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SUMMARY
Regional axial depths, mantle Bouguer anomaly values, geochemical proxies for the extent of partial melting and tomographic models along the Southwest Indian Ridge (SWIR) all concur in indicating the presence of thicker crust and hotter mantle between the Indomed and Gallieni transform faults (TFs; 46°E and 52°20′E) relative to the neighbouring ridge sections. Accreted seafloor between these TFs over the past ∼10 Myr is also locally much shallower (>1000 m) and corresponds to thicker crust (>1.7 km) than previously accreted seafloor along the same ridge region. Two large outward facing topographic gradients mark the outer edges of two anomalously shallow off-axis domains on the African and Antarctic plates. Their vertical relief (>2000 m locally) and their geometry, parallel to the present-day axis along a >210-km-long ridge section, suggest an extremely sudden and large event dated between ∼8 (magnetic anomaly C4n) and ∼11 Ma (magnetic anomaly C5n). Asymmetric spreading and small ridge jumps occur at the onset of the formation of the anomalously shallow off-axis domains, leading to a re-organization of the ridge segmentation. We interpret these anomalously shallow off-axis domains as the relicts of a volcanic plateau due to a sudden increase of the magma supply. This event of enhanced magmatism started in the central part of the ridge section and then propagated along axis to the east and probably also to the west. However, it did not cross the Gallieni and Indomed TFs suggesting that large offsets can curtail or even block along-axis melt flow. We propose that this melting anomaly may be ascribed to a regionally higher mantle temperature provided by mantle outpouring from the Crozet hotspot towards the SWIR.

Key words: Magnetic anomalies: modelling and interpretation; Mid-ocean ridge processes; Hotspots; Indian Ocean.

1 INTRODUCTION
Hotspot–ridge interactions induce physical and chemical anomalies along a significant portion (15–20 per cent) of the global mid-ocean ridge system (Ito et al. 2003). Near or on ridge plumes decrease the depth of the ridge axis, thicken the oceanic crust and leave an imprint on the mid-ocean ridge geochemistry. By far, the largest and best studied example of ridge–hotspot interaction is Iceland, where the mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) axis rises above sea level and is underlain by a region of low mantle velocities being interpreted as a hot plume (e.g. White et al. 1995; Wolfe et al. 1997; Searle et al. 1998; Pilidou et al. 2005). The amplitude of bathymetry and gravity anomalies is maximum on such on-axis hotspots and decreases with increasing ridge–hotspot distance (Ito & Lin 1995; Ribe et al. 1995). The along-axis length of these bathymetry and gravity anomalies, however, depend inversely on spreading rate, reflecting the extent to which plume material will flow along axis before being swept away by the spreading lithosphere (Ito & Lin 1995; Ribe et al. 1995).

The importance of thick lithosphere resulting from plate cooling with age and from large transform offsets in controlling the style of ridge–hotspot interaction in ultraslow spreading environments has been pointed out by Georgen et al. (2001) and Georgen & Lin
The Southwest Indian Ridge (SWIR) is among the world's slowest-spreading ridges (at 64°E/28°S, Patriat et al. 1997; Chu & Gordon 1999). Together with the ultraslow-spreading Arctic ridges, the SWIR makes up a significant proportion of the global oceanic ridge system (about 20 per cent of the total length of ridges spreads at rates less than 20 km Myr$^{-1}$; Bird 2003). Both the Bouvet and Marion hotspots have significant effects on the accretionary processes in the western and central portion of the SWIR, respectively (Georgen et al. 2001). By contrast, the Crozet hotspot, located at ~1000 km south of the ridge axis (Fig. 1) is thought to have presently no interaction with the ridge (Meyzen et al. 2005).

Using available off-axis bathymetry, gravity and magnetic data, we show evidence for a transient event of enhanced magmatism occurring along the central part of the SWIR between the Indomed transform fault (TF) and the Gallieni TF (46°E and 52°20′E, respectively). We interpret this event as due to more pronounced interactions between the SWIR and the Crozet hotspot in the recent past (<10 Ma).

