover.

Combining data from single grain U/Pb age measurements on zircon (Graf, 2001) with the U/Pb SHRIMP analysis from this work, an age of 569 - 544 Ma has been obtained for the protolith of the crystalline basement of the Struma unit. These rocks did not experience any high-grade metamorphism, southwest of the line Zlogosh-Koniavo, until the lower Cretaceous. A Variscan metamorphic event may have affected the basement northeast of this line. Therefore it is tentatively suggested that the front of the Variscan orogen was positioned in this zone.

The lower Cretaceous thrusting of the Morava unit over the Struma unit yielded lower amphibolitic facies metamorphism in the

basement of the latter. This thrusting occurred between 135 Ma, identified through the age of the youngest sediments involved in the thrusting, and 112 Ma, the oldest  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  cooling age of the amphibolite facies rocks.

A rapid cooling phase at about 96 Ma predicted from  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  and zircon fission-track ages, may have been related to extension at that time. Such extension is documented by the development of the Gurbino-Zlogosh low-angle normal fault (Ivanov, in press) and the normal faulting along the Contact C2 (Bonev et al., 1996).

The Cenozoic tectonic history of the Kraishite is related to the exhumation of the Osogovo-Lisets complex along the Eleshnitsa and Dragovishtitsa detachments. The extension started before 47 Ma and was contemporaneous with the extension in the Rhodope (Burg et al., 1996). Between 47 and 35 Ma, acceleration in the cooling rate of the Osogovo-Lisets core is documented through the fission-track data. The extension was accompanied by the development of sedimentary basins in the hanging wall position where syn-detachment clastic sediments were deposited. Rapid uplift of the hotter footwall induced heating in the hanging wall and the sediments. By the late Eocene the detachments were no longer active and were sealed by post-detachment marine sediments. Post-sedimentary (Miocene?) deformation was associated with SW-NE followed by NNW-SSE extension.

It is still difficult to say whether the extension in the Kraishite and the Rhodope was caused by syn- to post-orogenic collapse or was related to the retreating subduction. Syn- to post-collisional extension is suggested for the upper Cretaceous, whereas the Cenozoic extension may be more likely subduction-related.

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# EXHUMATION OF THE NORTHERN SUB-ANDEAN ZONE OF ECUADOR AND ITS SOURCE REGIONS: A COMBINED THERMOCHRONOLOGICAL AND HEAVY MINERAL APPROACH

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The Ecuadorian Andean Amazon Basin (AAB) developed along the eastern Andean margin as a response to the (1) interaction of the subducting Farallon/Nazca plates and the South American Craton, and (2) accretionary events since Early Cretaceous. The Aptian to Recent sediments contain clastic material which was eroded from the craton and its Paleozoic cover to the east as well as the rising Andean Cordilleras in the west. Previous work established a quantitative thermal history record of exhumation in the bounding orogen to the west although the depths of rock exhumed limit the temporal extent of this record. Often information cannot be continuously traced within the orogens because it has been removed by erosion or overprinted. Hence the details of source region tectonics can be recognized in sedimentary sequences using geochronology. An advanced thermochronological methodology based on pattern of changes in lagtime upwards in the stratigraphic column, combined with heavy mineral analysis, allowed events in the source regions of the AAB to be distinguished through dating of the eroded material present in the northern SAZ and Pastaza depression where uplift has exposed both the Jurassic basement and its Aptian to Recent sedimentary cover.

In a preliminary study, the thermal history of the northern SAZ was constrained using fission-track analysis on both zircon and apatite from 25 samples from the basement of the region. The results reveal that the basement of the sediments, dominantly Jurassic igneous sequences, has never undergone temperatures higher than 100°C since emplacement. Consequently, the region was never heated to temperatures that would have modified zircon detrital fission-track ages in the overlying sedimentary sequences (zircon has a closure temperature of  $\sim 270 \pm 40^\circ\text{C}$ ). Hence, the dated zircon fission-track ages from the Aptian to Recent siliciclastic sediments are true detrital ages and express the varied thermal histories of the source regions.

70 detrital zircon fission-track age populations were statistically extracted from 1082 zircon grains, and show a significant variation from  $579 \pm 65$  Ma to  $22.9 \pm 1.2$  Ma. The abundance of

DZFT populations with Proterozoic to Early Cretaceous ages in the Aptian-Albian Hollin Fm. suggests that several distinct source regions, which may have been significantly geographically dispersed, contributed to the early infilling of the AAB. The old populations (600-250 Ma) indicate a probable sourcing in the Guyana-Brazilian Shield regions to the east. Early Cretaceous detrital zircon fission-track populations suggest a Late Jurassic-Early Cretaceous phase of exhumation along the Ecuadorian margin (Peltetec event?), which may be responsible for the 60 My hiatus observed in some locations between the Jurassic Misahualli volcanic arc and the overlying Aptian-Albian sediments (Hollin Fm.).

A rapid exhumation within the source region greater than 2mm/yr during the Coniacian/Santonian to Paleocene was recognised. This is most likely from within the Cordillera and may have been due to the accretion of an oceanic plateau, referred to as the Pallatanga Terrane, against the Ecuadorian margin. This is also manifested by the first appearance of metamorphic detritus into the Maastrichtian Tena Fm.

