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0521548039 - Earth's Glacial Record: International Geological Correlation Project 260 - Edited by M. Deynoux, J. M. G. Miller, E. W. Domack, N. Eyles, I. J. Fairchild and G. M. Young

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Glacial deposits provide a long-term record of climate and sea level changes on Earth. Detailed study of sedimentary rocks deposited during and immediately after glacial episodes is paramount to accurate paleoclimatic reconstructions and for our understanding of global climatic and eustatic changes. This book presents new information and interpretations of the ancient glacial record, looking in particular at the Late Proterozoic and Late Paleozoic eras. The influence of global tectonics on the origins and distribution of ice masses and the character of glacial deposits through geologic time is emphasised. Sequence stratigraphic techniques are applied to glaciogenic successions, and explanations are put forward for possible low-latitude glaciation during the Late Proterozoic era and the association of carbonate deposits with glaciogenic rocks. Early interglacial conditions, represented by dark-grey mudrocks and ice keel scour features, are discussed. These studies, from key workers in International Geological Correlation Program Project 260, will aid the understanding of Earth's climatic history.

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# Earth's Glacial Record

EDITED BY

M. DEYNOUX, J. M. G. MILLER,

E. W. DOMACK, N. EYLES,

I. J. FAIRCHILD, G. M. YOUNG

International Geological Correlation Project 260:

Earth's Glacial Record



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## Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	xi		
<i>Preface</i>	xiii		
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii		
1 Geodynamic controls on glaciation in Earth history	1		
N. EYLES and G.M. YOUNG			
Abstract	1		
Introduction	1		
Late Archean–Paleoproterozoic glaciations	2		
Mesoproterozoic non-glacial epoch	3		
Neoproterozoic glaciations	5		
Overview	5		
Timing and tectonic setting	6		
The importance of extensional rift basins	7		
South Australia/northern Canadian Cordillera	7		
North Atlantic sector	8		
Discussion	9		
Early and Late Paleozoic glaciations	10		
South America	11		
South Africa	14		
Australia	15		
Antarctica	17		
Southeast Asia	17		
Arabian Peninsula	17		
India and Pakistan	17		
Discussion	18		
Mesozoic glaciation	18		
Late Cenozoic glaciations	19		
The role of tectonic uplift	19		
The role of ocean currents	21		
Conclusions	22		
Acknowledgements	22		
References	22		
2 Glacial-marine facies in a continental rift environment: Neoproterozoic rocks of the western United States Cordillera	29		
P.K. LINK, J.M.G. MILLER and N. CHRISTIE-BLICK			
Abstract	29		
Introduction	29		
Evidence for overall glacial origin	31		
Facies associations	31		
Review of stratigraphy	34		
Death Valley region of southeastern California (Kingston Peak Formation)	36		
Central Wasatch Range and Antelope Island, northern Utah (Mineral Fork Formation)	36		
Fremont Island, Little Mountain and Ogden area, northern Utah (formation of Perry Canyon)	37		
Sheeprock Mountains and Deep Creek Range, western Utah (Sheeprock Group and Horse Canyon Formation)	37		
Southeastern Idaho (Pocatello Formation)	38		
Interpretation of facies associations	38		
Massive diamictite facies association: ice-proximal non-reworked deposits	38		
Stratified diamictite and graded sandstone association: sediment gravity flow deposits	39		
Diamictite and laminated sandstone association: ice- proximal deposits with abundant meltwater	39		
Carbonate, shale and sandstone association: non- glacial marine deposits	40		
Cross-bedded sandstone association: fluvial deposits	40		
Discussion: facies distribution, subsidence mechanisms, unconformities and preservation potential in rift settings	40		
Subsidence mechanisms	40		
Relation of facies to tectonic position	41		
Generation of unconformities	41		
Geologic setting of the Rapitan glaciation	42		
Acknowledgements	42		
References	42		
3 The Neoproterozoic Konnarock Formation, southwestern Virginia, USA: glaciolacustrine facies in a continental rift	47		
J.M.G. MILLER			
Abstract	47		
Introduction	47		
Stratigraphic and structural setting	48		
Paleotectonic setting	50		
Facies and facies associations	50		
Argillite	50		
Sandstone	53		
Diamictite	54		
Environmental synthesis	55		
Conclusion	57		
Acknowledgements	57		
References	57		
4 Glaciogenic deposits of the Permo-Carboniferous Dwyka Group in the eastern region of the Karoo Basin, South Africa	60		
V. VON BRUNN			
Abstract	60		