2 GEOLOGICAL SETTING

The SWIR (Fig. 1) is among the world’s slowest-spreading ridges. Between the Prince Edward TF (35°30′E) and the Rodrigues Triple Junction (70°E) the SWIR separates Somalia and Antarctica with an almost constant spreading rate of ~14 km Myr$^{-1}$ (Horner-Johnson et al. 2005). The compilation of multibeam bathymetric data along the axial valley of the SWIR reveals two shallow regions of the ridge (Fig. 1c). The western one, near the Marion Island, has a 3090 m mean axial depth and is bounded by the Prince Edward TF and the Discovery TF, which offset the ridge by about 720 and 350 km, respectively. The eastern shallow region is located at ~1000 km to the north of the Crozet hotspot and is bounded by the Indomed and Gallieni TFs which offset the ridge axis by about 145 and 115 km, respectively (corresponding to ~20 and ~16 Myr age offsets, respectively). The mean axial depth reaches 3180 m between these two TFs. The axis runs deeper (3530 m) between the Discovery and Indomed TFs. To the east of the Gallieni TF, axial depths increase, reaching a mean value of 4730 m in the deepest
part of the ridge, between the Melville TF (61°E) and the Rodrigues Triple Junction. These large-scale (>200 km) variations in axial depths of the SWIR appear primarily owing to heterogeneities in mantle temperature (Cannat et al. 1999b, 2008). Despite some local compositional complexities, regional averages of sodium content of SWIR basalts (Na80 corrected for the effect of low-pressure fractional crystallization to a common MgO content of 8 wt. per cent) are well correlated with the regional axial depths along the ridge (Cannat et al. 2008). These regional averages of the Na80 contents of basalts are commonly used to evaluate melt supply variations along the mid-ocean ridge system (Klein & Langmuir 1987). Between the Andrew Bain TF system and the Galienni TF, the along-axis variations of Na80 content of basalts mimic the axial depth variations (Fig. 1c). Two subsections with a lower mean Na80 (indicating higher partial melting degree) are separated by a small subsection between the Discovery and Indomed TFs, where Na80 is on average slightly higher (indicating lower partial melting degree). Both axial depths and basalt Na80 content steadily increase to the east of Galienni TF (Fig. 1c), suggesting a progressive eastward decrease of the ridge's melt supply. This increase in Na80 contents of basalts is correlated with a decrease in their Fe80 contents (Meyzen et al. 2003). This is consistent with an eastward decrease in the mean pressure of mantle melting (Klein & Langmuir 1987), and suggests lower mantle temperature in the east (Meyzen et al. 2003). Very low-degrees of melting of abyssal peridotites were also inferred from the Cr/(Cr+Al) ratio in spinels along the 61–64°E section of the SWIR (Seyer et al. 2003).

The Marion hotspot has been purported to have formed the Karoo flood basalts in Southern Africa 184 Ma ago (e.g. Morgan 1981) and may thus be one of the oldest active hotspots. It is also proposed as a source of the Cretaceous flood basalts in Madagascar (Mahoney et al. 1991; Storey et al. 1995). Subsequent to the Madagascar volcanism, the plume would have created the Madagascar province (Mahoney et al. 1991; Storey et al. 1995). The mid-Ocean ridge basalts (MORB) are characterized by low Na80 and low iron content (Mahoney et al. 1991; Storey et al. 1995). The Marion hotspot has been proposed as a source for the Kerguelen Island basalts (Haug & Kellogg 1995; Recq et al. 1998). The seismic crustal thickness of 10–16.5 km beneath the Crozet Bank is similar to the mean thickness determined for plume-affected structures (Recq et al. 1998). The seismic crustal thickness of 10–16.5 km beneath the Crozet Bank is similar to the mean thickness determined for plume-affected structures (Recq et al. 1998). The seismic crustal thickness of 10–16.5 km beneath the Crozet Bank is similar to the mean thickness determined for plume-affected structures (Recq et al. 1998). The seismic crustal thickness of 10–16.5 km beneath the Crozet Bank is similar to the mean thickness determined for plume-affected structures (Recq et al. 1998). The seismic crustal thickness of 10–16.5 km beneath the Crozet Bank is similar to the mean thickness determined for plume-affected structures (Recq et al. 1998). The seismic crustal thickness of 10–16.5 km beneath the Crozet Bank is similar to the mean thickness determined for plume-affected structures (Recq et al. 1998).

3 DATA ANALYSIS

Detailed mapping of the axial valley is now available almost over the entire length of the SWIR. The most recently acquired multibeam data covers the axis between 32°E and 49°E (Figs 1 and 2) and was acquired during the SWIFT cruise on board of the R/V Marion Dufresne in 2001. We used these bathymetric data merged with existing multibeam data of the GALLiEni cruise (Sauter et al. 2001; Mendel et al. 2003; Figs 2 and 3) to refine the MBA map of Georgen et al. (2001) which was calculated using the GECBO-97 bathymetric map (5′ grid spacing) of Fisher & Goodwillie (1997) and satellite-derived free air anomaly data (2′ grid spacing global gravity database of Sandwell & Smith 1997). Because no gravity data was collected during the SWIFT cruise, we merged, between
the Andrew Bain and Gallieni TFs, free air anomaly data from the Gallieni cruise (Sauter et al. 2001) and satellite-derived free air anomaly data. The effect of a constant thickness (5 km), constant density (2700 kg m$^{-3}$) crust was removed from these free air anomaly data to obtain MBA values (Figs 2 and 3c). This new MBA map, which was calculated with multibeam bathymetric data is more reliable and has a higher resolution than the MBA map of Georgen et al. (2001). It shows similar long-wavelength trends but differs at the shorter-wavelength scale of ridge segments. For areas with significant bathymetric coverage (i.e. the region mapped during the Gallieni cruise between 49$^\circ$ and 51$^\prime$E), we also used the gravity-derived crustal thickness map published by Mendel et al. (2003) (see Fig. 3d).