During the Eocene, distinct provenance changes were coeval with the deposition of proximal sedimentary facies in the AAB (Tiyuyacu Fm.), suggesting that the contemporaneous tectonic development along the Ecuadorian margin was more protracted. Rapid exhumation in the hinterland of the AAB was restricted to the Middle to Late Eocene, when lower crustal levels were eroded into the AAB. This phase probably ended with the final docking of the Macuchi oceanic island arc against the Ecuadorian margin where it currently constitutes part of the Cordillera Occidental.

A clear change of provenance, characterized by the introduction of a pyroxene-olivine dominated heavy mineral assemblage, is observed between the Late Miocene Chambira Fm. and the Pliocene-Pleistocene Mesa and Mera Fms. Rocks with an oceanic affinity, such as the basement of the Cordillera Occidental and parts of the Interandean region, must have been eroded into the AAB since the Pliocene

suggesting that western, allochthonous Ecuador was eroding at this time.

Collectively, the combination of these techniques permit (1) an assessment of the thermal and tectonic history of the northern Sub-Andean Zone and Pastaza depression, (2) the identification of the source regions of the preserved western and proximal deposits of the AAB, and (3) a refinement of the exhumation histories of individual source regions. Knowledge

gained from this study contributes to the understanding of the Jurassic - Recent active continental margin of Ecuador. Furthermore, the northern Sub-Andean Zone forms a relic part of the flat lying Andean Amazon Basin, which is a major, hydrocarbon contributor and an increased understanding of its evolution may enhance the productivity and economic prosperity of the area.

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## TECTONIC EVOLUTION OF AN ACTIVE OROGEN AS REFLECTED BY ITS SEDIMENTARY RECORD; AN INTEGRATED STUDY OF THE TERTIARY PIEDMONT BASIN (INTERNAL WESTERN ALPS, NW ITALY)

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Syn- to post-orogenic basins such as the Oligocene to Miocene Tertiary Piedmont Basin (TPB) contain the evolutionary record of the syn- to post-collisional kinematics in the surrounding orogen and evidence for the mechanisms responsible for the formation of the accommodation space in the sedimentary basin. Because of its position within the Internal Western Alps, the TPB represents an important record of processes occurring in the Alpine retro-wedge during the last ~30My. In particular TPB sediments contain information on the HP-UHP rock exhumation pattern (e.g. Voltri Group, Dora Maira) in the Western Alpine orogen. Furthermore, the position of the TPB on top of the Alpine/Apennine thrust belts poses fundamental questions as to the tectonics of the basin subsidence. Having undergone little deformation, TPB sediments also provide insight on the stress regime and rotations in the kinematically very complex area surrounding the basin itself. A multidisciplinary approach has been applied in this Thesis, in order to fully understand the Western Alpine orogen and related sedimentary basin evolution.

Facies analysis, electron microprobe analysis on phengite and amphibole,  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  dating on phengite, and Apatite Fission Track Thermochronology (AFTT) has been applied to the lowermost clastic unit in order to provide a reliable picture of the geology of the source area at Oligocene time. The provenance data produce an image of the Ligurian Alps during the Oligocene very similar to the present day one. Integrated  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  and AFTT suggest a fast cooling/exhumation episode of the Ligurian Alps during the Oligocene (up to  $100^\circ\text{C}/\text{My}$ ).

In particular the  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  age distribution of detrital white micas from the entire TPB infill shows that from Oligocene (~34 Ma) until Aquitanian (~20.5 Ma) times the clastic sediments were fed mainly from a southern source area (Ligurian Alps) that widely records HP Alpine metamorphism and in part Variscan metamorphism. From the Miocene, the main source area gradually moved from the south to a Western Alpine provenance characterised by strong Meso-alpine (38-50 Ma) and Eo-alpine signals (70-120 Ma). From the Serravallian, there is the reappearance of Variscan ages, this time attributed to the exposure of the Argentera Massif as new source for the TPB.

The youngest detrital signals suggest a regional fast cooling/exhumation event prior to ca. 38 Ma followed by a period of slower exhumation/erosion of crustal rocks with a statistically uniform isotopic signature for over 25 My. This has resulted in a pattern of regularly increasing lag time up section which is representative of a short-lived episode of fast exhumation followed by slow erosion in the absence of thermal equilibrium.

Furthermore subsidence, structural analysis, measurements of magnetic susceptibility anisotropy (AMS) and natural remanent magnetisation (NRM) have been applied to the TPB in order to better constrain the tectonic kinematics of the basin evolution. Subsidence of the TPB began in the Early Oligocene and continued throughout the Miocene. During the Oligocene, subsidence was stronger in the SW part of the TPB than in the NE. Towards the end of the Early Miocene subsidence accelerated over most of the TPB including the eastern sector, which was a high structural domain

during the Oligocene. Burdigalian subsidence affected the entire basin and in particular its central eastern parts. Magnitudes of vertical movements are higher in this period than during Oligocene time. Structural analysis has detected two main directions of shortening: one NE-SW and the other NW-SE. Structures associated with N-S tension are quite common but the amount of strain they accommodate is minor. NE-SW directed compression and limited shortening was active in Langhian-Tortonian times. NW-SE directed compressional features have been identified and they were probably active during post-Tortonian time. Magnetic susceptibility anisotropy (AMS) data generally confirm the direction of deformation detected by structural investigation. In addition, natural remanent magnetisation (NRM) preliminary data suggest counterclockwise rotation in the TPB in the order of 20° which has taken place during Serravallian time.

