$^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages of CAMP in North America: Implications for the Triassic–Jurassic boundary and the ^{40}K decay constant bias

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ABSTRACT

The Central Atlantic magmatic province (CAMP) is one of the largest igneous provinces on Earth ($>10^7$ km^2), spanning four continents. Recent high-precision $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ dating of mineral separates has provided important constraints on the age, duration, and geodynamic history of CAMP. Yet the North American CAMP is strikingly under-represented in this dating effort.

Here we present 13 new statistically robust plateau, mini-plateau and isochron ages obtained on plagioclase and sericite separates from lava flows from the Fundy ($n = 10$; Nova Scotia, Canada), Hartford and Deerfield ($n = 3$; U.S.A.) basins. Ages mostly range from 198.6 ± 1.1 to 201.0 ± 1.4 Ma (2σ), with 1 date substantially younger at 190.6 ± 1.0 Ma. Careful statistical regression shows that ages from the upper ($199.7.0 \pm 1.5$ Ma) and bottom (200.1 ± 0.9 Ma) units of the lava pile in the Fundy basin are statistically indistinguishable, confirming a short duration of emplacement ($\ll 1.6$ Ma; ≤ 1 Ma). Three ages obtained on the Hartford (198.6 ± 2.0 Ma and 199.8 ± 1.1 Ma) and Deerfield (199.3 ± 1.2 Ma) basins were measured on sericite from the upper lava flow units. We interpret these dates as reflecting syn-emplacement hydrothermal activity within these units. Collectively, CAMP ages gathered so far suggest a short duration of the main magmatic activity (2–3 Ma), but also suggest the possibility of a temporal migration of the active magmatic centers from north to south. Such a migration challenges a plume model that would postulate a radial outward migration of the magmatism and is more compatible with other models, such as the supercontinent global warming hypothesis. When compared to the age of the Triassic–Jurassic boundary, the filtered CAMP age database suggests that the onset of the magmatic activity precedes the limit by at least few hundred thousand years, thereby suggesting a causal relationship between CAMP and the end of Triassic mass extinction.

An age at 191 Ma possibly suggests a minor CAMP late tailing activity (190–194 Ma) which has been observed already for dykes and sills in Africa and Brazil. We speculate that, if genuine, this late activity can be due to a major extensional event, possibly heralding the oceanization process at ~190 Ma. Comparison between high quality U/Pb and $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages of pegmatite lenses from the North Mountain basalts confirms a ~1% bias between the two chronometers. This discrepancy is likely attributed to the miscalibration of the ^{40}K decay constants, in particular the electron capture branch.

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1. Introduction

Many previous studies of large igneous provinces (LIPs) and continental flood basalts (CFBs) have focused on magma composition (e.g. Ingle et al., 2002; Ewart et al., 2004; Deckart et al. 2005; Hou et al., 2006) and the timing of emplacement (e.g. Gurevitch et al., 1995; Courtillot et al., 2000; Coulié et al., 2003; Jourdan et al., 2007a). Although studies concerning the former are essential to understanding the genesis and mantle origin of these provinces, an increasing number of studies of paleomagnetism and absolute geochronology in particular has provided important constraints on timing and eruptive rates. Because LIPs and CFBs are dominated by

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basaltic rocks, the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ technique is the most widely applied isotopic clock, due to the high analytical precision available, provided that caution is used in selecting fresh minerals (mostly plagioclase). Typically, the most significant findings for CFBs concern their origin, geodynamics and timing, relationships with oceanization and possible direct and indirect implications for mass extinctions (cf. Courtillot and Renne, 2003). In addition, geochronology can provide essential information on the giant dyke swarms associated with CFBs, such as their timing and the degree to which structural inheritance controlled their emplacement (i.e. Jourdan et al., 2006). However, to be considered reliable, geochronological constraints (and their derived models) must include sufficient data to be statistically valid.

The Central Atlantic Magmatic Province (CAMP) is described as the most extensive CFB on Earth with a surface area potentially in excess of 10^7 km², now distributed over four continents (Marzoli et al., 1999; McHone et al., 2005; Fig. 1). Currently, CAMP consists mostly of dykes and sills along with restricted remnants of lava flow sequences preserved in Triassic–Jurassic basins (Olsen et al., 2003, Marzoli et al., 2004). Undoubtedly due to its association with the onset of the Pangean breakup and the Triassic–Jurassic mass extinction, CAMP has among the largest numbers of high-quality (mineral separates) isotopic dates for a CFB (58 $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ plateau ages) obtained so for

a CFB (cf. filtered compilation by Nomade et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the geographic distribution of the age data in CAMP is far from homogeneous with, for instance, more than half of the data obtained from Africa. Particularly striking is the scarcity of data (only one age datum available) on the lava flow sequences preserved in the eastern U.S.A. and Canada basins. This lack of reliable dates from northwestern CAMP is a significant hindrance for any model that attempts to explain the global geodynamics of the province or to constrain the age and duration of the major lava piles.

Here we investigate the timing of CAMP in eastern North America using the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ technique on fresh and sericitized plagioclase separates. Our results provide crucial information on the age and duration of the lava piles in the Hartford/Deerfield and Fundy basins. These new ages, coupled with the available CAMP age database, suggest that emplacement of individual lava piles was brief and that part of the CAMP activity predated the Triassic–Jurassic boundary (TJB) mass extinction, as originally proposed by Marzoli et al. (2004). These data also suggest a migration of the magmatic centers throughout the CAMP (as previously proposed by Nomade et al., 2007). In addition, our results allow examination of the significance of "sericite" $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages as a geochronological tool and further underscore the increasingly documented bias between the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$
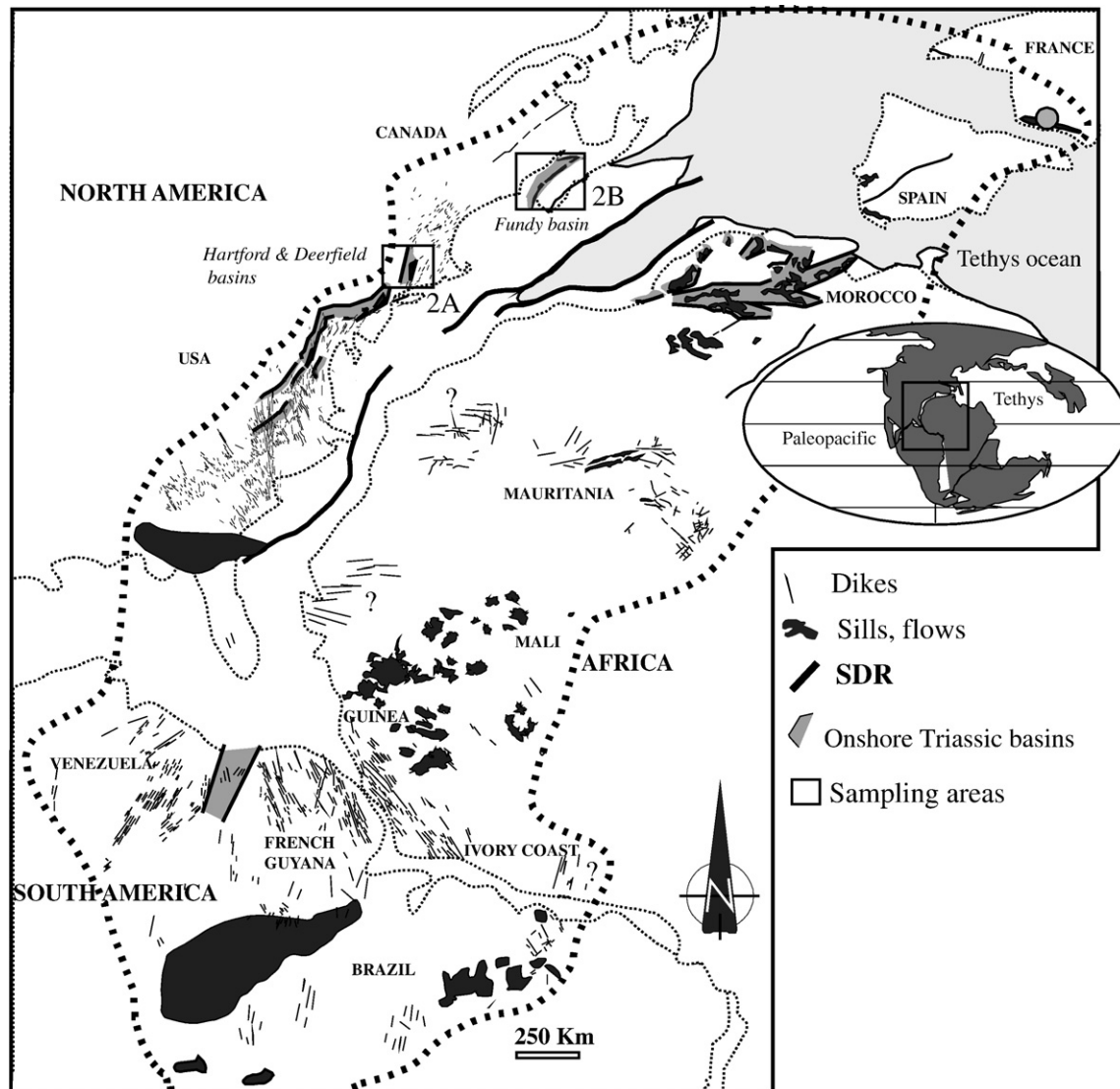

Fig. 1. Sketch map of the remnants of CAMP lava flows, sills and related dykes (modified after McHone (2000) and Knight et al. (2004). SDR: Seaward dipping reflector. Dashed curve indicates the currently known extension of CAMP.

and U/Pb ages (Min et al., 2000; Mundil et al., 2006; Kuiper et al., 2008) that shifts the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages toward younger values.

