Timing and position of Late Wisconsinan ice-margins on the upper slope seaward of Laurentian Channel

Chronologie et emplacement des marges glaciaires sur le talus supérieur au large du Chenal laurentien

Cronología y localización del margen glaciar durante el periodo wisconsiniano tardío de la vertiente costera superior del canal del san lorenzo

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Résumé de l'article

Au cours du dernier maximum glaciaire, le principal exutoire à travers le Chenal laurentien se terminait sur le talus continental supérieur. Une surface de 10 km\(^2\) sur le talus supérieur a été étudiée en détail, à l'aide de profils résultant de l'utilisation de divers instruments de sismique réflexion. Le glissement pendant le tremblement de terre de 1929 au Grand Banc a causé la mise à nu sur le fond marin de sédiments du dernier maximum glaciaire, normalement enfoncés sous des dizaines de mètres de nouvelles couches. Les lithofaciès et faciès acoustiques ont été interprétés à l'aide de critères mis au point sur la plate-forme continentale et la chronologie a été fournie par les datations SMA faites sur des coquillages de mollusques in situ. Les données sismiques font ressortir une crête morainique à 500 m snm (sous le niveau actuel de la mer) correspondant à la ligne d’ancrage au dernier maximum glaciaire. Un changement dans le régime thermique de la glace ou une éruption d’eau de fusion sousglaciaire à 16,5 ± 0,15 ka (âge corrigé à -0,4 ka, compte tenu de l’effet de réservoir) a causé la libération d’eau de fusion enfouie qui a creusé des ravins sur le talus continental. Cette surface d’érosion a immédiatement été recouverte par un important diamicton pierreux jusqu’à 700 m snm, qui semble être un till déposé au cours d’une crue glaciaire. La marge glaciaire s’est par la suite retirée vers l’amont vers 16,3 ka, à l’emplacement de l’importante moraine située à 380 m snm, sur le bord du chenal Laurentien. Des indices tirés des boues de turbidites sur l’éventail Laurentien laissent croire que cette position de la marge glaciaire a été maintenue jusque vers 14,2 ka. La glace s’est ensuite rapidement retirée vers le nord le long du chenal Laurentien, vers 14 ka (Épisode de Heinrich 1/Heinrich Event 1). Des sédiments proglaïcières plus récents se sont effondrés vers 12 ka, probablement en raison d’une surcharge causée par une récurrence glaciaire tardive à travers le banc de Saint-Pierre.
TIMING AND POSITION OF LATE WISCONSINAN ICE-MARGINS ON THE UPPER SLOPE SEAWARD OF LAURENTIAN CHANNEL

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ABSTRACT At the last glacial maximum, the major ice outlet through Laurentian Channel terminated on the upper continental slope. A 10 km square area of the upper slope has been investigated in detail, using airgun and boomerc seismic reflection profiles and piston cores. Sediment failure during the 1929 Grand Banks earthquake resulted in exposure of sediments that are normally buried beneath tens of metres of younger strata. Ice-margin acoustic and lithofacies are interpreted using criteria developed on the continental shelf and chronology is provided by AMS radiocarbon dates on in situ molluscan shells. Seismic data show a morainal ridge at 500 mbsl (mbsl = metres below (present) sea level) corresponding to the Last Glacial Maximum ice grounding line. A change in thermal regime of the ice or a subglacial meltwater outburst, at 16.5 ± 0.15 ka (radiocarbon years), 0.4 ka marine reservoir correction applied), resulted in release of sediment-laden meltwater that eroded gullies on the continental slope. This erosion surface is immediately overlain by a prominent stony diamict that extends to about 700 mbsl and may represent till deposition from a glacial surge. The ice margin then retreated upslope by 16.3 ka, probably to the prominent moraine at 280 mbsl at the tip of the Laurentian Channel. Evidence from mud turbidites on Laurentian Fan suggests that this ice marginal position may have persisted until about 12 ka, when the ice retreated rapidly northwards up Laurentian Channel, synchronous with Heinrich Event 1 at about 14 ka. Younger proglacial sediment on the upper continental slope slumped at about 12 ka, probably as a result of loading by a large late-glacial advance across St. Pierre Bank.