Various kinds of subsidence mechanisms have been discussed and tested for the first time with numerical models in order to check on various tectonic scenarios proposed in the past

(extension vs. compression) as mechanisms involved in TPB evolution. Tests on lithospheric stretching as a possible mechanism for the TPB subsidence show that the amount of lateral displacement produced by detected normal faults is by far insufficient to produce the amount of stretching necessary to fit the total subsidence observed in the TPB. Tests on flexural loading as a possible mechanism for the TPB subsidence show that the TPB geometry cannot be reproduced and that the total subsidence can be fitted only by applying an extra vertical force. Lithospheric buckling appears to be the most promising candidate for the evolution from Late Oligocene until post-Late Miocene times.

In general, the new dataset produced in this multidisciplinary study shows that  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  thermochronology together with AFTT, and mineral chemistry on detrital minerals have great potential for provenance discrimination and provide fundamental information on complex orogenic cooling/exhumation patterns. Structural geology together with paleomagnetic data and modelling provide information on the kinematics of sedimentary basin formation.

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## EXHUMING THE ALPS THROUGH TIME: CLUES FROM DETRITAL ZIRCON FISSION-TRACK AGES

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Detrital zircon fission-track analysis, a common tool for provenance and exhumation studies, has been tested on modern river sediments from over 16 rivers draining the European Alps toward their fore- and hinterland. The outcome of this study shows that detrital zircon fission-track results are reproducible, and that all major grain-age components in a drainage area can be detected, even in larger scale drainages like the Rhone river system. Erosional yield seems more important than the areal distribution of cooling ages, indicating that areas that erode faster have a higher input, with respect to zircon yield, given similar lithologies. One result of this study is that the distribution of fission-track grain-ages changes downstream in a river system with increasing drainage area. Nevertheless, the signal of fast orogenic exhumation can be detected in the river deltas, even if the deltas are up to 1000 km away from the orogenic sediment sources.

Furthermore, analysis of over 30 stratigraphic samples from the alpine fore- and hinterland allowed the reconstruction of the long-term

exhumation of the Alps. Exhumation is defined as all processes like normal faulting, ductile thinning and erosion, which contribute to the unroofing of deeply seated rocks and their rise to the Earth's surface. With respect to the zircon fission-track system, the Alps are in an exhumational steady-state since the Oligocene. The exhumational signal is evident in a relatively symmetric fashion in the fore- and hinterland. The long-term average exhumation rate of the areas with the fastest exhumation is about 0.7 km/m.y.

Additionally, the closure temperature for fission-tracks in natural zircon was determined with samples from the Gold Butte block, SE Nevada, at  $205 \pm 16^\circ\text{C}$  for a  $\sim 20.3^\circ\text{C}/\text{km}$  geothermal gradient and a  $0.55^\circ\text{C}/\text{m.y.}$  cooling rate. This estimate is in good agreement with previously published field-based estimates, which indicates that the closure temperature of fission-tracks in zircon is about  $240^\circ\text{C}$  in orogenic settings like the European Alps with a more common cooling rate of  $15^\circ\text{C}/\text{m.y.}$

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# THE THERMOTECTONIC EVOLUTION OF THE NORTHERN PRECAMBRIAN SHIELD, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

URSULA WEBER

School of Earth Sciences, The University of Melbourne

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Reconnaissance  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  dating of K-feldspars and muscovites, and fission track and (U-Th)/He thermochronometry on apatites has been applied to  $\sim 1 \times 10^6 \text{ km}^2$  of the northern Western Australian Shield. The study area includes the Archaean northern Yilgarn Craton and Pilbara Craton, and the intervening Proterozoic basins.

K-feldspar  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  data reveal four cooling episodes at times between  $\sim 2400$ – $2200 \text{ Ma}$ ,  $\sim 1800$ – $1600 \text{ Ma}$  or  $1200$ – $1000 \text{ Ma}$  depending on the sample. Apatite fission track (AFT) data yield ages between  $\sim 280$ – $150 \text{ Ma}$  with confined horizontal mean track lengths ranging between  $11.5$ – $14.3 \mu\text{m}$  and standard deviations of track length distributions falling between  $1.1$ – $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ . (U-Th)/He apatite data yield ages  $\sim 194 \pm 6 \text{ Ma}$  or older and are often older than their coexisting AFT ages.

Numerical modelling of the K-feldspar data reveals different monotonic cooling histories, with episodes of accelerated cooling alternating with slower cooling and periods of quiescence, commencing at some time in the Proterozoic depending on the sample. Modelling of time-temperature history paths of AFT data reveals a Late Carboniferous to Early Permian regional cooling episode lasting to the Late Jurassic/Early

Cretaceous. The onset of this cooling is related either to the waning stages of the Alice Springs Orogeny or to the early stages of Gondwana breakup. The interpretation of the Phanerozoic thermal history models is reconciled with the development of extensive clastic sedimentary basins on- and offshore in Palaeozoic to Mesozoic time, adjacent to the Western Shield. Sediment supply and palaeodrainage patterns from the shield, inferred from palaeotemperature models, are directly linked with important clastic facies development hosting hydrocarbons in the North West Shelf. Assuming a geothermal gradient of  $\sim 18 \pm 2^\circ \text{ C/km}$  was representative of much of the Phanerozoic then a minimum of  $\sim 50^\circ \text{ C}$  of Late Palaeozoic to Mesozoic cooling is calculated, suggesting denudation of  $\sim 3 \text{ km}$  of section from the northern Western Shield over this time span.