2. Geological setting and previous results

For this study, we investigated outcrops in the Hartford–Deerfield and Fundy basins in the northwestern part of CAMP (Figs. 1 and 2). These basins are the eroded remnants of Mesozoic rift basins that occur along the circum-Central Atlantic coasts (from Newfoundland to the Gulf of Mexico; Olsen, 1997; Fig. 1). The onshore basins from Nova Scotia, Canada and the northeastern U.S.A., are collectively termed the Newark Supergroup basins (Manspeizer and Cousminer, 1988). The basin-filling sequence includes non-marine Carnian to Early Jurassic sediments and the ~199 Ma CAMP volcanic sequence (Olsen et al., 2003), which we examine below.

2.1. The Fundy basin

The Fundy basin is the northernmost of the well-exposed Mesozoic rift basins of eastern North America. Most of the basin lies beneath the Bay of Fundy, but sedimentary strata and volcanics outcrop on the shores of the bay in western Nova Scotia and eastern New Brunswick, ~500 km north of the Hartford basin. In Nova Scotia, the basin is bordered along its northern margin by the Minas Fault Zone, the master fault for the basin (Olsen and Schlische, 1990). The CAMP basalt of the Fundy basin is the North Mountain Basalt, which overlies the Blomidon Formation. The Blomidon Formation (~200–300 m thick) consists of sandstones and mudstones that accumulated mostly in playa, sandflat, eolian and fluvial environments (Tanner, 2000). Based on palynological constraints from one outcrop on the north shore of the Minas Basin (Partridge Island), the TJB has been placed in the uppermost meter of the Blomidon Formation (Fowell and Traverse, 1995; Whiteside et al., 2007) although this was questioned by Tanner et al. (2004) and Lucas and Tanner (2007). On the south shore, the contact between Blomidon sediments and North Mountain Basalt is exposed in generally inaccessible outcrops.

Outcrops of the North Mountain Basalt occur both on the north shore of the Minas Basin, where it is frequently tectonized, and on the south shore of the basin, as well as along the western coast of Nova Scotia where it is only slightly tilted and largely undisturbed. It is not exposed onshore in New Brunswick, but does cover most of Grand Manan Island in the southern Bay of Fundy. The CAMP lava flows reach a thickness of 400 m and can be subdivided into three units. The lower unit (East Ferry Member; up to 185 m thick) consists of a massive basalt lava flow with well developed columnar jointing (Kontak, 2002, 2008) and locally including (upward) coarse-grained feldspar- or pyroxene-rich pegmatite lenses (Papezik et al., 1988; Hodych and Dunning, 1992; Kontak, 2002, 2008). The middle unit (Margaretsville Member) consists of a succession of 10–15 m thick, strongly weathered lava flows, with abundant voids, veins and pipes, generally filled with zeolites (Kontak, 2008). The upper unit (Brier Island Member; up to 150 m thick) is similar to the lower unit and is formed by one or two massive flow(s) with abundant columnar jointing. Rare sedimentary deposits occur locally between the flows of the middle unit, but are otherwise absent within the basaltic sequence. The North Mountain Basalt is overlain by the McCoy Brook Formation. Locally, the carbonate-rich lacustrine strata of the Scots Bay Member rest directly on the surface of the basalt (Tanner, 1996).

2.2. Hartford and Deerfield basins

The Hartford basin and its connected northern extension, the Deerfield basin (cf. below) are the northernmost of the onshore Mesozoic rift basins in the eastern U.S.A. (Fig. 1). Both basins are asymmetric half-grabens (Fig. 2a), with the major border fault on the eastern margin of the basins (Hozik, 1992) and stratigraphic units dipping up to 30° eastward (toward the border fault). The Hartford basin fill comprises a succession of four sedimentary and three lava flow formations (Fig. 3; Olsen et al., 2003). From the base to the top, these are: (1) the New Haven Formation consisting mainly of alluvial deposits (~2250 m thick). A palynological turnover in the topmost New Haven strata has been interpreted as the Triassic–Jurassic boundary (Olsen et al., 2003); (2) the Talcott Basalt, consisting of one to four lava flows, with a total thickness from 65 to 215 m (Puffer et al., 1981); (3) the Shuttle Meadow Formation, which consists mostly of lacustrine with minor alluvial sedimentary deposits (~100 m thick);
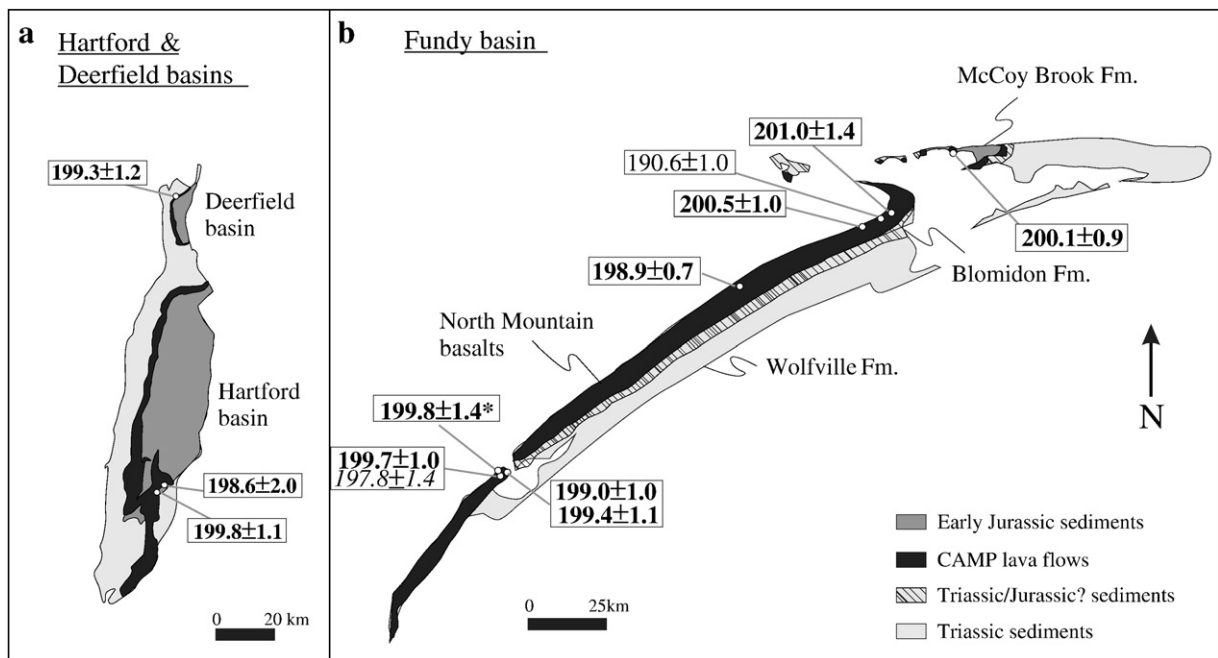

Fig. 2. Simplified geological map of the Hartford and Deerfield (U.S.A.) and Fundy (Canada) basins. Ten $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ plateau and one isochron ages (*) are reported in bold. One statistically valid mini-plateau ages is indicated in normal font. Errors are reported at 2σ. Number in italic is a mini-plateau age but with age spectrum showing strong Ar loss, thus discarded in the mean age calculation of the pegmatite lenses.
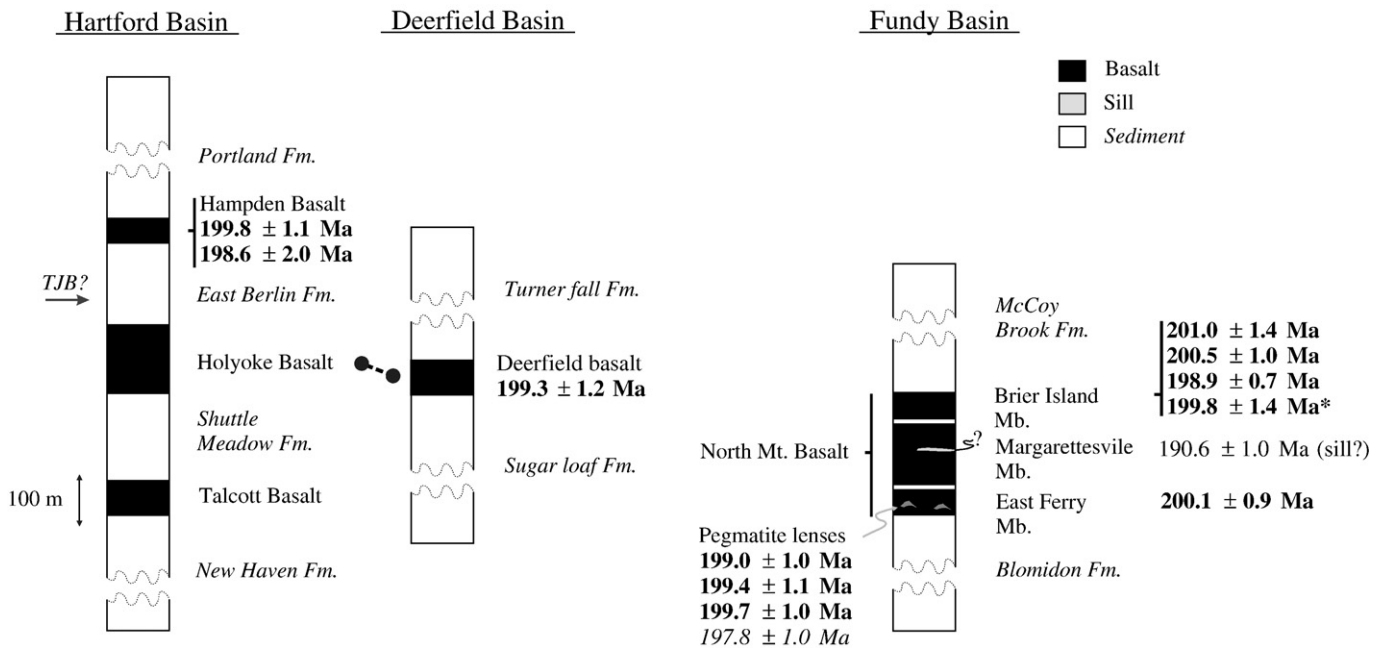
Hartford Basin   Deerfield Basin   Fundy Basin

Fig. 3. Synthetic stratigraphic section of the Hartford, Deerfield and Fundy basin sequences. $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages obtained on the magmatic units are shown in the sequence. White, black and light gray layers represent sediment, basalt and sill respectively. Pegmatite lenses are indicated in dark gray. * indicates isochron age. Question marks besides light gray indicate that the contacts between sills and lava flows have not been observed in the field. Modified after Whiteside et al. (2007). Detailed sedimentary stratigraphy is provided by Whiteside et al. (2007). The Triassic–Jurassic boundary (TJB) is after Cirilli et al. (2007).