We also used magnetic anomalies in order to refine the spreading history of the SWIR between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs. We used off-axis magnetic data collected during the Gallieni cruise (Sauter et al. 2004) and SWIFT cruises (Fig. 3). Total magnetic field data were collected during both cruises using towed proton precession magnetometers along approximately north–south flow line parallel profiles. We also re-analysed three isolated magnetic profiles (md121, gall02 and rco14), which cross the ridge to the east of 49$^\circ$E (Fig. 3). Mean spreading rates and magnitudes of spreading asymmetry between magnetic anomalies C1n.o-C3An.y and C3An.y-C5n.o are given in Mendel et al. (2003) for the Gallieni cruise area (y and o stand for the young and old edge of the magnetic block, respectively). Here, we analyse selected magnetic anomaly profiles (Fig. 3) by performing simple 2-D forward modelling to identify magnetic anomalies C2An.y (2.581 Ma), C3n.y (4.18 Ma), C3An.y (5.894 Ma), C4n.o (8.072 Ma) and C5n.o [10.949 Ma; ages are from the geomagnetic reversal timescale of Cande & Kent (1995)].

4 RESULTS

4.1 Along-axis bathymetric and gravimetric variations between the Andrew Bain and Gallieni TFs

Gravity anomalies reflect the density structure of the crust and upper mantle. MBA lows correspond to thicker constant density model crust, or to lighter material whereas MBA highs correspond to thinner constant density model crust or to denser crustal or upper-mantle material. MBA shows pronounced intermediate- to long-wavelength trends along the SWIR (Fig. 2). From west to east, MBA values decrease from a high at the Andrew Bain TF (Georgen et al. 2001) to a regional low (up to $-99$ mGal) between the Prince Edward and Discovery TFs (Fig. 2). This prominent MBA low is interpreted as due to thicker crust and/or a hotter mantle near Marion Island (Georgen et al. 2001). Further east MBA values decrease again from a regional high between the Discovery and Indomed TFs to a regional low ($-84$ mGal) bounded by the Indomed and Gallieni TFs. This second local MBA low corresponds to our study area (Fig. 3). To the east of the Gallieni TF, MBA values increase again and the ridge deepens towards the Melville TF (Cannat et al. 1999b). The ridge axis is highly oblique there (56$^\circ$ mean ridge azimuth) whereas it is less oblique between the Discovery and Gallieni TFs ($-70^\circ$ mean ridge azimuth; Cannat et al. 2008).

The bathymetric and gravimetric signature of the small-scale segmentation also varies along the SWIR axis. Long (>70 km) and high-relief segments (up to 2400 m) corresponding to marked MBA lows characterize the relatively shallow ridge section between the Prince Edward and Discovery TFs (Fig. 2). It is likely that this segmentation reflects robust magmatism due to the Marion hotspot (Georgen et al. 2001). By contrast, the section between the Discovery and Gallieni TFs reveals much shorter segments (<40 km) with lower relief (<1400 m) except in the shallowest part of the ridge section at 50$^\circ$ 30$'$E (Fig. 2). In this ridge section, a long (85 km) and high relief segment (>1900 m) with a pronounced MBA low (Fig. 3c) has been interpreted as a magmatically robust segment by Sauter et al. (2001). The axial valley disappears at the centre of this segment [segment #27 following the nomenclature of Cannat et al. (1999b)] where numerous flat-topped volcanoes are observed (Mendel et al. 2003). The first active hydrothermal vent field discovered in 2007 along the SWIR is located at the western end of this segment #27 (Tao et al. 2007).