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RESUMEN Cronología y localización del margen glacial durante el período wisconsinano tardío de la vertiente costera superior del canal del san lorenzo Durante el clima de la última glaciación, el mayor avance del hielo dentro del canal lorenziano se encontraba en la vertiente continental superior. Con la ayuda de diversos métodos de perfiles de reflexión sísmica, un área de 10 km² de la vertiente superior a sido investigada en detalle. En 1929 el terremoto acaecido en Grand Banks puso al descubierto el lecho marino compuesto por sedimentos del período climático de la última glaciación, dichos sedimentos generalmente se encuentran sepultados a decenas de metros de los estratos más recientes. La interpretación del margen acústico del hielo y las litofaciess fueron establecidas con base a criterios desarrollados en la zona continental, la edad de las formaciones fue proporcionada por la datación(AMS) de isótopos de carbono radiactivo in situ sobre conchas de moluscos. Los datos sísmicos indican una cima morainica a 500 brm (brm = metros bajo el nivel del mar) correspon- diente a la línea de anclaje durante el clima de la última glaciación. Un cambio en el régimen térmico del hielo o una erupción subglacial que generó la fusión del agua a 16,5±0,15 ka (años de radiocarbono, -0,4 ka considerando la corrección debido al efecto de (reciente) mar) dio por resultado la liberación de sedimentos. El gran terremoto que asocia el agua de fusión, y que generó las barrancas de la vertiente continental, Dicha erosión superficial fue inmediatamente recubierta por una capa túscica de diamicto que se exten- dió hasta 700 m brm, que probablemente n se depositó al curso de un flujo glacial. La pétida glacial se encuentra formada por la suelte se retiró del marge glaciar hacia 14,2 ka. La glace se encontró reci- dimentada durante la 12 brm al borde del canal lorenziano. Siendo un margen de la vertiente hacia 16,3 ka, probablemente hasta la moraine situada a 380 mbrm en el borde del canal lorenziano. Ciertos índices obtenidos a partir de la tabla del marge en el y de la moraine permiten suponer que la posición marginal del hielo puede haberse mantenido hasta unos 14,2 ka. Más tarde los hielos de retiraron rápi- damente hacia el norte del canal lorenziano al mismo tiempo que el Evento 1 de Heinrich, aproximadamente 14 ka. Algunos sedimen- tos proglaciares mas recientes en la parte superior de la vertiente continental se han- dieron hace unos 12 ka, probablemente como resultado de una progresión tardía del glaciación hacia el banco de St. Pierre .
INTRODUCTION
The Laurentian Channel (Fig. 1) was the major ice outlet of the Appalachian Ice Complex and the southeastern portion of the Laurentide Ice Sheet (Grant 1989). When glacial ice extended to the top of the continental slope, it played an important role in supplying sediment to Laurentian Fan (Uchupi and Austin, 1979; Skene, 1998), the largest Pleistocene sediment depocentre off southeastern Canada. Calving of icebergs from this ice margin was an important source of ice-rafter detritus to the North Atlantic Ocean (Bond and Lotti, 1995). The deglacial history of the ice outlet in the Gulf of St. Lawrence since about 14 ka has recently been documented by Josenhans and Lehman (1999). In this paper, we attempt to define the glacial history of the ice outlet around the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM).

METHODS
The principal data set for this study is a detailed seismic survey in August 1999 using a Huntec Deep-Tow Seismic boom system and one piston core (99036-01) located on the

FIGURE 1. Regional setting of outer Laurentian Channel, showing rapid Late Wisconsinan ice retreat between 14.3 and 13.7 ka (largely from Josenhans and Lehman, 1999; some information from Stea et al., 1998 and Piper and Skene, 1998). Also shows schematically the grounding line ridges discussed in text.
basis on this survey (Fig. 2a). Previous data from the area include high-resolution sparker seismic-reflection profiles, run along strike, that were interpreted by Bonifay and Piper (1988) and a 1-km swath deep-water sidescan survey and coincident airgun seismic reflection profiles, interpreted by Piper et al. (1999). Several piston cores have been collected from the area on previous cruises. Navigation for cruises since 1990 has been by GPS; earlier cruises used Loran C. All AMS radiocarbon ages (Table I) are reported in radiocarbon years with a -400 year reservoir correction.

**SEISMIC STRATIGRAPHY**

Regional seismic stratigraphy is known from multichannel seismic profiles STP-1 and STP-5 illustrated by MacLean and Wade (1992). These show that the modern shelf break approximately corresponds to the shelf break at the base of the Tertiary and that a series of basin-dipping normal faults underlie the outer shelf and upper slope.