(4) the Holyoke Basalt, consisting of two major flows (~100 m thick) and locally containing coarse-grained evolved segregation sheets (Philpotts et al., 1996); (5) the East Berlin Formation, comprising lacustrine and minor alluvial sedimentary deposits (~150 m thick); (6) the Hampden Basalt (~60 m thick), consisting of one or possibly two moderately to strongly altered lava flows; and (7) the Portland Formation, which comprises mostly lacustrine sedimentary rocks in the lower half of the sequence and fluvial sediments in the upper half. Some dolerite dykes thought to be the feeders to the different lava units (based on their geochemical characteristics) crosscut the Hartford basin (Philpotts and Martello, 1986). The most prominent dykes are the Higganum–Holden–Fairhaven dyke (feeder of the Talcott basalts), the Buttress–Ware dyke (feeder of Holyoke basalts) and the Bridgeport–Pelham dyke (feeder of Hampden basalts). Relatively thick sills, e.g. the West Rock sill, can be geochemically correlated to the Talcott lava flows. Samples from these dykes and sills have failed to yield reliable $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ dates so far (F. Jourdan, unpublished data).

The Deerfield basin section is much thinner and includes only three sedimentary formations and one lava flow. The basal formation is the alluvial Sugarloaf Arkose (~2000 m thick), the uppermost portion of which consists of the lacustrine Fall River beds (informally named, ~50 m thick). The only basaltic flow in the basin is the Deerfield Basalt. It is ~80 m thick and pervasively altered, mostly affecting the feldspars. Based on the concentrations of immobile elements (e.g., TiO_2) it correlates to the Holyoke Basalt of the Hartford basin (McHone, 1996 and references therein). It is overlain by the fluvial Turners Falls Formation and the Mount Toby Conglomerate (~2000 m thick) (Olsen et al., 1992).

The sedimentary and lava flow units of the Hartford–Deerfield basins can be correlated to equivalent formations in the more southern Newark and Culpeper basins, from New Jersey to Virginia (Tollo and Gottfried, 1992; Olsen et al., 2003). In particular, the correspondence of the Talcott Basalt with the Orange Mountain and Mountain Zion Church basalts, respectively, of the Holyoke with the Preakness and Sanders basalts, and of the Hampden Basalt with the Hook Mountain Basalt (Newark basin) is constrained by bio- and

cyclo-stratigraphy of the interlayered sediments and by basalt geochemistry, mineralogy and volcanological characteristics.

3. Prior geochronology of CAMP in North America

Few reliable $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ and U/Pb dates are available currently for North America CAMP rocks. Carefully statistically filtered $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ age compilations were proposed by Baksi (2003) and by Nomade et al. (2007). The latter compilation will constitute the basis for our discussion. This compilation excludes K/Ar ages, $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages that were obtained on whole rocks (cf. discussion in Jourdan et al., 2007b) and/or using poorly calibrated standards. As a consequence, only 11 ages ranging from 197.5 ± 1.7 to 200.9 ± 1.5 Ma (Hames et al., 2000; Beutel et al., 2005; Nomade et al., 2007) are available. These ages were obtained only on dykes from U.S.A. and no lava flow dates were considered sufficiently reliable to be included in the CAMP age database (cf. discussion in Nomade et al., 2007). In addition, no $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages satisfying the requirements are available for CAMP in Nova Scotia, although one recent plateau age was obtained on the North Mountain Basalts (Kontak and Archibald, 2003; recalculated at 200.8 ± 2.2 Ma). However, this age was obtained on whole rock and is rejected from the CAMP $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ age compilation for consistency.

Four U/Pb ages are available for North America. Two of them are from the Gettysburg (201.3 ± 1.0 Ma) and Palisades (200.9 ± 1.0 Ma) sills (Dunning and Hodych, 1990) in U.S.A.. The two other ages are from pegmatitic lenses within the lower unit of the North Mountain basalts. Two multi-grains fractions of zircon yielded ages at $201.7 + 1.4 / - 1.1$ Ma (Hodych and Dunning, 1992). Ten single zircon grains yielded a $^{238}U/^{206}Pb$ weighted mean age of 201.3 ± 0.3 Ma (Shoene et al., 2006). Considering the increasing evidence of the slight inaccuracy of the ^{40}K decay constant that shifts $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages by ~1% (cf. further discussion below), the U/Pb and $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages are generally in good agreement.

4. Sample description and analytical procedures

We selected eleven fresh samples from the Fundy basin, Nova Scotia. These samples are low-Ti ($TiO_2 < 1.7$ wt.%) tholeiitic basalts

($n = 9$) and pegmatitic gabbros/diorites occurring as segregation sheets in some lava flows ($n = 2$). The primary mineralogy of the basalts consists of augite–pigeonite, plagioclase, Fe–Ti oxides and ±olivine. The pegmatitic segregations are olivine-free and contain interstitial granophyric patches of micropegmatite and apatite needles. Most of the rocks contain slight alteration such as sericite after plagioclase (mostly in cracks). We separated unaltered, optically transparent, 125–200 μm-size, plagioclase of nine of the samples for $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ dating. These minerals were separated using a Frantz magnetic separator, and then carefully hand-picked under a binocular microscope. Only completely transparent minerals free of both white cracks (potential reservoirs for sericite) and cloudy regions were selected. In contrast, due to pervasive alteration in the Hampden (Hartford) and Deerfield basalts (U.S.A.), mostly affecting the feldspars, three largely altered basaltic samples from these basins were used to obtain strongly/entirely sericitized plagioclase (Annex 1). We selected only white grains, free from visible greenish and brownish inclusions (such as chlorite), in order to estimate the age of hydrothermal alteration events that affected those rocks. After hand-picking, the plagioclase and "sericite" minerals were further leached in diluted HF for 1 min and then thoroughly rinsed with distilled water in an ultrasonic cleaner.

One irradiation of 10 h duration (#346FJ) was performed in the Cd-shielded (to minimize undesirable nuclear interference reactions) CLICIT facility of the TRIGA reactor at Oregon State University, U.S.A. Samples were loaded into the large wells of three 1.9 cm diameter and 0.3 cm depth aluminum discs. These wells were bracketed by seven small wells that included Fish Canyon sanidine used as a neutron fluence monitor. We calculated J-values relative to an age of Fish Canyon sanidine of 28.03 Ma (Jourdan and Renne, 2007) and using the decay constants of Steiger and Jäger (1977). A recent age of 28.21 Ma has been proposed by Kuiper et al. (2008) based on orbital tuning. However, this age cannot be used here to calculate the age of unknowns as it needs to be used in conjunction with a more accurate value of the ^{40}K decay constant. No consensus has been reached yet about the values that need to be adopted and we therefore use the values based on Steiger and Jäger (1977). The issue of the ^{40}K decay constant calibration will be addressed in the discussion section below. The three mean J-values computed from the small pits range from 0.0026752 ± 0.0000040 (0.15%) to 0.0026644 ± 0.000054 (0.20%), determined as the average and standard deviation of J-values of the small wells for each irradiation disc. The correction factors for interfering isotopes correspond to the weighted mean of 10 years of measurements of K–Fe and $CaSi_2$ glasses and CaF_2 fluorite in the OSTR reactor: $(^{39}Ar/^{37}Ar)_{Ca} = (7.60 \pm 0.09) \times 10^{-4}$; $(^{36}Ar/^{37}Ar)_{Ca} = (2.70 \pm 0.02) \times 10^{-4}$; and $(^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar)_K = (7.30 \pm 0.90) \times 10^{-4}$. $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ analyses were performed at the Berkeley Geochronology Center using a CO_2 laser. The gas was purified in a stainless steel extraction line using two C-50 getters and a cryogenic condensation trap. Ar isotopes were measured in static mode using a MAP 215–50 mass spectrometer with a Balzers electron multiplier mostly using 10 cycles of peak-hopping. A more complete description of the mass spectrometer and extraction line is given in Renne et al. (1998). Blank measurements were generally obtained before and after every three sample runs. Mass discrimination, assuming a power-law relationship between D and atomic mass, was monitored several times a day (every 9 steps) and provided mean values of 1.00646 ± 0.00238 and 1.00654 ± 0.00248/Da (atomic mass unit) depending of the batch of

Table 1

Summary table indicating integrated, plateau/mini-plateau and isochron ages for the Hartford, Deerfield and Fundy CAMP plagioclase and sericite separates.