viii	Contents		
Introduction	60	Poorly stratified diamictite facies	103
Pre-Dwyka highland surface (Northern Region)	60	Bedded diamictite facies	103
Zone of irregular palaeorelief (Intermediate Region)	62	Dropstone-bearing laminated lithofacies	103
Diamictite–mudrock facies association	63	Thin-bedded to banded-laminated siltstone–mudstone facies	104
Sandstone–arenaceous diamictite–conglomerate facies association	63	The Wudaotang Section in Helan County	104
Pre-Dwyka lowland plain (Southern Region)	65	The Tuerkeng Section	105
Sequence of events	66	The Zhengmuguan Section	105
Discussion	67	The Jingdiquan Section	105
Acknowledgements	68	REE geochemical characteristics of the Zhengmuguan Formation	106
References	68	Sedimentary facies and environmental analysis	107
5 Itararé Group: Gondwanan Carboniferous–Permian of the Paraná Basin, Brazil	70	Conclusions	107
A. B. FRANÇA		References	107
Abstract	70	9 Architectural styles of glacially influenced marine deposits on tectonically active and passive margins	109
Introduction	70	M. R. GIPP	
Tectonic setting	70	Abstract	109
Stratigraphy	71	Introduction	109
Lagoa Azul Formation	72	The Gulf of Alaska	109
Campo Mourão Formation	73	The Scotian margin	110
Taciba Formation	75	Models	111
Summary and conclusions	76	Passive margin	111
Acknowledgements	82	Active margin	112
References	82	Similarities	113
6 The interpretation of massive rain-out and debris-flow diamictites from the glacial marine environment	83	Distinguishing features in the models	116
J. N. J. VISSER		Other examples	117
Abstract	83	Summary	119
Introduction	83	Acknowledgements	119
Massive diamictites from the Dwyka Formation	84	References	119
Floriskraal	84	10 Marine to non-marine sequence architecture of an intracratonic glacially related basin. Late Proterozoic of the West African platform in western Mali	121
Elandsvlei	86	J. N. PROUST and M. DEYNOUX	
Kransgat River	87	Abstract	121
Douglas	90	Introduction	121
Discussion	92	Baselevel concept	122
Acknowledgements	94	Geological setting	122
References	94	Definition of the depositional genetic unit from the sediment architecture of a key exposure	124
7 Neoproterozoic tillite and tilloid in the Aksu area, Tarim Basin, Uygur Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Northwest China	95	Facies distribution in architectural elements	127
LU SONGNIAN and GAO ZHENJIA		Landward-stepping unit	127
Abstract	95	Vertical stacking unit	130
Introduction	95	Seaward-stepping unit	132
The Precambrian stratigraphic sequences	95	Discussion	135
Sedimentary features of diamictites in the Qiaoenbulak Group	97	Bimodal facies architecture and time/space distribution of sediments and bounding surfaces within genetic units	135
Features of the diamictite of the Umainak Formation (Wushinanshan Group)	98	Stacking cycle	137
Comparison between diamictites of the Qiaoenbulak Group and the Wushinanshan Group	98	Comparison with genetic units described in the literature	138
Acknowledgements	99	Estimated baselevel cycles duration	139
References	99	Inferred factors controlling sedimentation	139
8 Lithology, sedimentology and genesis of the Zhengmuguan Formation of Ningxia, China	101	Conclusion	141
ZHENG ZHAOCHANG, LI YUZHEN, LU SONGNIAN and LI HUAIKUN		Acknowledgements	141
Abstract	101	References	142
Introduction	101	11 The enigmatic Late Proterozoic glacial climate: an Australian perspective	146
Tectonic and stratigraphic setting of the Zhengmuguan Formation	101	G. E. WILLIAMS	
The sedimentary facies and their associations in the Zhengmuguan Formation	103	Abstract	146
Massive diamictite facies	103	Introduction	146
		Late Proterozoic glacial and periglacial climate	146
		Possible explanations of low-palaeolatitude glaciation	153
		Global refrigeration	153

