

Rapid exhumation of Earth's youngest exposed granites driven by subduction of an oceanic arc

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Key Points:

- Timing of crystallization and exhumation of the youngest exposed plutons are constrained with high precision analytical techniques.
- One of the highest exhumation rates for plutonic rocks worldwide are reported.
- Exhumation of Pleistocene granitoid plutons driven by subducting Izu-Bonin oceanic arc.
- Subduction of oceanic arcs drives lithospheric exhumation creates regional-scale thermochronological “hot spots”.

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Abstract

Exhumation of plutonic systems is driven by a range of mechanisms including isostatic, tectonic, and erosional processes. Variable rates of plutonic exhumation in active subduction systems may be driven by idiosyncrasies of regional geology or by first-order tectonic features. We report new age, isotope, and low-temperature thermochronology constraints of granitoids from the Hida Mountains of central Japan that constrain the highest rates and magnitude of plutonic rock exhumation within the Japan and one of the highest worldwide. This extreme exhumation is centered on the apex of a lithospheric scale anticlinorium associated with the subduction of the Izu-Bonin oceanic arc. The spatial and temporal relationship between the exhumation of these Pleistocene plutons and the subducting/accreting Izu-Bonin oceanic arc links the plate-scale geodynamics and regional exhumation patterns. Identifying thermochronological anomalies within magmatic arcs provides an opportunity to identify ancient asperities previously subducted and responsible for rapid exhumation rates within ancient subduction systems.

Plain Language Summary

Plutonic rocks reach the surface through a variety of geological processes. Generally, this is driven by active tectonic and erosive forces. We provide high-precision geochronological constraint on the youngest exposed subduction zone plutons found in the Hida Mountains of Japan that are 818.5 ± 9.6 thousand years old. Regionally, the Hida Mountains is identified as a thermochronological “hot spot” where the rocks in the region came to the surface very rapidly within the past ~300 thousand years. The exhumation of these plutons was driven by the subduction of the Izu-Bonin oceanic arc.

1 Introduction

Rates of exhumation of plutonic rocks and processes controlling it vary for different tectonic settings (Herman et al., 2013). In cratonic regions that are characterized by long-term stability and little internal deformation, the exhumation of plutonic rocks is controlled primarily by erosion on the surface and exhumation rates are very low, typically not exceeding few tens of meters per million year (e.g., Danišík et al., 2008; Gleadow et al., 2002). Exhumation of plutonic rocks on plate boundaries, in contrast, is enhanced by tectonic processes whereby exhumation rates often range from several hundreds of meters to a few kilometers per million year (e.g., Danišík et al., 2007; Glotzbach et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2001). It is often difficult to constrain whether high exhumation rates are achieved primarily through higher erosive potential due to topographic and climatic effects or are instead accomplished through structural mechanisms such as intra-orogenic upper crustal extension and/or mid-crustal isostatic readjustment, for example. Constraints on bedrock exhumation rates are critical in assessing these questions especially in modern settings where comparisons can be made to measurable precipitation rates, mass wasting flux, and surface uplift to better understand the nature of ancient orogenic processes.

The Hida Mountain Range (HMR) is unique in that it contains the youngest exposed plutonic rocks on the planet dated as young as 0.8 Ma (Ito et al., 2017; Ito et al., 2013). This fact together with reported cooling ages of <1 Ma (Yamada, 1999; Yamada and Harayama, 1999) requires extremely rapid exhumation rates, but why this is the case and how exhumation rates vary temporally and spatially in this region remains unresolved (Yamada and Harayama, 1999). The driver of this exhumation is thought to be associated with E-W compression accommodated by the Takasegawa fault that lies parallel to the Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line

(ISTL) (Harayama, 2003; Harayama et al., 2003; Ito et al., 2012; Yamada, 1999). Additionally, the Philippine Sea plate is subducting obliquely to the direction of Pacific Plate convergence (Isozaki, 1996). However, the orientation of this major fault zone is parallel to the convergence direction and perpendicular to the major tectonic features associated with the Japanese subduction system (Fig. 1). Thus, the nature of the structural features within and flanking the HMR and their relationship to boundary processes and subducting slab geometry and kinematics within the Japanese subduction zone is unclear.

Thermochronology can constrain the temperature-time histories of rocks so as to model the age and rate of their exhumation to the surface and to better constrain the geometry of structures that may have accommodated some or all of their exhumation. Low-temperature thermochronometers such as zircon and apatite (U-Th)/He systems are optimal for characterizing the upper few kilometers of exhumation paths, whereas high-temperature systems such as zircon U-Pb method helps to pinpoint beginning of the exhumation paths at magmatic temperatures.

In this study, we provide new zircon U-Pb geochronology together with zircon (U-Th)/He (ZHe) and apatite (U-Th)/He (AHe) thermochronological data from igneous bedrocks samples in the HMR that not only provide the most precise geochronology of the region (using ID-TIMS), but also provide constraints on geodynamics of the formation, evolution, and exhumation of the plutonic systems of the HMR. These data provide further implications on spatial exhumation patterns of a complex subduction system that link the regional geology to tectonic-plate scale geodynamic forcings.

2 Geological Setting and Samples

The HMR is one of the highest mountain systems in Japan. It includes several >3000 m peaks and stretches north-south for over 100 km. The HMR lie west of the ISTL (i.e. the Eurasian-North American plate boundary) and is recognized as one of the most active seismotectonic regions of the Japanese islands (Ide, 2001; Mikumo et al., 1988). The HMR are composed predominately of Upper Cretaceous to lower Cenozoic plutonic rocks and Pleistocene to Holocene volcanic rocks with a minor amount of older pre-Cenozoic sedimentary and metamorphic basement. Within the HMR are two major Quaternary plutonic complexes, the Kurobegawa Granite and Takidani Granodiorite. The Kurobegawa granite pluton is exposed over an area of ~100 km² and represents the youngest exposed felsic plutonic complex in the world which has previously been dated at ~750 ka (Ito et al., 2017).

