

## ***Interactive comment on “Glacial to interglacial climate variability in the southeastern African subtropics (25–20° S)” by Annette Hahn et al.***

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### **FIRST REVIEWER -REBUTTAL IN CAPITAL LETTERS**

Summary In this article, Hahn et al. report on the analysis of a 958 cm sediment core that was taken in the Delagoa Bight off southeastern Africa. The source of the sediment is argued to be from three nearby river catchments that are relatively small, and as a result of this the environmental information derived from the sediments represents a fairly clean signal (in contrast to nearby cores that sample the Limpopo River catchment which is vast and probably includes multiple climate sensitivities). The chronology for the core is generated using 12 radiocarbon dates, of which two are beyond the limit of the method, and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values from benthic foraminifera that are compared to the

C1

LR04 benthic stack. The radiocarbon dates from the upper part of the record overlap with the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values from the lower part of the stack so that one of the tie  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  tie points has an a priori age assignment. The results of the age model demonstrate a relatively constant deposition over the last 100 000 years. Ca/Mg ratios on foraminifera are used to reconstruct past sea surface temperature (SST), and this record demonstrates that SST was almost 4°C warmer during interglacials (MIS 5 & 1) than it was during glacials (MIS 4-2). The main substance of the article is the presentation of multiple geochemical tracers of terrestrial climate and the associated vegetation responses in the catchment. These include  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  C31 (terrestrial plants community indicator), red/blue ratios (organic vs. classic indicators), K/Al (chemical vs. physical weathering), Ca/Fe (terrestrial vs. marine source indicator) and  $\delta\text{DC31}$  values (rainfall amount indicators). The authors identify a coherent pattern in which all of the geochemical tracers vary in concert with one another, and this is coherently argued to reflect hydrological changes in the associated river catchments. The underlying cause for the alternation between mesic and xeric conditions in the catchment are explored through northern hemisphere forcing in the form of Heinrich Stadials, and southern hemisphere forcing in the form of Antarctic ice advances. What emerges is that the forcing during glacials and interglacials differ from one another, and this must be reconciled through synoptic scale changes in the drivers of continental rainfall (rather than insolation variability). The model that is proposed centers on the way in which the two main moisture-bearing systems, the inter-tropical convergence zone (ITCZ) and the southern hemisphere westerlies (SHW), interact and influence the development of the South African high system that is dominant influence on modern rainfall. In essence the argument is that during glacial conditions the SHW migrate northwards because of Antarctic expansion, while the thermal equator (ITCZ) migrates southward because of Arctic expansion, and the South African high system occludes. The extinction of the South African high pressure system during glacials prevents the development of the southern Indian Ocean convergence zone (SIOCZ) and the associated temperate tropical troughs (TTT) that dominate modern summer rainfall (but please note the comment on this subject below).

C2

As a result, the catchment maintained a relatively constant water balance between glacials and interglacials as the glacial loss of the TTT/SIOCZ was compensated by direct summer rainfall from the ITCZ and/or winter rainfall from the southern hemisphere westerlies (depending on the dominant Arctic vs. Antarctic forcing at the time). **Scientific merit** Notwithstanding the critique that is presented below, this manuscript makes a valuable contribution to climate science in southern Africa. The dynamics of the climate system are relevant to both future projects of climate change, and the interpretation of the rich archaeological heritage of the region. Several archaeological sequences of a similar age are in close enough proximity for the climate model to be relevant. Sibudu cave and Border Cave contain evidence of mesic/xeric cycles, and they are also well dated, so there is potential to refine the glacial/interglacial climate model. Key palaeoclimate records, such as the Pretoria Salt Pan have been dated using insolation arguments, and if the climate model proposed by Hahn et al. is correct, then the basis for the age model of the Pretoria Salt Pan is justified. The authors have presented their data in supplementary tables, which is going to be very useful for comparing this dataset to others. **WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THIS REVIEWER FOR THEIR CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTS AND WE HAVE REPLIED TO EACH COMMENT INDIVIDUALLY BELOW. THE REVIEWER COMMENTS ARE IN BLACK AND OUR RESPONSES IN BLUE.** Review The critique of the manuscript is in the form of substantive clarifications, minor issues, and typos. Substantive clarification One of the most important contributions of this manuscript is the model for synoptic shifts in the region during glacial periods, and in particular its effect on the SIOCZ. Clarification is required of exactly what the SIOCZ is. Comparing Figure 1 with Figure 5 it would appear as if the ITCZ and the SIOCZ are synonymous, but the text line 330 couples the SIOCZ to TTT, and line 334-336 clearly decouples the SIOCZ and the ITCZ. Certainly in the modern system the SIOCZ and TTT systems are distinct from the ITCZ. Since Figure 1 includes the ITCZ, the SHW and the circulation patterns, it should also indicate the modern SIOCZ and TTT systems. **YES, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIOCZ AND ITCZ NEEDS TO BE BETTER EXPLAINED. WE HAVE ADDED**