4.2 Off-axis bathymetric and gravimetric variations between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs

Off-axis bathymetric data between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs (Fig. 3a) show the presence of anomalously shallow seafloor extending on both ridge flanks. The deepening of the seafloor with age does not follow a simple subsidence curve. Instead two outward facing topographic gradients with >2000 m of vertical relief locally bound two off-axis domains of anomalously elevated seafloor (hereafter called shallow off-axis domains; Figs 3 and 4). This step-like deepening of the seafloor is clearly distinct from the progressive deepening of seafloor with age estimated using the empirical depth ($D$) versus age ($t$) curve of Parsons & Sclater (1977) $D(t) = 340t^{1/2} + D(t = 0)$ and assuming symmetrical spreading about the location of the present-day axis (Fig. 4). Shipboard bathymetry, gravity and magnetic data over the two large outward facing slopes marking the outer edges of the shallow off-axis domains are available only in the 49$^\circ$ 20$'$E to 51$^\prime$ 20$'$E region (Fig. 3). In this region, these outward facing slopes are located at 30–70 km from the axis on both plates. Their average slope is $\sim 10^\circ$ with rare and steeper faults scars (Fig. 4). Detailed multibeam bathymetric maps of these outward facing slopes as well as those of most of the shallow off-axis domains reveal rounded shaped features suggesting a volcanic constructional origin (Mendel et al. 2003; Fig. 5). Towards the axis the shallow off-axis domains on both plates are bounded by the walls of the present-day axial valley. The shallower seafloor at the centre of segment #27, where the axial valley disappears, connects the southern and northern shallow off-axis domains (Figs 3 and 4). The seafloor there is almost flat (see profile G25 in Figs 3 and 4). The axial valley is present at the eastern and western ends of segment #27, and narrows towards the segment centre (Fig. 3a). Such shallow off-axis domains are not observed neither to the east of the
Figure 3. Magnetic anomaly identifications superimposed to the (a) bathymetric map, (b) physiographic sketch, (c) MBA map of the SWIR between the Indomed and the Gallieni TFs and (d) the gravity-derived crustal thickness map of Mendel et al. (2003) between 49°15′E and 51°20′E. Multibeam bathymetric data (in bright colours) from the SWIFT and the GALLiENi cruises were merged with a 2′ grid of predicted seafloor depths from satellite data (in light colours) (Smith & Sandwell 1997). Black hexagons are C5n.o (10.949 Ma) identifications from Lemaux et al. (2002). Black stars and triangles are C6n.o (20.131 Ma) and C8n.o (26.554 Ma) identifications from Patriat et al. (2008). The MBA calculated with multibeam bathymetric data is shown in bright colours whereas light colours correspond to the MBA calculated with the GEBCO bathymetric map (Fisher & Goodwillie 1997). The thin black lines indicate the location of the profiles shown in Figs 4 and 6: G9, G25, G37, G47 of the GALLiENi cruise (Sauter et al. 2001), mdu121 of the SWIFT cruise and rco14 of the RC1401 cruise. Colour and contour intervals are every 400 m in the crustal thickness map. The white dashed frame in the crustal thickness map shows the location of Fig. 5.

Gallieni TF (Mendel et al. 2003) nor to the west of the Indomed TF (Figs 1 and 4).

The width of the shallow off-axis domains on each plate, as defined by the axial valley walls and by the outward-facing outer slopes, is almost constant (50–60 km) in the >210-km-long ridge region between ~47°15′E and ~49°30′E (Fig. 3). Isolated magnetic profiles available in this region (Figs 3 and 6) show that the outward-facing outer slopes correspond to crustal ages between...
...magmatic robust segment #27 in the shallow off-axis domains. Asymmetric spreading would also explain why the off-axis shallow domain in the GALLiENi survey area, is significantly wider in the southern plate than in the northern plate (~60 km against ~40 km at 50°E, see profiles G25 and G37 in Fig. 6).

Bathymetry and the crustal thickness variation map modelled from gravity data in the GALLiENi survey area (Fig. 3d; Mendel et al. 2003) reveal that the seafloor is on average 1000 m shallower, and the crust 1.7 km thicker beneath the shallow off-axis domains (average seafloor depth 2080 ± 350 m; average crustal thickness 6.1 ± 0.8 km), than beneath the older and deeper off-axis domains (average seafloor depth 3050 ± 310 m; average crustal thickness 4.4 ± 0.8 km). This is illustrated in Fig. 7, where seafloor depth and modelled crustal thickness are plotted along Chrons C2An.y and C5n.o in the African and Antarctic plates. On top of the shallow off-axis domains, the seafloor is about 1 km shallower along Chron C2An.y than along Chron C5n.o (Fig. 7). The differences between the mean crustal thickness calculated along these two Chrons fall in the range 1.4–2.4 km. The maximum model crustal thickness corresponds to the present-day ridge axis at the centre of segment #27. The model crust there is 3 km thicker than in the older and deeper seafloor outside the shallow domain (see profile G25 in Fig. 6). On average, the model crust on-axis in the Gallieni survey area is 0.8 km thinner than over the shallow off-axis domains. However, the gravity-derived crustal thickness model neglects lateral density variations. While this assumption may be valid, at least as a working hypothesis, in the off-axis areas, it is unlikely to be so on axis, where local melt concentrations would modify the density structure, and where the thermal structure is most poorly constrained. For this reason, the gravity-derived crustal thickness variations between the axial area and the off-axis domains should be taken with caution.

