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Total synthesis of (+)-A83586C, (+)-kettapeptin and (+)-azinothricin: powerful new inhibitors of β-catenin/TCF4- and E2F-mediated gene transcription

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Herein we describe our asymmetric total syntheses of (+)-A83586C, (+)-kettapeptin and (+)-azinothricin. We also demonstrate that molecules of this class powerfully inhibit β-catenin/TCF4- and E2F-mediated gene transcription within malignant human colon cancer cells at low drug concentrations.

Introduction

The discovery of (+)-azinothricin in the culture filtrates of Streptomyces sp. X-14950 by Hubert Maehr and co-workers at F. Hoffmann La Roche in 1986 heralded the community’s first encounter with this new structural type of pyranylated cyclodepsipeptide (Fig. 1). Ever since that time, various other family members have periodically been found, the majority of which have been shown to have powerful antitumour effects in vitro and in vivo. Although (+)-azinothricin was itself never tested as an antitumour drug, it was documented as being one of the most potent Gram-positive antibiotics ever discovered, its MIC values ranging from 0.001–0.016 μg mL−1 against 51 different bacterial strains. Even so, because of a fairly poor toxicological profile in mice (LD50 = 10 mg kg−1 [intravenous] and 3.2 mg kg−1 [intraperitoneally]), (+)-azinothricin was never taken forward as a new antibiotic drug and, as a result, it initially looked set to rapidly fall from scientific view.

However, two years later in 1988, the closely-related natural product, (+)-A83586C, was identified in fermentation broths of the Guam soil microorganism, Streptomyces karnatakensis by Tim Smitska and his colleagues at Eli Lilly. Like azinothricin, (+)-A83586C had its molecular structure determined by combined single-crystal X-ray analysis and chemical degradation. Together these techniques revealed significant differences in the N-hydroxamic acid components of both cyclodepsipeptides. In A83586C, an N-hydroxy-L-alanine unit resides within the peptidal array, whilst in (+)-azinothricin, an N-hydroxy-1-methoxyserine occupies this position. There is also significant dichotomy in the C(37) substituents (A83586C-β-hydroxy-L-methoxyserine) that are present, with a methyl group being located at this site in (+)-A83586C, and an ethyl substituent in (+)-azinothricin.

Not unexpectedly, (+)-A83586C and (+)-azinothricin had quite similar antibiotic profiles, with (+)-A83586C also having...
potently inhibiting the growth of Gram-positive bacterial strains with MICs of 0.008–0.06 μg mL⁻¹. (+)-A83586C likewise induced toxic death in mice when given intravenously at 9.3 mg kg⁻¹.

Given these toxic liabilities, the Lilly team took the immediate decision not to develop A83586C clinically as a new antibacterial drug and, without any further delay, they simply published their findings in *J. Antibiotics.* One of the more interesting observations that was made by this group regarded the very pronounced antitumour effects of (+)-A83586C against a CCRF-CEM human T-cell leukaemia cell line; its IC₅₀ being 13.5 nM. This excellent antitumour potency notwithstanding, no further anticancer testing was done on (+)-A83586C because of its perceived toxicity in vivo. It thus appeared, at this point in time, as if molecules of the A83586C/azinothricin class would surely drift into the sea of chemical obscurity over the coming years.

However, pharmacological interest was soon rekindled in 1990 when Nakagawa and co-workers, at the Kirin Brewery in Japan, reported the results of their independent in vivo antitumour testing of (+)-citropeptin in mice, at doses well below the 4 mg kg⁻¹ day⁻¹ threshold needed to cause toxic death. Specifically, they observed that citropeptin could confer a 123% life-extension on mice with P388 lymphocytic leukaemia when administered at the low dosage of 2 mg kg⁻¹ day⁻¹. This was a most significant result for it showed, for the first time ever, that molecules of the azinothricin-A83586C class could elicit a therapeutically beneficial anticancer effect in an established animal tumour model without serious toxic side-effects.

Although not outstanding in terms of antitumour potency, the data on (+)-citropeptin did nevertheless serve to spur many groups who were actively considering synthesising these molecules, for it signalled that natural products of this class might potentially be tractable as drug design leads, and that they might ultimately be capable of being further improved and exploited. Indeed, this was a view that only got further reinforced as later biological test data emerged on the sister molecules (−)-verucopeptin and (+)-GE3.

With regards to (−)-verucopeptin, it showed pronounced broad-spectrum antitumour effects in vitro (IC₅₀ = 0.004 μg mL⁻¹ vs. B16 melanoma; IC₅₀ = 0.08 μg mL⁻¹ vs. P388 lymphocytic leukaemia), including against a HCT-116 human colon carcinoma cell line (IC₅₀ = 0.04 μg mL⁻¹). However, subsequent in vivo assaying did later reveal that it was a quite specific and selective agent in its therapeutic window. For example, it did not increase the life-expectancy of mice xenografted with P388 lymphocytic leukaemia, although it did significantly extend the lives of mice with B16 melanoma, it conferring life-extensions of 146–162% in some instances; activity that was actually superior to mitomycin C at several of the dosages examined.

Of much greater significance, however, was Sakai’s 1997 report that the structurally more elaborate congener, (+)-GE3, could exert substantial antitumour effects against BALB/c-nu/nu nude mice xenografted with the currently incurable PSN1-human pancreatic carcinoma. Specifically, a single 2 mg kg⁻¹ dosage of (+)-GE3 was found to produce a 47% reduction in tumour volume (11 days post-treatment) and, although this very substantial antitumour effect was associated with an 18.2% reduction in body weight, none of the treated animals died as a result of receiving the drug. To us, this substantial shrinkage of an incurable human tumour highlighted the great potential of these molecules as drug design leads. It also suggested that they might be useful new tools for deconvolutional biology and for new oncological target identification.

With regard to the mechanism of GE3 antitumour action, the Kyowa Hakko Kogyo group suggested that it was functioning by preventing active E2F transcription factor complexes from binding to the promoter regions of target genes involved in cell cycle progression. Moreover, the strong antiproliferative effects observed in these studies further reinforced as later biological test data emerged on the sister molecules (−)-verucopeptin and (+)-GE3.

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genes critically involved in cancer cell growth and proliferation. However, no firm details were ever provided of the precise experiments that were used to support these mechanistic assertions.

Since this 1997 report on (+)-GE3 by Sakai, several closely related natural products have been isolated from various Streptomyces strains including (+)-polyoxypeptin A, (+)-pipalamycin and (+)-kettapeptin, all of which have been found to have pronounced broad-spectrum in vitro antitumour effects. However, no additional communiques have appeared on the mechanism of antitumour action of this class.

In order to provide fresh insights into how these natural products are functioning as antitumour agents, we commenced asymmetric total syntheses of (+)-A83586C and (+)-azinothricin back in late 1991. We were particularly keen to devise syntheses that would be capable of providing both molecules in meaningful quantities for future chemical biology experiments and for more detailed in vivo antitumour screening. Herein, we now discuss our cumulative progress.

**Our first-generation asymmetric total synthesis of antitumour antibiotic (+)-A83586C**

Our original disconnective bond analysis of (+)-A83586C is shown in Scheme 1. It proposed acquisition of the natural product through a chemoselective macrolactonisation of the seco-acid 1 which itself would be obtained from the regioselective coupling of amine hydrochloride 2 with hydroxybenzotriazole activated ester 3. Of special note in our planning was the fact that we would completely dispense with protecting groups at the final stages of our synthesis, to specifically avoid the many potential snares and pitfalls that could potentially arise when attempting to remove acid- or base- or redox-labile protecting groups from a complex and highly multifunctionalised molecule of this sort. Naturally, such a bold plan would greatly restrict the range of possible coupling reactions that could potentially be used to unify 2 with the pyran sector. Nevertheless, we considered this to be a risk worth taking given the extreme sensitivity of (+)-A83586C towards the majority of chemical reagents. To our way of thinking, the massively improved prospects for securing the natural product via such a daring approach far outweighed any possible operating constraints that we might have to work under. We also reasoned that a chemoselective coupling of this sort might gain some added advantage from the strong intermolecular hydrogen-bonding interactions that could potentially arise between both reaction partners, and from the greatly reduced steric hindrance that would exist around the two centres undergoing reaction.