C3

THE MODERN SIOCZ AND TTT SYSTEMS TO FIGURE 1. FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE DETAILED THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ITCZ AND THE SIOCZ IN THE TEXT (SECTION: “REGIONAL SETTING” LINES 113-116: ). FOLLOWING THE REQUEST BY REVIEWER 2 WE HAVE ALSO DETAILED THE REGIONAL CLIMATE SECTION A BIT MORE ALSO ADDING FIG 1B AND C. The text that describes the contribution of ITCZ summer rainfall in the relevant catchment during glacials (lines 343-347) but in Figure 5 the source of summer rainfall is indicated as the SIOCZ. This needs to be reconciled. **YES; THIS AN ERROR IN FIGURE 5 THAT HAS BEEN CORRECTED NOW. WHAT WAS INITIALLY MARKED AS “SIOCZ” WAS ACTUALLY THE ITCZ, THIS HAS BEEN CHANGED AND THE SIOCZ POSITION IS NOW INDICATED AS WELL.** CONCERNING THE TEXT ON GLACIAL PERIODS: THE SOUTHWARD SHIFTS OF THE ITCZ (DUE TO A MORE SOUTHERLY POSITION OF THE THERMAL EQUATOR) WOULD ENTAIL SOUTHWARD SHIFTS OF THE SIOCZ. IT IS UNCLEAR IF THIS, OR A DIRECT ITCZ INFLUENCE CAUSED HUMID PHASES DURING HEINRICH EVENTS. THIS HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE SECTION “3.2.1.2. HYDROLOGY OVER GLACIAL-INTERGLACIAL TRANSITIONS” LINES 359-363. In the discussion of SST (line 237-240), comparison is between core top SST with modern SST data from Fallet et al. 2012 in order to defend a seasonal interpretation of the *G. ruber* Mg/Ca values. This argument is justified in many ways. First, the uppermost Mg/Ca result from the sediment core is from 40.5cm depth in the core, which is approximately 5 000 years old according to the radiocarbon dates. This cannot be compared with the “modern” data from Fallet et al. (2012) which is approximately 1000 years old. Indeed the age of the youngest Mg/Ca SST value prevents any verification against modern SST values. Second, the satellite data for SST in the Mozambique Channel presented by Fallet et al. (2012), and also the SST data based on Locarnini et al. (2013) presented in Figure 1 show a strong thermal gradient in the Mozambique Channel. Correlating the Mg/Ca 27°C SST temperature for the “top” of this sediment core does not take into account this southward cooling gradient. The inshore location of this core in the Delagoa Bight also implies stronger coastal influences that