General characteristics							Plateau characteristics					Isochron characteristics				
Sample N°	Lab N°	Coordinates	Unit	Mineral	Integrated age (Ma, ±2σ)		Plateau age (Ma, ±2σ)	Total ^{39}Ar released (%)	Attribute	MSWD	P	Isochron age (Ma, ±2σ)	n	$^{40}Ar/^{36}Ar$ intercept (±2σ)	MSWD	P
Deerfield basin																
HB1	58273-01	42°36'51"N 72°33'06"E	Deerfield (Holyoke equi.)	Sericite	198.3 ± 1.4		**199.3 ± 1.2**	94%	Pl	0.75	0.77	205.9 ± 1.2	14	64 ± 6	1.4	0.16
Hartford basin																
HB50	58274-01	41°39'02"N 72°40'04"E	Hampden (upper unit)	Sericite	197.8 ± 2.4		**198.6 ± 2.0**	97%	Pl	1.07	0.38	200.9 ± 2.8	16	256 ± 17	0.86	0.6
HB86	58275-01	41°37'26"N 72°44'14"E	Hampden (upper unit)	Sericite	199.2 ± 1.4		**199.8 ± 1.1**	73%	Pl	1.16	0.29	200.1 ± 1.0	21	266 ± 15	1.4	0.13
Fundy basin																
NS3	58265-01	45°23'43"N 64°11'50"E	East Ferry Member	Plg	200.6 ± 1.4		**200.1 ± 0.9**	90%	Pl	1.50	0.14	199.9 ± 1.2	11	307 ± 10	1.7	0.09
NS9	58252-01	45°18'52"N 64°25'33"E	Brier Island Member	Plg	200.4 ± 1.8		**201.0 ± 1.4**	92%	Pl	1.25	0.26	199.7 ± 2.2	12	330 ± 20	1.3	0.21
NS12	58263-01	45°14'44"N 64°27'23"E	Margaretsville Member (sill?)	Plg	190.1 ± 1.2		190.6 ± 1.0	65%	MPl	1.60	0.16	192.8 ± 1.6	8	282 ± 13	1.9	0.08
NS13	58262-01	45°13'52"N 64°30'50"E	Brier Island Member	Plg	201.3 ± 3.4		**200.5 ± 1.0**	82%	Pl	0.99	0.44	200.6 ± 1.0	12	302 ± 6	1.2	0.28
NS15	58248-01	45°06'14"N 64°56'57"E	Brier Island Member	Plg	197.3 ± 1.8		**198.9 ± 0.7**	97%	Pl	0.36	0.96	199.9 ± 1.4	13	235 ± 7	1.3	0.2
NS19 (coarse)	58287-01	44°39'45"N	East Ferry Member	Plg	195.3 ± 1.4		**199.0 ± 1.0**	85%	Pl	0.93	0.49	198.8 ± 1.0	10	297 ± 5	1.4	0.2
NS19 (med.)	58288-01	65°45'58"E	(pegmatite lense)	Plg	196.1 ± 1.4		**199.4 ± 1.1**	74%	Pl	0.07	1	–	–	–	–	–
NS21	58286-01	44°39'55"N 65°49'57"E	Brier Island Member	Plg	204.4 ± 2.4		201.5 ± 1.1	77%	Pl	0.70	0.62	**199.8 ± 1.4**	11	314 ± 4	1.9	0.05
NS23 (coarse)	58290-01	44°39'09"N	East Ferry	Plg	186.5 ± 1.2		197.8 ± 1.0	57%	MPl	0.14	0.98	–	–	–	–	–
NS23 (med.)	58289-01	65°47'50"E	Member (pegmatite lense)	Plg	199.7 ± 1.4		**199.7 ± 1.0**	100%	Pl	0.89	0.56	199.6 ± 1.0	13	310 ± 40	0.95	0.49

Pl = plateau and MPl = mini plateau. Data in bold are ages that should be added to the filtered compilation by Nomade et al. (2007). MSWD for plateau and mini-plateau and isochron, probability (P) for plateau and mini-plateau, percentage of ^{39}Ar degassed used in the plateau calculation, number of analyses included in the isochron, and $^{40}Ar/^{36}Ar$ intercept are indicated. Analytical uncertainties on the ages are quoted at 2 sigma (2σ) confidence levels and at 1σ for the $^{40}Ar/^{36}Ar$ intercept.
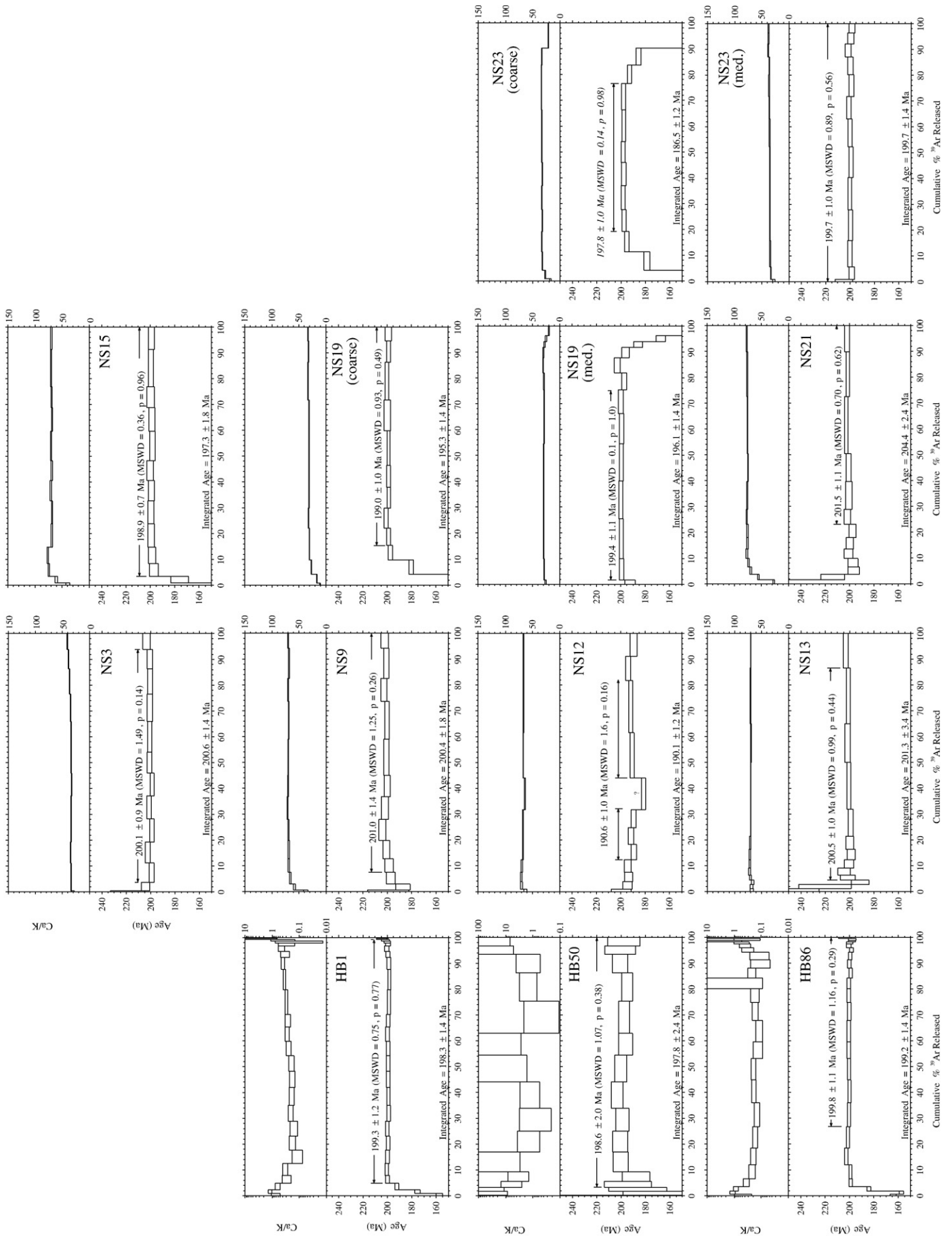
samples analyzed. Ar isotopic data corrected for blank, mass discrimination and radioactive decay are given in Annex 2. Individual errors in Annex 2 are given at the 1σ level. Our criteria for the determination of plateau are as follows: plateaus must include at least 70% of ^{39}Ar. The plateau should be distributed over a minimum of three consecutive steps agreeing at 95% confidence level and satisfying a probability of fit of at least 0.05. Plateau ages (Table 1 and Fig. 4) are given at the 2σ level and are calculated using the mean of all the plateau steps, each weighted by the inverse variance of their individual analytical error. Mini-plateaus are defined similarly except that they include between 50% and 70% of ^{39}Ar. Integrated ages (2σ) are calculated using the total gas released for each Ar isotope. Inverse isochrons include the maximum number of consecutive steps with a probability fit of ≥ 0.05. The uncertainties on the $^{40}Ar*/^{39}Ar$ ratios of the monitors are included in the calculation of the integrated and plateau age uncertainties, but not the errors on the age of the monitor and on the decay constant (internal errors only, see discussion in Min et al., 2000). Detailed $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ results are shown in Annex 2 and summarized in Table 1.

Mineral major element compositions of sericitized plagioclase from sample HB1 were analyzed at the IGG-CNR Padova, Italy on a Cameca SX50 electron microprobe (EMP) using ZAF on-line data reduction and matrix correction procedures, at constant accelerating voltage and beam current 15 kV and 15 nA, respectively. Repeated analyses of standards indicate relative analytical uncertainties of about 1% for major and 5% for minor elements. Data are available in Annex 3. An image of the sericitized plagioclase is available in Annex 1.

5. Results

Eleven samples yielded 10 plateau, 2 mini-plateau and 1 isochron $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages on lava flows from the northeastern U.S.A. (3 analyses) and Nova Scotia (10 analyses on 8 rocks) (Table 1 and Fig. 4). Plateau and mini-plateau ages mostly range from 198.6 ± 1.1 to 201.0 ± 1.4 Ma (2σ), with 1 substantially younger age at 190.6 ± 1.0 Ma.

The northeastern U.S.A. samples (Fig. 1 and 2) yielded three plateau ages on (voluntarily selected) ultra-sericitized plagioclase grains (Annex 1 and 3), as fresh plagioclase grains were too scarce in each sample. We obtained a plateau age at 199.3 ± 1.2 Ma (MSWD $= 0.75$; $P = 0.77$) on the basaltic lava flow unit from the Deerfield basin (HB1). Two other ages at 198.6 ± 2.0 and 199.8 ± 1.1 Ma (MSWD $= 1.07$ and 1.16 and $P = 0.38$ and 0.29, respectively) were obtained for samples from lava flows from the Hampden Basalt (HB50 and HB86; Fig. 4 and Table 1) which represents the youngest CAMP flow of the Hartford basin. Due to their K-rich composition, sericitized plagioclase $[KAl_2(OH)_2(AlSi_3O_{10})]$ show a Ca/K ratio (~0.1–1; Fig. 4) much lower than usually observed for fresh plagioclase from a basaltic LIP (e.g. plagioclases from this study show Ca/K ratios varying from ~30 to ~80).