We opted to use macrolactonisation to close the cyclodepsipeptide ring of (+)-A83586C to remove any possibility that O- to N-acyl rearrangement would occur in the hydroxy-leucine moiety during the key fragment coupling step that would be used to join the pyran and peptide partners. Such a problem might arise if an alternative union of a fully elaborated cyclodepsipeptide amine hydrochloride salt and the activated ester 3 was purveyed. Although activation of the carboxyl in 1 might potentially result in a β-lactone, this too could potentially macrocyclise in the desired way over time and, given this possibility, we elected to pursue this approach with vigour, to see what would eventually come as a result.

For the construction of 2, a sequential [3 + 2 + 1]-fragment condensation strategy was envisaged between 7, 6 and 8. This would lead to 5 whose hydroxy-leucine residue would be elaborated by Sharpless asymmetric dihydroxylation (AD), azidation and hydrogenolysis. Provided the hydrogenolytic deprotection of 4 could be conducted under carefully defined acidic conditions, this reaction sequence could be expected to yield the linear hexapeptide salt 2. Although the aforementioned
[3 + 2]-fragment coupling between 6 and 7 did risk a loss of stereochemical integrity at the α-methyl stereocentre of 6, such a side-reaction might be totally avoidable through a judicious choice of carboxyl activating agent and a due optimisation of the fragment coupling conditions. Despite the fact that a Sharpless AD\textsuperscript{10} had never previously been applied to a complex peptide such as 5 back in 1992, this lack of previous precedent only served to further heighten our desire to pursue this approach, for it could potentially establish the viability of using such a strategy to elaborate the hydroxyleucine residues of complex peptides. Certainly a plan of this sort would carry with it considerable economy of approach, when compared with other alternative strategies for installing this amino acid, which inevitably would involve us effecting a union with a more fully functionalised hydroxyleucine fragment. We therefore viewed the present investigation as an important new test case for Sharpless AD chemistry.

As for the activated ester 3, it appeared derivable from the ketone 9.\textsuperscript{11} The latter would itself originate from a coupling between sulfone 11 and aldehyde 10, if followed by alcohol oxidation and desulfonylation.

One possible way of setting the C(35)-C(36)-trisubstituted olefin in 11 would be to effect a Stille cross-coupling\textsuperscript{12} between enol triflate 13 and tetramethylstannane, under Pd(0)-catalysis, or alternatively, to implement a McMurry-Scott cross-coupling between 13 and lithium dimethyl cuprate, in a manner similar to that used by Smith and co-workers in their successful synthesis of (−)-FK506.\textsuperscript{13}

Ketone 14 therefore became a logical precursor of 13 and the former, in turn, appeared derivable from the anionic union of sulfone 16 with aldehyde 15. With respect to 16, its two stereocentres would be forged by an Evans asymmetric aldol reaction\textsuperscript{14} between 18 and tiglic aldehyde 19 while aldehyde 15 would have its stereochemical arrangement secured by a C(3)-site-selective ring-opening of the 2,3-epoxy alcohol 17 with Me\textsubscript{3}Al as first described by Masamune.\textsuperscript{15}

With this synthetic blueprint in mind, our first objective in the route to 3 was to develop a synthesis of the phenylsulfone 16.\textsuperscript{11} This was fashioned according to the pathway shown in Scheme 2 which commenced with an Evans asymmetric syn-aldol reaction\textsuperscript{14} for installation of the C(37)-stereocentre within 20. The latter was then converted into ester 21 with NaOMe and the latter reduced with DIBAL. The resulting 1,3-diol 22 was regioselectively thioetherified with Bu\textsubscript{3}P/(PhS)\textsubscript{2} and the thioether O-silylated prior to oxidation with oxone. The entire six step sequence to 16 proceeded in 52% overall yield and was fully amenable to large scale work.

The pivotal step used in the construction of aldehyde 15 (Scheme 3) was the site-selective C(3)-ring-opening of chiral 2,3-epoxy alcohol 17 with Me\textsubscript{3}Al,\textsuperscript{15,16} which proceeded with a 20 : 1 level of regiocontrol in favour of the desired ring-opened product, as first observed by Masamune.\textsuperscript{15} In order to introduce the requisite PMB group onto the secondary-OH of this diol, recourse was made to reduction of the p-methoxybenzylidene acetal 25 with DIBAL,\textsuperscript{17} which again proceeded with excellent regiocontrol. A Swern oxidation\textsuperscript{18} of 26 then completed our synthesis of aldehyde 15.

Not entirely unexpectedly, the anionic union of sulfone 16 with aldehyde 15 proceeded with reasonable efficiency (75%) to procure the β-hydroxysulfones 27 as a diastereoisomeric mixture. Without any purification, these were taken forward towards ketone 14 by Swern oxidation with trifluoroacetic anhydride and DMSO,\textsuperscript{18} and by Smith/Hale/McCauley free radical-mediated desulfonylation with Bu\textsubscript{3}SnH/AIBN.\textsuperscript{19}

After significant experimentation, conditions were eventually identified for preparing the enol triflate 13 as a single geometric isomer. However, all of this effort proved futile for it subsequently emerged that enol triflate 13 was a most unwilling participant in transition metal-catalysed cross-coupling.

Scheme 2 Synthesis of the A83586C phenylsulfone 16.\textsuperscript{11}

Scheme 3 First-generation route to the A83586C phenylsulfone 11.\textsuperscript{11}
processes with various Me-carbanion sources. In this regard, various Pd(0)-, Cu(I)-, and Ni(0)-catalysed cross coupling reactions were screened for their ability to elaborate the desired alkene 30 but none were successful.

Consequently, we resorted to a chelation-controlled addition of MeMgBr to ketone 14 to create a tertiary alcohol that was then dehydrated. After surveying a host of different dehydrating reagents to obtain 30 (including the Martin sulfane), the combination of phosphorus oxychloride and pyridine proved optimal for our purposes, it delivering a 2.6 : 1 mixture of the tri- to 1,1-di-substituted alkenes that could be readily separated after the primary OTBDPS ether had been selectively cleaved with HF-pyridine complex to give 29 and 30. Thiophenylation of 30 and sulfide oxidation with oxone then provided the desired phenylsulfone 11.

With the synthesis of 11 now complete, we turned our attention to the assembly of its aldehyde partner 10 (Scheme 4). For this, the 1,1-disubstituted alkene 12 had already been selected as a key intermediate. It was built up from commercially available butane-1,2-diol 32 via the chemistry outlined in Scheme 4. Although our application of the AD-mix-b reagent10 to alkene 12 did actually provide the desired diol 35 in 80% ee and 82% yield (and it was successfully carried forward to 10),11 it was only after further detailed investigations into how O-protecting group size affects AD-facial selectivity in 1,1-disubstituted systems20 that we successfully unearthed the result that would thereafter underpin our future A83586C synthesis studies over the coming years. Specifically, we observed that if we increased the size of the silicon protecting group on the allylic-oxygen to that of a TBDPS (as in 37), we could dramatically improve the ee of our product diol 38 to a really quite impressive 91%, with minimal erosion in product yield.20 Indeed, to this very day, this remains one of the great success stories of the Sharpless AD reaction in 1,1-disubstituted alkene systems,20 which often do not perform that well when compared with other substituted olefin classes.