The Kurobegawa Granite has a vertical exposure from 700 m to 3000 m and is geochemically and texturally divided into three units (upper, middle, and lower) and is intrusive into the Quaternary Jiigatake felsic volcanic rocks (Harayama et al., 2003; Wada et al., 2004). Our sampling campaign targeted the northern and southern portions of the pluton. Samples, ranging in composition from diorite (enclaves) to granodiorite and granite, were collected from the locality previously identified as hosting the youngest granite plutonic sample on Earth (Ito et al., 2013). The zircon U-Pb ages of granodiorite samples reported by Ito et al. (2017) reproduce and confirm the young age previously reported (Harayama et al., 2010). However, one sample (JP15) was also collected from an aplite dyke that crosscuts the granodiorite previously argued to be the youngest granite.

The Takidani Granodiorite covers ~50 km² with vertical exposure from 1450 m to 2670 m in elevation that is elongated along the N-S axis of the HMR. The pluton is compositionally zoned with equigranular biotite-hornblende granodiorite at the base grading towards porphyritic biotite-hornblende granite at the top

(Harayama, 1992; Ito et al., 2017). Two samples were collected from the southern portions of the pluton. Additional samples of Miocene and Paleocene granites were collected within the environs of the Kurobegawa and Takidani plutons (Okukurobe and Oshirasawa). GPS coordinates of sample locations are presented in Table 1.

3 Methods

Collected samples were disaggregated using jaw crusher and disc mill housed at the John de Laeter Centre (JdLC) at Curtin University. Zircon and apatite were extracted using traditional mineral separation techniques (i.e. sieving, Wilfley table, Franz magnetic separation, and lithium polytungstate and diiodomethane heavy liquid separation). Zircon were mounted in epoxy, imaged with cathodoluminescence, and analyzed for $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, U-Pb, and Hf via secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS; $\delta^{18}\text{O}$) at the University of Western Australia and laser ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS; U-Pb and Hf) at the JdLC following the methods of Spencer et al. (2017a). Zircon from one sample (JP15) was analyzed with chemical abrasion-isotope dilution-thermal ionization mass spectrometry (CA-ID-TIMS) at the NERC Isotope Geosciences Laboratory (NIGL) of the British Geological Survey following the methods of Condon et al. (2015). Zircon and apatite were analyzed for (U-Th)/He using an Alphachron system and solution ICP-MS at the JdLC and TSW Analytical, respectively, following the methods of Danišík et al. (2012a,b). Full methodology is described in the supplementary material. Summary of data in this study is presented in Table 1.

4 Results

4.1 Zircon U-Pb (LA-ICP-MS)

Ten samples were analyzed via LA-ICP-MS that range in age from ~0.8 to ~64.6 Ma (Fig. 2A). Weighted means and reduced chi-squared values were calculated using $\text{KD}\chi$ (Spencer, et al., 2017b). Nine samples revealed single populations (as defined by the reduced chi-square test; Spencer et al., 2016) whereas, one sample (JP01) revealed three discrete age populations (~1.4 Ma, ~1.0 Ma, and ~0.8 Ma). Weighted means of the samples fall into five discrete ages, ~0.8 Ma (two samples), ~1.0-1.2 Ma (three samples), ~1.5 Ma (three samples), ~9 Ma (one sample), and ~63 Ma (three samples).

4.2 Zircon U-Pb (CA-ID-TIMS)

Chemically abraded zircon (Mattinson, 2005) from sample JP15 analyzed by ID-TIMS following the method of Tapster et al. (2016) yielded a ^{230}Th corrected $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{238}\text{U}$ weighted mean age of $0.8185 \pm 0.0087 / 0.0096$ Ma (± 2 sigma analytical / total uncertainty; $n = 4$, $\text{MSWD} = 0.13$) from the youngest population interpreted as best estimate for emplacement. Two additional grains yielded ages of ~0.9 Ma that were excluded from the weighted mean age calculation (Fig. 2A). The ^{230}Th correction adds ~0.09 Ma (from 0.7282 ± 0.0030 to 0.8185 ± 0.0087) to the final age.

4.3 Zircon $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and ϵHf

Zircon $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ were obtained for eight samples with weighted means of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ range from $5.9 \pm 0.4\%$ to $6.9 \pm 0.2\%$. When combined with the geochronological data, the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values increase from the Paleocene- to

Quaternary-age samples (Fig. 2B). Zircon ϵHf was obtained for the same samples as $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ whose weighted means range from -0.4 ± 0.3 to -4.6 ± 0.3 and decrease through time (Fig. 2B).

4.4 Zircon and Apatite (U-Th)/He

Single zircon grains ($n=60$) from nine and apatite single grains ($n=19$) from four samples were dated by (U-Th)/He method. Average zircon and apatite (U-Th)/He ages corrected for alpha ejection (Farley et al., 1996) range from ~ 7.8 Ma to ~ 370 kyr and from ~ 650 kyr to ~ 289 kyr, respectively (Fig. 1). See Supplementary Figure 1 for modelled time-temperature diagrams showing thermal trajectories reproducing measured (U-Th)/He ages of the samples.

5 Discussion

Geochronologic data has previously been reported from the Kurobegawa and Takidani plutons highlighting the fact these plutons are the youngest currently known on the planet (Harayama, 1992; Harayama, 1994; Ito et al., 2017; Ito et al., 2013; Yamada and Harayama, 1999). Previously published thermochronologic data of the Takidani pluton based on whole rock and biotite Rb-Sr, biotite and hornblende K-Ar, and zircon fission track dating methods also identified the HMR as representing a region of rapid exhumation (Harayama, 1992; Harayama, 1994; Yamada and Harayama, 1999). The high-precision CA-ID-TIMS zircon U-Pb analyses of the youngest phase of magmatism of the Kurobegawa plutonic system support this with a final age of 818.5 ± 9.6 kyr (Fig. 2). The Quaternary magmatism in the HMR appears to have occurred in three discrete pulses at ~ 2.3 Ma, ~ 1.6 Ma and 0.9 Ma evidenced by analysis of detrital zircon in modern rivers (Ito et al., 2017). The LA-ICP-MS zircon U-Pb analyses also confirm the used ages of Quaternary pulses of magmatism as well as previous episodes of magmatism extending back to the early Paleogene (Fig. 2).