C4

is associated with warmer SST (also based on data in Fallet et al. 2012). The seasonality of this SST reconstruction is not central to the development of the climate forcing argument, but it will need to be tempered as a stand-alone interpretation. THIS IS TRUE; WE HAVE REMOVED THE COMPARISON WITH THE CORE TOP SAMPLE. WE HAVE LEFT THE REFERENCE TO WANG ET AL., (2013) SAYING THAT THE AUTHORS "SUGGEST THAT UK<sup>37</sup>SST REFLECTS WARM SEASON SST MODERATED BY CHANGES IN THE ATLANTIC, WHEREAS THE G. RUBER MG/CA SST INDICATOR USED IN THIS STUDY RECORDS COLD SEASON SST MODERATED BY CLIMATE CHANGES IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE.". ALTHOUGH WE AGREE WITH THE REVIEWER THAT THE SEASONALITY OF THE SSTS IS NOT CENTRAL TO OUR ARGUMENTATION, BUT WE THOUGHT WE WOULD LEAVE THIS SUGGESTION AS INFORMATION FOR THE READER. Minor issues The age model for the core is very clearly argued, and is sufficiently convincing for the broad-brush stroke assessment of palaeoenvironmental proxies, but close scrutiny of the radiocarbon dates indicates some heterogeneity in deposition rates. Rapid deposition is indicated between 300cm and 200 cm, and also between 150cm and 100cm (although the Bacon model produces a parsimonious smoothing that downplays the date from 102cm). Placing more emphasis on the outlier date leads to the possibility of very slow deposition in the 15 000-6 000 year range, and also in the 32 000 -25 000 year range. The Bacon model needs more input data to verify this level of heterogeneity, and so there is possibly an underestimation of the error in the age model around these periods of slow deposition. Similarly only 2  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  tie points are used in the chronology for the oldest 60 000 year part of the record. This clearly cannot capture heterogeneity in the deposition rate, and again the age model error estimates are probably too small. WE AGREE WITH THE REVIEWER AND HAVE ADDED THIS TO THE AGE MODEL ERROR ESTIMATION IN SECTION "2.3. AGE MODEL" SEE LINES 156-171

The suite of proxies that reflect wet and dry conditions in the catchment are reported to change in concert with one another, and this is clear in a relative sense but not in an absolute sense. Scrutiny of Figure 4, for example, shows clear oscillations in

C5

values that are synchronized between proxies, but within proxies these oscillations are really most apparent because of the contrasting peaks and trough values that are immediately older or younger. The absolute values do not hold up to the wet/dry assignations. The K/Al and Ca/Fe ratios in the wet period around 82 000 years ago, for example, have very similar values to the arid values at around 46 000 and 52 000 years ago, and so the absolute values are seemingly not important. Some discussion of the relative nature of these proxies should be presented. WE AGREE AND HAVE ADDED THIS IDEA TO THE END OF THE "3.1.3 PRECIPITATION INDICATORS" SECTION LINES 313-328 The interpretation of the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  record invokes a framework presented by Dupont et al. (2011) in which woodlands and forests with grasslands in the interior during interglacials is contrasted with rivers fringed with gallery forests & sedges in glacials. This scenario may account for the observed trends in the record, but it is a very imprecise science. The entire  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  variability noted in the 100000 year record all falls very in the range of C3 plants, and even the maximum values that are interpreted as an increased C4 plant community still fall in the C3 range. As much as this represents an integrated C3/C4 environmental shift, it could just as well represent a xeric/mesic environment with exactly the same C3 plant communities. THE ENTIRE  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  VARIABILITY NOTED IN THE 100000 YEAR RECORD (-26 TO -23‰) IS INDEED RELATIVELY SMALL AND CLOSE TO THE  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  VALUES EXPECTED FOR ALKANES FROM C4 PLANTS (AROUND -20‰) DEPLETED UP TO -25‰. COMPARED AT SET ALL AFRICA FOR C31 ALKANE IN GARCIN ET AL., 2014 25 SO THE VARIABILITY OBSERVED IN OUR RECORD MUST BE CAUSED BY VAI A) IF SHIFTS IN D13C WERE ONLY DEPENDENT ON SHIFTS IN HYDROLOGY (X 0.15), WE ASSUME THAT A FURTHER FACTOR (I.E. SHIFT IN VEGETATION BIO 1 INTERGLACIAL TRANSITIONS. IF THIS WAS THE CASE IN THE LIMPOPO CAT 285 FINALLY WE NOTETHAT WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO PINPOINT EXACTLY W. 285). The role of sedges in the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  record interpretation also needs closer consideration. Stock et al. (2004 *Austral Ecology*) suggest that 14% of sedges are C4 in winter rainfall areas and 67% are C4 in summer rainfall areas. Seasonality of rainfall is