The off-axis bathymetry predicted from satellite data shows no stable off-axis trace of the segmentation in the old and deep off-axis domains between 49°E and the Gallieni TF (Fig. 3a). The bathymetric highs there are randomly distributed (Mendel et al. 2003). There is no continuity between the axial segmentation and the gravity structure in these old and deep off-axis domains, indicating that the present-day segmentation was not established prior the formation of the shallow off-axis domains. The obliquity of the present-day axis between 49°E and the Gallieni TF is lower than between 49°E and the Indomed TF where a large axial non-transform discontinuity offset the ridge by >70 km. This large axial discontinuity could have been inherited from the large discontinuities observed in the deep off-axis domains at 48°E using the bathymetry predicted from the satellite data (Fig. 3a). However, the lack of multibeam bathymetry data to the west of 49°E does not allow further analysis. The off-axis traces of the present-day axial discontinuities can be followed up to the outward-facing outer slopes (Fig. 3). The past activity of the magmatically robust segment #27 in the shallow off-axis domains is revealed by large abyssal hills (60 km long, 10–20 km width and 500–900 m high) with a steep faulted scarp facing towards the axis and a gentle dipping outward-facing slope crowned by numerous conical seamounts (Mendel et al. 2003). These abyssal hills look like the large abyssal hills (10–16 km wide and 600–700 m high) observed in the ridge section between the Andrew Bain and Prince...
The ages determined for the southern branch of the V-shaped shallow off-axis domains in the GALLiENi survey area would correspond to an eastward propagation of the emplacement of the shallow off-axis domains 8.1–4.2 Ma ago, at a mean rate of \(~30\) km Ma\(^{-1}\) (twice the spreading rate). However, the outer slope of the southern shallow off-axis domain has an en-échelon shape with sections, which are nearly spreading-perpendicular, and at least 3 and possibly four sections which are more oblique (Fig. 3). This indicates that the propagation probably did not occur progressively at this average rate of 30 km Ma\(^{-1}\) over the 8.1–4.2 Ma time period, but faster over at least three and possibly four shorter time periods. Two of the more oblique sections of the southern outer slope coincide with the east and west ends of segment #27 (at about 50°05'E and 50°50'E; Figs 3a and b). This could indicate that the propagation of the emplacement of the shallow off-axis domains was discontinuous with small jumps of the ridge axis to the north-east inducing the formation of new axial discontinuities and no or little propagation meanwhile during the early construction of the segments.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 A melt supply anomaly and its along-axis propagation

Seafloor accreted along the SWIR between the Gallieni and Melville TFs (Hosford et al. 2003; Mendel et al. 2003). By contrast, they are up to 15 km wider and 500 m higher than the abyssal hills observed in the deeper section of the SWIR between the Gallieni and Melville TFs (Hosford et al. 2003; Mendel et al. 2003).

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5 DISCUSSION

5.1 A melt supply anomaly and its along-axis propagation

Seafloor accreted along the SWIR between the Indomed and the Gallieni TFs over the past \(~10\) Myr is locally much shallower and corresponds to thicker crust than seafloor accreted previously along the same ridge region. The outward facing topographic gradients marking the outer edges of the off-axis shallow domains are at least partially, volcanic constructions (Fig. 5). Their vertical relief (>2000 m locally) and their geometry, parallel to the present-day ridge axis along a >210-km-long ridge section, suggest an extremely sudden and large event dated between >8 and \(~11\) Ma (Figs 3 and 6). Asymmetric spreading and small ridge jumps occur at the on-set of the formation of the shallow off-axis domains, leading to a reorganization of the ridge segmentation. To the east of \(~49°30'E\) towards the Gallieni TF, and possibly also to the west of \(~47°15'E\) towards the Indomed TF (Fig. 3), the age of the outer edges of the shallow off-axis domains decreases indicating along-axis propagation of this event towards these TFs since \(~8\) Ma. At present, except at the centre of the matically robust segment #27, the axial valley is deeper and characterized by possibly thinner gravity-derived model crust than the shallow off-axis domains. We interpret these shallow off-axis domains as the relicts of a volcanic plateau due to a sudden increase of the magma supply which is still active at segment #27 but which has ended along the remaining part of the studied ridge section. We therefore interpret the present-day axial valley, which appears to propagate into segment #27, as partly the result of the rifting of this volcanic plateau.