The zircon $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and ϵHf data presented herein provides insight into the genesis and evolution of the plutonic systems of the HMR. The oldest magmatism in the HMR displays moderately elevated $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and unradiogenic ϵHf implying an elevated degree of reworking older crust (average depleted mantle model age = ~ 1200 Ma). The ϵHf signatures subsequently decrease through time and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ increase through time, with the Paleocene phase of magmatism representing the most mantle-like $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and most radiogenic ϵHf implying an increased amount of crustal recycling with time. This potentially signals the increased reworking of subducted supracrustal material from the Izu-Bonin Arc.

The new ZHe and AHe data constrain the timing of cooling of the samples through the $\sim 225^\circ\text{C}$ and $\sim 95^\circ\text{C}$ isotherms (assuming $60 \mu\text{m}$ radius equivalent sphere and the measured average cooling rate of $500^\circ\text{C}/\text{km}$; Farley, 2002; Reiners et al., 2004), respectively, related to the exhumation of the plutons in the HMR. ZHe data suggest that central part of the range (sample JP12) reached the depths of ~ 3.0 km at 1.1 Ma (here and elsewhere the values were calculated by assuming a geothermal gradient of $\sim 70^\circ\text{C}/\text{km}$ (average values from the HMR as reported by Tanaka et al. (2004) and surface temperature of 10°C)), whereas the northern and southern parts of the pluton at 790 - 370 kyr. AHe data suggest that central part of the pluton reached the depths of ~ 1.2 km at 650 - 580 kyr and southern part arrived at ~ 1.2 km depths at 290 kyr. These AHe ages document final exhumation of HMR plutons in the Middle Pleistocene and, together with two ages from Namche Barwa Syntaxis (Yang et al., 2018), represent the youngest cooling ages ever reported for basement rocks worldwide.

The contrasting tectonic settings responsible for these exceptionally young cooling ages (oceanic subduction and continental collision) implies the rapid exhumation rates are not confined to continent collisional settings.

High-temperature U-Pb and low-temperature (U-Th)/He data allow reconstruction of complete cooling trajectories for the samples from their crystallization to their exhumation to the surface (Fig. 3), and the obtained cooling trajectories in combination with assumed geothermal gradients can be in turn used to calculate not only the rates but also the magnitude of exhumation. Our data for <1.6 Ma granites suggests that some portions of HMR plutons were exhumed from depths of <24 km to subsurface levels in 400 kyr at rates ranging from 20 up to 40 mm/yr (km/Ma; assuming a minimum of 25 °C/km; 5 to 10 mm/yr (km/Ma) if 100 °C/km is assumed; 25 °C/km and 100 °C/km are minimum and maximum values of geothermal gradient of the HMR reported by Tanaka et al., 2004). These extremely high exhumation rates and magnitudes are one of the greatest values thus far documented for granites by geochronological data. It is likely, however, that a portion of the extreme cooling paths documented between zircon U-Pb ages of crystallization and ZHe age reflects rapid initial cooling due to emplacement of the magma at relatively shallow depths and thus will need to be amended as future studies provide better constraints on emplacement depth.

Our new constraints can be compared to previous estimates of exhumation in the HMR and regionally. Terrestrial *in situ* cosmogenic nuclides were previously used to estimate denudation rates in the HMR ranging from 0.2 to 7.0 mm/yr (Matsushi et al., 2014), which are significantly lower than the exhumation rates presented in this study. This slight difference can be explained by the fact that cosmogenic nuclides record denudation moderated by surface processes rather than tectonic processes that are recorded by high- and low-temperature thermochronometers presented here (Vance et al., 2003). Maximum uplift in the HMR during the Quaternary was estimated to be approximately 1700 m by measuring the elevation of low-relief erosional surfaces assumed to represent uplifted remnants of peneplains established by late Neogene time at near sea-level (Research Group for Quaternary Tectonic Map, 1968). It is possible that the maximum uplift of ~1700 m is underestimated because this study did not account for denudation and neglected the possibility of high-altitude denudation surfaces were potentially formed by periglacial processes (Sugai, 1990, 1995). Low-temperature thermochronology data have also been used in southern part of the Northeast Japan Arc (Fig. 4), to estimate exhumation rates as being <0.1 mm/yr in the forearc region, ~0.1 to 1 mm/yr along the volcanic front, and ~0.1 to 0.3 mm/yr in the backarc region (Sueoka et al., 2017).

The HMR lies parallel to the ISTL which is likely the primary fault system controlling the exhumation of the Quaternary plutonic rocks (Harayama, 1992; Ito et al., 2013; Wada, 2004). ISTL is a complex active thrust fault system that thrusts the crustal block of the HMR to the east (Sagiya et al., 2002, 2004). Slip rates along the thrust fault systems associated with the Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line is estimated as high as ~9 mm/yr (Ikeda & Yonekura, 1986).

Importantly, the ISTL lies along the apex of a large anticlinorium within the Izu collision zone (Fig. 4). The collision of the Izu-Bonin arc with the Honshu arc has resulted in the deformation of the major tectonic boundaries in central Honshu and the subduction of the Izu-Bonin arc and the buoyant nature of the subducting oceanic arc is likely the direct cause of the exhumation in the HMR (Yamamoto et al., 2009).

The spatially diverse exhumation of the Honshu arc (Fig. 4) may provide a useful framework in constraining the subduction of crust thicker than normal oceanic crust (e.g. oceanic arcs, ocean islands, mid-ocean ridges). We

would predict that regions where thicker than normal oceanic crust has subduction would have experienced higher than normal exhumation. For example, the subduction of the Nazca Ridge beneath the Andes of South America has resulted in ~5 km exhumation of the Fitzcarrald Arch (Bishop et al., 2018; Espurt et al., 2010). Although the basement rocks are not yet exposed at the surface in the Fitzcarrald Arch, our model would predict the basement rocks beneath the sedimentary cover would exhibit younger exhumation ages than the basement north and south of the where the Nazca Ridge is subducting.

Exhumation anomalies in subduction zones around the world merit further consideration for their potential as geothermal resources. Additionally, campaign-style thermochronological investigations of ancient subduction zones may provide insight into the reconstruction of the oceanic crust and whether exhumation 'hot spots' as seen in the HMR indicate the subduction of thicker-than-normal oceanic crust.

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The full dataset supporting the conclusions can be obtained in the online supplementary materials.