C6

clearly a controlling factor in the C3/C4 pathways for sedges, but the interpretation of the sediment core  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  record seems to hint that they are all C4. THIS IS AN INTERESTING POINT AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT VARIATIONS IN WINTER AND SUMMER RAINFALL MAY AFFECT THE VEGETATION AND THUS OUR D13C RECORD. HOWEVER, WITHOUT DOWNCORE PALYNOLogy WITH PHYTOLITH ANALYSIS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN C4 AND C3 GRASSES, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO GO INTO SUCH DETAIL. LOOKING AT THE DATA, IT ALSO SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH AN EFFECT TOOK PLACE: IF THE SHIFTS FROM WINTER TO SUMMER RAIN WERE DRIVING D13C VALUES, OUR DATA WOULD SUGGEST THAT GLACIAL PERIODS HAVE INCREASED SUMMER RAINS, WHEREAS INTER-GLACIALS HAD A MORE WINTER RAINFALL REGIME. THIS IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY; WE KNOW THAT MODERN (INTERGLACIAL) CLIMATE IS A SUMMER RAINFALL REGIME AND THAT ONLY DURING GLACIALS HAS THE WINTER RAINFALL ZONE BEEN INFERRED TO SHIFT NORTHWARD. THIS INTERPRETATION OF THE D13C SIGNAL WOULD THEREFORE BE VERY DIFFICULT TO CONSOLIDATE WITH WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE REGIONAL CLIMATE. The association between the wet/dry cycles portrayed in the core, and Heinrich Events and the Antarctic Isotope Maxima events is important in resolving the underlying climate forcing. It should be noted that HS4 is the negative excursion in the NGRIP  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  record around 37 000 years ago (possibly older as it is portrayed in Figure 4 – maybe 38 000 -40 000 years ago). It is associated with a dry interval (red shading in Figure 4) but the text associates it with a wet period (lines 395-399). Overall the association between wet/dry phases in the core proxies and the AIM and HS data is dependent on the errors in the age model, which was argued to be underestimated, but still comprises several thousand years in the older portion of the core. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS IS TRUE, AND WE HAVE POINTED THIS OUT IN THE MANUSCRIPT AT THE END OF THE SECTION “3.2.2.2. DURING MIS 4-2 GLACIAL CONDITIONS” DISCUSSION: LINES 438-441 It would be useful for those who will undoubtedly make use of this record in their research if the supplementary tables include a model age assignation,

C7

and not just the sample depth in the core. GOOD IDEA. THIS HAS BEEN DONE. Figures and Agure captions Figure 1: Please depict the SIOCZ and TTT because it is relevant in the discussion. UPON SUGGESTION BY THE 2ND REVIEWER, WE HAVE ADDED A NEW SUB FIGURE TO FIG1 THAT NOW SHOWS IN DETAIL THE MODERN CLIMATE SYSTEM INCLUDING SIOCZ AND TTT. Wonderkrater is depicted in the wrong place (somewhere in Zimbabwe). In reality it is well within the Limpopo catchment. YES! CHANGED. Figure 2: The caption mentions “LR04” twice in a redundant manner. DONE Figure 3: This caption needs to be rewritten. It is difficult to decipher what is being referred to because of a random sprinkling of right parentheses and colons. WE HAVE REWRITTEN THE CAPTION FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING Figure 4: This caption attributes blue or green shading as wet, “while wet phases are marked in red or yellow”. Presumably one of these is dry. YES, THIS HAS BEEN CORRECTED, THE LATTER IS DRY. What is described as blue appears purple – this may be a personal problem, but possibly re-consider the colour that is used. WE HAVE OPTED FOR A PURE BLUE Now. The text “related to low pressure cells” is correct but confusing in its detail and should be revised. YES, THIS DETAIL IS CONFUSING IN THE TEXT, WE HAVE REMOVED IT. Typos Line 66: winterly should be winter OK Line 67, 114-115, 330, 334-336: DeAgne the SIOCZ, is this the same as TTT (in Ag 5 it seem synonymous with the southern extent of the ITCZ, but line 330 couples it to TTT, and line 334-336 clearly decouples the SIOCZ and the ITCZ) YES, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIOCZ, TTT AND ITCZ NEEDS TO BE BETTER EXPLAINED. THE SIOCZ IS A SOUTHWARD EXTENSION OF THE ITCZ. THE TROPICAL TEMPERATE TROUGHS (TTTS) FORM AT THE SIOCZ. WE HAVE ADDED THE MODERN ITCZ, SIOCZ AND TTT SYSTEMS TO NEW SUBFIGURE OF FIGURE 1. FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE DETAILED THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ITCZ AND THE SIOCZ AND TTT IN THE TEXT (SECTION: “REGIONAL SETTING” LINES 113-116 ).