With diol 38 in hand we proceeded towards aldehyde 10 in two more steps. Even so, and notwithstanding us being able to successfully couple aldehyde 10 with sulfone 11, and thereafter process 41 into ketone 9 by Swern oxidation18 and Al/Hg-mediated desulfonylation,21 we were unable to effect the subsequent successful conversion of 9 into methyl glycoside 43. In fact, nothing resembling the desired product could ever be isolated from our many attempts at implementing this reaction under a range of conditions.22

Given this synthetic impasse, we decided to modify our tactics once more. Our intention now was to investigate whether a Seebach-style enantioretentive Claisen condensation9,23 between 46 and 49 would help us build up the pyran framework of 3 via 50 (Scheme 5).22 The main advantage of following this approach to 3 would lie in its introduction of the C(28)-carbon at the correct acid oxidation state. It was hoped that Fischer glycosidation on 50 would subsequently allow a methyl glycoside to be positioned at C(30), to thereafter permit a cleavage of the carboxyl protecting group and enable a further elaboration into 3.
Accordingly, the δ-valerolactone 46 was prepared from phenylsulfone 11 by the route shown in Scheme 5. The first step involved the C-acylation of the sulfone anion derived from 11 with methyl chloroformate. The 2-phenylsulfonyl ester 44 was then reductively desulfonylated with 6% Na/Hg in MeOH. The desired lactone 46 was isolated in 94% yield. Unfortunately, the desired C(34)-OPMB-ether in MeOH. The desired lactone ester 44 was then reductively desulfonylated with 6% Na/Hg in MeOH. The desired lactone 46 was isolated in 94% yield. Unfortunately, the desired enantioretentive Claisen condensation of 46 with 49 failed to deliver even a small amount of 50 under the various reaction conditions that we examined. Invariably, the starting lactones 46 and 49 were always recovered unscathed from these coupling processes.

In light of this low reactivity, we reformulated our plan. On this pass through we would forge the C(29)–C(30) bond via an enantioretentive aldol addition between 49 and aldehyde 54 (Scheme 6). It was hoped that this reaction would proceed under kinetically-controlled conditions to give a single aldol adduct having the correct stereochemistry at C(29). In the event, only low diastereorecontrol was observed in this addition, presumably because of the reversibility of the aldol reaction and the occurrence of rapid product equilibration. In this regard, when we performed a subsequent TPAP oxidation, a very disappointing 1:2 mixture of the β-keto esters 55 and 56 was eventually encountered. Fortunately, the major component of this mixture was the desired product 56, and it was separable in pure condition by SiO2 flash chromatography.

Compound 56 next had its PMB group oxidatively excised from O(34) with DDQ. The resulting lactol was then subjected to a Fischer glycosidation to obtain 57. It was hoped that these conditions would selectively transesterify the pivaldehyde acetal system but, unfortunately, this did not happen. Difficulties were also encountered when we attempted to cleave the acetal from 57 with a variety of bases; invariably these conditions always inflicted damage on other regions of the molecule, most especially whenever we attempted to force the various reactions to proceed. Given all of these difficulties, we reluctantly decided to beat a retreat from this position, and modify our approach once more.

Our plan now was to couple the phenylsulfone 11 with aldehyde 58 (Scheme 7). Although the presence of an ester group within 58 did carry with it the attendant risk of a competing sulfone anion addition to this carbonyl, we did not believe that this would be a particularly problematical side reaction at low temperatures, where the more electrophilic aldehyde would almost certainly react preferentially. Accordingly, we duly pursued the route in Scheme 8.

Of course now we had to find an effective way of introducing the requisite PMB-grouping onto the tertiary-OH of 39 without disrupting the remainder of the structure. Eventually, we found that reduction of the p-methoxybenzylidene acetal 59 with DIBAL accomplished this task successfully but, rather disappointingly, it only gave rise to a 2 : 1 mixture of regioisomeric products. Still, we had to be grateful that the desired product 61 had predominated, and that it was readily separable from 60 by SiO2 flash chromatography. We duly pressed forward and applied a PDC oxidation/CH₂N₂ esterification sequence to 61.

O-Desilylation of 62 then ensued with n-Bu₄NF/THF. The resulting alcohol 63 was oxidised to 58 under Swern conditions. We were now able to examine the critical coupling between 11 and 58 (Scheme 8). To our delight, this proceeded successfully, as did the subsequent Swern oxidation and Al/Hg amalgam reduction. Together these reactions furnished the desired ketone 67 in 73% overall yield. A delicate phase of the synthesis was now entered, where we had to chemoselectively remove the secondary PMB group from the O(34)-atom of 67 whilst retaining the more sterically hindered, less electron-rich, O(29)-PMB. Back in 1996, when this work was being done, nothing comparable to this had ever been accomplished. It was with some considerable trepidation therefore that we approached this reaction. In the event, all our fears proved groundless, for the selective deprotection of 67 proceeded very straightforwardly when 1.2 equivalents of DDQ were used for the PMB cleavage. This delivered a mixture of two ring-closed hemiketal anomers and the open-chain δ-hydroxy ketone, in addition to a small amount of the ring-closed glycal 68. Because of the difficulties involved in processing this mixture, we had to identify conditions that could fully convert it into 68 in good yield such that we could progress our synthesis further. In the event, catalytic PPTS in methanol at 60 °C very nicely achieved our objective.
The O-desilylation of 68 with n-Bu4NF in THF proved very slow, but as soon we resorted to excess n-Bu4NF in DMF our problems were quickly solved, with an 84% yield of 69 being obtained after 48 h.25 The next obstacle that we faced was hydrolytic cleavage of the methyl ester group from 69 to access the acid. Unfortunately, every hydroxide source that we examined, over a range of different concentrations, failed to accomplish this task. Reasoning that severe steric hindrance from the O(29)-PMB group was responsible for this lack of reactivity, we duly modified our approach, examining the Bartlett–Johnson method27 for methyl ester cleavage, which utilises lithium ethanethiolate in THF/HMPA at 0°C. This worked very well indeed on 69, providing the desired acid in good yield.25 The latter was then treated with Castro’s BOP reagent28 to access the hydroxybenzotriazole activated ester 70. Despite the fact that 70 had a pendant hydroxyl within its framework, it proved quite stable to prolonged storage. Indeed, as long as it was kept in the refrigerator at –20°C under N2, it remained intact and pure, even following 6 months of storage. This stability proved pivotal to us eventually performing the subsequent Swern oxidation to the α,β-enone in 87–97% yield. The final step in our route to the activated ester 3 was the DDQ-mediated cleavage26 of the O(29)-PMB group from this enone which proceeded uneventfully when conducted in commercially available CDCl3.25 Whilst 3 was stable enough to undergo rapid SiO2 flash chromatography, we generally found it best to use it for all subsequent couplings without delay, otherwise it started to decompose. It also proved necessary to completely remove all of the last traces of the DDQ residues from 3 prior to effecting any peptide couplings with unprotected A83586C hexapeptide fragments so as to prevent oxidation of the piperazic acid residues.

In parallel with these total synthesis efforts on the pyran sector, we also pursued a synthesis of the hexapeptide coupling fragment 2.29 Of massive importance to this endeavour was our development of the tandem asymmetric electrophilic hydrazination-nucleophilic cyclisation strategy for piperazic acid construction (Scheme 9),30 which underpinned all subsequent synthetic progress on this peptide.

In this protocol, an Evans–Vederas asymmetric hydrazination31 is effected on the Li-coordinated bromovaleryl enolate 72 with di-tert-butylazodicarboxylate (Scheme 9). This affords an N(1)-aza anion which rapidly cyclises after DMPU is added to the reaction mixture, and the reactants are allowed to warm to 0°C. This tactic provides the cyclised adduct 73 alongside a small quantity of the hydrolysed acid 74. In light of this, it was generally found best to submit the crude, worked-up, cyclisation mixture to LiOH-induced hydrolysis to fully convert it to 74. The latter was then subjected to trifluoroacetic acid mediated Boc-removal. The crystalline (3R)-Piz TFA salt 75 so obtained was typically of >96% ee but recrystallisation rendered it completely pure both chemically and enantiomerically; the

Scheme 8 Eventual successful route to the A83586C activated ester 3.24,25

Scheme 9 Our tandem asymmetric electrophilic hydrazination–nucleophilic cyclisation strategy for building up enantiopure piperazic acid and its application in the synthesis of the northern dipeptide 6.29,30
overall yield of pure 75 from 71 was 68% without resort to chromatography and even today, 18 years after its development,\textsuperscript{30} this remains the premier method for constructing this particular chiral α-hydrazino acid.