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Figure 1. A) Simplified map of the Hida Mountain Range (HMR) (after Ito et al., 2017). ISTL: Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line, MTL: Median Tectonic Line. B) Topographic map of the sampling region of the HMR with sample locations and geo- and thermochronological data from this study. All uncertainties are given at 2 sigma and include systematic uncertainty (2%). C) Simplified geologic map of the HMR (after Ito et al., 2013).

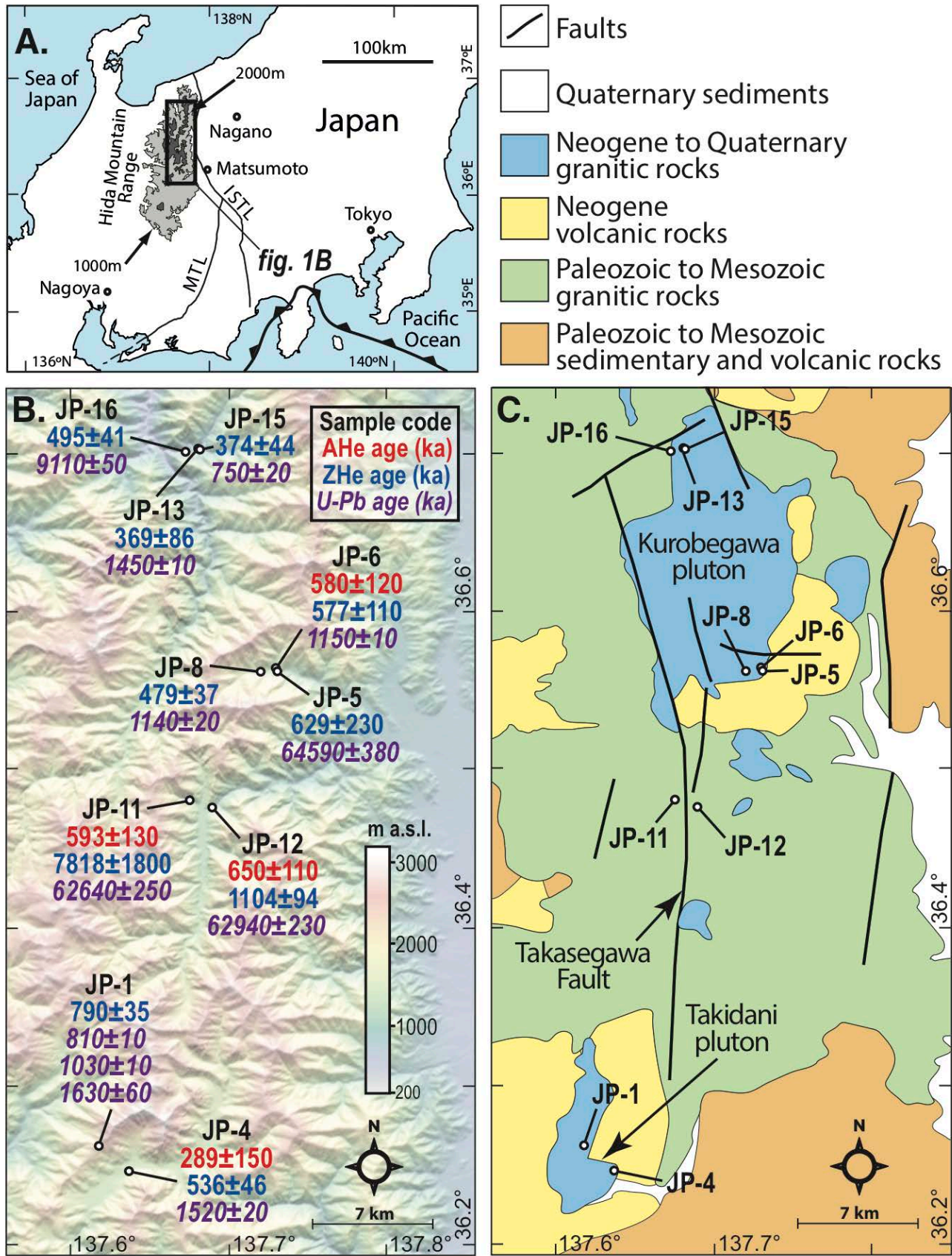


Figure 2. A) Zircon U-Pb data from the HMR granitoid samples of Paleocene, Miocene, and Pleistocene age, respectively. All samples were analyzed with LA-ICP-MS and JP15 was also analyzed by ID-TIMS. Sample JP01 had multiple age populations. B) Zircon O- and Hf- isotope compositions (shown at 2-sigma) plotted against U-Pb age (note the log-scale). Mantle $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ compositional range is from Page et al. (2007). ϵHf values are shown as initial ratios at time of crystallization ($\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{initial}}$). CHUR: Chondrite Uniform Reservoir.