## Contents

ix

Equatorial ice-ring system	154	Whitehill Formation	198
Geomagnetic field non-axial	154	Palaeoclimatic reconstruction	198
Obliquity of the ecliptic > 54°	155	Depositional model for the mudrocks	200
Other evidence for Late Proterozoic obliquity	156	Conclusions	201
Discussion	159	Acknowledgements	202
Conclusions	161	References	202
Acknowledgements	161		
References	161	15 A palaeoenvironmental study of black mudrock in the glacigenic Dwyka Group from the Boshof–Hertzogville region, northern part of the Karoo Basin, South Africa D.I. COLE and A.D.M. CHRISTIE	204
12 Isotopic signatures of carbonates associated with Sturtian (Neoproterozoic) glacial facies, central Flinders Ranges, South Australia A.R. CROSSING and V.A. GOSTIN	165	Abstract	204
Abstract	165	Introduction	204
Introduction	165	Geology	204
Regional stratigraphy	165	Depositional environment of the Dwyka Group	205
Methods	167	Black mudrock	208
Isotopic and geochemical analysis	167	Description	208
Palaeoenvironmental and diagenetic interpretation	169	Total organic carbon and organic composition	210
Interpretation of ancient dolomites	170	Palaeoenvironment	210
Comparison with other Neoproterozoic dolomites	170	Conclusions and regional analysis	212
The overlying isotopic signal	173	Acknowledgements	213
Geochemistry and the carbon signal	174	References	213
Conclusions	174	16 Late Paleozoic post-glacial inland sea filled by fine- grained turbidites: Mackellar Formation, Central Transantarctic Mountains M.F. MILLER and J.W. COLLINSON	215
Acknowledgements	174	Abstract	215
References	174	Introduction	215
13 Reactive carbonate in glacial systems: a preliminary synthesis of its creation, dissolution and reincarnation I.J. FAIRCHILD, L. BRADBY and B. SPIRO	176	Stratigraphic setting	215
Abstract	176	Facies	217
Introduction	176	Shale facies	217
Creation of fine detrital carbonate	178	Interbedded sandstone and shale facies	217
Chemical controls on dissolution and precipitation	179	Massive sandstone facies	220
Weathering reactions	179	Burrowed sandstone facies	220
Equilibrium thermodynamics	180	Diamictite facies	221
Kinetics factors	181	Large-scale cross-stratified sandstone facies	222
Mechanisms of precipitation	182	Large-scale channels	223
Ripening	182	Facies associations and depositional environments	223
Warming	183	Facies associations	223
Freezing	183	Depositional environments	224
Common ion effect	183	Paleocurrents	226
Changes in CO <sub>2</sub> and alkalinity	184	Paleosalinity	226
Evaporation and transpiration	184	Biogenic structures	226
Skeletal biomineralization	184	Carbon:sulfur ratios	226
Recent examples	184	Comparison with Upper Paleozoic post-glacial marine sequences	226
Carbonate saturations of proglacial waters	184	Summary	227
Processes in the ice-marginal meltout zone	186	Water depth	227
Crusts on clasts: regelation versus vadose zone phenomena	188	Paleogeography	227
Post-glacial transformations	189	Model for filling of the Mackellar post-glacial inland sea	228
Application to glacial sedimentary sections	190	Basinal processes and environments	228
Crusts on clasts	190	Shoreline processes and environments	230
Diamict matrix and muds	190	Model	230
Sorted sands and gravels	190	Conclusions	230
Acknowledgements	190	Appendix. Outcrop locations	231
References	190	Acknowledgements	231
14 A Permian argillaceous syn- to post-glacial foreland sequence in the Karoo Basin, South Africa J.N.J. VISSER	193	References	231
Abstract	193	17 Ice scouring structures in Late Paleozoic rhythmites, Paraná Basin, Brazil A.C. ROCHA-CAMPOS, P.R. DOS SANTOS and J.R. CANUTO	234
Introduction	193	Abstract	234
Spatial and age relationships of the Prince Albert and Whitehill Formations	193	Introduction	234
Lithology	196	Stratigraphic setting	234
Prince Albert/Pietermaritzburg Formations	196		