The mean depth difference between the shallow off-axis domains and the older and deeper off-axis domains (\(~1\) km in the GALLiENi survey area), is equivalent to the difference between the mean present-day axial depths of the ridge sections to the east and to the west of the Gallieni TF (Cannat et al. 1999b; Fig. 2). Based on modelled relationships between regional axial depth, and mantle temperature and melt supply (Klein & Langmuir 1987; White et al. 1992), this difference in mean depth suggests that the melt anomaly responsible for the formation of the shallow off-axis domains in our study area had an amplitude of about \(~2\) km, and could have corresponded to melting of \(~40\) °C hotter subaxial mantle [see Cannat et al. (2004) for explanations on the 1-D analytical model of mantle melting derived from Langmuir et al. (1992) and taking into account the effect of upper-mantle conductive cooling at the top of the melting regime in a similar way to the corner flow 2-D model of Bown & White (1994)]. The reduction in melt supply to the east of the Gallieni TF may also be partly ascribed to a decrease in the rate of mantle upflow due to the highest ridge axis obliquity there (Dick et al. 2003). However, the corresponding decrease of effective spreading rate (the half-spreading rate resolved in the ridge-perpendicular direction, Dick et al. 2003) is less than \(~1\) km Myr\(^{-1}\) (from \(~6.8\) to \(~6\) km Myr\(^{-1}\)). Using the analytical model of mantle melting of Cannat et al. (2004), we estimate that the effect of ridge obliquity on melt production is significant (resulting in a...
Figure 6. Magnetic anomaly, bathymetric and gravimetric profiles from the RCO1401, SWIFT and GALLiENi cruises across the off-axis shallow domains (in orange) between the Indomed and the Gallieni TFs. MBA profiles are shown in green. Crustal thickness variations (in red) are from Mendel et al. (2003). The bathymetric profiles are shown in black. The magnetic anomaly profiles (in blue) are compared with synthetic magnetic anomaly profiles calculated using the geomagnetic reversal timescale of Cande & Kent (1995) and assuming a 15 km Myr$^{-1}$ spreading rate at 49°E/38°N (Lemaux et al. 2002) and a constant 500-m-thick magnetic layer draped on the bathymetry with a 14 A m$^{-1}$ magnetization for the Brunhes period and a uniform ±7 A m$^{-1}$ magnetization off-axis. We modelled the transition zone between two inversely magnetized blocks using the method of Tisseau & Patriat (1981) and Mendel et al. (2005). Thick black lines underline sections of the profiles with highly asymmetric spreading rates (>30 per cent). We trace the outer edges of the off-axis shallow domains at the foot of the large outward facing topographic gradients where the vertical relief exceeds ∼2000 m (i.e. in profiles G25, G37 and G47). In areas where the off-axis shallow domains are less well marked in the topography (i.e. in profiles G9, rco14 and mdu121) we also used the lateral continuity of these domains in plan view (e.g. Fig. 3) to identify their edges.

∼300 m crustal thickness decrease) but not enough to explain the observed variations in regional axial depth and Na8.0 content of basalts on each side of the Gallieni TF. Moreover, isochrones in the deep off-axis domains show that the overall ridge geometry between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs is stable for the last 33 Myr (Patriat et al. 2008). We therefore conclude that the melt supply anomaly in this ridge region is not produced by a change of the ridge obliquity.

This event of higher melt supply started in the central part of the ridge section between the Indomed and the Gallieni TFs. It then propagated along axis to the east and probably also to the west towards these TFs, but did not cross them. The Gallieni TF coincides with a distinct step in the isotopic compositions of present-day basalts in Pb and to a lesser extent in Nd (Meyzen et al. 2005). This suggests that there is presently no continuity in mantle flow beneath this TF (Meyzen et al. 2005). The ridge sections near the Bouvet and Marion hotspots also display gravity and bathymetric anomalies that are confined between large fracture zones (Andrew Bain and Discovery II TFs), suggesting that large offset transforms are capable of inhibiting or even blocking along-axis melt flow (Georgen et al. 2001). Such a situation could occur if the mantle flow below the ridge is predominantly shallow and controlled by the connectivity of a low-viscosity, subaxial channel. Numerical modelling with such a simplified channel-flow geometry predicts that TFs reduce the along-axis asthenospheric flow (Georgen & Lin 2003). Along-axis flow stagnates farther upstream from the transform as the transform offset increases (Georgen & Lin 2003). The decreasing width of the off-axis shallow domains towards the Indomed and Gallieni TFs would then reflect such a decreasing of the along-axis flow as the TFs are approached. Additional thermal effects such as athermal erosion of the TFs caused by anomalously hot material may also gradually favour the propagation of the melting anomaly towards the TFs.
The along-axis length of the SWIR melting anomaly between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs (580 km) falls in the range of lengths of the V-shaped ridges described near the Azores (~400 km; Vogt 1976) and near Iceland (~700 km; Vogt 1976) hotspots. Only one event of enhanced magmatism can be identified on the MAR near the Azores hotspot (Cannat et al. 1999a) while the V-shaped ridges south of Iceland occur every 2–6 Myr (Jones et al. 2002). Propagating rates of these ridges along the MAR are highly variable (60 and 75–200 km Myr−1 near the Azores (Cannat et al. 1999a) and Iceland (Vogt 1976; White et al. 1995), respectively). Crustal thickness variations and inferred mantle temperature anomaly on the SWIR are close to those estimated south of Iceland (2 km and 30 °C; White et al. 1995) while the crust may be more than 5 km thicker and the mantle temperature variation may reach 35 or 70 °C at the Azores [depending on the type of melting model used to estimate the MORB production (Cannat et al. 1999a; Asimow et al. 2004)].