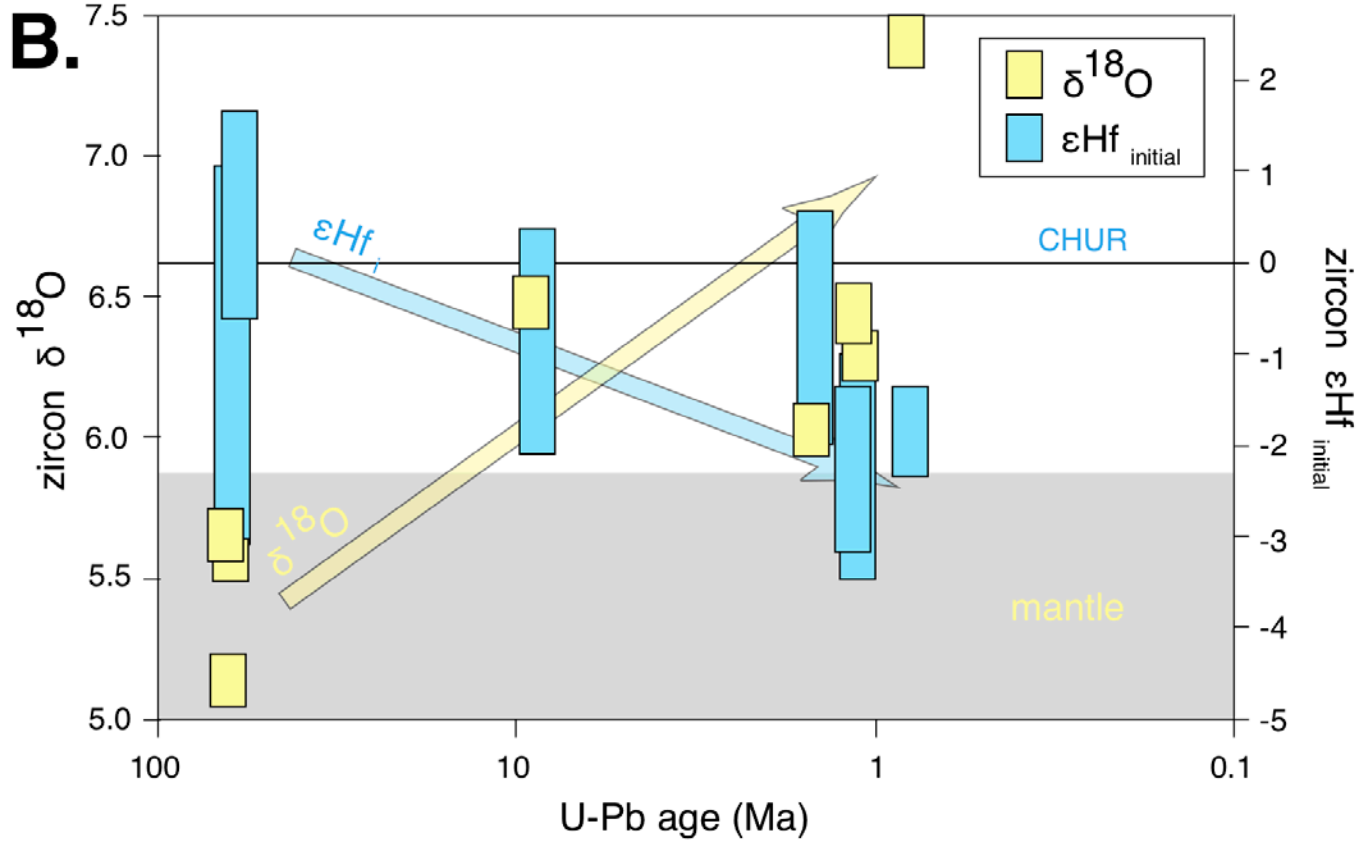
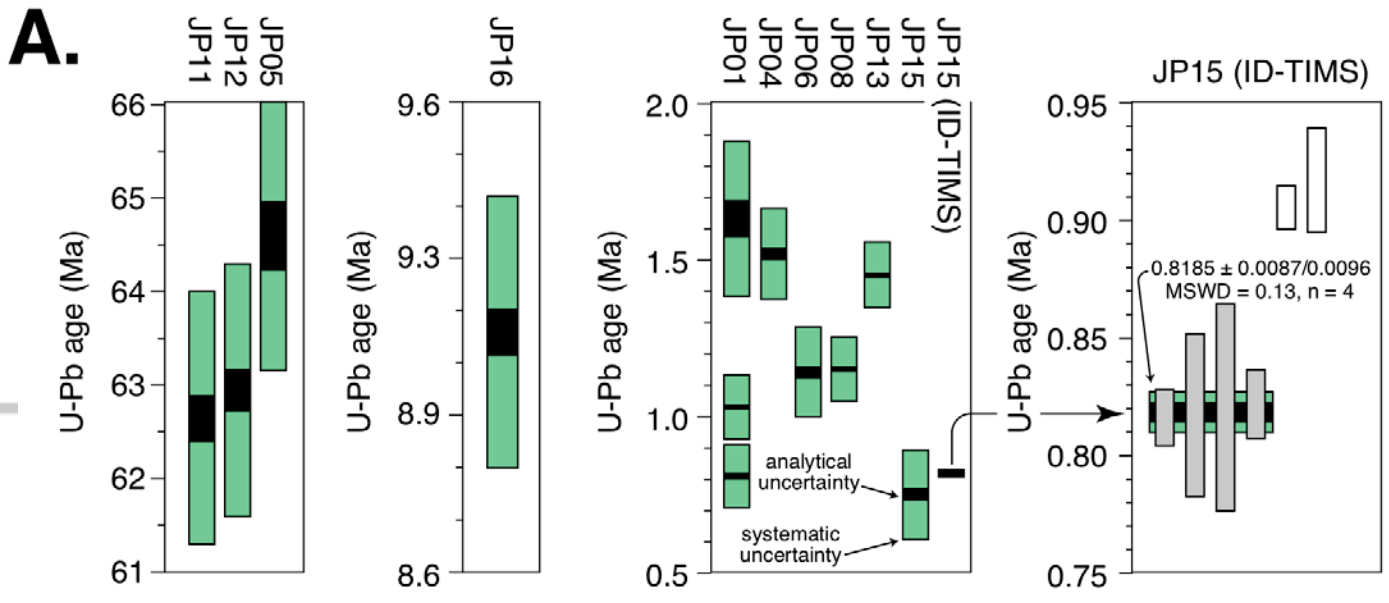


Figure 3. Time-temperature exhumation paths for the HMR granitoids as constrained by zircon and apatite geochronological data and assuming a geothermal gradient of 25°C/km and 100°C/km (Tanaka et al., 2004) and zircon crystallization of 600°C, i.e. the approximate minimum temperature of the granite wet solidus (Holtz & Johannes, 1994; Luth et al., 1964). If the true zircon crystallization temperature were higher, the exhumation rates would be higher and if the geothermal gradient were higher, the exhumation rates would be lower.