In the Fundy basin, Nova Scotia, we obtained five plateau ages on the basaltic sequence, sampled at five distinct localities and belonging to the East Ferry (NS3) and Brier Island members (NS9, NS13, NS15, NS21; Figs. 3 and 4; Table 1). These ages range from 201.5 ± 1.1 to 198.9 ± 0.7 Ma (MSWD and P values range from 1.49 to 0.36 and 0.96 to 0.14, respectively). The oldest age from this range (sample NS21) is likely to be affected by cryptic excess ^{40}Ar, as we will discuss later. One sample (NS12) from near the middle of the basaltic sequence (Margaretsville Member) yielded a somewhat perturbed age spectrum with a younger apparent age (Fig. 4). If one outlying step in the middle of the age spectrum is excluded, then a mini-plateau age at 190.6 ± 1.0 Ma (MSWD $= 1.6$, $P = 0.16$) is obtained for this sample. The associated Ca/K spectrum is flat, therefore suggesting that this plagioclase separate is free of alteration. We believe that this age may be geologically significant, which would imply that NS12 represents a later magmatic

event, such as a sill (see discussion below). Three plateau ages were obtained on two pegmatitic segregation sheets (NS19 and NS23) sampled near the upper part of the East Ferry Member (Fig. 3). On each rock, we analyzed two plagioclase fractions at 150–210 μm and 210–315 μm. Three separates yielded indistinguishable ages ranging from 199.0 ± 1.0 to 199.7 ± 1.0 Ma (MSWD and P values range from 0.93 to 0.10 and 1.00 to 0.49, respectively). The coarser plagioclase fraction of NS23 shows a perturbed bell-shaped spectrum indicating strong ^{40}Ar loss (Fig. 4). It nevertheless gives a mini-plateau age at 197.8 ± 1.0 Ma (MSWD $= 0.14$; $P = 0.98$).

We plotted all the results in an inverse isochron diagram for each sample ($^{36}Ar/^{40}Ar$ vs. $^{39}Ar/^{40}Ar$ not shown; e.g. Heizler and Harrison, 1988). The inverse isochrons yielded apparent ages ranging between 205.9 ± 1.2 and 198.8 ± 1.0 (with the younger age at 192.8 ± 1.6 Ma) concordant with the plateau ages at 2σ (Table 1). Most of the data cluster near the $^{39}Ar/^{40}Ar$ axis and do not yield meaningful initial $^{40}Ar/^{36}Ar$ values (64 ± 6 to 330 ± 20; 1σ). In addition, eight analyses (e.g. NS9, NS19) show some evidence of ^{40}Ar loss ($\pm ^{37}Ar$ recoil and $\pm$ recrystallization?) for the low temperature steps with their age spectra following a fickian diffusion profile. Therefore, most of the results do not fulfill the strict definition of an isochron (i.e. a mixing line between trapped and radiogenic ^{40}Ar) which prevents us from using this technique for these samples. Nevertheless, the plateau and "pseudo-isochron" ages are in excellent agreement (Table 1).

One exception is given by sample NS21 and deserves further explanation. This sample shows an integrated age (i.e. the total fusion age; 204.4 ± 2.4 Ma) that is noticeably greater than the plateau age (201.5 ± 1.1 Ma), the latter being older than the isochron age (199.8 ± 1.4 Ma) (Table 1 and Annex 4). Furthermore, this age is older than the otherwise concordant plateau ages obtained for other samples from the upper basalt unit in Nova Scotia (Brier Island member basalt). These observations strongly suggest that NS21 is affected by excess $^{40}Ar*$. This is further confirmed by the high initial $^{40}Ar/^{36}Ar$ value (314 ± 4) obtained by the inverse isochron calculation. Isochrons have proven a robust technique for derivation of meaningful ages when excess Ar is present in the sample and when the total ^{40}Ar represents a homogeneous mixing between the excess $^{40}Ar*$ and the radiogenic $^{40}Ar*$ produced after the crystallization of the samples (Merrihue and Turner, 1966; Roddick, 1978; Heizler and Harrison, 1988; Sharp and Renne, 2005). The relatively significant spread of NS21 data along the isochron line (Annex 4) allows us to use this technique to calculate a more accurate age for this sample at 199.8 ± 1.4 Ma (MSWD $= 1.9$; $P = 0.05$).

6. Discussion

6.1. Age and duration of CAMP in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia CAMP basalts yielded four plateau ages and one isochron age ranging from 201.0 ± 1.4 to 198.9 ± 0.7 Ma. Based on their stratigraphic level, the dates belong to the East Ferry (NS3: 200.1 ± 0.9 Ma) and Brier Island members (NS9, NS13, NS15 and NS21: 198.9 ± 0.7 to 201.0 ± 1.4 Ma; Fig. 3). These ages are statistically quasi-indistinguishable and show no apparent sign of alteration as based on their flat Ca/K spectra.

Deriving a precise duration of the entire sequence using these five ages is difficult because of the relatively large uncertainty on each age and the still-low number of analyses. At best, the raw standard deviation (2σ) of the five ages and the mid-height width of the probability peak (not shown) suggest a duration shorter than 1.6 Ma.

Field observations can help us to further constrain the emplacement duration of the lava pile. It is not clear if the Brier Island Member

Fig. 4. $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ apparent age and related Ca/K ratio spectra of the plagioclase separates versus the cumulative percentage of ^{39}Ar released. Errors on plateau (>70% ^{39}Ar released) and mini-plateau ages (50–70%) are quoted at 2σ and do not include systematic errors (i.e. uncertainties on the age of the monitor and on the decay constant). MSWD and probability (P) are indicated. Integrated ages are reported (2σ).

consists of a single eruptive event or two lava flows (Kontak, 2002, 2008). The minimum thickness of the member is about 150 m, but we note that the upper contact is not observed. Nevertheless, if we consider the four dates obtained on the Brier Island Member as indicating a single age, then we calculate a weighted mean age, with an error expanded by student's t times the square root of the MSWD to account for the scatter of the data, at 199.7 ± 1.5 Ma. The relatively large uncertainty is due to the age scatter which can be attributed to cryptic excess $^{40}Ar*$ and/or undetected alteration or, admitting that the upper unit includes two lava-flows, the time span between the different eruptive events within the upper units. The total age of the Brier Island Member is then compared with the single older age obtained on the East Ferry Member at 200.1 ± 0.9 Ma. These two ages are in perfect agreement, although their precision is still too low to derive an absolute duration. Following Jourdan et al. (2007b), we combine analytical treatment and stratigraphic constraints and derive an absolute duration on the North Mountain Basalt lava pile of 0.4 ± 1.7 Ma (2σ).

To conclude, these ages suggest a duration much shorter than 1.6 Ma and most likely on the order of (or shorter than) ~1 Ma, although a more precise estimate is hard to predict with the present dataset. We note however, that more data would be required to allow performing a reliable statistical treatment in order to more precisely estimate the North Mountain emplacement duration by radioisotopic techniques (e.g. see for example Hofmann et al., 1997; Jourdan et al., 2007b).

Two pegmatitic segregations from the East Ferry Member yielded three indistinguishable plateau ages ranging between 199.0 ± 1.0 and 199.7 ± 1.0 Ma (Table 1 and Fig. 4) and a total weighted mean age of 199.4 ± 0.8 Ma. Their ages are similar within error to the ages of the lava flows themselves and confirm the ages obtained for the flow units.

The duration of CAMP volcanism in eastern North America has been estimated using cyclostratigraphy by Olsen et al. (1996, 2003) and Whiteside et al. (2007). According to these authors, the sedimentary layers below, between and above the CAMP lavas (Fig. 3) define a cyclicity controlled by Milankovitch climate cycles. Assuming that the preserved sedimentary record is complete and continuous, those cycles can be used to estimate an approximate duration of ~610 ka for the entire lava sequence of the Newark basin (Olsen et al., 2003; Whiteside et al.; 2007). By cyclostratigraphic and magnetostratigraphic correlations, they extended this duration to all of the lava sequences located in the multiple North American (including Fundy) and North African rift basins. As discussed by Marzoli et al. (2008) such a time span duration would be correct provided that the sedimentary record is complete. This is questionable to some extent since all of the strata were deposited in continental environments; for instance, it has been suggested that the upper Rhaetian (below the first CAMP basalt) is missing in the Newark basin sequence (Kozur and Weems, 2005; Gallet et al., 2007). Therefore, we interpret the ~610 ka estimate as an indicator of the *minimum* total duration of the Newark and possibly Hartford basin lava piles. However, cyclostratigraphy cannot be applied to the Fundy basin CAMP lava flows because there are no intercalated sedimentary strata. In any case, direct isotopic and analogous cyclostratigraphic ages constrain the duration of the CAMP lava flows in the Fundy basin to between 0.6 and ≪1.6 Ma (≤1 Ma?).