Compound 75 was then regionselectively N-acylated with benzyl chloroformate according to the procedure of Adams and co-workers at Roche, Nutley.\textsuperscript{32} In our hands, this worked very well indeed. Although others have experienced difficulties in attaining high yields for this step, we have always found that the secret to success is to ensure that one properly acidifies the aqueous medium containing the Z-Piz, after the N-acylation has occurred. This must be done, however, after the excess ZCl has been completely extracted with ether. By adhering to this protocol, one can routinely obtain good yields of (3R)-Z-piperazic acid, which normally crystallises directly from the cooled, stirred, aqueous fraction. It transpires that dipeptide 6\textsuperscript{9,33} (Scheme 9) had previously been synthesised by the Durette/Caldwell team at Merck Rahway during their 1989 total synthesis of the pyranlated cyclodepsipeptide, L-156,602.\textsuperscript{9,33} They prepared compound 78 from 76 by the pathway shown in Scheme 9 which exploited optically pure (3R)-N(1)-Z-piperazic acid to secure 6. In their synthesis,\textsuperscript{9,33} however, optically pure (3R)-N(1)-Z-Piz was obtained using Hassall’s rather low yielding procedure of ephedrine-induced optical resolution of (±)-N(1)-Z-piperazic acid,\textsuperscript{34} which itself had been prepared via a high-yielding Diels–Alder reaction between methyl 2,4-pentadienoate and DBAD in CCl\textsubscript{4} at reflux.\textsuperscript{31b} Our highly efficient tandem asymmetric hydrazination pathway to 75 and 76 thus greatly improved the prior art for obtaining 6 which utilised Carpino’s Fmoc-amino acid chloride bisphasic coupling technology\textsuperscript{35} to connect the fragments 80 and 77 together. The hydroxamic acid partner 80 was itself obtained from methyl-D-lactate via Ottenheijm’s triflate displacement technology\textsuperscript{36} which again worked very well in our hands.

The creation of southern dipeptide 86 (Scheme 10) yet again required the use of Fmoc-amino acid chloride coupling technology for success in the N-acylation of the electronically deactivated (3S)-Piz residue 84. In this instance, Durette and Caldwell’s silver cyanide mediated N-acylation method\textsuperscript{9,33} was exploited to secure 86 in 92% yield over 2 steps. Dipeptide 86 then had its diphenylmethyl ester group\textsuperscript{33} cleaved by CF\textsubscript{3}CO\textsubscript{2}H to give acid 87 which was coupled to the partially protected α-threonine derivative 88 with DCC\textsuperscript{38} and HOBt. It transpired that CuCl\textsubscript{2} was an essential additive for this reaction, if one wished to obtain an 85% yield of the diastereomically pure tripeptide 89, and one also wanted to avoid epimerisation\textsuperscript{39} at the (3S)-piperazic acid centre, which was highly problematical when the CuCl\textsubscript{2} was missing.

Following Fmoc-group removal from 89 we explored the [3 + 2]-union of the two peptide fragments 89 and 6. A range of carboxyl activation methods were surveyed unsuccessfully before BOPCl\textsuperscript{38} was eventually identified as the optimal coupling reagent for effecting this union. It performed admirably in this condensation, it delivering a 58% overall yield of the desired pentapeptide in diastereomically pure condition. After Fmoc detachment, we were now able to focus on N-acylating the (3R)-piperazic acid residue with acid chloride 8. Again a high temperature silver cyanide coupling fashioned the desired pentapeptide 5 in an unoptimised 47–52% yield.

We next addressed whether Sharpless AD chemistry\textsuperscript{10} could be used to elaborate the hydroxyleucine side chain of the target (Scheme 11). Unfortunately, even when a massive excess of super-reinforced AD-mix-α (which contains extra potassium osmate) was employed for this AD, we were never successful in coaxing any reaction out of the alkene 5. The substrate simply sat there untouched in the reaction mixture. We now recognised that we had to abandon our originally formulated plan and focus on connecting a fully elaborated (2S,3S)-hydroxyleucine side chain in which appropriate protecting groups were now present.

When we first confronted this problem back in 1994, the best pathway to (2S,3S)-hydroxyleucine was that of Bondy and Caldwell.\textsuperscript{41} They exploited a C(2)-site-selective ring-opening of a Sharpless asymmetric epoxidation (AE)-derived chiral 2,3-epoxy acid for installation of the requisite anti-amino alcohol motif. We sought a much more convenient method for obtaining this amino acid on large scale. The pathway that was eventually devised\textsuperscript{42} set off with a Wittig reaction on isobutyraldehyde 92 to obtain enolate 93 (Scheme 12) which thereafter was subjected to a Sharpless AD with AD-mix-α. We then used Sharpless’ excellent cyclic sulfate ester-nucleophilic displacement technology\textsuperscript{43} for introducing the required α-azido group in 96. Ester hydrolysis and azide reduction completed this very convenient pathway to optically pure 97 which requires no column chromatographic purifications of the intermediates at any stage, and which proceeds in 73% overall yield.\textsuperscript{42}
Given that amino acid chloride coupling technology would be a prerequisite for acylation of the (3R)-piperazic acid N(2)-atom in 101, we had to make an appropriate choice of amine protecting group for the hydroxyleucine coupling partner. After giving all viable options due consideration (α-Boc- and α-Z-groups excluded, of course), we opted to employ an α-Fmoc group for our purposes. It was introduced into 97 in 83–95% yield. Diphenyldiazomethane treatment of 98 then installed a diphenylmethyl ester 37 which, after O-silylation with TBSOTf, provided 99. Hydrogenolysis of the diphenylmethyl ester group was then accomplished in EtOAc and the resulting acid was converted into acid chloride 100 by exposure to oxalyl chloride in benzene. Silver cyanide-induced N-acylation9a,33 of 101 now provided hexapeptide 102 in 77% yield. Having served its purpose, the Fmoc unit was detached from 102 with diethylamine in acetonitrile. The two TBS protecting groups were then removed by exposing 103 to concentrated HCl in methanol. The resulting amine hydrochloride was concurrently O- and N-debenzylated by catalytic hydrogenation in methanol in the presence of 10% Pd/C at 200 psi. After 8 h, the fully deprotected hexapeptide methyl ester 2 was obtained in 53% yield for these last two steps.25

The activated ester 3 and the hexapeptide amine hydrochloride 2 were now mixed together in a flask and dichloromethane was added. After cooling to -78 °C, excess Et3N was introduced. The mixture was briefly stirred at this temperature for several minutes before being warmed to room temperature where it was maintained for a further 10 min. TLC analysis then revealed that a very clean and smooth coupling reaction had taken place. Following chromatographic purification on SiO2, the hydrated product 104 was isolated in a noteworthy 65% yield.25

It was now time to hydrolyse the methyl ester from 104, and LiOH appeared to do this successfully. However, despite our repeated attempts to macro lactonise the crude seco-acid 1, we were never successful in securing (+)-A83586C (Scheme 13).44 Confronted with this massive breakdown in our strategy at the very final step, we had no other choice but to completely redesign our synthesis or face defeat.

In our new plan for (+)-A83586C (Scheme 14),44 we would now attempt the high-risk chemoselective coupling of cyclised hexadepsipeptide salt 106 with activated ester 3. Buoyed by the success and rapidity of our previous chemoselective coupling of 2 with 3,25 which was complete after only 10 min at room temperature, and which provided 104 in 65% yield, we reasoned that we might be able to effect a similar rapid coupling between 106 and 3 and avoid the potential problem of us encountering a deleterious O- to N-acyl rearrangement in the hydroxyleucine moiety.9a The latter would, of course, give rise to a ring-contracted macrolactam which would be totally unmanipulable. Although rearrangements of this sort can, on occasion, be quite facile, they typically do not proceed with great rapidity; often taking many hours before rearrangement is anywhere near fully complete.9,45 Cogniscent of this fact, we reasoned that if rearrangement only took place slowly,45 and our coupling reaction proceeded rapidly, we might be able to overcome this potential snag.