Interpretation of the helium ages is problematic, due to their old ages compared to their coexisting AFT ages and the poor replication of these data. Experiments carried out preclude the possible discordance of ages due to U and/or Th-bearing micro-inclusions and zoning of U and Th in the apatite grains. Further investigations are required to resolve this discordance.

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## THE AUSTRALIAN REPLACEMENT RESEARCH REACTOR AT LUCAS HEIGHTS

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On December 12 and 13<sup>th</sup> 2002, the Australian Neutron Beam User Group organised a workshop on "Neutrons for the Earth Sciences", the final in a series of such meetings held at Lucas Heights through 2001-2002 with the stated aim of defining the range of instrumentation and facilities required (or at least desired) for neutron beam experiments at the Replacement Research Reactor Facility, currently under construction at Lucas Heights (as discussed in previous issues of OnTrack).

By a fairly indirect route, we became aware of this meeting at a fairly late stage. All of us in Australia, and possibly many overseas users of HIFAR, have been frustrated by a long history of

zero information flow from ANSTO on what we can expect from the RRR, so this promised a welcome opportunity to actually obtain some firm information. But we were puzzled by the apparent focus of the meeting solely on neutron beams. A number of emails and phone calls to meeting convenors Brett Hunter and Rob Robinson of ANSTO confirmed that the meeting was actually intended to cover all applications of neutrons to the Earth Sciences, and they had already included a talk on activation analysis by David Garnett of Becquerel Labs (a private organisation on-site at ANSTO, specialising in applications to Gold exploration). Brett Hunter, in particular, stressed that they were very keen to



expand the scope of the meeting to cover as many areas of the earth sciences as possible, and offered me the opportunity to make a presentation on fission track analysis. They also organised an additional presentation by Ken Hurlock of ANSTO on the RRR and the planned irradiation facilities. At a very late stage in proceedings, requirements for  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  dating were also included, as a result of input from Andy Gleadow in Melbourne and Mark Harrison and Ian MacDougall at ANU.

Prior to this, all we had been able to glean concerning the RRR amounted to vague rumours (most of which seem to have been pretty wide of the mark), so it was with a sense of anticipation that I flew to Sydney on December 11<sup>th</sup>. (Plus, I got to see Peter Crowhurst's new (U-Th)/He laser system, which made the trip doubly worthwhile.)

The first day of the meeting was concerned mostly with neutron diffraction studies, particularly as applied to High Pressure High Temperature conditions, but also including applications to neutron radiography and small angle neutron scattering. Of more direct interest was a presentation on the RRR itself, by Rob Robinson, in which he explained that the RRR was planned to be commissioned in January 2006, and would operate 340 days per year. A six month period is planned where HIFAR and the RRR will operate in parallel. (This sounds good, but in fact the timing could be tight because as I understand it, the close down of HIFAR is governed by the return of the last batch of fuel for reprocessing. Any delays in commissioning the RRR are likely to impact critically on the time when parallel operation is possible.) Emphasis was placed on the choice of non-enriched uranium fuel, which will avoid potential regulatory problems with use of enriched uranium which seem set to cause problems with the new Reactor Facility under construction in Germany.

The afternoon was more productive in terms of our concerns, through a session in which each attendee (numbering around 35, from various Universities, Museums, Institutions and private companies across Australia) had the opportunity to make a 5 minute statement on why they were attending the meeting and what they hoped to gain from being there. Both myself and David Garnett and Helen Waldron from Becquerel said the same thing – we're here to get some basic information on what is planned for the new irradiation facilities! All three of us also took the opportunity to make clear our dissatisfaction at the lack of information that we had been able to obtain previously. (Prior to the meeting, Helen, who is an old friend, colleague and tennis adversary from her days at Melbourne Uni,

emailed me to say that despite the fact that Becquerel were located on-site at ANSTO, they knew no more than we did about the RRR!). This led to promises that all would be revealed, and that this was why these meetings were organised.

As an aside at this point, it became clear, from talking to various people at ANSTO, that one practical factor that has impeded the flow of information to users in the past is ANSTO's practice of encouraging early retirement of their senior personnel at age 55, through inducements concerned with Superannuation rights. This certainly explains the lack of continuity we have experienced in identifying suitable contacts at ANSTO with whom we can discuss technical aspects of the RRR, and why previous attempts to have input to the design have failed. In preparing for the meeting, I discovered a letter that we had written in 1992 to the appropriate person within ANSTO at that time, setting out our ideal requirements for thermal neutron irradiations. Unfortunately, Ken Hurlock confirmed that he had never seen this letter, which seems to have vanished into the ANSTO filing system as efficiently as anything that Bernard Wooley might have filed for Jim Hacker (a reference to the BBC's "Yes, Prime Minister", for those who don't recognise it).

The real action began on the second day, which began with a detailed presentation by Ken Hurlock on the RRR and the planned irradiation facilities. This is the part that most of you will be interested in. One of the first points made by Ken was that there has been a reluctance to release any technical information on the new reactor because of worries that unsuccessful tenderers may claim that their model could have done better. But then he eased our fears considerably when he explained that the prime consideration in designing the new reactor was that it should be at least as good as HIFAR in every way. If only someone had explained this a few years ago!

On to the technical details - the following list provides some highlights of the specifications of the RRR, taken from Ken's presentation.