Regional airgun single-channel seismic reflection profiles (Fig. 2a) show that the outermost part of Laurentian Channel
is underlain by material with incoherent seismic reflections identified as till (King and Fader, 1986). This inferred till, corresponding to the Lower Till of Josenhans and Lehman (1989), occurs as a morainal ridge with several tens of metres of sea-bed relief at the outermost edge of Laurentian Channel (Fig. 1). King and Fader (1990) showed that this till stratigraphically underlies a series of three till-tongues off St. Pierre Bank and one off Misaine Bank, the latter interpreted as dating from about 13.5 ka by Stea (1991). Similar relationships are found in several areas along the upper continental shelf.

2. In radiocarbon years with a 400 year marine reservoir correction

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<th>Core</th>
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<td><em>Astarte crenata</em> frags</td>
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<tr>
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1. All ages expressed in radiocarbon years with a 400 year marine reservoir correction

TABLE I
New AMS radiocarbon ages

PISTON CORE CONTROL AND RADIOCARBON CHRONOLOGY

The uppermost stratified unit has been sampled by several piston cores, including 89015-05 (Fig. 4), for which a series of radiocarbon dates is available. The Holocene section comprises 1 m of sandy silt with scattered molluscan shells. It overlies 2.5 m of alternating olive grey bioturbated mud and laminated sandy silt beds, with radiocarbon ages between 10.55 and 10.75 ka. Beneath this, a 4.6 m long interval of bioturba-
ted muds corresponds to the acoustically transparent unit. Up- slope, where the acoustically transparent unit is incoherent and has surface relief, core 86034-04 retrieved 20 cm of Holocene sandy silt overlying 2 m of alternating bioturbated mud and sandy silt beds, resting on a mud clast conglomerate of highly contorted blocks of a variety of types of mud. Such mud clast conglomerates are typical of rotational slumps and debris flows found elsewhere on the Scotian Slope (Piper et al. 1985; Shor and Piper, 1989).
The stratified unit capped by the orange reflector has not been penetrated by cores, except for its extreme base in core 99036-01. This core, located within a slump scar, penetrates a thin sequence of the diamict unit near its downslope limit, together with the underlying stratified sediment (Fig. 7). The uppermost 30 cm consists bioturbated silty mud that rests apparently unconformably on stiff grey mud, 1.3 m thick, with sparse dropstones and alternating bioturbated and unbioturbated intervals. This is interpreted as the base of the stratified unit that is capped by the orange reflector. It overlies 55 cm of alternating laminae (1-3 cm) of brown and grey sandy gravelly mud, interpreted as a proximal ice-meltout facies. Stratification becomes thicker near the base of the unit, which passes into 35 cm of diamict with a wide range of clast sizes, including stones up to 6 cm in size. Maximum clast size is limited by the 10 cm diameter of the corer. The dominant rock type is reddish sandstone and siltstone, apparently derived from Upper Carboniferous-Permian strata of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (cf. Piper and Skene, 1998). The diamict and the overlying sandy gravelly mud are interpreted to correlate with the diamict acoustic unit. The diamict overlies > 1 m of bioturbated grey mud with sparse dropstones, which corresponds to the lower stratified acoustic unit (Fig. 4). Neither diamict nor underlying grey mud appears overconsolidated, suggesting that if the diamict is a till, then ice was essentially supported by its buoyancy. Three radiocarbon dates from this core show a progressive increase in age downcore. A date of 16.37 ka was obtained from a single valve of a bivalve mollusc at a depth of 1.15 m in the core, 45 cm above the top of the laminated sandy gravelly mud. Bivalve mollusc fragments in the diamict (presumably reworked from the underlying sediment) yielded an age of 16.53 ka and bivalve mollusc fragments (probably broken during core splitting) from the underlying grey mud dated at 16.55 ka (Table I). The consistency of these dates suggests that they reliably date the diamict and the underlying erosion surface as younger than 16.53 ± 0.15 ka but older than 16.37 ± 0.05 ka.
DISCUSSION

INTERPRETATION OF ACOUSTIC FACIES AND LITHOFACIES

The bioturbated grey muds of the lower stratified unit closely resemble glaciomarine muds described by Gipp (1994) as lithofacies 2 of the Emerald Silt Formation from Emerald Basin on the Scotian Shelf (Fig. 1). Off Laurentian Channel, these muds appear to pass upslope into a morainal ridge (Fig. 3a), similar to relationships seen elsewhere on the Scotian and Grand Banks margins (Bonifay and Piper, 1988; Mosher et al., 1989; Piper, 2000). If sedimentation rates are similar to the 20 m/ka determined by Bonifay and Piper (1988) close to ice margins on St. Pierre Slope, then the 15 m of muds could represent as little as a thousand years of sedimentation, but on the steep continental slope, overall sedimentation rates were likely lower than in an enclosed basin.