and also put it on to Ag 1 as it comes up repeatedly OK Line 76: Re introduces the SIOCZ acronym THIS HAS BEEN REMOVED. Line 201: permil, but on line 139 per

C8

mil. Please be consistent throughout the text OK Line 244: Fig. 1a should be Fig. 3a  
YES!

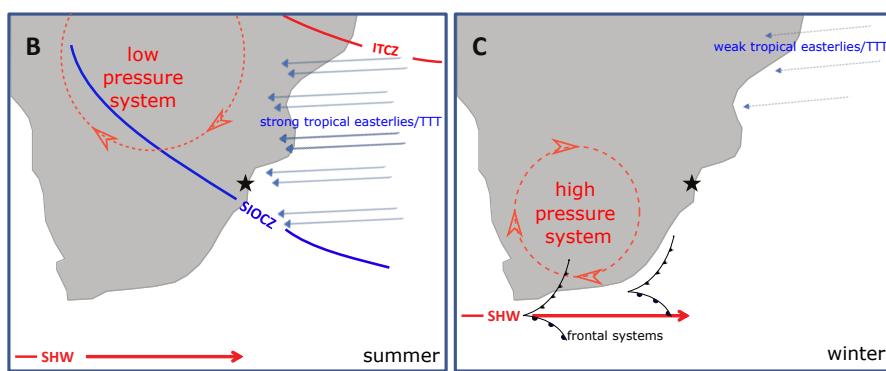
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Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<https://cp.copernicus.org/preprints/cp-2019-158/cp-2019-158-AC1-supplement.pdf>

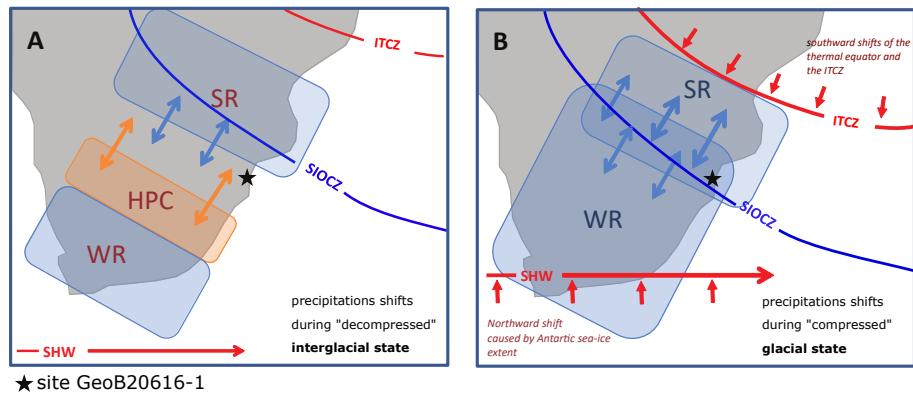
Interactive comment on Clim. Past Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/cp-2019-158>, 2020.

C9



**Fig. 1.** revised fig 1

C10



**Fig. 2.** revised fig 5

C11