### **Project requirements**

- World class facility: high performance, reliable & available
- Large neutron beam research capabilities
- Diverse & broad irradiation capabilities
- Compliant with Australian regulations and IAEA guidelines on safety

### **Subordinated requirements**

- Pool type reactor
- Nominal reactor thermal power limited to 20 MW

- Unimpeded access to the top of the reactor core
- Fuel enrichment < 20 wt %

### The reactor

Reactor: 20 MW core power. Compact core compatible with non pressurized cooling system (~300 kW/L) Plate type fuel assemblies (High density fuel, Al clad)

- Upwards forced cooling of reactor core
- D<sub>2</sub>O reflector with intermediate cooling system
- Safety & plant systems of proven design and performance
- ALARA considerations all along the plant (segregation, material selection, shields, HVAC, operation & maintenance, ...)

### Facility Requirements

- Neutron Beam Research
  - Thermal and cold neutron beams with super mirror guides
- Radioisotopes for Nuclear Medicine
  - long term bulk irradiations in removable rigs
  - short term irradiations of targets in pneumatically loaded rigs
- Irradiations for Industry
  - short term irradiations for research
  - short term irradiations of silicon ingots in rotating ‘removable’ rigs
- Neutron Activation and Delayed Neutron Analysis
  - short term irradiations in pneumatically loaded or rotating rigs

### Thermal Flux Irradiations

- 49 irradiation positions in pneumatically operated rigs
- Irradiations cans will be aluminium or titanium
- Can diameter 25mm, length 70mm
- Flux range from  $2 \times 10^{12}$  to  $1 \times 10^{14}$  n.cm<sup>-2</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>
- Flux uniformity will be +/- 2% to +/- 5%

### Fast Flux Irradiations

- 6 irradiation positions in pneumatically operated rigs
- Fast Flux > 0.821MeV  $5 \times 10^{12}$  n.cm<sup>-2</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>
- Can diameter 25mm, length 70mm
- Cans will rotate during irradiation
- Flux uniformity better than +/- 7%

Other highlights include a “pneumatic cushion” within the pneumatic transfer tubes, so that irradiation cans are brought to a halt smoothly. Hopefully, this will eliminate the familiar effect of broken slides that most users of HIFAR have ‘enjoyed’ at one time or another.

Operating temperatures should be similar to those in HIFAR.

So as far as this goes, it seems like all good news for fission track analysis. Flux levels will be similar to or higher than present-day levels, cans are slightly bigger, and no more broken slides! However, the one piece of information that we were most desperate for, i.e. the degree of thermalisation in the new irradiation positions, was not available at the meeting. Ken is promising to update us with this information in February. With no graphite moderator, we had been worried that the thermalisation might not be as good as in HIFAR. But Ken assures us that at least some of the irradiation tubes will be as good as or better than HIFAR. Basically, the further away from the core, the better the thermalisation, so there will be a choice of positions. With even the lowest flux levels quoted for the RRR being similar to those is the X-7 facility of HIFAR, we should be able to feel confident that the RRR will be just as suitable for fission track work as X-7.

After that, my presentation, in which I stressed the need for a uniform, well thermalised flux around a few  $\times 10^{12}$  n.cm<sup>-2</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>, seemed rather unnecessary, somehow! I did, however, take the opportunity to point out that there is a large potential user base for fission track irradiations around the world, and if convenient and “user-friendly” access can be provided, the RRR could easily become the “Reactor of choice” for the fission track community. Whether all this happens remains to be seen! (And was rather outside the scope of this meeting.)

After that, discussion moved on to the question of whether suitable conditions could be designed for fast neutron irradiations as required for <sup>40</sup>Ar/<sup>39</sup>Ar dating. Mark Harrison began his presentation with the remark that you could take almost everything I had said about irradiation conditions required for fission track analysis and reverse them for Ar-Ar studies! Ian MacDougall explained that he had pressed from an early date for inclusion of an in-core irradiation facility at the RRR, but according to ANSTO, this was just not possible. Considerable discussion ensued behind the scenes, involving Andy Gleadow, Mark Harrison and Ian MacDougall and ANSTO personnel, in an attempt to ensure that a suitable facility could be provided, and by the end of the afternoon it seemed that this would indeed be possible.

So in the end, it seems that everyone went home satisfied, and relatively optimistic about the suitability of the RR for future needs. The one thing that worried me about the whole thing was related to the bush fires that had raged through the surrounding National Parks during the previous week. While most people on site at

Lucas Heights, including the HIFAR staff, were unaffected, the construction crews on the RRR site were evacuated. I just hope this doesn't have implications for the future!

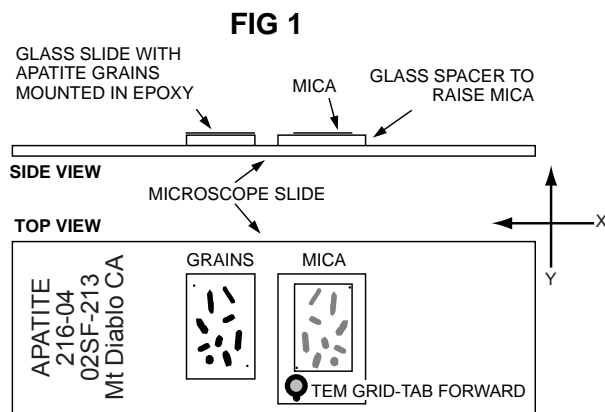
A final postscript to the story is that Ken Horlock has now said that Cd ratios for Au will be between 250 and 480 in different facilities within the RRI.

