Paralleling the central horst along the entire rift zone from Lake Superior to Kansas are linear gravity minima that mark the site of thick deposits of Keweenawan sedimentary rock. In Wisconsin the most prominent of these minima, the Bayfield low, appears to be on trend with the horst axis gravity maxima. This anomaly may represent a rift flank sedimentary basin offset by right-lateral faulting. Immediately to the southwest of the Bayfield low, the Midcontinent Gravity High appears to bifurcate (fig. 1). The southern bifurcated branch traces the Middle Keweenawan Portage Lake Volcanic Group outcrop up the center of the Keweenaw Peninsula; the northern branch outlines the Duluth Gabbro Complex and the North Shore Volcanic Group northeastward to the Canadian border.

The geometry of the flanking basins is usually depicted as resembling the Kay (1951) taphro-geosyncline, "sediment filled, deeply depressed rift blocks bounded by one or more high angle faults." In northwestern Wisconsin the northern flanking basin sedimentary rocks are identified in outcrop as type strata of the Bayfield Group, composed of from oldest to youngest, the Orienta Sandstone, Devils Island Sandstone, and the Chequamegon Sandstone. These three formations average 89 percent quartz; the middle unit is classified as an orthoquartzite. The Bayfield Group is subhorizontal, mineralogically and texturally more mature and much thinner than the Oronto Group. Minimum thickness is 815 m (Myers, 1971); overall total subsurface thickness for the Bayfield Group may approach 2,100 m. In Minnesota and Iowa the presence of Bayfield Group equivalent strata is based on deep well, refraction seismic, and gravity data analysis.

## LITHOSPHERIC FLEXURE AND EVOLUTION OF THE MIDCONTINENT RIFT

Jonathan E. Nyquist and Herbert F. Wang

In 1984 Petty Ray Geophysical ran a speculative seismic reflection survey across the Midcontinent Rift System crossing the Wisconsin-Minnesota border near St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. The basement profile suggests that the sedimentary basins flanking the Midcontinent Rift System formed by flexure of the lithosphere rather than as half grabens. We modeled the lithosphere as an elastic plate of thickness (h) floating on a fluid mantle. A line load of magnitude ( $V_0$ ) acting at the center of the plate deforms the lithosphere and sediments fill the depression (fig. 1). The elastic thickness of the lithosphere is a modeling fiction. It is the thickness of an elastic plate that approximates the long-term behavior of the lithosphere and is always thinner than the thermal lithosphere.

The best model fit to the seismic data is for a flexural parameter of a = 35 km and a load of  $6.3 \times 10^{12} \text{ N/m}$  (fig. 2). This surprisingly low value is reflected in the narrow basin width and indicates that the lithosphere was thinned at the time of basin formation, possibly by a combination of extension and high heat flow. The magnitude of the central load required to produce the flexure is too great to be explained by volcanics; a major mountain range would be required. We suggest that mantle material intruded the lower crust, an idea supported by the anomalously high compressional velocities seen in the lower crust by deep refraction.

Deep seismic refraction data disclose that the Moho "basin" beneath the rift has also been deformed by flexure. However, the Moho is much wider, implying that the lithosphere cooled and thickened after rifting. Compensation for the intracrustal load now occurs at a greater depth.

The seismic reflection and refraction data give two snapshots of basin evolution. The reflection data show the sedimentary basin shape, which probably formed within the first 50 m.y. after rifting; the surface flexure represents the situation when the plate cools. The refraction data show the present shape of the Moho a billion years later. We suggest the following scenario for the evolution of the Midcontinent Rift System in this region:

- (1) Extension and high heat flow thins the lithosphere, and the mantle material intrudes the lower crust. Isostatic adjustment creates a gently dipping basin that fills with sediments and fissure-fed volcanics (fig. 3).
- (2) Volcanic activity ceases and the cooling intrusion contracts, increasing in density and loading the crust; sedimentation keeps pace with the deepening basin. The elastic thickness of the lithosphere rapidly increases with cooling (fig. 4).
- (3) Subsidence stops when the intrusive body has cooled. The St. Croix Horst is thrust up along the Douglas and Lake Owen Faults. The intracrustal body is preserved by the stable cratonic environment, but as the lithosphere thickens compensation occurs at a greater depth and with a longer wavelength reflected in the present day deformation of the Moho (fig. 5).

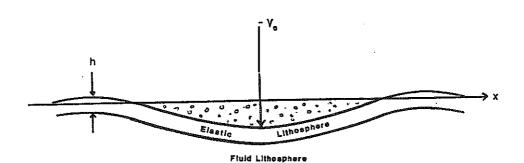


Figure 1. Flexural model.

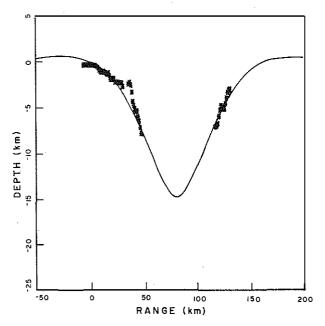


Figure 2. Least squares fit of unbroken plate model to seismic data, a=35 km; load, vo =6.3 X 10<sup>13</sup> N/M.

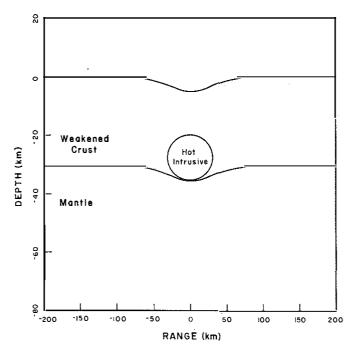


Figure 4. The intrusive cools and increases in density flexing the lithosphere further. Volcanics and sediments accumulate in the basin.

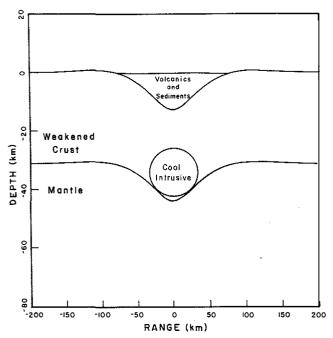


Figure 3. Extension and high heat flow thin the elastic lithosphere. The weight of hot, dense material intruding the lower crust flexes the lithosphere and produces a gentle basin.

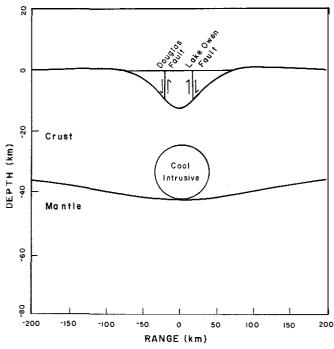


Figure 5. The elastic lithosphere thickens as the normal geothermal gradient is restored. The surface deformation is frozen in, but intrusive body is preserved by the stable cratonic environment and is now compensated at great depth over a wider region. The St. Croix Horst is uplifted along the Douglas and Lake Owen Faults in a later compressional event.

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