Ice scour structures	236	Icebergs and glacimarine sediments in East Greenland	249
Discussion	237	Origin of massive diamicton and ice keel turbate	249
Acknowledgements	239	Criteria for distinguishing glacimarine diamictons and related facies	252
References	239	Discussion	253
18 Soft-sediment striated surfaces and massive diamicton facies produced by floating ice	241	Summary and conclusions	256
C.M.T. WOODWORTH-LYNAS and J.A. DOWDESWELL		Acknowledgements	256
Abstract	241	References	256
Introduction	241	19 Environmental evolution during the early phase of Late Proterozoic glaciation, Hunan, China	260
Origins of soft-sediment striated surfaces	242	QI RUI ZHANG	
Subglacial flutes	242	Abstract	260
Ice sheet grounding line striations	242	Introduction	260
Surfaces formed by free-floating ice masses	242	Geological setting	260
Scour by free-floating ice masses: ice keel scour mark morphology and identification criteria	243	Sedimentology of the Xieshuihe Formation	260
Examples of ice keel scour marks and soft-sediment striated surfaces in ancient glacial sediments	243	Features of the upper contact of the Xieshuihe Formation	264
Background	243	Discussion	266
Examples	244	Acknowledgement	266
Iceberg scouring and massive diamicton formation in the modern glacimarine environment of East Greenland	249	References	266

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0521548039 - Earth's Glacial Record: International Geological Correlation Project 260 - Edited by M. Deynoux, J. M. G. Miller, E. W. Domack, N. Eyles, I. J. Fairchild and G. M. Young

Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter/Prelims

[More information](#)

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xii

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## Preface

### An IGCP contribution

This volume represents the final contribution of the International Geological Correlation Program Project 260 'Earth's Glacial Record'. The project was active from 1987 until 1991. It succeeded IGCP Project 24 'Quaternary Glaciations in the Northern Hemisphere', and Project 38 'Pre-Pleistocene Tillites'. Thus, its goal was to promote further research on glaciations, whatever their age and location, and to encourage geologists working in Modern or Quaternary sequences and those working on Pre-Pleistocene rocks to share their experience and different approaches. In this way we hoped to emphasize and illuminate global aspects of glacial phenomena in addition to facies description and regional problems. Participants in the project were encouraged to consider the tectonic versus climatic control on sedimentation in glacially influenced basins, the nature of the feedback between plate positioning, tectonics, and climate, and the paleoenvironmental significance and distribution of specific rock types (e.g. black shales, carbonates, iron formations, etc.) during and immediately after glacial periods.

These ambitious objectives were addressed by three subgroups that were in charge of, respectively, geodynamic setting, paleomagnetic reconstructions, and significance of specific rock types. Yearly meetings and field trips were held in various countries (10 field trips in Canada, Brazil, USA, UK, Mali), covering a vast variety of structural terranes (active and passive margins, intracratonic basins) from Proterozoic up to Modern in age. This clearly demonstrated the interest in and necessity for such a comprehensive approach among geologists. We do not pretend that all objectives were perfectly met, but aspects have been clarified and progressively more communications on global climatic or tectonic implications were presented during the successive meetings. This awareness of the importance of a global approach is certainly one of the most significant results of the project.

A second outcome of the project is a definite improvement in communication among workers on ancient and modern deposits leading to more sophisticated facies interpretation. Such interaction, as well as the idea of submitting a common IGCP project, began at the Till Mauretania 83 Symposium (Deynoux, 1985*a*), when Quaternary and 'paleo' geologists examined West African

Late Proterozoic glacial deposits. The final decision to submit the project, which was encouraged and supported in particular by J.C. Crowell and N.M. Chumakov, was made after an informal meeting during the 1986 International Sedimentological Congress in Canberra.

### Content of the volume

The present volume complements the largely descriptive compilation made by Hambrey and Harland (1981) for IGCP 38. It is less encyclopedic and more interpretive. It reflects results of research on the IGCP 260 project themes outlined above.