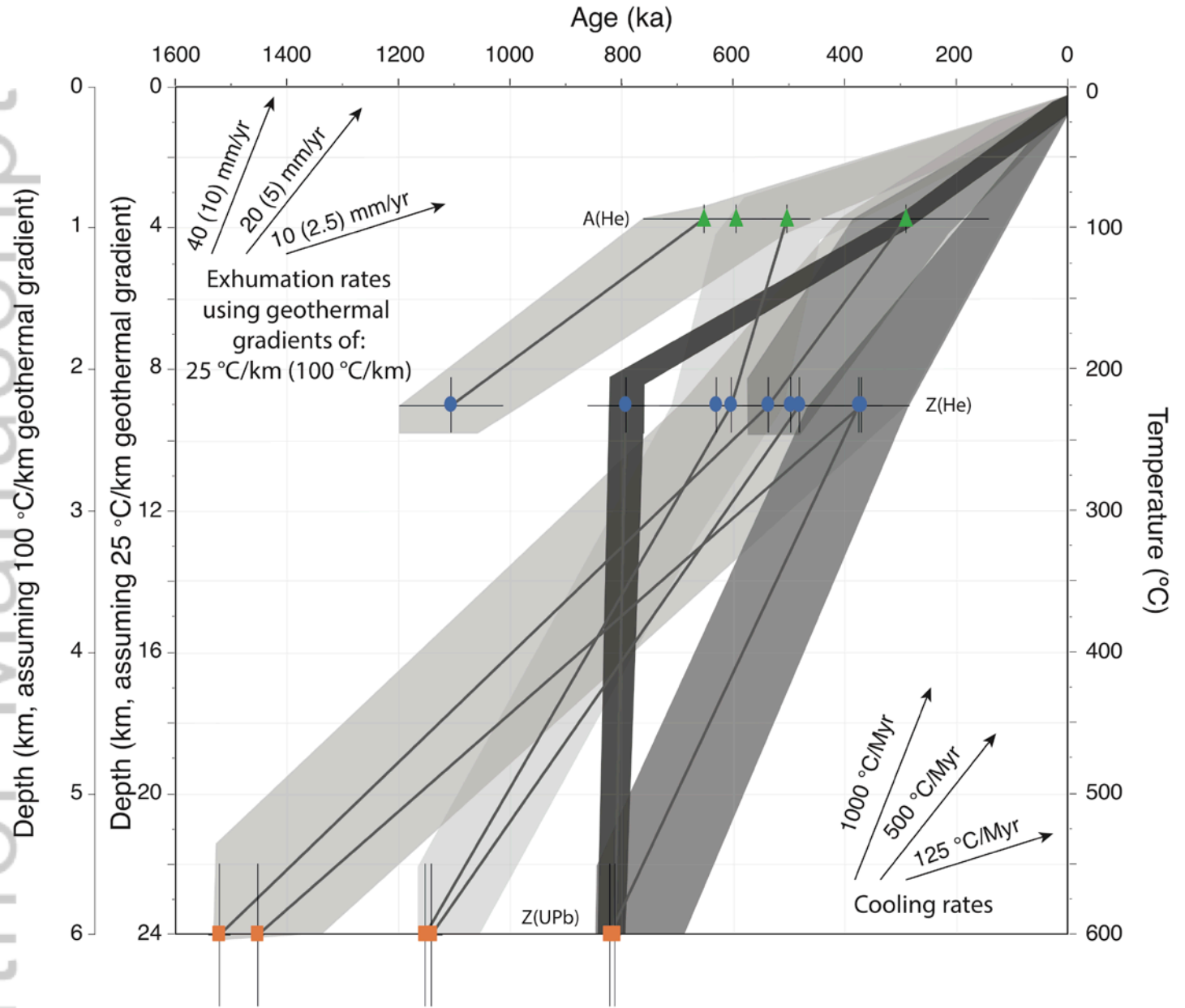


Figure 4. A) Spatial interpolation (inverse distance weighting) of compiled zircon and apatite fission track (ZFT and AFT, respectively) and ZHe and AHe data from Japan. Volcanic and sedimentary samples are excluded from this compilation. There is a clear zone of high exhumation that is centered on the HMR. Data are compiled from Yamada and Harayama, 1999; Ito and Tanaka, 1999; Tagami and Shibata, 1993; Hasebe et al. 2000; Kamp and Takemura, 1993; Yuguchi et al. 2011, 2017; Yamada and Tagami, 2008; Sueoka et al., 2012, 2017; and this study. B) Simplified map of the major tectonic structures of central Japan (Yamamoto et al., 2009). Importantly, these structures are either caused or heavily modified by the collision and accretion/subduction of the Izu-Bonin oceanic arc. The HMR lies directly in line with the trajectory of the Izu-Bonin oceanic arc that is likely the direct cause of the fast exhumation of the HMR. In all cases, the apatite He ages are younger than the zircon He ages. The apparent contradiction to this relationship seen in the regions without data is due to interpolation methods.

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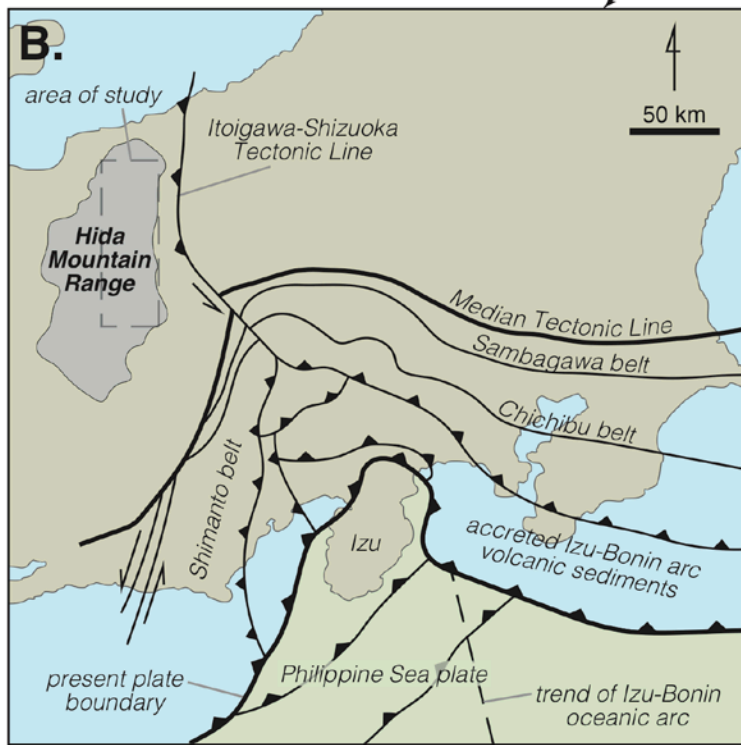
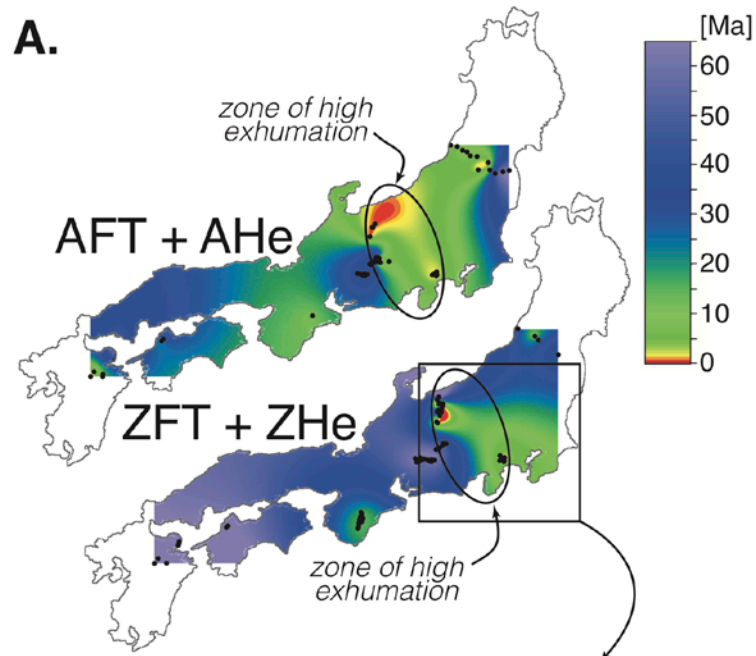
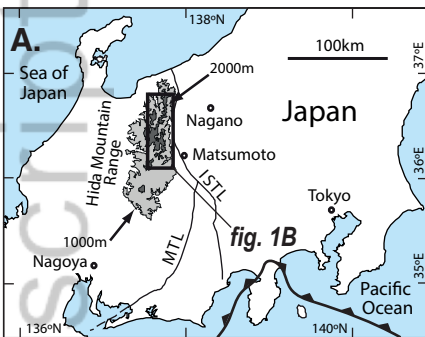