## USING TEM GRIDS AS REFERENCE CROSSES ON FISSION TRACK SLIDES

TREVOR DUMITRU

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In order to use computer-automated microscope stage systems to analysis fission track slides, it is usually necessary to mark an easily visible reference point on the slide. This point serves as the origin for an X-Y coordinate system so the computer can calculate the locations of grains, mica prints, track lengths, etc. (Fig. 1). The reference point has traditionally been made by scratching a small reference cross on the glass slide with a diamond-tipped pencil.



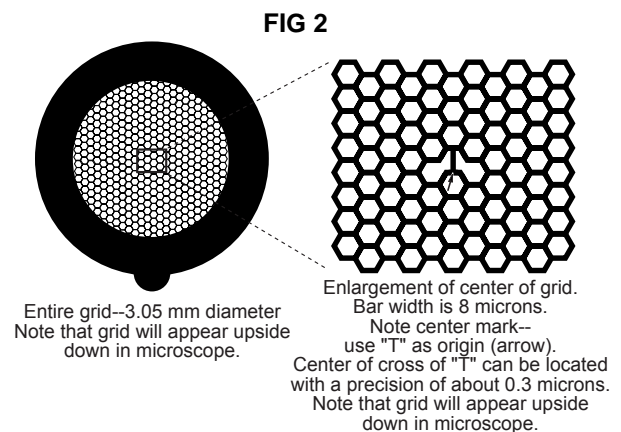
Glue TEM grid on top of glass spacer next to the mica

More recently, a few FT labs have started using TEM grids instead of crosses. After investigating various possibilities, we have settled on using Gilder Grids model G600HH grids made of nickel in our lab (Fig. 2).

The main shortcoming of crosses is that glass shards flake out along the scratched lines over time, so the center of the cross tends to move and/or become ill defined. Movement is commonly a few microns and sometimes can approach 10 microns. In contrast, the center marks of the TEM grids remain stationary and can be relocated to about  $\pm 0.3$  microns.

The G600HH grid is designed for mounting samples for transmission electron microscopy (TEM). It consists of a metal disc 3.05 mm in diameter and 6 microns thick, with a grid of bars

and holes something like a window screen. It also happens to have a special center mark that serves very well as a reference point for fission track purposes (Fig. 2). The grids are easy enough to handle with small, precise forceps, handling them with coarse forceps won't work.



In our laboratory, we mount our micas on top of rectangular glass spacers cut down from microscope slides, so the micas are at essentially the same height as the sample grains (Fig. 1). We glue the grids onto the spacers, next to the mica. The grids have little index tabs that line up with the center marks and we orient the tabs pointing away from the mica. One side of the grid is shiny, we mount the shiny side down for no particular reason. We glue the grids down with clear finger nail polish, which forms an optically clear, durable bond. The exact amount of polish used does not seem to be critical, although too large a lump could potentially scratch an objective.

The grids are made in England by a company named Gilder Grids. Their web site, [www.gildergrids.co.uk](http://www.gildergrids.co.uk), lists distributors in many countries. Be sure to specify nickel when you order. We buy ours from Electron Microscopy Sciences in the U.S. (<http://www.emsdiasum.com/ems/>), which

charges US\$51 for a vial of 100 grids. EMS's catalog number for the item is "T600H-Ni". EMS tells me they would be happy to ship to almost any country in the world.

We selected model G600HH in nickel after looking at several possibilities. In particular, the G600HH grid has the finest (smallest) pattern and the distinctive T shape in the middle serves well as a reference point. I emailed Gilder and they said that nickel grids should easily last at least 100 years under normal storage conditions on FT slides. Less expensive copper grids might corrode rapidly, whereas gold grids are considerably more expensive.

The use of TEM grids is still a bit experimental. I'm 99% sure that they will work well in all ways but this remains to be proven. Use them at your own risk. My remaining concerns are:

1--Will the grids corrode over time (years to decades), from contact with air, glass, or glue?

2--Could the metal grid scratch an objective?

3--Will the grid fall off if the glue deteriorates over time?

4--Does the glue shrink over time causing the grid to move a little?

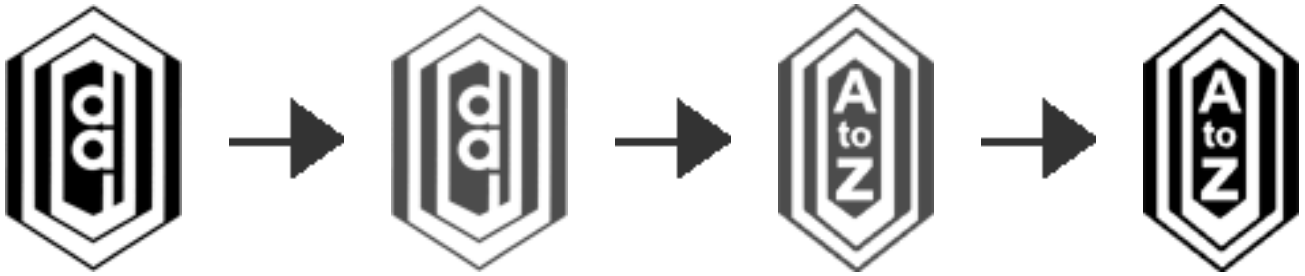
5--Most important, the grid is a little lower than the mica (and the sample grains) because the grid is so thin. With our microscope, we can

easily focus on the grid with a high power objective without hitting the mica. Other labs should be careful to confirm that they will not scratch a mica or objective with their particular slides and microscope.