The overlying diamict is interpreted as a till, on the basis of its acoustic character, downslope limit at about 700 mbsl, and lithology. The possibility that it is an aquatill rather than a lodgement till cannot be excluded. The downslope limit has been mapped at about the same water depth over a distance of 6 km, suggesting that it is not an ice-margin debris flow facies, which would show more irregular downslope extent. Likewise, if it were a proximal glaciomarine facies, its abrupt termination in acoustic records is difficult to account for. The alternating brown and grey sandy gravelly muds are similar to lithofacies 1 of Gipp (1994), interpreted as deposited proximal to melting and calving ice. They have a much higher proportion of coarse ice-rafted detritus than the muds underlying the diamict, which seismic reflection profiles show accumulated only 1.5 km from the ice margin marked by the morainal ridge. The overlying alternating bioturbated and unbioturbated muds with dropstones are similar to Gipp’s lithofacies 2. He demonstrated that these accumulated within 10 km of a marine ice margin. Only the extreme base and top of this acoustically stratified section between the diamict and reflector c has been sampled (Figs. 4a and 5). It has a mean sediment accumulation rate of about 3 m/ka. Given the radiocarbon age of reflector c as 10.75 ka and the 16.37 ka date just above the diamict, the interpolated age of the orange reflector is about 14.1 ka (Fig. 3b). This prominent reflection thus has an age similar to the brick-red sandy-mud ice-rafted horizon “d” described by Piper and Skene (1998) on the Scotian margin, which they interpreted as transported by ice-rafting during rapid calving.
A glaciological interpretation of the sediment sequence

The morainal ridge at 500 mbsl is interpreted as a stable ice margin position of perhaps 1 ka duration that is a little older than 16.4 ka (Fig. 8). We suggest that this is likely the ca. 18 ka Last Glacial Maximum position of ice in Laurentian Channel and that the ice margin was stable for at least a thousand years, based on the thickness of proglacial stratified sediment. Following this, there was an erosional event that cut deeply incised gullies in places and appears to have had little effect in other places. The erosional agent was presumably sediment-laden water: the gullies appear too narrow (Fig. 4b) for the erosion to have been by ice. The gully erosion also continues into deeper water, suggesting that it was not exclusively by subglacial meltwater. The position of the ice-margin at this time is unknown, but with the shelf break at 380 mbsl, this erosion cannot be related to a lowstand of sea level. Neither is upper slope sediment failure an adequate mechanism to explain such 10-20 m deep erosion. We suggest that the erosion resulted from an event that released erosive subglacial meltwater, which continued to flow down the steep slope as hyperpycnal flows. Overlying the erosion surface is a discontinuous stony diamict that extends to water depths of about 700 mbsl. Its age is less than 200 years younger than the erosional surface, suggesting that the two events may have been glaciologically related. They appear to represent a change in glacial conditions similar to that inferred for Heinrich events in Hudson Strait, i.e. either a change in basal temperature regime to warm-base conditions (MacAyeal, 1993) or release of dammed subglacial water (Johnson and Lauritzen, 1995). The age of this event corresponds to the Scotian Phase of Stea et al. (1998).