One of the most puzzling climatic phenomena in the Earth's history is the possibility of glaciations at low latitudes, inferred from low paleomagnetic inclinations in many Late Proterozoic (Neoproterozoic) strata containing glacial deposits. In response to this paradox, a glacial origin for most alleged Late Proterozoic 'tillites' was denied by Schermerhorn (1974) in an excellent and somewhat provocative paper. Among his arguments was the occurrence of diamictites in active tectonic settings, implying that many diamictites may be explained better as deposited by debris-flow processes or in association with mountain glaciations, and the association of these diamictites with rocks generally indicative of warm climate, such as carbonate or iron deposits. Such an extreme position has in many cases been undermined by field evidence (Hambrey and Harland, 1981). However, Schermerhorn's paper forced reappraisal of arguments in terms of plate tectonic activity and reinforcement of those arguments which concern the glaciogenic origin of diamictite-bearing facies associations. IGCP Project 260 extended these themes by investigating the effect of tectonic setting upon the distribution and type of sedimentary facies in proven glaciogenic successions. The first nine papers of this volume address these themes.

N. Eyles and G.M. Young (p. 1) give an overview of glaciations in Earth's history and focus on the role of plate tectonic processes in the production and preservation of glaciogenic deposits. They demonstrate that strong uplift in active collisional margins or on the flanks of basins undergoing regional extension, and the resultant enhanced weathering that causes drawdown of atmospheric

CO<sub>2</sub>, provide first-order controls on glaciations. Many points that they discuss are fleshed out in papers later in the volume. The paper by P.K. Link, J.M.G. Miller, and N. Christie-Blick (p. 29) may serve as an illustration of the Eyles and Young hypothesis on the origin of glaciations. They present well-documented examples of Late Proterozoic glacial-marine sedimentation along the margin of differentially subsiding basins that developed during an episode of rifting in western North America. They provide careful descriptions of diamictite-bearing facies associations and emphasize the common occurrence of relatively deep-water facies in most of the Late Proterozoic sequences of inferred glacial origin. In contrast, J.M.G. Miller (p. 47) illustrates the merits of Schermerhorn's arguments in an excellent example of Late Proterozoic diamictite-bearing facies associations in a continental rift system in eastern North America. She proposes that diamictites were deposited in a lacustrine environment under the influence of a local alpine glaciation.

The next two papers show the influence of local tectonics upon glacial sedimentation patterns during the Late Paleozoic. V. Von Brunn (p. 60) proposes a Permo-Carboniferous model in which glacial-marine deposits, including a large amount of diamictite, were formed within and on the flanks of a subsiding trough which developed over a failed rift. Depositional architecture appears largely controlled by pre-existing topography and glacially related sea-level changes. A.B. França (p. 70) presents an overview of the stratigraphy and hydrocarbon potential of the Carboniferous-Permian Itararé Group in the whole Brazilian Paraná Basin. The Itararé Group forms a continuous and thick record of a temperate glacial-marine environment in which the distribution and thickness of sedimentary units were affected by structural lineaments. This contribution is original because it concerns an economic aspect of the glacial sequences. According to structural setting and proximity of source rocks, the Itararé Group constitutes an excellent model for petroleum exploration.

Difficulty determining the origin of massive diamictites was frequently discussed at IGCP 260 meetings, J.N.J. Visser (p. 83) addresses this problem using four examples from the Permo-Carboniferous Dwyka Formation in South Africa. He proposes well-defined criteria, based on clast fabric and facies context, for the absolute identification of mechanisms of deposition of these diamictites in a glacial marine environment. Harking back to Schermerhorn (1974), Lu Songnian and Gao Zhenjia (p. 95) questioned the origin of two superposed Late Proterozoic diamictite-bearing formations in West China. Both formations were previously interpreted as glacial. Using stratigraphic and sedimentologic arguments, the authors demonstrate that the 'lower diamictite' corresponds to non-glacial debris-flows, the 'upper diamictite' to continental glacial deposits. Zheng Zhaochang and Li Yuzhen (p. 101) report Late Proterozoic glaciogenic successions in north-western China, which consist of massive to bedded diamictite layers deposited subglacially or as subaqueous debris flows, overlain by transgressive post-glacial, thinly bedded siltstones and shales. They emphasize the importance of regional and local facies context in inferring the glaciogenic origin of the diamictite.