In case any one is interested, the finger nail polish we use is "Sally Hansen Hard As Nails with Nylon", size 13.3 ml, color nude. Lots of luck finding it outside the U.S. It dries extremely fast, so you need to recap the bottle between gluing down each grid and work very quickly. We've used this stuff to glue our irradiated apatite mounts and micas to our slides for about 10 years. Because this product is not designed for such uses, I worry about going back to an old box of slides and finding all the mounts have fallen off, but it hasn't happened yet. I'm sure there must be some better glass adhesive available now; if any one knows, please let me know. Ed Sobel tells me they use a German product, Blitz Glas, but haven't tried it for TEM grids yet. This glue can be completely removed with acetone. (Just to avoid confusion, do not use nail polish, etc., to glue loose apatite grains to slides before grinding and polishing.)

For labs that are presently using the FT Stage automated system, I plan to send out one trial G600HH grid per lab sometime in the next few months. If anyone else would like one to look at, please email me your mailing address.

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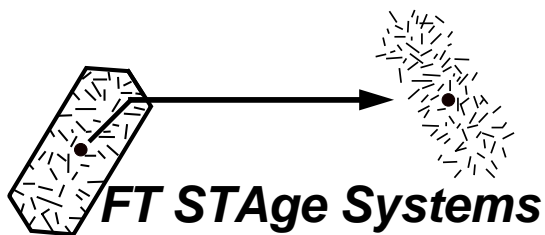
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#### **Fission Track Laboratories Using the System**

*(year installed; \*adapted to a non-Kinetek stage)*

- Stanford University, Stanford, California (1991)
- University of California, Santa Barbara, California (1992)
- ARCO Exploration and Production Technology, Plano, Texas (1992). Moved to University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1999.
- Universität Bremen, Bremen, Germany (1993)
- E.T.H., Zürich, Switzerland (1993\*)
- Kent State University, Kent, Ohio (1993)
- University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming (1993)
- University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona (1993). Moved to Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, in 2000.
- Max-Planck-Institut, Heidelberg, Germany (1993\*)
- Union College, Schenectady, New York (1994)
- Monash University, Melbourne, Australia (1994\*). Moved to University of Melbourne in 1999.
- La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia (two systems, 1994\*). Moved to University of Melbourne in 1999.
- University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1995)
- Universität Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany (1995)
- Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela (1995)
- Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (1995)
- Central Research Institute of the Electric Power Industry, Chiba, Japan (1995)
- Universität Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria (1996)
- University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California (1996)
- E.T.H., Zürich, Switzerland (second system, 1996\*)
- Geologisk Centralinstitut, Copenhagen, Denmark (1996\*)
- University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand (1996\*)
- Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy (1997)
- Centro di Studio di Geologia dell'Appennino e delle Catene Perimediterranee, Florence, Italy (1997)
- University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming (second system, 1997)
- Universität Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany (1997)
- Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea (1998)
- E.T.H., Zürich, Switzerland (third system, 1998)
- Universität Basel, Basel, Switzerland (1998)
- University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (1998)
- Universite Paris-XI, Paris, France (1998)
- Universität Graz, Graz, Austria (1998)
- Göteborgs Universitet, Göteborg, Sweden (1999)
- Universidad de Cádiz, Cádiz, Spain (1999)
- Universite Montpellier II, Montpellier, France (1999)
- Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, India (1999)
- Universität Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany, (second system, 1999)
- California State University, Fullerton, California (2000)
- Geoforschungszentrum, Potsdam, Germany (2000)
- Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow, Poland (2000)
- University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland (two systems, 2001)
- Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (2001)
- Université Joseph Fourier, Grenoble, France (2001)
- Universität Bremen, Bremen, Germany (second system, 2002)
- Université des Sciences et Technologies de Lille, Villeneuve d'Ascq, France (2002)

#### **Further Information:**

An early version of the system is described in a paper in Nuclear Tracks and Radiation Measurements, vol. 21, p. 575-580, Oct. 1993 (1992 Philadelphia Fission Track Workshop volume). For detailed information please contact: Dr. Trevor Dumitru, 4100 Campana Drive, Palo Alto, California 94306, U.S.A., telephone (auto-switching voice and fax line): 1-650-725-6155.

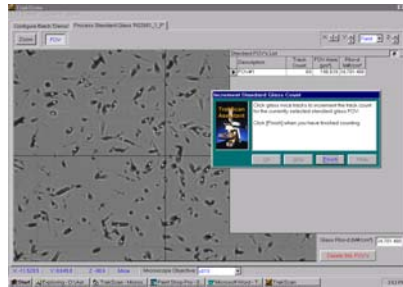


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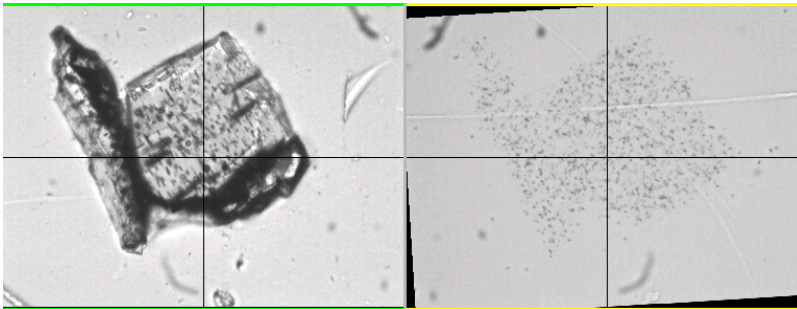


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## Fission-Track Papers

The following is a list of recent and soon-to-be published fission track papers. While a few were submitted by the authors for inclusion in this issue of *On Track*, the majority were found using a database and the keywords "fission track". The list is extensive but far from complete. It may however serve as a starting point for compiling a 'complete' list of fission-track papers. We would all agree that such a list has practical use as a reference to what is happening in fission-tracks or in your study area. This cannot be achieved without everyone's active co-operation. So, if you have or know of a paper that you would like to see listed in this section, please send the complete reference or a photocopy of the first page to the editor. We are also interested in non-fission-track papers that may be of interest to the fission-track community. The next issue will only include 2001 and 2002 references which are not included herein; of course, 2003 references are welcome!