6.2. Age of the Hartford lava and significance of the "sericite" ages

In tholeiitic CFB sequences, plagioclase is the mineral of choice for $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ dating, but unfortunately it can be partially altered to sericite during subsequent hydrothermal activity. Due to the strong compositional contrast between Ca-rich and K-poor plagioclase of CAMP basalts ($K_2O<0.2$ wt.%; Jourdan et al., 2003) and sericite ($K_2O~10$ wt.%), even small amounts of alteration can substantially bias the measured age (Verati and Féraud, 2003; Fuentes et al., 2005). Here, due to the scarcity of fresh plagioclase in all Hampden and Deerfield basalt samples, we chose to select the most altered plagioclase (white "plagioclase" grains almost entirely converted into sericite) in order to date the hydrothermal event(s) in the Hartford and Deerfield basins. We obtained two indistinguishable ages on the Hampden Basalt (upper unit, Fig. 3) at 198.6 ± 2.0 Ma (HB50) and 199.8 ± 1.1 Ma (HB86). A third age at 199.3 ± 1.2 Ma (HB1) is given by the sericite from the Deerfield Basalt (equivalent to the Holyoke Basalt of the Hartford basin; Fig. 3). Ca/K ratios from samples HB86 and HB1 vary between 0.1 and 1, showing almost complete sericitization of the plagioclase grains (Fig. 4). Sample HB50 shows a somewhat higher Ca/K (between 1 and 10, generally), suggesting that the sericitization process was less developed on these plagioclase grains or possibly, but less likely, that the starting Ca/K composition of the plagioclase was substantially higher than for HB86 and HB1. Verati and Féraud (2003) showed that for a typical CFB plagioclase composition (Ca/K ≈ 50), the measured age would approach the age of the hydrothermal event when more than 20% of sericite is present in the separates and would be indistinguishable above 50% of sericitization. A large amount of sericite in the system can produce "alteration" plateau ages as almost all the K comes from the sericite and is no longer influenced by the K content of the pristine plagioclase (e.g. samples B8 and B11 in Jourdan et al., 2003). In other words, tilda-shaped age variation induced by the plagioclase-sericite phase mixture is no longer observed. Additionally, the high K content and alteration origin of the sericite sample prevent any further alteration, rending the K/Ar system quasi-closed to further perturbation.

In the case of the Hartford samples, the sericitization is likely to be substantially greater than 50% as suggested by our petrographic observations (Annex 1), microprobe data (Annex 3) and the concordant age spectra. Far from showing a much younger age, however, the ages obtained on the Hartford and Deerfield lava flows are indistinguishable from the peak activity of CAMP derived from fresh plagioclase $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ data on lava flows (this study, Marzoli et al., 1999, 2004; Knight et al. 2004; Nomade et al., 2007; Verati et al. 2007). Accordingly, we interpret these sericite dates as reflecting the hydrothermal activity developed during the cooling of the host flows. This is further justified as the three analyzed samples belong to the topmost Hampden Basalt of the Hartford basin and to the only lava flow of the Deerfield basin, respectively (Fig. 3), excluding subsequent magmatic activity as being responsible for the hydrothermal system. Therefore, and in consideration of the large uncertainties of these dates, which are larger or equal to the total duration of the lava flow sequence, we interpret these ages as representing the emplacement age of the Deerfield and Hampden basalts and their respective sub-synchronous hydrothermal systems.

These three data represent the first reliable ages of CAMP lava flows from the Hartford and Deerfield CAMP and are quasi-indistinguishable from the age of Fundy lava flows, although they are potentially slightly younger (cf. discussion below). HB50 and HB86 yield a weighted mean age at 199.5 ± 1.1 Ma (MSWD = 1.1; P = 0.3) for the uppermost formation of the lava pile. This age is statistically indistinguishable from the age at 199.3 ± 1.2 Ma (HB1) obtained on the Deerfield Basalt, correlated with the Holyoke Basalt, i.e. the middle unit of the Hartford basin (Fig. 3). Calculation of the duration between the top and middle of the lava pile gives a value of 0.2 ± 1.6 Ma (cf. discussion above and Jourdan et al., 2007b) and a 2σ standard deviation of 1.2 Ma, constraining the duration to the order of 1.2 Ma or less. As stated for the Nova Scotia lava pile, this number is likely to be a maximum value and the real duration should be less than 1 Ma. Altogether this suggests that the emplacement time of ~70% of the CAMP lava sequence in the Hartford–Deerfield basins is likely to be short, i.e. between 0.3 Ma (Whiteside et al., 2007) and 1.2 Ma (this study). This is similar to our data on the Nova Scotia lava pile, and by

extension suggests that the entire sequence emplacement in the Hartford–Deerfield basins is also on the order of (or less than) 1 Ma. However, more than three age data would be required to fully verify this hypothesis.

These data are extremely close to the results obtained on nine CAMP dykes from eastern U.S.A. (Hames et al., 2000; Beutel et al., 2005; Nomade et al., 2007; excluding two ages <195 Ma) that yield a weighted mean age of 198.7 ± 0.3 Ma at 95% confidence level. This mean is noticeably associated with an MSWD of 1.02 and *P* of 0.42, indicating a very low scatter of the data. Altogether, the lava flows and sills of eastern U.S.A. analyzed so far yield a weighted mean of 198.9 ± 0.3 Ma (MSWD = 1.12; *P* = 0.34) arguing for a relatively short duration of the CAMP magmatic activity in this region.

6.3. Timing of CAMP versus T–J boundary: radioisotopic dating perspective

The Triassic–Jurassic boundary is one of the five largest mass extinctions of the Phanerozoic. Various scenarios have been proposed to explain such a biotic crisis and ultimate causes are still intensively debated. Extensive description of the TJB and possible causes of the crisis are described by Tanner et al. (2004). Among them, the emission of large volumes of volatiles during eruption of the CAMP basalts has been suggested as a direct or indirect cause of major climate change and mass extinction (Marzoli et al., 1999; Courtillot and Renne, 2003; Marzoli et al., 2004; Tanner et al., 2004, 2007, 2008).

Marzoli et al. (2004, 2008) have proposed that the TJB in Morocco postdates the oldest CAMP lava-flows, therefore suggesting causal relationship between CAMP and the TJB extinction. Detailed biostratigraphic studies by Cirilli et al. (2007) in the Hartford basin yielded similar conclusions, with the TJB revised to a location above the Talcott and Holyoke basalts, based on new palynological data from the inter-eruptive sediments (Shuttle Meadow and East Berlin formations). These results are consistent with the presence of Triassic fossils above the lowermost CAMP flows of the Culpeper basin, Virginia (Kozur and Weems, 2005; Lucas and Tanner, 2007).

In the Fundy basin, the TJB has been placed at the highest observed occurrence of some Triassic palynomorphs, about 30–40 cm below the North Mountain basalt at Partridge Island (North Shore) (Fowell and Traverse, 1995; Whiteside et al., 2007).

Isotopic constraints on the age of the TJB includes a U/Pb single zircon age of 199.6 ± 0.3 Ma obtained on the Sandilands Formation in the Queen Charlotte Islands in western Canada (Pàlfy et al., 2000). Considering the ~−0.8–1% bias between $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ and U/Pb chronometers (Mundil et al., 2006), this date is significantly younger than the ages reported throughout CAMP (e.g. Nomade et al., 2007; this study) but careful examination of the data suggests that this age might have suffered from Pb loss and thus might be a minimum age (Mundil and Pàlfy, 2005). A more recent estimate of the TJB age is given by an ID-TIMS dating of single chemical-abraded zircon from volcanic ash layers within the Pucara Group, Aramachay Formation in the Utcubamba Valley, northern Peru (Schaltegger et al., 2008). The latter authors obtained an age of 201.6 ± 0.3 Ma, substantially older than the age obtained by Pàlfy et al. (2000). A recent U/Pb age using a similar approach was obtained by Friedman et al. (2008) at 201.7 ± 0.6 Ma on the TJB in Kunga Island (Queen Charlotte Islands, Canada), confirming the result obtained by Shaltegger et al. (2008). These ages can be compared with the U/Pb age from a pegmatite lens of the East Ferry Member of the North Mountain Basalt of Nova Scotia (201.3 ± 0.3 Ma; Schoene et al., 2006), and ~0.8% bias-corrected (Mundil et al., 2006) $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages from the East Ferry Member (201.7 ± 1.7 Ma; this study) and CAMP in general (Fig. 5).

6.3.1. U/Pb age vs. U/Pb ages

Comparison between the two U/Pb dates does not need to include error on the decay constant and thus these ages become 201.58 ±
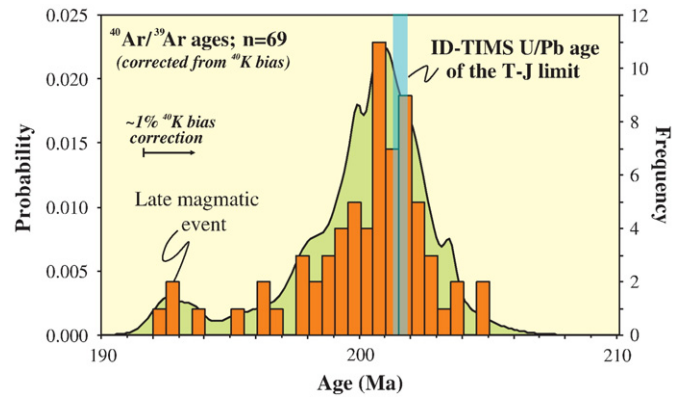

Fig. 5. Age probability density distribution diagram (PDD) and frequency histogram (error bars not included) of 69 $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages of CAMP obtained on plagioclase separates. Age data are from this study and those reported in the compilation by Nomade et al. (2007; and references therein). The PDD curve suggests a total duration of 8–10 Ma for the entire magmatic activity, expressed notably by 2 distinct peaks of activity (see text for interpretation). Both peaks suggest a duration of ~3 Ma.

0.17 Ma (TJB in Peru; Schaltegger et al., 2008) and 201.27 ± 0.06 Ma (CAMP pegmatite; Schoene et al., 2006). These two ages are statistically distinguishable, with the age obtained for the TJB being 80 to 540 ka older. Schaltegger et al. (2008) discussed the difference between these two ages and proposed that (1) the true age of the TJB might be 75 ka younger on the basis of the stratigraphic constraints (the TJB, as defined by the first appearance of ammonites of the genus *Psiloceras*, occurs 5 m above the tuff), (2) there is interlaboratory bias, and (3) the pegmatite lens are not the earliest event in the CAMP eruptive sequence, but instead formed late in the evolution of the East Ferry Member. We add that the zircon grains obtained from the Aramachay tuff in Peru might include a residence time component of several thousand years (i.e. in this case, the eruption age would be younger than the zircon age). Such residence time effects are increasingly reported for volcanic tuffs and plutons (e.g. Min et al., 2000; Bachmann et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2008) and can matter when the age precision is within a few thousand years. In contrast, the formation mode of the North Mountain pegmatite lenses excludes significant residence time, but on the other hand, may include a cooling age component (of several tens to hundred ka?; in this case the lava flow emplacement age would be older). We reiterate the conclusion of Schaltegger et al. (2008) that these two ages are not yet sufficiently conclusive for definitively assessing the relationship between CAMP and the TJB.