Following deposition of the diamict, the abundance of ice-rafted detritus suggests proximity to an ice margin that calved or melted much more vigorously than the LGM ice margin, perhaps because of changed thermal regime of the ice. The rapid upward decrease in abundance of ice-rafted detritus suggests that the ice margin retreated rapidly. It may have restabilised at the lip of Laurentian Channel, at about 380 mbsl, where there is a prominent morainal ridge in the Lower Till (Fig. 1). We suggest that this ice margin persisted until about 14.2 ka and supplied suspended sediment that accumulated as mud turbidites on Laurentian Fan. Deposition of these mud turbidites terminated abruptly and typically 0.5 m above the topmost turbidite is a distinctive bed of ice-rafted sandy-gravelly mud derived from the Gulf of St. Lawrence and dated at about 14.0 ka (Piper and Skene, 1998).
Available radiocarbon dates suggest that the retreat of ice from the end of Laurentian Channel back into the Gulf of St. Lawrence took place at about 14 ka within a span equivalent to the error range of radiocarbon dating and uncertainties in reservoir corrections and bioturbational mixing. The youngest date in red mud turbidites on Laurentian Fan, 4 m below the ice-rafted sandy-gravelly mud bed, is 14.09 ± 0.09 ka (Piper et al., 1999). Keigwin and Jones (1995) obtained an age of 14.00 ± 0.06 ka from 15 cm above the mud turbidites and Piper and Skene (1998) reported an age of 14.0 ± 0.2 ka at a similar stratigraphic level. About 100 km southwest of Cabot Strait, Josenhans and Lehman (1999) reported an age of 14.31 ± 0.15 at the base of glaciomarine sediment in core V17-179 and 80 km northeast of Cabot Strait, a date of 14.02 ± 0.17 ka at the base of the glaciomarine section in core HU90028-037. The rapid retreat of ice implied by the Josenhans and Lehman (1999) dates was probably responsible for the release of voluminous ice-rafted detritus to give ice-rafted sandy-gravelly mud bed, is 14.09 ± 0.09 ka (Piper et al., 1999). Keigwin and Jones (1995) obtained an age of 14.00 ± 0.06 ka from 15 cm above the mud turbidites and Piper and Skene (1998) reported an age of 14.0 ± 0.2 ka at a similar stratigraphic level. About 100 km southwest of Cabot Strait, Josenhans and Lehman (1999) reported an age of 14.31 ± 0.15 at the base of glaciomarine sediment in core V17-179 and 80 km northeast of Cabot Strait, a date of 14.02 ± 0.17 ka at the base of the glaciomarine section in core HU90028-037. The rapid retreat of ice implied by the Josenhans and Lehman (1999) dates was probably responsible for the release of voluminous ice-rafted detritus to give ice-rafted sandy-gravelly mud bed over much of the Scotian margin (Piper and Skene, 1998). This event initiated the rapid retreat of ice from Laurentian Channel, which Josenhans and Lehman (1999) documented as retreating to Anticosti Island (Fig. 1) by 13.7 ka. Shaw et al. (2000) reported open water along the southwest coast of Newfoundland starting about 14.2 ka. Following this retreat, ice occupied Halibut Channel (Moran and Fader, 1997) and crossed St. Pierre Bank (Bonday and Piper, 1988) at about 12 ka. Whether this represented local ice developed on St. Pierre Bank or was derived from south- eastern Newfoundland, probably the Avalon Peninsula, as suggested by detrital petrology, is not clear. We postulate that this ice advance caused the widespread slumping on the upper slope off the eastern Laurentian Channel.

CONCLUSION

1. At the LGM, ice was grounded to 500 mbsl seaward of Laurentian Channel and built a morainal ridge.
2. A change in thermal regime or a subglacial meltwater outburst, between 16.54 ± 0.15 ka and 16.37 ± 0.05 ka, resulted in release of sediment-laden meltwater that caused local gully erosion on the continental slope. This erosion surface is overlain by a prominent stony diamict that extends to about 700 mbsl and may represent till deposition from a glacial surge.
3. The ice margin then appears to have retreated upslope, probably to the prominent moraine at 380 mbsl at the lip of the Laurentian Channel. Evidence from mud turbidites on Laurentian Fan suggests that this ice marginal position persisted until about 14.2 ka.
4. Ice retreated rapidly northwards up Laurentian Channel at about 14 ka. Younger proglacial sediment on the upper continental slope slumped at about 12 ka, probably as a result of loading by a late-ice advance across St. Pierre Bank.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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REFERENCES


FIGURE 7. Photographs and lithostratigraphy of the middle part of core 99036-1.
Photographies et lithostratigraphie de la partie centrale de la carotte 99036-1.

FIGURE 8. Cartoon showing generalised stratigraphy and inferred ice history at the seaward end of the Laurentian Channel in the Late Wisconsinan.
Stratigraphie générale et évolution glaciaire du chenal Laurentien à sa limite vers le large pendant le Wisconsinien supérieur.