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### **2001**

- Ambers, C. P., 2001, Evidence of elevated pressure and temperature during burial of the Salem Limestone in south-central Indiana, USA, and its implications for surprisingly deep burial: *Sedimentary Geology*, v. 143, p. 245-257.
- Anczkiewicz, R., Oberli, F., Burg, J. P., Villa, I. M., Gunther, D., and Meier, M., 2001, Timing of normal faulting along the Indus Suture in Pakistan Himalaya and a case of major Pa-231/U-235 initial disequilibrium in zircon: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters*, v. 191, p. 101-114.
- Babic, E., Kusevic, I., Marinaro, D., Dou, S. X., Boldeman, J., and Weinstein, R., 2001, Vortex pinning by fission tracks in U-235-doped Ag/Bi2223 tapes: *Solid State Communications*, v. 118, p. 607-610.
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- Balcázar, M., Glasmacher, U.A., Díaz, S., A. López, A. and Wagner, G.A. 2001, Particle-Track dating a tool to define age of mineral deposits. *Proc. of the XXIV Conv. Int. de la Aso. de Ing. de Minas Metalurgicas Y Geologias de Mexico*, 33-35.
- Balestrieri, M. L., and Bigazzi, G., 2001, First record of the Late Cretaceous denudation phase in the Admiralty Block (Transantarctic Mountains, northern Victoria Land, Antarctica): *Radiation Measurements*, v. 34, p. 445-448.
- Barbarand, J., Lucazeau, F., Pagel, M., and Seranne, M., 2001, Burial and exhumation history of the south-eastern Massif Central (France) constrained by apatite fission-track thermochronology: *Tectonophysics*, v. 335, p. 275-290.
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- Batt, G. E., 2001, The approach to steady-state thermochronological distribution following orogenic development in the Southern Alps of New Zealand: *American Journal of Science*, v. 301, p. 374-384.
- Batt, G. E., Brandon, M. T., Farley, K. A., and Roden-Tice, M., 2001, Tectonic synthesis of the Olympic Mountains segment of the Cascadia wedge, using two-dimensional thermal and kinematic modeling of thermochronological ages: *Journal of Geophysical Research-Solid Earth*, v. 106, p. 26731-26746.
- Beate, B., Monzier, M., Spikings, R., Cotten, J., Silva, J., Bourdon, E., and Eissen, J. P., 2001, Mio-Pliocene adakite generation related to flat subduction in southern Ecuador: the Quimsacocha volcanic center: *Earth and Planetary Science Letters*, v. 192, p. 561-570.
- Benedek, K., Nagy, Z. R., Dunkl, I., Szabo, C., and Jozsa, S., 2001, Petrographical, geochemical and geochronological constraints on igneous clasts and sediments hosted in the Oligo-Miocene Bakony Molasse, Hungary: evidence for a Paleo-Drava River system: *International Journal of Earth Sciences*, v. 90, p. 519-533.
- Bernet, M., Zattin, M., Garver, J. I., Brandon, M. T., and Vance, J. A., 2001, Steady-state exhumation of the European Alps: *Geology*, v. 29, p. 35-38.
- Bierman, P. R., and Caffee, M., 2001, Slow rates of rock surface erosion and sediment production across the Namib Desert and escarpment, southern Africa: *American Journal of Science*, v. 301, p. 326-358.
- Bondar, J. V., and Perelygin, V. P., 2001, Cosmic history of the Bragin pallasite: evidence from the fission-track analysis: *Radiation Measurements*, v. 34, p. 391-396.
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## International Fission-Track Directory

This revised and extended International Fission-Track Directory is by no means complete or accurate. Although a number of people do not figure in the staff, e-mail or phone directories of the institutes under which they are mentioned, this has not been interpreted as a sign of non-existence, and they have for the moment been retained with their old affiliations. It would be much appreciated if you would let the editor know if your address has changed, or if people have joined or definitively left your lab, so that the directory can be updated.

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## Call for Contributions

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The next issue of On Track is scheduled for September 2003 and we are looking for contributions. On Track welcomes contributions of virtually any kind, including scientific articles, news, gossip, job openings, descriptions of new lab techniques, reviews of useful products, ravings about what the other labs are doing wrong, meeting announcements, cartoons and descriptions of what you are doing in your research.

If you would like to contribute, please send the final document no later than **August 30, 2003**. If you intend to submit a substantial article, please let the editor know as soon as possible.

On Track includes a list of recent and forthcoming fission-track papers. If you know of a paper that was published recently or is in press and should appear in the list, please let me know so that it can be added to the list. Also, if you happen to change location due to a change in jobs or finishing off the thesis and graduating, please inform the editor. Thesis abstracts are particularly encouraged!

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