Lastly, the paper by M.R. Gipp (p. 109) provides sedimentological models for the large-scale architecture of glaciated shelf and slope systems in Late Cenozoic active (Gulf of Alaska) and passive (Nova Scotia) margins. Processes of deposition appear identical on both active and passive margins, but the gross depositional architecture of glacial marine deposits differs depending on the preservation potential of sediments, which is controlled by tectonics and relative sea-level changes.

Recent years have seen the introduction of the exciting new concepts of sequence stratigraphy. Such ideas are particularly relevant to glaciogenic successions because of the associated rapid and large-scale sea-level changes. However, sequence stratigraphy remains scarcely used in glacial rock successions owing probably to local effects related to the common occurrence of glaciogenic deposits in tectonically active areas. J.N. Proust and M. Deynoux (p. 121) propose a sequence stratigraphic model based on the definition of a depositional genetic unit and its evolution through space and time in the marine to continental transitional zone of an intracratonic glacially influenced basin. Their model is developed from detailed field analysis of Late Proterozoic glacially related deposits on the West African platform. These genetic units and their different development in a stacking pattern lead to the definition of different orders of stacked sequences that are interpreted in terms of short-term climatically (glacially) controlled and long-term tectonically driven baselevel fluctuation cycles.

As shown by the papers quoted above, geologists have strong arguments which confirm the glacial origin of several Late Proterozoic successions. However, this does not solve the problem of low latitude glaciations (Chumakov and Elston, 1989). Hypotheses such as fast-moving plates (Crowell, 1983) or global glacial climate (Harland, 1964) have been proposed but are difficult to support on paleomagnetic and geologic grounds. Astronomical causes have also been proposed (Williams, 1975, Sheldon, 1984), and in this volume G.E. Williams (p. 146) again addresses this problem which 'challenges conventional views on the nature of the geomagnetic field, climatic zonation, and the earth's planetary dynamics in Late Proterozoic time'. Williams gives new evidence (paleomagnetic and time-series analysis of tidalites, and paleoclimatic interpretation of periglacial structures) supporting his previous hypothesis of a large obliquity of the ecliptic (> 54°) leading to a reverse climatic zonation and marked seasonality.

Although still used as an argument against glaciation, the co-occurrence of carbonate rocks and glacial deposits is common. However, there are many facets of the association. Skeletal carbonates are common in high latitude seas today but they do not have exact equivalents in Proterozoic rocks. As reviewed by Fairchild (1992) the extensive ice sheets of Late Proterozoic times appear to have encroached onto previously warm carbonate-forming environments which returned following glaciation. Glacial deposits are carbonate-rich primarily because of the incorporation of detrital carbonate. Subglacial redistribution of detrital carbonate by dissolution and reprecipitation by stress-related melting-freezing processes was proposed for some Late Proterozoic terrestrial tillites (Deynoux, 1985b). The discovery of marine recrystallization of

Late Proterozoic glacially transported rock flour in Svalbard (Fairchild *et al.*, 1989) gave new insight to the problem. Following this discovery, Crossing and Gostin (p. 165) investigated examples of diamictites in the Adelaide geosyncline of south Australia and found geochemical evidence from the composition of the matrix for deposition in a sea diluted by meltwater. Additionally, correlation between high Fe and reduced  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values in the matrix suggests that bacterial activity accompanied the diagenesis of the rock flour. In order to gain a better understanding of the chemical processes involved when carbonate rock flours interact with fluids in glacial systems, investigations of carbonate-rich Quaternary glacial systems have been started, and I.J. Fairchild, L. Bradby, and B. Spiro (p. 176) report their preliminary conclusions. Although they stress the importance of postglacial processes in controlling lithification of the sediments, evidence is also found for the precipitation of calcite in the matrix of a refrozen meltout till. Since this article was prepared they have found similar material in unfrozen meltout till and basal ice.