6.3.2. U/Pb age vs. $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages

The advantage of the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ age over the U/Pb chronometer is that there is no residence time effect for K-bearing minerals from volcanic rocks due to their relatively low Ar closure temperatures, and the fact that the cooling time of the basaltic lava flow is likely to be instantaneous, in contrast to the pegmatite lenses. However, these gains are largely balanced by the relatively poor precision of the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ method compared to the U/Pb technique, especially when the latter is measured by ID-TIMS. The age obtained on the lowermost formation of the CAMP in Nova Scotia gives a bias-corrected $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ age of 201.7 ± 1.7 Ma which is clearly not sufficiently precise to provide unequivocal information when compared with the U/Pb age of the TJB. To date, however, the CAMP database includes 69 high-standard statistically filtered mineral separates ages (e.g. Nomade et al., 2007 and this study). When plotted together in a decay-constant-bias-corrected PDD plot, these ages show a Gaussian curve centered at ~201 Ma (Fig. 5). The U/Pb age obtained on the TJB plots at the onset of the major eruptive activity and more importantly, several hundred ka (even Ma) after the onset of the CAMP activity (represented by a

statistically significant number of ages; $n = 15$). Altogether these dates confirm biostratigraphic observations in Morocco (Marzoli et al., 2004), and the Hartford (Cirilli et al., 2007), Culpeper and Newark (Kozur and Weems, 2005) basins showing that part of CAMP activity predated the TJB. Although the exact volume of this pre-TJB magmatism is still uncertain, the huge total volume of CAMP makes this pre-peak magmatism volumetrically significant. It may have had the potential to initiate substantial climate change, and ultimately force a major extinction event.

6.4. A possible north to south migration of the magmatism: implications for origin of CAMP

In order to test a possible migration of the magmatic centers during CAMP generation, as previously proposed by Baksi (2003) and Nomade et al. (2007), we calculated the weighted mean (with errors expanded by student's t times the square root of the MSWD) of the statistically filtered $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ ages compiled by Nomade et al. (2007) and the new results from North America obtained in this study. For this exercise, we consider that the magmatic activity of a given area was brief enough (cf. discussion above on North Mountain Basalt and Hartford–Deerfield lava piles) to be considered as a single date. It should be kept in mind that each of these values represents a mean between the earliest and latest activity of a given area. We regrouped the ages by region (Fig. 1) and we excluded all ages corresponding to late-stage process (i.e. younger than ~195 Ma).

We obtained weighted mean ages at the 95% confidence level of 199.6 ± 0.6 Ma for Nova Scotia ($n = 7$; MSWD = 2.0; $P = 0.05$), 198.9 ± 0.3 Ma for eastern U.S.A. ($n = 12$; MSWD = 1.1; $P = 0.34$), 198.9 ± 0.5 Ma for Morocco (excluding the slightly younger recurrent lava flow; $n = 16$; MSWD = 0.93; $P = 0.53$), 198.2 ± 1.3 Ma for Mali ($n = 10$; MSWD = 7.4; $P = 0.00$) and 198.0 ± 0.3 Ma for Brazil ($n = 7$; MSWD = 0.71; $P = 0.64$) (Fig. 6). Three ages from Guinea yield a weighted mean age of 201 ± 6 Ma with a MSWD of 55, but the low precision and insufficient number of data render this result irrelevant for this exercise. A recent U/Pb dating on a guinean sill yielded an age of 200.2 ± 0.8 Ma (Brinckman and Meinhold, 2007), which, provided adequate calibration with the $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$ chronometer, indicates an $^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar$-equivalent age of ~198 Ma. A MSWD close to 1 and relatively high probability for each region indicates a low dispersion of the data and argues for a relatively brief emplacement time for each area, i.e. likely less than 1 Ma for the main volume.

Two or perhaps three groups of ages arise from this compilation: Nova Scotian basalts would be older (by $\sim 0.7 \pm 0.8$ Ma) than or synchronous with eastern U.S.A. (and Morocco). A second group (but in fact, possibly the same group), only slightly younger, is given by the CAMP from Morocco and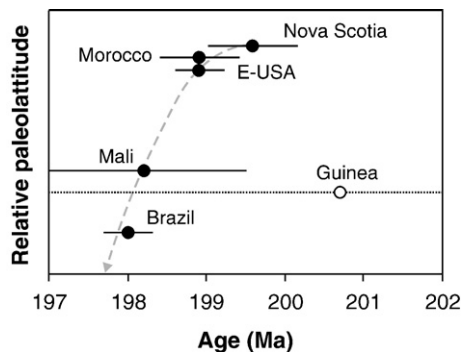 eastern U.S.A. which are a few hundred thousand years younger than Nova Scotia. Indistinguishable mean ages between Morocco and eastern U.S.A. also confirm previous hypotheses based on the geochemistry and magnetostratigraphy (Knight et al., 2004; Marzoli et al., 2004) that proposed that the Moroccan and eastern U.S.A. lava piles were emitted almost synchronously, although these authors showed that the oldest part of the series (the lower unit of Morocco) is missing in U.S.A..

The CAMP from South America (and possibly Guinea) shows a mean age that is $\sim 1.6 \pm 0.8$ Ma and $\sim 0.9 \pm 0.4$ Ma younger than CAMP in Nova Scotia and eastern U.S.A., respectively. If calibration between the apparent ages is correct, as implied by the compilation of Nomade et al. (2007), then the age difference between the northern and southern CAMP magmatism is statistically significant. South America was previously proposed as the youngest region belonging to the main peak activity of CAMP (Baksi, 2003; Nomade et al., 2007). The relatively low precision on the weighted mean age of CAMP from Mali does not allow distinguishing it from the group Morocco-eastern U.S.A. or Brazil and additional data are urgently required in this region.

The two clearly distinct groups of ages suggest an apparent migration of the magmatism between the northern (Nova Scotia, eastern U.S.A., Morocco) and southern (Brazil) CAMP areas (Fig. 6), or at least that temporally distinct magmatic activities occurred throughout the province. These dates support an overall duration of the main magmatic activity of ~2 to 3 Ma (Fig 5), although the peak magmatism of any given region certainly occurred during a much more restricted period (cf. discussion above). Such a migration would challenge any model invoking a mantle plume as the source of CAMP. The plume model postulates that the magma should propagate from the central region of the province, the locus of the plume center, toward its margins (e.g. Morgan, 1981; White and McKenzie, 1989; Hill, 1991; Wilson, 1997). Such a plume location had been proposed previously as centered on the Blake Plateau, based on an inferred radiating dyke pattern (May, 1971; Hill, 1991; Ernst et al., 1995; Wilson, 1997; Oyarzun et al., 1997; Ernst and Buchan, 2002). However, further studies have demonstrated that these dykes in part follow inherited Proterozoic structures (Villeneuve et al., 1993; see discussion about CAMP in Jourdan et al., 2006) and/or can be Proterozoic in age whether they follow the radial pattern of May (1971) or not (Hebeda et al., 1973; Choudhuri et al., 1991; Deckart et al., 1997; Nomade et al., 2002). An absence of outward migration of the magmatism is clearly in contradiction with the mantle plume hypothesis as a magma source of CAMP. These results are in accordance with tectonic observations (Tommasi and Vauchez, 2001; De Min et al., 2003; McHone et al., 2005), elemental and isotopic geochemistry (e.g. Bertrand et al., 1982; Puffer, 2001, 2003; Jourdan et al., 2003; Deckart et al., 2005; Verati et al., 2005) and detailed analysis of regional dyke orientations and distributions (Ragland et al., 1983; McHone, 2000; Verati et al., 2005; McHone et al., 2005; Beutel et al., 2005) that, taken together, contradict the mantle plume hypothesis. Instead, these data support alternative hypotheses, such as shallow mantle melting (Anderson, 1994; Puffer, 2001; Jourdan et al., 2003; Deckart et al., 2005; Verati et al., 2005) that potentially was triggered by supercontinent "global warming" (Coltice et al., 2007; Coltice et al., in press).

6.5. A younger event?

Five statistically robust ages that range from 190 to 194 Ma were previously reported in Guinea (Deckart et al., 1997), Brazil (Baksi and Archibald, 1997; Marzoli et al., 1999; including a whole-rock date) and U.S.A. (Nomade et al., 2007). Two additional ages ~190 Ma were obtained in Mali (Verati et al., 2005), but were not selected by Nomade et al. (2007) for statistical reasons. Although we agree with the judicious selection of Nomade et al. (2007), the age and Ca/K spectra of these samples do not show any evidence of alteration, and

Fig. 6. Weighted mean of CAMP ages by location vs. relative paleolatitude (cf. Fig. 1). Errors are reported at 2σ and are expended by student's t times MSWD to account for the scatter of the data. The weighted means included only ages from the first peak of activity (i.e. >195 Ma). Dashed curve: second order polynomial regression to illustrate the apparent age progression (roughly) from North to South that suggests a migration of the magmatic activity.

therefore could be used to support the existence of a possibly significant magmatic event at this time. In this study, we obtained an additional young age on plagioclase at ~191 Ma. This datum does not show any sign of alteration, although we cannot explain why one step (12% ^{39}Ar) drops by ~10 Ma in the middle of the age spectrum (Fig. 5). While this date should not be viewed as a "robust" plateau age to be included in the CAMP age database, it deserves further discussion, in part because of its possible geodynamic implications. This date was obtained on a sample (NS12) from the Margaretsville Member of the North Mountain Basalt in the Fundy basin (Figs. 2 and 3). As stressed above, the Brier Island and East Ferry members yielded indistinguishable, much greater ages of ~200 Ma. Therefore, we see two possible explanations here: (1) this date is an artifact due to cryptic complications of the K–Ar system or (2) we sampled a sill intruded into the middle unit of the North Mountain Basalt.