Table 1. Sample information, GPS localities, geo- and thermochronological summary, and isotopic data.

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— Faults

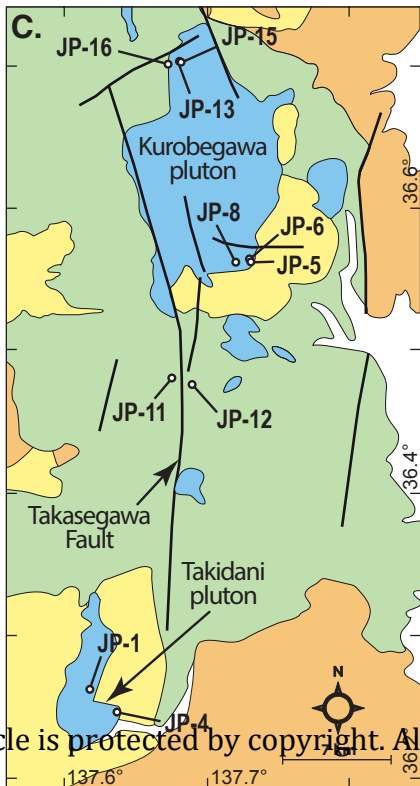
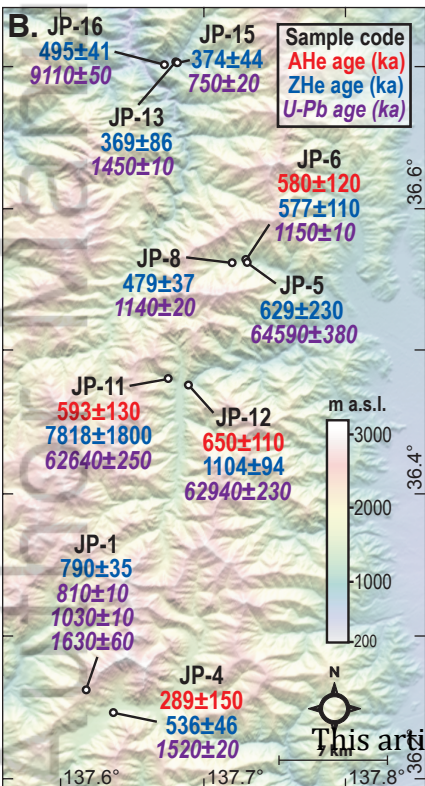
□ Quaternary sediments

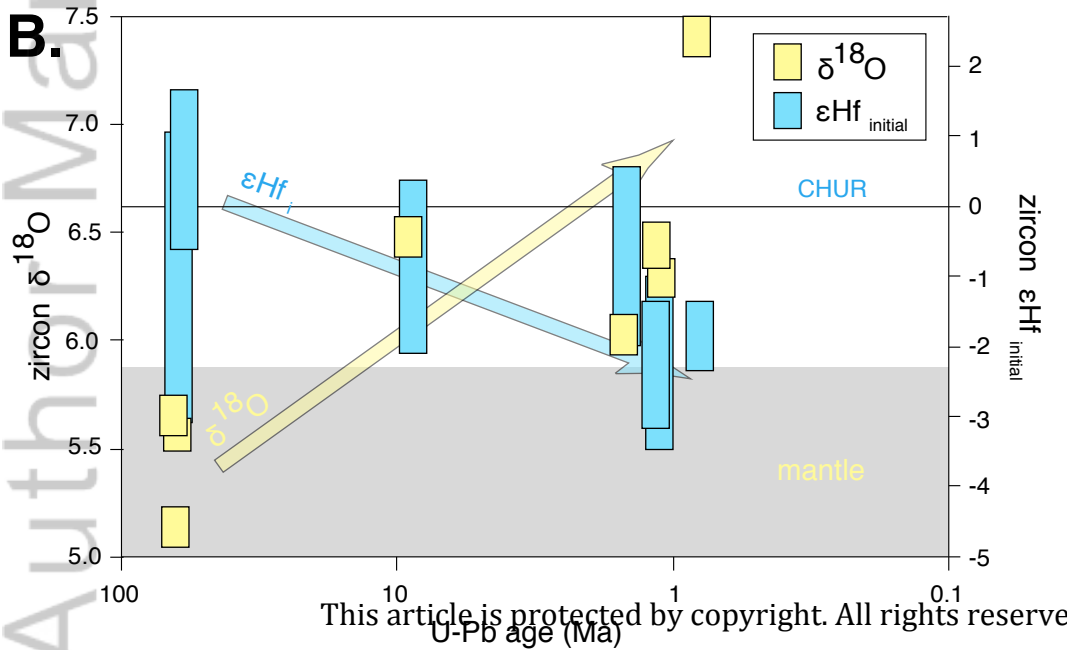
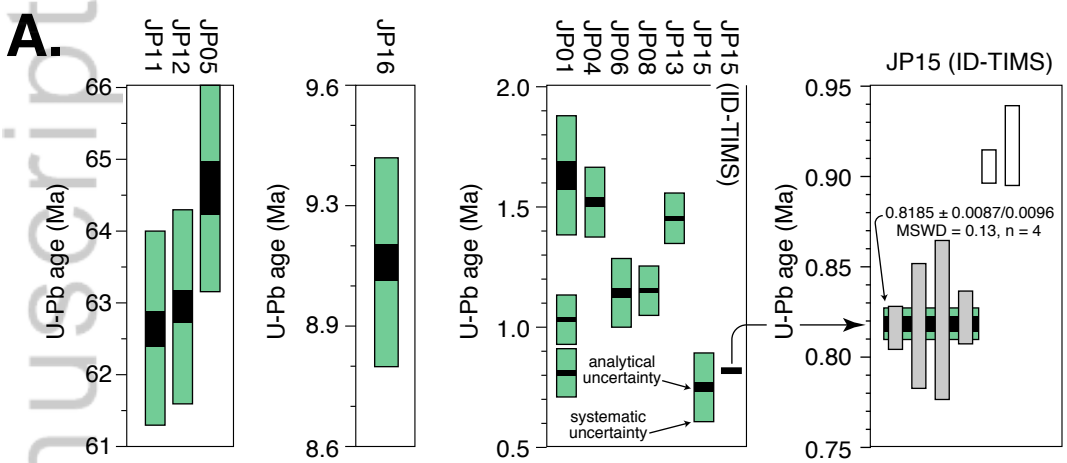
■ Neogene to Quaternary granitic rocks