The succession of glacial deposits in Late Paleozoic sequences across much of Gondwana is punctuated by a sharp contact between diamictites and overlying late- or post-glacial dark- to black-colored mudstones (Domack *et al.*, 1992). Such a sharp contact has also been described in intracratonic Late Proterozoic and Late Ordovician glacial sequences on the West African platform (see Deynoux and Trompette in Hambrey and Harland, 1981). The diamictite–black mudstone transition is important in that it is widely believed to represent the end of glacial climates within the regional extent of the basins in which it is found. Hence these rocks preserve a record of global warming associated with an apparently rapid ‘glacial’ to ‘interglacial’ transition. A similar hypothesis was also proposed for certain Proterozoic carbonate horizons capping glacial deposits (e.g. Williams, 1979). Depositional mechanisms for the dark to black mudstones are varied. J.N.J. Visser (p. 193) describes the conditions that prevailed in a shallow to moderately deep Late Carboniferous foreland basin (Dwyka glaciations of the Karoo Basin) after self-destructive collapse of a marine ice sheet resulting from a relative sea-level rise. The syn- to post-glacial dark to black mudrocks, which overlie the glaciogenic deposits, were deposited by suspension settling of mud and mud turbidites. Basin tectonics, oceanic circulation, and climate controlled the organic-rich black mud deposition. D.I. Cole and A.D.M. Christie (p. 204) also describe Early Permian black mudrocks overlying diamictites (debris and turbidity flows) deposited by a retreating tidewater glacier during the final phase of the Dwyka glaciation. The black mudrocks are the product of pelagic mud settling proximal to the ice front where freshwater plumes mixed with basinal saline water. They account for a sudden increase in organic productivity, indicating that the rapid termination of the Dwyka glaciation was accompanied by a sharp rise in temperature. M.F. Miller and J.W. Collinson (p. 215) describe the processes and environments that characterize the filling of a large Lower Permian post-glacial inland sea in Antarctica. Deposition in relatively shallow water was dominated by turbidity currents carrying fine-grained sediments in channel-overbank systems. The glacial

environment allows the definition of a model in which a fine-grained turbidite system is paradoxically fed by a coarse-grained braided stream of the outwash plain.

Recent years have seen increasing interest in the sedimentary record of ice scours on continental shelves and lakes. Such structures and associated diamict deposits are widespread on Pleistocene shelves but are rarely known from the rock record. The paper by A.C. Rocha-Campos, P.R. dos Santos, and J.R. Canuto (p. 234) describes Early Permian iceberg scours. These scours are encountered on bedding planes of rhythmites inferred to be varves in a relatively deep freshwater body. C.M.T. Woodworth-Lynas and J.A. Dowdeswell (p. 241) argue that many striated surfaces, and associated diamictites found in ancient successions may have been produced by marine (or lacustrine) ice keel scour and report a modern analogue from the Greenland shelf. The need for a more critical examination of ancient glacial striated surfaces and associated facies is clearly indicated. Qui Rui Zhang (p. 260) describes periglacial indicators such as iceberg scours and dropstones, ice wedge casts, and glaciotectionic structures. These structures indicate that, instead of an abrupt erosional unconformity, the glaciogenic deposits of the Nanhua Ice Age (Late Proterozoic) of South China are locally conformably underlain by rocks that mark a progressive climatic transition from warm to cold.

### Significance

The results of IGCP Project 260 are very relevant to current concerns about global change. As more details of the present climate and the climate of the Pleistocene are revealed, the interplay of ocean, atmosphere, biosphere and lithosphere with the internal heat engine of the Earth is being revealed as something of great complexity. We are still far from a complete understanding of the Earth's climatic system but glaciogenic deposits provide critical palaeoclimatic data. In spite of recent suggestions that some tillites/diamictites may be the ejecta of large planetesimal impacts (Rampino, 1992; Oberbeck *et al.*, 1993), extensive research and field studies demonstrate that the vast majority of documented ancient glaciogenic deposits correctly record periods of cold climate during Earth history. The discovery of mechanisms governing the appearance and disappearance of glaciers on Earth is paramount to the understanding of long-term climatic change, and the only long-term record of climatic change is the geologic record. The rock record of glaciation has been catalogued (Hambrey and Harland, 1981) but still has not been perfectly described. Since the 1983 Mauritanian meeting (Deynoux, 1985a), good facies descriptions of ancient glacial deposits have been proposed, and lately sequence stratigraphic concepts have developed. Now glacial sedimentology has joined the mainstream of sedimentology. In the near future, because most ancient glacial evidence is preserved in marine sequences, we must achieve a better understanding of the workings of glacially related marine basins.

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