Global standard names for the Lowermost Cambrian Series and Stage

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to announce the ratification of names for the lowermost stage and series of the Cambrian System. A GSSP marking the base of the Cambrian System was ratified by the IUGS in 1992. Ratification of the GSSP point at the base of the Trichophycus pedum Ichnozone in the Fortune Head section, eastern Newfoundland, Canada, automatically defined the conterminant base of the lowermost series and stage of the Cambrian although names for those subdivisions were not proposed at the time of the decision. In 2007, the IUGS ratified the names Terreneuvian Series and Fortunian Stage for these previously unnamed chronostratigraphic subdivisions. The Terreneuvian Series replaces the provisional name “Series 1,” and the Fortunian Stage replaces the provisional name “Stage 1,” of the Cambrian System.

Terreneuvian Series

Name of the series

The name “Terreneuvian Series” replaces the provisional name “Cambrian Series 1.” The base has been defined at a point 2.3 m above the base of what was referred to as “member 2” of the Chapel Island Formation (Figures 1, 2) in the measured section of Narbonne et al. (1987) of the Fortune Head section, Burin Peninsula, Newfoundland, Canada. The units earlier termed members 1 and 2 of the Chapel Island Formation now comprise the lower part of the Mystery Lake Member of the Chapel Island Formation (Landing, 1996). The position of the GSSP coincides with the FAD of Trichophycus pedum and the base of the T. pedum Ichnozone as known at the time of ratification (Landing, 1994). The T. pedum Ichnozone is an assemblage-zone based on trace fossils. It reflects the appearance of complex sediment-disturbing behavior by multiple metazoans (Figure 1). The boundary is a standard age/stage GSSP. The top of the series will be defined by the base of the overlying series (provisionally called Series 2), which is presently undefined and unnamed.

The name “Terreneuvian” is derived from Terre Neuve, the modern French name for the island of Newfoundland. Terreneuvian evokes “Terre Neufve,” which, prior to a spelling reform, was the formal name for the 17th century French colony in Newfoundland. Terre Neufve essentially corresponded to the Burin Peninsula, in the southwest of which is the GSSP. Although the Latinized variant “Terra Nova” has been used as a lithostratigraphic (Terra Nova Group) term, “Terre Neufve” has never been used previously as a lithostratigraphic or chronostratigraphic term.

Correlation

The base of the Terreneuvian Series is equivalent to the base of the Placentician Series as used regionally in Avalonia (Landing et al., 1989), and is roughly equivalent to the Cordubian Series as used for part of western Gondwana (i.e., Iberia and Morocco; see Geyer and Landing, 2004).

Geochronology

The Terreneuvian Epoch comprises a significant portion of the lower part of the Cambrian Period. As summarized by Shergold and Cooper (2004), the age of the base of the Cambrian System, which is
also the age of the base of the Terreneuvian Series and the Fortunian Stage is slightly younger than 543 Ma (Bowring et al., 1993; Brasier et al., 1994; Grotzinger et al., 1995; Tucker and McKerrow, 1995). The maximum age of the Terreneuvian base is 543 ± 1 Ma, as determined from U-Pb zircon dates (IDTIMS) on a volcanic ash assigned to the uppermost Ediacaran System in Namibia (Grotzinger et al., 1995). Another U-Pb IDTIMS date, 539.4 ± 1 Ma, was obtained from a volcanic ash in Trichophycus pedum-bearing beds that overlie an erosional unconformity in the same area of Namibia. This places an upper limit on the age of the Terreneuvian base. A U-Pb zircon date on an ash that lies approximately in the middle of the Terreneuvian Series on the Avalonian paleocontinent (i.e., southern New Brunswick) has an age of 530 ± 1 Ma (Isachsen et al., 1994).

The base of the Cambrian System has been approximated from drill cores in Oman (Bowring et al., 2003; Amthor et al., 2003) by the use of chemostratigraphic (the BACE excursion of Zhu et al., 2006; see also Grotzinger et al., 1995; Bartley et al., 1998; Corsetti and Hagadorn, 2001; Kimura and Watanabe, 2001; Maloof et al., 2005) and paleontologic data (extinction of the Proterozoic skeletonized fossils Namacalathus and Cloudina; see Grotzinger et al., 2000; Amthor et al., 2003). An ash bed immediately below the base of the Terreneuvian yields a U-Pb age of 543.2 ± 0.5 Ma (Bowring et al., 2003; Amthor et al., 2003), and an ash bed coinciding with the base of the series yields an age of 542.0 ± 1.0 Ma (Bowring et al., 2003; Amthor et al., 2003; see also Bowring in Shergold and Cooper, 2004).

The base of the Cambrian series provisionally called Series 2 is expected to be close to the horizon marking the first appearance of trilobites in Gondwana. That position, once it becomes ratified, will automatically define the top of the Terreneuvian Series. A U-Pb zircon date from the Avalon paleocontinent demonstrates that the earliest trilobite-bearing strata in southern Wales have a U-Pb volcanic zircon age (IDTIMS) of 519 Ma (Landing et al., 1998).

Fortunian Stage

Name of the stage

The name “Fortunian Stage” replaces the provisional name “Cambrian Stage 1.” It is the lowest stage of the Cambrian and the lower part of its first series, the Terreneuvian Series. The base of the Fortunian Stage is conterminant with the base of the Cambrian System and the Terreneuvian Series. It is defined by a GSSP in the Fortune Head section, Burin Peninsula, Newfoundland, Canada (Brasier et al., 1994; Landing, 1996; Figures 1, 2). The boundary is a standard age/stage GSSP. The top of the stage will be defined by the base of the overlying stage (provisionally called “Stage 2”), which is presently undefined and unnamed.

The name Fortunian is derived from the Grand Bank 1 M/4 Canadian national map area in the Burin Peninsula, eastern Newfoundland, Canada. The name “Fortunian” denotes Fortune Head, Newfoundland, Canada, the site of the stratigraphic section containing the GSSP.

“Fortune” constitutes one of the few unused geographic names available for use as a chronostratigraphic term in the Fortune Head area. A “Fortune Formation” had been proposed (Heyl, 1936) in north-central Newfoundland for Ordovician trench-fill deposits, but has been abandoned (see Lexicon of Canadian Geologic Units,
2007) as unrecognizable and ambiguous for mapping purposes (Helwig, 1969; Horne and Helwig, 1969).

Correlations and geochronology of the base of the Fortunian Stage were discussed in the preceding section on the Terreneuvian Series. The base of provisional Stage 2, which will mark the top of the Fortunian Stage, is undefined. However, the position is likely to be close to the middle of the Terreneuvian Series. Middle Terreneuvian strata in New Brunswick, Canada, as noted above, have yielded a U-Pb zircon age of 530 Ma (Isachsen et al., 1994). Numerous ages occur in the lower Fortunian Stage (Landing, 2004; E. Landing and S.A. Bowring, unpublished data), and will likely provide dates on the lowest occurrence of diverse small shelly fossils and the pace of the Cambrian radiation.

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