Scheme 12 Synthesis of the C(1)–C(47) backbone of A83586C (104).25,42

Scheme 13 Attempted macro lactonisation of 1 to obtain A83586C.44
Accordingly, we now made the acquisition of 107 our top priority, and this required us to completely reconsider how we would assemble the peptide sector. Given that many of the potential macro lactamisation sites in this sequence would necessitate the N-acylation of an inductively-deactivated or a sterically-hindered nitrogen atom there was, in the end, only one viable option for effecting ring closure, and that was at the amide bond which connected the D-threonine and (3S)-piperazic acid residues. However, even this particular choice could potentially cause our downfall, since this now presented us with the highly daunting (and synthetically challenging) prospect of having to close the cyclodepsipeptide ring at an N(2)-acylated (3S)-piperazic acid residue which we knew would be highly prone to undergoing significant epimerisation once its carboxyl was activated. Indeed, as we shall see later, in the synthesis of 4-epi-A83586C, we had every reason to be fearful of this occurrence, even though we had previously shown that the inclusion of CuCl2 could very powerfully suppress epimerisation in the intermolecular coupling of 87 with 88 with DCC/HOBt. Nevertheless, it was not at all clear whether these conditions would again lead to a successful outcome in the context of macro lactamisation. Even so, given that all of the other ring-closure options looked completely untenable, we elected to pursue this synthetic analysis further. Our plan for assembling the linear hexa-peptide 108 would first effect a [2 + 2]-fragment union between 111 and 6 to secure a tetrapeptide whose Fmoc-group would be removed to give 110, the latter would then be N-acylated with the acid chloride 109 and the resulting linear hexapeptide subjected to a series of protecting group interchanges to arrive at 108. Clearly the build up of a complex amino-acid chloride such as 109 might not be technically feasible given the potentially acid-labile Boc-carbamate protecting group that was also going to be present within its structure. However, given our desire to unmask the two reactive centres of the seco-amino acid 108 concurrently, we felt that we had very little choice in our selection of this strategy. There was, as well, the issue of whether a Troc group would survive the silver cyanide mediated N-acylation process. This was yet another obstacle that could potentially smite us, but given the need for amino acid chloride coupling chemistry to solve this problem, and our fear that use of an Fmoc-alternative might trigger an O- to N-acyl rearrangement in the subsequent Fmoc-deprotection step, after macro cyclisation had occurred, we stuck firm with our protecting group choice for 109.

Quite early on in our synthetic forays on A83586C we had observed that if one attempted to remove the Fmoc-protecting group from ester-protected dipeptides such as 86 (Scheme 10) with Et2NH in MeCN, one always forms the diketopiperazine instead of the desired dipeptide amine. Such internal cyclisations are often problematical in dipeptide esters that contain an N-methyl amino acid residue in the sequence, but this tendency towards cyclisation is even more pronounced when a (3S)-piperazic acid residue is also present in the chain; the latter appears to induce considerable “turn-like” character within the dipeptide to further favour the ring-closure process. The increased propensity of Piz-containing dipeptide esters to form diketopiperazines is most beautifully illustrated by the fact that even when a tert-butyl ester analogue of 86 is subjected to the same conditions, it cyclises in exactly the same way, which is most unusual, since tert-butyl ester dipeptides are usually stable under such circumstances! In light of this, we were forced to devise a new protecting group solution to overcome the diketopiperazine-forming problem.

Recognising that removal of the Fmoc-group from tripeptide 89 was facile and successful (Scheme 10), we sought to install a removable amide-type protecting group into the (3S)-Piz residue of 87 to perform a similar cyclisation-deterring role in an analogous Fmoc-protected dipeptide. However, the protecting group installed would have to be cleavable at a later point in the synthesis, under conditions that would leave the remainder of the peptide intact.
After giving the problem some due thought, we eventually decided to employ the seldom-used tert-butyloxycarbonyl-hydrazide group in this role. We were attracted to this particular option by the excellent 1981 report of Meienhofer and Walho47 at Roche Nutley who demonstrated that complex peptidal acyl hydrazides could be readily converted into acids using aqueous NBS.46 Encouraged by their results, we sought to apply this technology to overcome the diketopiperazine ring-forming problem in systems such as 86.

Accordingly, we converted our previously prepared dipeptide acid 87 into the amine 111 (Scheme 15) and, most notably, we found that this device completely overcame the internal cyclisation issue. Amine 111 was then used for a BOPCl-mediated coupling with acid 6. After 4 h at 0 °C, a 75% overall yield of tetrapeptide 112 was obtained over two steps.

Given the potential risks of simultaneously N-acylating the Boc-hydrazide unit of the Fmoc-deprotected tetrapeptide with acid chloride 109 and the possible difficulties that we might encounter on converting the acyl Boc-hydrazide unit into an acid in a more complex hexapeptide substrate, we elected to perform this conversion at this stage. This was accomplished by cleaving the Boc group from 112 with trifluoroacetic acid, oxidising the acyl hydrazide to the carboxylic acid with NBS in aqueous THF,46,47 and then esterifying this acid with diphenyldiazomethane.37 The Fmoc-group was then detached from the product to obtain 110.

Its acid chloride coupling partner 109 was prepared by a DCC38/DMAP mediated union between the Troc-protected hydroxyleucine allyl ester 113 and N-Boc-O-benzyl-D-threonine.48 This proceeded in 83% yield, but was always accompanied by 5–10% epimerisation at the α-carbon of the D-threonine unit. The unwanted diastereoisomer was readily separated from 114 by SiO2 flash chromatography. Following cleavage of the O-allyl ester from 114 with Pd(0) and morpholine, according to the method of Kunz and Waldmann,49 we duly converted the resulting acid into acid chloride 109 by treating it with excess oxalyl chloride in benzene. After removing the excess chlorinating agent in vacuo, the crude 109 was used for the silver cyanide-assisted N-acylation9 of 110 which proceeded in 73–86% yield after heating the reactants at 60 °C in benzene for two minutes.

We now decided to remove the Troc-group from 115 and to temporarily cap this position with a Z-group to allow purification of the hexapeptide fragment 116 to very high standards and to help us remove all of the zinc residues from the initially liberated amine salt. We were concerned that if we delayed this purification to a later stage of the synthesis (after cyclisation), we might encounter O- to N-acyl rearrangement9 during the purification step. In the event, this protecting group swap worked out very well indeed. Exposure to trifluoroacetic acid and phenol thereafter fashioned the seco-amino-acid 116.

Much effort went into identifying conditions that could successfully macro lactamise 116 without also causing significant epimerisation of the (3S)-piperazic acid residue undergoing activation. The DCC/HOBt/CuCl2 method39,39 failed in this instance. Eventually, we found that Carpino’s excellent HATU reagent50 accomplished this cyclisation in 25% overall yield over two steps, provided high-dilution conditions and a large excess of HATU50 were employed.

The highly pure macro lactam 107 was now hydrogenated for 24 h at 1 atmosphere pressure in the presence of 10% Pd/C and 1 equivalent of anhydrous HCl in methanol. The latter was generated by adding 1 equivalent of acetyl chloride to the anhydrous methanol that was used for the reaction, and
allowing the solution to stand for several hours under a dry N₂ atmosphere prior to use. This protocol nicely delivered the desired cyclosporin peptide hydrochloride salt in essentially pure condition without O- to N-acyl transfer in the hydroxyproline component. Compound 106 was combined with a freshly prepared sample of pure activated ester 3, and dichloromethane was added. The reaction flask was then cooled to −78 °C and excess Et₃N was then added dropwise. After the Et₃N addition was complete, the cooling bath was removed and the reactants were allowed to warm to room temperature, whereafter stirring was continued for a further 10 min. TLC analysis at this stage revealed that a single coupled product 105 had formed along with some of the hydrated activated ester. The desired glycid 105 was obtained in 31% overall yield from 107. Following chromatographic purification, 105 was then completely hydrated in essentially quantitative yield by storing the sample in commercial CDCl₃ (Aldrich) over 2–3 days. At long last, we had completed the first asymmetric total synthesis of (+)-A83586C 44 and we had done so via the most high-risk end-game that one could have possibly imagined! The result was clearly very satisfying.