Hypothesis (1) cannot be firmly ruled out, even though there is neither any sign of alteration visible on the Ca/K ratio (~65; Fig. 4), nor is there an ^{40}Ar* loss diffusion profile observed on the age spectrum that could explain an anomalously younger age. Alternatively, the observed spectrum may have resulted from a resetting of the K–Ar system by a widespread thermal event, around 190 Ma. Such an event is documented by several lines of evidence, in particular the formation of well-developed zeolites in the middle basalt unit (Kontak and Archibald, 2003). The NS12 sample has a chemical composition identical to some of the lava flows from the upper unit dated at ~200 Ma (e.g. NS13), which would argue for sub-synchronous emplacement of these rocks. Hypothesis (2) is not easy to test as sills and lava flows are difficult to discriminate in the field; however, the site where we collected the massive basalt with fresh plagioclase laths strongly contrasts with the vesicular and altered middle flow unit observed everywhere else in the North Mountain Basalt, and may be an indication that we sampled a sill.

If we admit the validity of ~191 Ma as a crystallization age (hypothesis 2), it would represent the youngest data obtained so far in North America, providing additional evidence for late scattered activity of CAMP. This tailing activity represents a significant second-order peak in the general CAMP age probability plot (Fig. 5), occurring 7–8 Ma after the peak of the dominant magmatic activity. Despite their younger age, all the rocks investigated so far that belong to this late magmatic event (Fig. 5) display a low-Ti enriched tholeiitic composition, similar to the "common" low-Ti composition that predominates throughout most of the CAMP. They do not exhibit the MORB affinity which characterizes the late stages of other CFB provinces, such as Karoo (Rooi Rand dykes: Duncan et al., 1990; Jourdan et al., 2007a) and Paranà-Etendeka (Horingbaii dyke swarms: Renne et al., 1996). Therefore a sporadic emplacement of enriched lithosphere-derived magmas persisted locally (Nova Scotia, Mali, Guinea, Brazil) until the formation of the first oceanic crust, which is inferred to be as old as late Sinemurian (Sahabi et al. 2004), i.e. 190–192 Ma, according to the geological timescale of Gradstein et al. (2004). If correct, the very onset of oceanization would be synchronous with the ~190–194 Ma activity. The lithospheric thinning associated with the oceanization process may be responsible for this second burst of magmatism (mostly intrusive) by means of significant decompression melting. Interestingly, subordinate amounts of CAMP magmas displaying some MORB affinity do occur (e.g. the Hampden basalt in Hartford basin and the recurrent basalt in Morocco) but they do not belong to this late magmatic event.

6.6. Additional evidence of a bias in the ^{40}K decay constant

The K/Ar dating technique and its derivative, the ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar method, are exceedingly versatile as they can measure ages spanning the entire histories of the Earth and solar system, from just a few thousand years to 4.5 Ga. However, recent studies reveal that

systematic errors associated with the ^{40}K decay constant (Steiger and Jäger, 1977) are now singularly large (e.g. Begemann et al., 2001). More importantly, comparisons between ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar and U/Pb ages strongly suggest that the value of the ^{40}K decay constant is slightly inaccurate (e.g. Renne, 2000; Min et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2002; Chambers et al., 2005; Villa and Renne, 2005; Krumrei et al., 2006), the electron capture decay branch, in particular. This results in U/Pb ages that are ~0.8–1% older than ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar ages for Phanerozoic rocks (Mundil et al., 2006).

The three ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar results we obtained here on the North Mountain pegmatite lenses present an opportunity for comparison with the recent high-precision single grain zircon U/Pb dates obtained by Schoene et al. (2006) on the same unit (and same sampling site). Schoene et al. (2006) analyzed ten air abraded zircon grains that yielded a ^{238}U/^{206}Pb weighted mean age of 201.27 ± 0.06 and ± 0.27 Ma, excluding and including uncertainty of the ^{238}U decay constant, respectively.

Both ages were obtained using well-calibrated standards (Schoene et al., 2006; Jourdan and Renne, 2007), and thus permit a further test of the ^{40}K decay constant bias hypothesis. For the pegmatite lenses, the age difference due to the different closing temperatures of Ar in plagioclase (~150 °C) and Pb in zircon (>800 °C) (i.e. the cooling ages) is likely to be negligible, or at least very short due to the geologically sub-instantaneous crystallization of the pegmatite lenses. Similarly, the residence time of zircon may range from 0 to several thousand years (Kwon et al., 2002; Simon et al., 2008), but can be considered as negligible for Triassic–Jurassic rocks in this exercise. We note that the U/Pb results were obtained on air-abraded zircon and not using the CA-TIMS technique (Mattison, 2005). The latter eliminates zircon domains which have undergone Pb-loss and allows analysis only of closed-system zircon. The Concordia plot of Schoene et al. (2006) suggests that Pb loss (along with grain inheritance) is negligible from zircons of the North Mountain pegmatites, and therefore that the zircon age is valid.

We obtained three indistinguishable plateau ages on plagioclase separates that range from 199.0 ± 1.0 to 199.7 ± 1.0 Ma (Table 1 and Fig. 4) and that yield a weighted mean age of 199.4 ± 0.9 Ma (with error on *J*-value propagated on the final weighted mean age). In order to compare our age with U/Pb ages we must include the uncertainties on the age of the FCs monitor (Jourdan and Renne, 2007) and on the current ^{40}K decay constants (Steiger and Jäger, 1977). We recalculate a ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar age of 199.4 ± 1.9 Ma that yields an age difference of −1.9 ± 1.9 Ma (2σ; 1 ± 1%) with the ^{238}U/^{206}Pb age.

As noted by Renne (2000), when all of the uncertainties are included in both the ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar and ^{238}U/^{206}Pb ages, they are statistically quasi-indistinguishable at 2σ. However, the absolute mean values (i.e. 199.4 and 201.3 Ma) between the two systems are offset by ~1%, as previously observed by Min et al. (2000) on several ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar–U/Pb age pairs. Our result thus confirms the existence of a discrepancy between the two geochronometers, most likely attributable to miscalibration of the ^{40}K decay constants, and underscores the necessity of improving both the accuracy and the precision of the latter by using samples with a simple geological history (e.g. Mundil et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, although it is problematic to compare ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar and U/Pb ages of the CAMP province due to the bias of ^{40}K decay constant, it is worth noting that most of the conclusions concerning the CAMP geochronology (e.g. CAMP emplacement, duration and magmatic migrations) are based on the ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar system alone and are thus unaffected by systematic errors carried by the ^{40}K constant (as all the ages are shifted by the same amount).

7. Conclusions

We obtained ten plateau, two mini-plateau and one isochron ages on the CAMP from the Fundy basin (Nova Scotia) and the Hartford and

Deerfield basins (U.S.A.) that range from 198.6 ± 1.1 to 201.0 ± 1.4 Ma (2σ), with 1 date substantially younger at 190.6 ± 1.0 Ma. These new results in combination with previous results and geological observations allow us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The lava pile of the CAMP in the Fundy basin (North Mountain Basalt, Nova Scotia) was emplaced in a very short time span (i.e. $\ll 1.6$ Ma and possibly ≤ 1 Ma) at ~200 Ma, based on isotopic ages obtained for geologically well-constrained samples from lava flows at the base and the top of the succession.

2. Three ages obtained on sericitized plagioclase grains of basalt lava flows from the Hartford and Deerfield basins (U.S.A.) indicate that hydrothermal alteration is synchronous with the crystallization age of these lava flows and can be used (in conjunction with geological constraints) as a reliable proxy for dating the time of lava extrusion. Age constraints at the middle and top of the sequence suggest a very brief emplacement at ~199 Ma. This age is in perfect accordance with other dates obtained on dykes from the eastern U.S.A., and the resulting short duration of CAMP volcanism in this region is consistent with the conclusions of cyclostratigraphic studies of the Newark basin sedimentary successions.

3. Comparison between the ID-TIMS zircon U/Pb age of the Triassic–Jurassic boundary and the CAMP (^{40}K decay-constant bias-corrected) ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar age database shows that the onset of the CAMP magmatic activity precedes the boundary by at least several hundred thousand years, therefore suggesting a causal relationship between the CAMP eruptions and the Triassic–Jurassic mass extinction. This is in accordance with recent biostratigraphic observations in Morocco and the eastern North America sedimentary basins arguing for placement of the Triassic–Jurassic boundary within or above the CAMP eruptive sequence.

4. Weighted mean ages calculated for each CAMP region suggest a temporal migration of the magmatic activity with a mean age of 199.6 Ma for Nova Scotia, similar within error to the mean age of 198.9 Ma for the eastern U.S.A. and Morocco, but statistically distinct from a ~198 Ma mean age for South America. If these ages are valid, the data imply a 2–3 Ma duration for the main volume of CAMP and provide further evidence against the mantle plume hypothesis for CAMP genesis.

5. A younger age of 190.6 ± 1.0 Ma obtained in Nova Scotia, together with four other young ages (190–194 Ma) reported previously for South America and Africa, may suggest the occurrence of a second minor magmatic pulse in the CAMP province. If genuine, this pulse tapped the same mantle source as the main magmatic peak at ~199 Ma, just prior to or synchronous with the onset of ocean-floor spreading.

6. Comparison between zircon U/Pb and plagioclase ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar ages obtained on samples from the same pegmatite lenses of the North Mountain Basalt confirms the previously established bias between the two chronometers. This bias is mostly attributed to the ^{40}K decay constant, and in particular the electron capture branch. Miscalibration of the ^{40}K constant shifts the ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar ages by $\sim -1\%$ for the Phanerozoic and limits the direct comparison of the ^{40}Ar/^{39}Ar and U/Pb database. This study supports an urgent revision of the ^{40}K decay constant.

Acknowledgments

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.lithos.2008.12.011.

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