5.2 Hotter mantle temperatures between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs than in the neighbouring ridge sections: influence of the Crozet hotspot?

Between the Indomed and the Gallieni TFs, both regional axial depth and the along-axis variation of Na80 content of basalts indicate higher melt production than beneath the neighbouring deeper ridge sections (Cannat et al. 2008). The along-axis variations of other geochemical proxies for the extent of partial melting, such as (Sm/Yb)n or CaO/Al2O3, also support higher mantle temperatures in the subaxial mantle of this ridge region (Meyzen 2003). A prominent MBA low also suggests thicker crust and/or a hotter mantle beneath this shallow region of the present-day SWIR (Fig. 2).

We extracted lateral variations in shear velocity from the surface wave tomography of fundamental and higher mode Rayleigh waves of Debayle et al. (2005) to provide new insights into the thermal structure of the upper mantle beneath the SWIR (Fig. 8b). Because S-wave velocities are particularly sensitive to temperature, S-wave speed maps are valuable for understanding thermal variations in the mantle. Sampling the tomographic model of Debayle et al. (2005) along the SWIR axis at 75 km depth bring out two large negative anomalies of S-wave velocities which are centred near 35°E, close to the Prince Edward TF, and near 50°30'E in segment #27 (Fig. 8b). The amplitude of these S-wave velocities variations is >2 per cent at 75 km depth (SV-wave perturbations are in per cent relative to PREM (reference Vs = 4.39 km s−1 at 75 km depth Dziewonski & Anderson 1981). The NS dotted line at 50°E indicates the location of the cross section shown in (c). (b) Comparison between the smoothed along-axis depth profile (blue line) along the axis of the SWIR between the Du Toit and the Melville TFs and the along-axis variation of the SV-wave heterogeneity at 75 km depth (red line). To the east of the Atlantis II TF the S-waves velocity decrease (dashed red line) is due to the lack of resolution of the tomographic images and to the influence of the nearby Central and Southeast Indian ridges. The orange areas indicate the two ridge sections with prominent MBA lows and shallow bathymetry as in Figs 1 and 2. (c) NS striking cross-section at 50°E in the tomographic model. DT, AB, Ma, PE, ES, Di, In, Ga, At and Me as in Fig. 1.
to the ridge axis, between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs (Fig. 8a). This shallow anomaly is connected at depth to a large low-velocity anomaly present at the bottom of the oceanic lithosphere. This large anomaly is elongated in the NE–SW direction, with a lateral extension greater than 1000 km. It has a maximum slow velocity perturbation near 150 km depth, between the SWIR and the Conrad R-wave (Fig. 8c). Previous studies (Debayle & Sambridge 2004) have shown that such structures are well resolved in Debayle et al. (2005) model. The shallow slow anomaly at 75 km depth (Fig. 8a) is much weaker (~1 per cent slower than PREM) than the anomalies detected along the MAR close to the Azores and Iceland hotspots (~−3.5 to −4 per cent; Plidou et al. 2005) which would suggest a weaker thermal anomaly beneath the SWIR than beneath the MAR. It also decays to the PREM background level below ~200 km depth beneath the Crozet bank (Fig. 8). No low-velocity anomalies were found that might be interpreted as plume stems beneath this hotspot. However, this does not rule out the existence of plume stems, as such narrow features (~200 km) are not expected to be properly resolved in the deep part of the model (Debayle et al. 2005). We therefore suggest that the hot (low-velocity) anomaly beneath the SWIR between the Indomed and the Gallieni TFs is produced by the Crozet hotspot. Higher mantle temperatures in this region would have led to an event of enhanced magmatism ~10 Ma ago and to the construction of a large volcanic plateau.