New insights into the mechanism of antitumour action of A83586C

With our synthetic sample of (+)-A83586C in hand, we could now examine its antitumour effects in more detail in collaboration with Drs Alexander Wood and Ying-Nan Chen of Novartis. 51

At first we jointly evaluated whether A83586C had broad spectrum antitumour activity against a range of different human tumour cell lines. It transpired that it did, its IC₅₀ values ranging from 18–90 nM. 51

Because Sakai and co-workers 5 had stated that ‘‘GE3 was shown to prevent the E2F transcriptional factor, the intracellular target of retinoblastoma susceptibility gene product, from binding to its recognition sequence’’, we duly examined whether A83586C, over a range of drug concentrations, could interfere with E2F-1/DP-1/DNA binding, using E2F-1 response element DNA and HeLa lysate in a gel-shift assay. At concentrations of 2 and 10 µM, A83586C did not inhibit the gel-shift, suggesting that it was not inhibiting E2F/DP transcription factor activity by this mechanism as was originally proposed by Sakai for GE3. 51

There are eight E2F proteins (E2Fs 1–8) and two DP proteins (DPs 1 and 2) so far characterised in human cells. Only E2Fs 1–6 form functionally active heterodimeric E2F/DP transcription factor complexes with one of two DP proteins. 52 The ability of these complexes to modulate gene transcription is generally tightly controlled in normal cells by several ‘‘pocket’’ proteins that include the retinoblastoma protein (pRb). 53 The latter functions as a tumour-suppressor protein when it is in its dephosphorylated state. Functionally-active dephosphorylated pRb controls the G1-S boundary in cell cycle by binding to, and repressing, the transcriptional-activating capabilities of E2F1-3/DP complexes. There are a number of genes critically involved in cell growth and proliferation that are switched on by functionally active E2F/DP transcription factor complexes. These include: cyclins A and E, cdc2, thymidylate synthase, dihydrofolate reductase, DNA polymerase α and ORC1, and their overexpression in cancer patients is typically associated with poor disease outcome. Mutations to the pRb or other pocket proteins, or upregulated cyclin/cdk activity leading to pRb hyperphosphorylation, are now known to increase aberrant E2F transcriptional activity and contribute to the onset of many cancers. E2F transcription factor inhibitors such as A83586C are thus of considerable pharmaceutical interest.

E2F7 and E2F8 lack this requirement for a specific DP partner to elicit their biological effects, 52a and they primarily serve as transcriptional repressors or delayers of cell cycle progression. E2Fs 4–6 can also act as repressors in G0 or G1.

Given that upregulated E2F 1–3/DP transcription factor activity is thought to be a major contributor to the onset of human malignancy, we sort to examine whether A83586C might be inhibiting E2F through a disruption of the E2F-DP protein-protein interaction. For this, we performed pull-down experiments with full length GST-E2F1 and 35S-labelled DP1 in the presence of various concentrations of A83586C (2, 10 and 50 µM, in fact). Our results indicated that A83586C does not perturb this protein-protein interaction. 51

Since cyclin/cyclin-dependent kinase activity is known to be upregulated in many human cancers, and this maintains pRb in its oncogenic (tumour-promoting) hyper-phosphorylated state, we next examined whether A83586C had the ability to induce pRb hypophosphorylation (dephosphorylation) to produce the tumour-suppressing form of the protein in HCT-116-human colon carcinoma cells. Indeed, at 0.3 µM drug concentration in DMSO/RPMI1640 culture medium, A83586C does this very effectively after just 24 h of cell exposure to the drug. 51

We also evaluated whether A83586C had the ability to downregulate E2F1 expression in HCT-116 colon carcinoma cells at 0.3 µM drug concentration, and significantly, the Western blots revealed that it did this very markedly. 51

As a result of this combined work, we have now shown that molecules of the A83586C/GE3 class probably do not disrupt or prevent active E2F-DP transcription factors from binding to the target promoters of E2F regulated genes. Rather, our evidence suggests that they most likely operate as E2F inhibitors by other indirect means, such as through E2F1 protein downregulation and through induction of pRb hypophosphorylation. 51 Indeed, provided the tumour in question has a functionally active pRb, which can often be the case, this would appear to be one of the main mechanisms by which tumour growth and progression are halted by A83586C.

Yet another novel mechanism that we have jointly identified by which A83586C and its congeners can exert their powerful antitumour effects is through a potent disruption/blockade of upregulated β-catenin/TCF4 transcriptional activity and Wnt signalling within human cancer cells. 51 Upregulated β-catenin signalling is often a major contributor to cancer onset in many human tumours. 54 Since the β-catenin/TCF4 protein-protein interaction is known to initiate transcription from a number of genes that are centrally involved in cancer cell growth and metastatic spread, our discovery that A83586C is the most potent inhibitor of this β-catenin/TCF4 transcriptional activating interaction so far identified is of major biological significance.
We established this property for A83586C via TOP-FLASH/FOP-FLASH TCF4-luciferase reporter assaying in HCT-116 human colon carcinoma cells, which indicated that A83586C has an IC₅₀ of 3 nM in this capacity. As such, A83586C currently holds the world-record in terms of its potency for inhibiting β-catenin-TCF4-mediated Wnt-signalling.

A new second-generation synthesis of (+)-A83586C, (+)-kettapeptin and (+)-azinothricin

Based upon these exceptional biological findings, Novartis sponsored our group to develop a new and improved second-generation synthesis of molecules of this class and, in this section, we now illustrate our latest strategy for securing various family members in the context of us completing the first ever total synthesis of (+)-kettapeptin (Scheme 16), a natural product that has the pyran side-chain of (+)-A83586C grafted on to the cyclodepsipeptide sector of (+)-azinothricin.

At the time we were attempting to devise our new route to the A83586C/kettapeptin activated ester, our group was heavily involved in developing the O-directed free radical hydrostannation reaction of propargylically oxygenated alkyl-acetylenes with Pb₃SnH and catalytic Et₃B. When applied in acetylenic systems whose stereocentres cannot be jeopardised via 1,5-H-atom abstraction reactions by the intermediary vinyl radicals, this reaction can give superb results in terms of offering a highly stereocontrolled entry into various stereo-defined trisubstituted alkenes. However, because the complex mechanistic course of this reaction involves vinylic radicals being reversibly generated from stannyl radical addition to either acetylenic carbon, it is important to examine any potential substrate very carefully before deploying this reaction in synthesis, so as to ensure that either of the vinyl radicals that are generated cannot engage in stereocentre-compromising 1,5-H-atom abstraction processes (Scheme 17).

For the problem at hand, we considered this situation very carefully, and saw an excellent opportunity to apply the O-directed hydrostannation process to the acetylenic alcohol with a view to controlling the C(35)-C(36)-double bond geometry of (Scheme 16). Of course, given all of the knowledge that we had accrued on this reaction over the preceding years, we predicted that it would lead to the vinylstannane at high stannane concentration, and that this would thereafter be manipulable into the iodide and thence into (+)-A83586C pyran sector. This complex mechanistic course of this reaction involves vinylic radicals being reversibly generated from stannyl radical addition to either acetylenic carbon, and it is important to examine any potential substrate very carefully before deploying this reaction in synthesis, so as to ensure that either of the vinyl radicals that are generated cannot engage in stereocentre-compromising 1,5-H-atom abstraction processes (Scheme 17). For the problem at hand, we considered this situation very carefully, and saw an excellent opportunity to apply the O-directed hydrostannation process to the acetylenic alcohol with a view to controlling the C(35)-C(36)-double bond geometry of (Scheme 16). Of course, given all of the knowledge that we had accrued on this reaction over the preceding years, we predicted that it would lead to the vinylstannane at high stannane concentration, and that this would thereafter be manipulable into the iodide and thence into (+)-A83586C pyran sector. This complex mechanistic course of this reaction involves vinylic radicals being reversibly generated from stannyl radical addition to either acetylenic carbon, and it is important to examine any potential substrate very carefully before deploying this reaction in synthesis, so as to ensure that either of the vinyl radicals that are generated cannot engage in stereocentre-compromising 1,5-H-atom abstraction processes (Scheme 17).