■ Neogene volcanic rocks

■ Paleozoic to Mesozoic granitic rocks

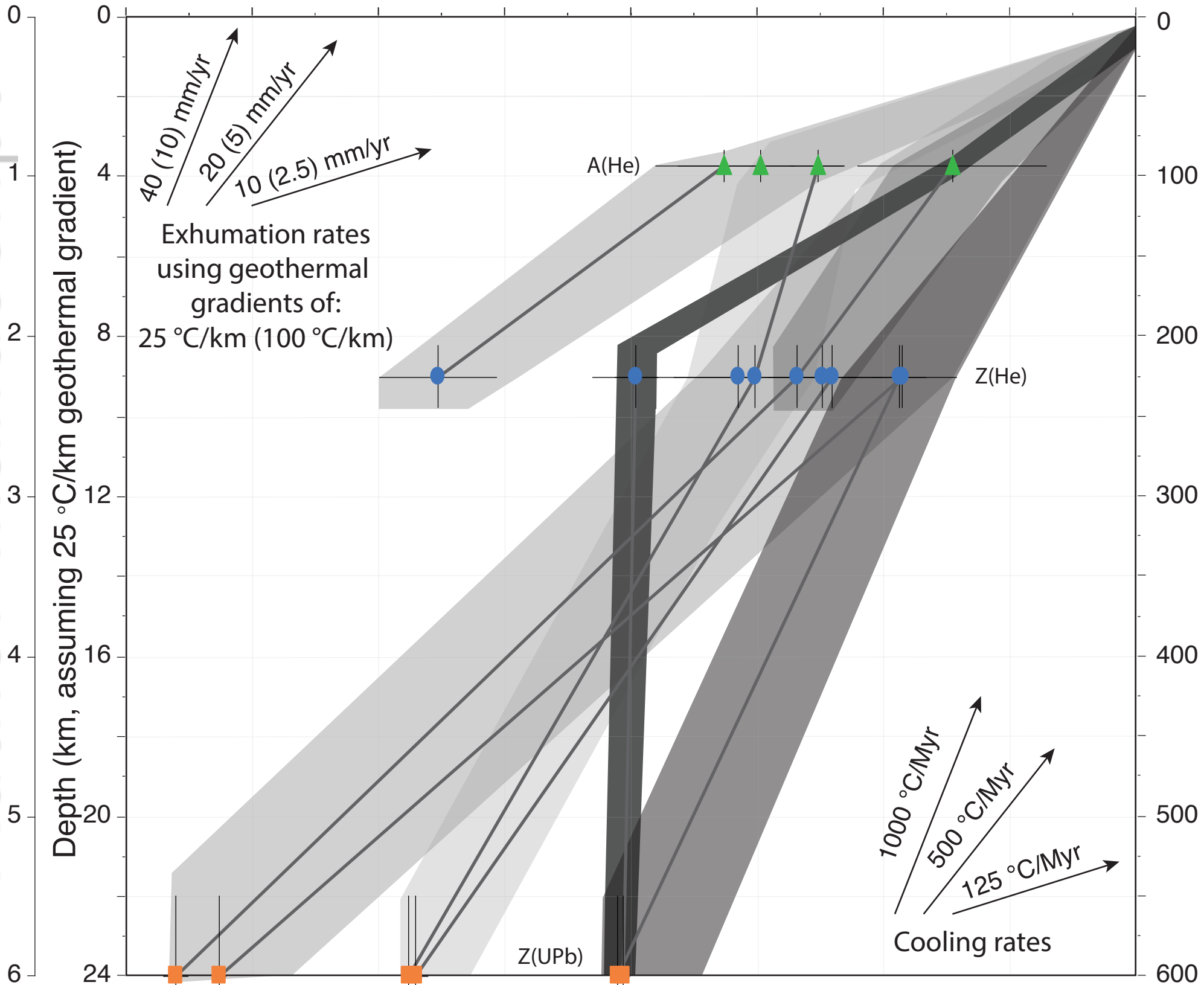
■ Paleozoic to Mesozoic sedimentary and volcanic rocks





Age (ka)

1600 1400 1200 1000 800 600 400 200 0



Exhumation rates
using geothermal
gradients of:
25 °C/km (100 °C/km)

A(He)

Z(He)

Z(UPb)

Cooling rates
1000 °C/Myr
500 °C/Myr
125 °C/Myr