A recent investigation of helium and trace elements variations along the SWIR reveals that the SWIR section located between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs displays a large primitive helium anomaly (4He/3He < 80 000; Gautheron et al. 2008, submitted). Such primitive helium isotopic ratios are distinctively lower than the homogeneous helium isotopic ratio in MORBs (4He/3He ~ 90 000), indicating a contribution of an undegassed and undepleted OIB source (Allegre et al. 1983). However, along the Indomed–Gallieni section, while He isotopic systematics indicate the presence of a primitive component, other geochemical proxies for the level of mantle depletion or enrichment in incompatible elements (such as K2O/TiO2 and La/Sr) rather show the presence of a depleted mantle source (Gautheron et al. 2008, submitted). Although there is no consensus regarding the trace element and Sr-Nd-Pb-Hf isotopic signature of the low 4He/3He component sampled by many OIBs and MORBs around the world (Kurz et al. 1998, 2005; Jackson et al. 2007), it is clear that this component includes significant portions of depleted mantle material (Kurz et al. 1998; Stuart et al. 2003; El-lam & Stuart 2004; Gautheron et al. submitted; Starkey et al. 2009). The geochemical signature of basalts from the Indomed–Gallieni ridge section could be, therefore, consistent with a contribution of material arising from the Crozet hotspot. However, the few helium isotopic data for this hotspot display MORB-like isotopic ratios (~90 000; Gautheron et al., submitted). Without additional sampling and geochemical data for the Crozet hotspot, it is therefore presently difficult to speculate further on its potential geochemical influence along the SWIR. Alternatively, the recent observation that U and Th may be less compatible than He during mantle melting (Parman et al. 2005; Heber et al. 2007) has also led to the suggestion that ancient melt depletion event during the earth history can freeze the 4He/3He ratio to low values (Graham et al. 1990; Class & Goldstein 2005; Parman et al. 2005). Such an ancient melt depletion event could explain at first order the multi-elemental geochemical signature of basalts from the Indomed–Gallieni ridge section, but the former domains of depleted mantle would then be highly refractory and would tend to starve the melt supply to the ridge which is inconsistent with the high melt production estimated for this ridge section. We therefore favour the hypothesis of a deep, hot and primitive-He-rich source, which might be related to the Crozet hotspot. We thus suggest that the Crozet hotspot could trigger small upper-mantle thermal plumes rising beneath the SWIR and incorporating small amounts of lower mantle material during plume formation. These mantle thermal plumes could produce focused events of enhanced magmatism such as the one observed in this study.

The long ridge-hotspot distance of more than 1000 km from the Crozet bank to the SWIR may be put forward to argue that the Crozet hotspot is unlikely to interact with the SWIR. Theoretical relations and observations at other hotspots show a decrease of the along-axis plume length with increasing plume–ridge separation until becoming insignificant at distances more than about 500 km (Ito & Lin 1995; Ribe et al. 1995; Ito et al. 2003). However, there are a number of exceptions to this tendency. Geochemical data suggest, for example, that the Kerguelen and La Réunion hotspots may still exert residual influence on the southeast and on the central Indian ridges, respectively, although located more than 1000 km from these ridges (Mahoney et al. 1989; Graham et al. 1999). Off-axis volcanic chains or lineaments (e.g. Rodrigues ridge) occur between these ridges and the hotspot centres (Small 1995; Dyment et al. 2007). Measurements of 23 separate oceanic hotspots (excluding the Crozet hotspot) show a nearly linear increase in volcanic lineament length with increasing age of the plate at the hotspot and increasing plume–ridge separation distance (Mittelstaedt & Ito 2005). This linear relationship holds until plate ages of ~25 Ma and plume–ridge separation distances in excess of ~1250 km (Mittelstaedt & Ito 2005). This is in agreement with the absence of lineament between the Crozet hotspot (sitting on a late cretaceous lithosphere) and the SWIR (Fig. 1). Beyond 25 Ma, plate thicknesses may be too large for plume stresses to enhance the ability of magma to penetrate the plate (Mittelstaedt & Ito 2005).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The SWIR section between the Indomed and Gallieni TFs displays physical characteristics, which may be consistent with the interaction with a hotspot. We have documented an event of enhanced magmatism starting ~10 Ma ago which may be ascribed to a regionally higher mantle temperature provided by mantle outpouring from the Crozet hotspot towards the SWIR. Clearly, further sampling of the flanks of the SWIR and imaging of the oceanic crust and mantle are needed to assess the hypothesis of an SWIR–Crozet interaction and particularly to provide new constraints on the mantle reservoir and the volume, distribution and composition of melts beneath this ridge section.

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