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**Scheme 16** Retrosynthetic strategy for (+)-kettapeptin.

**Scheme 17** Some examples of stereocentre-compromising 1,5-H-atom abstraction processes that need to be considered when planning to use the O-directed free radical hydrostannation reaction.
successive oxidation and a Noyori reduction$^5$ on the corresponding alkyne which should deliver $^{126}$.

With regards to aldehyde $^{58}$, we planned to use a Trost asymmetric allylic O-alkylation reaction$^5$ on the racemic epoxide $^{124}$ to introduce its tertiary OPMB group. Trost has had considerable success in his use of this reaction in a number of total synthesis settings$^5$ and given these great triumphs, we thought that a strategy of this sort might nicely overcome the 2:1 regioisomer problem that we had unexpectedly encountered in our previous synthesis of $^{58}$.$^{24,25}$

As for $^{119}$, it would again be prepared by macrolactamisation and a [2 + 2 + 2]-fragment union, on this occasion, involving $^{111}$, $^{120}$, and $^{109}$. The only difference this time through would be that we would try to retain the $\text{-Boc-hydrazide protecting group}$ in the (3S)-Piz residue throughout the synthesis, including for the [4 + 2]-fragment coupling with acid chloride $^{109}$. We also planned to build $^{111}$ directly, rather than indirectly from the dipeptide acid $^{87}$, as had been done previously. These various modifications promised to cut quite a few steps off the forward synthesis. As for dipeptide acid $^{120}$, we reckoned that a different protecting group strategy would almost certainly be required for its construction, given its potentially $\text{-eliminatable OMe group}$. To our mind, its presence would necessitate protection of the $L$-hydroxamic acid residue with an $O$-allyl ester, which would be cleavable at the final step under neutral conditions.

An early objective in new our route to the A83586C activated ester $^{35}$ was alkyne $^{128}$ (Scheme 18). It was prepared$^{5,6,c}$ from the aldol adduct $^{20}$ by Weinreb amidation, O-silylation, DIBAL reduction, and Ohira-Bestmann alkynylation. For the synthesis of aldehyde $^{127}$ we followed the excellent six step protocol of Mulzer and co-workers$^5$ which worked very well in our hands (Scheme 19). Aldehyde $^{127}$ was there-after condensed with the lithium acetylide derived from $^{128}$ at low temperature to obtain a 1:1 mixture of alcohol epimers $^{136}$ (Scheme 20).$^{6,0}$ Given the disappointing selectivity observed in this addition, we immediately oxidised $^{136}$ and attempted the asymmetric reduction of $^{137}$ with the Noyori-Ru catalyst $^{138}$. This proved to be a very clean reaction, and it did achieve its overall objective of enriching the dr in favour of the anti-configured product $^{126}$. However, it did not do this to particularly high standards, it furnishing $^{126}$ as the major product of an inseparable 5:1 mixture of epimers at this stage.

To our great delight, the O-directed free radical hydrostannation of $^{126}$ worked with virtually complete regio- and stereo-control.$^{6,0}$ It now proved possible to separate the resulting 5:1 mixture by SiO$_2$ flash chromatography and, with diastereomically pure $^{125}$ in hand we pressed forward towards vinyl iodide $^{123}$ by subjecting it to iodine-tin exchange. Again, this worked very nicely indeed, but sadly, all manner of subsequent transition metal-catalysed cross coupling reactions on $^{123}$ failed to deliver the desired alkene $^{139}$. Reluctantly, we again decided to abandon this approach having been vanquished once again.

We next decided to forge the C(35)-C(36)-trisubstituted alkene of phenylsulfone $^{122}$ via a Kishi-Nozaki-Hiyama$^{6,1}$ Ni/Cr coupling sequence (Scheme 21) which involved us in converting the vinyl iodide $^{141}$ into a vinylchromium species which rather disappointingly underwent a poorly stereo-controlled addition to $^{127}$ to give a mixture of allylic alcohols, in which the desired product predominated only slightly

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**Scheme 18** Synthesis of alkyne $^{128}$.$^{5,6,c}$

**Scheme 19** Our repetition of Mulzer’s route$^5$ to aldehyde $^{127}$.$^{6,0}$

**Scheme 20** Attempted synthesis of phenylsulfone $^{122}$ via O-directed free radical hydrostannation.$^{6,0}$
Fortunately, the two alcohol epimers could be readily separated by SiO₂ flash chromatography, which allowed 139 to be readily converted into the desired phenylsulfone 122 in 84% yield. Whilst this approach did set the C(35)–C(36)-alkene with complete stereocontrol, it did so at a price, that being a significant loss of stereocontrol in the setting of the C(34)-hydroxyl. Although this new route to 122 did, in essence, cut seven steps off our first-generation pathway, its low stereocontrol, high cost, and poor scaleability mandated that we continue to seek an alternative solution to the problem at hand.

Because of the need to move forward in our analogue programme with Novartis, we had to quickly find an improved and considerably shortened pathway to the phenylsulfone 122 that could rapidly deliver the tens of gram quantities of this material that we needed to make progress in these efforts. After examining several unsuccessful approaches, including the poorly selective Wadsworth–Horner–Emmons process shown in Scheme 22 (which ultimately was abandoned), we eventually devised the route presented in Scheme 23, which actually turned out to be quite effective.

It implemented a stereocontrolled Wittig olefination on aldehyde 133, a DIBAL reduction and an MnO₂ oxidation on the primary allylic alcohol to secure enal 150. A Roush crotylboration to aldehyde 150 using (E)-crotyldiisopinocampheylborane derived from (–)-Ip₂BOMe, actually gave rise to inferior selectivity, which is somewhat surprising given that the reaction of unsaturated aldehydes with such chiral boronates is generally known to deliver homoallylic alcohols with good stereocontrol.

Alcohol 152 was now O-benzylated with p-methoxybenzyl trichloroacetimidate and the product regioselectively hydroborated with 9-BBN to obtain alcohol 153, following basic H₂O₂ work-up. Thiophenylation and sulfide oxidation with oxone then provided the desired phenylsulfone 122 by a
pathway which now shaved ten steps off the original route to the analogous sulfone 11, and which now only required twelve steps as opposed to the previous twenty-two! Although the new pathway to 122 did significantly shorten our overall synthesis, it did nevertheless deliver a 2.3:1 mixture at one point in the synthesis and, in this respect, it was marginally worse than the original route to phenylsulfone 11! However, on the plus side, the new pathway now allowed us to make 50 gram batches of 122 in half of the time that was originally required to access a similar quantity of 11 which, from an operational perspective, was a massive improvement on what we previously had in place.

One of the special highlights of our new second-generation route to 3 was the considerably improved synthesis that we devised for the β-aldehyde-ester 58 (Scheme 24). The key step in this new sequence to 58 was the stereocontrolled Trost asymmetric epoxide ring-opening59 of racemic epoxide 124 with γ-methoxybenzyl alcohol 166 conducted in the presence of the chiral phosphine ligand 167, Pd(0), and catalytic Et3B, which delivered the desired product 168 as essentially a single enantiomer in 74% yield. The superb performance of the Trost ligand in this reaction is highly noteworthy for it completely overcame the 2:1 regioisomer mixture problem that plagued our original route to 58; it also improved our product ee to >99%. With a good pathway to alcohol 168 now secure, we duly advanced towards β-aldehydo ester 58 (Scheme 24).

Aldehyde 58 condensed readily with the α-phenylsulfonyl anion derived from 122 to give a β-hydroxysulfone mixture 155 (Scheme 23) which underwent facile Swern oxidation and Al/Hg reduction to provide β-ketoester 157 in 76% overall yield for the three steps. Given that Paterson had previously reported that allylic OTBS ethers can be readily cleaved and oxidised to enones by the action of DDQ in CH2Cl2–H2O,65 we were somewhat apprehensive that our selective deprotection of the PMB group from O(34) might simultaneously dislodge the allylic TBS group from O(38), to give a newly liberated hydroxyl/ketone that might now complicate the following step. In the event, these concerns turned out to be unfounded, for the DDQ-promoted cleavage proceeded uneventfully, as the hydroxyl/ketone that might now complicate the following step. In the event, these concerns turned out to be unfounded, for the DDQ-promoted cleavage proceeded uneventfully, and the remaining steps towards the A83586C/kettapeptin activated ester 3 were carried out as had been done previously.25

Whilst we were endeavouring to reduce the overall length of our synthesis of 3, we became engaged in developing a new improved pathway to the cyclodepsipeptide region of these molecules,53 and we will illustrate our new approach to the peptide sectors of this family in the context of our (+)-kettapeptin synthesis. This effort began with the attempted conversion of (3S)-2-piperazic acid 85 into 172 (Scheme 25) without the use of a protecting group on the N(2)-atom of 85. Such a coupling had never previously attempted in this synthetic arena and there were clearly concerns about the enantiomeric purity of the resulting product 172. All of these fears were soon allayed however when 172 was produced in optically pure condition in 75% yield from the DCC/HOBt mediated hydrazidation of 85 with tert-butyliborazate. Moreover, 172 underwent a very smooth AgCN-promoted coupling30,33 with the acid chloride 83 without perturbation of the tert-Boc acyl hydrazide unit, it producing the dipeptide 173 in a superb 92% yield. Removal of the Fmoc group was accomplished as it had been previously to afford 111 in good yield.

Our need to access the dipeptide acid coupling partner 120 for 111 mandated a synthesis of the protected hydroxamic acid derivative 182 (Scheme 26). For this we set off from Jager’s 2-O-benzyl-α-threitol 174 which was prepared in two steps from diethyl α-tartarate.66 The 1,2-diol unit of 174 was regio-selectively protected as an O-isopropylidene acetal by treatment with 2,2-dimethoxypropane and catalytic p-TsOH to allow introduction of the methoxy grouping onto the remaining hydroxyl by NaH mediated O-alkylation with MeI in DMF.

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Scheme 24 Our new second-generation pathway to aldehyde 58.55

Scheme 25 Our new second-generation pathway to dipeptide 111.55
Having served its purpose in installing this feature, the O-isopropylidene group was detached from 176 and the liberated 1,2-diol 177 oxidatively cleaved to the acid by successive lead tetracetate glycol fission and Pinnick oxidation\textsuperscript{67} which gave the acid 179. The latter thereafter had its O-benzyl ether group detached by catalytic hydrogenolysis and, following this, potassium carbonate promoted amination of 180 with allyl iodide furnishing ester 181 ready for O-triflation and S\textsubscript{N}2 displacement with O-benzylhydroxylamine.\textsuperscript{36} The desired substitution proceeded in 84\% yield to provide 182 in optically pure condition. The northern kettapeptin/azinothricin dipeptide 120 was elaborated by a high-temperature AgCN-mediated coupling between 182 and acid chloride 77 in benzene which again occurred in excellent yield (84\%). The final step needed to access acid 120 was the Pd(0)-mediated O-deallylation of 183 with phenylsilane in CH\textsubscript{2}Cl\textsubscript{2},\textsuperscript{68} which worked well on a problematical substrate where many other O-deallylation protocols had failed.

We could now investigate the critical [2 + 2]-fragment union between 111 and 120 (Scheme 27) which proceeded in a truly remarkable 79\% yield when mediated by BOPCl\textsuperscript{40} and Et\textsubscript{3}N at low temperature over 19 h with rigorous exclusion of moisture. Diethylamine then excised the Fmoc group from this product to give the tetrapeptide 184 which was subjected to a AgCN-promoted N-acylation with acid chloride 109 to obtain 185. As we had anticipated, this proved quite a tricky reaction to work out. However, reaction conditions were eventually devised which could reproducibly deliver 185 in 55\% yield. Although this direct coupling protocol worked less efficiently than our original A83566C [4 + 2]-coupling,\textsuperscript{44} it did carry with it the significant advantage that it cut a further two steps from the overall forward synthesis.

At this juncture, the two N-Boc-groups were removed from 185 and the newly exposed acyl hydrazone unit of the (3S)-Piz residue was oxidatively hydrolysed to the carboxylic acid with NBS in aqueous THF\textsuperscript{46,47} without any apparent loss of stereochemical integrity within this residue, and without damage to the D-threonine amine. The crude seco-amine acid salt 116 was then macrolactamated with excess HATU\textsuperscript{50} and N-ethylmorpholine in CH\textsubscript{2}Cl\textsubscript{2} at high dilution. The product cyclodepsipeptide 186, which had been obtained in 45\% overall yield from 185, now had its Troc-group reductively removed with Zn dust in aqueous acetic acid, and the crude amine salt was temporarily N-acylated with benzyl chloroformate to allow the cyclodepsipeptide 119 to be completely freed of all zinc residues and purified to very high standards by SiO\textsubscript{2} flash chromatography. The purified cyclodepsipeptide

![Scheme 26](image_url)  
**Scheme 26** Our route to the kettapeptin/azinothricin dipeptide 120.\textsuperscript{55}

![Scheme 27](image_url)  
**Scheme 27** Completion of the total synthesis of (+)-kettapeptin.\textsuperscript{55}
119 was then catalytically hydrogenolysed at atmospheric pressure, over a 10% Pd/C catalyst, in anhydrous methanolic HCl. The crude hydrochloride salt 118 was then coupled with the A83586C activated ester 3 in CH2Cl2 to give, after hydration of the coupled glycal in CDCl3, a 32% overall yield of (+)-kettapeptin for the three steps from 119, completing the first ever total synthesis51 of this recently discovered anticancer natural product,8 and simultaneously providing a new abridged second-generation total synthesis of (+)-A83586C with the new routes to 3 and 111 that it had developed.51

Given our success in this venture, and our possession of the azinothricin cyclodepsipeptide 118, we now wished to forge ahead with a synthesis of the long elusive (+)-azinothricin.

We therefore adapted our synthetic strategy for 3 to the synthesis of the azinothricin activated ester 200 (Scheme 28).55 The results essentially mirrored those of the previous synthesis of 3 including for the stereoselectivity of the Roush asymmetric crotylboration63 of enal 192 (2:3:1 selectivity in favour of 193 and 62% yield). The final coupling of 200 with 118 also proceeded in good yield. In fact, this particular union was one of the very best that we have so far encountered, it delivering (+)-azinothricin in 40% overall yield from the protected cyclodepsipeptide 119,55 further vindicating the high-risk planning that we had implemented at the very outset of our programme.

Some highlights of our A83586C analogue work and evidence that molecules of the A83586C class can potently disrupt/blockade transcriptional activation from the β-catenin/TCF4 promoter to thereby inhibit expression of metastasis-inducing osteopontin (Opn)

With our two synthetic strategies in place for building up this family, we duly adapted our routes to allow the construction of a wide range of synthetic analogues that have included the A83586C-GE3 hybrid (Scheme 29),51 the A83586C-citropeptin hybrid (Scheme 30),51 l-Pro-A83586C (Fig. 2),51 and 4-epi-A83586C52 (Fig. 2) to name but a few.

Of the various synthetic analogues that we have so far screened (Fig. 2), the A83586C-citropeptin hybrid 218 appears to have the most potent tumour growth inhibitory effects that we have so far seen, it being roughly of the same order of potency as (+)-A83586C itself against various different human colon tumour cell lines. The A83586C-GE3 hybrid showed potent but less pronounced growth inhibitory effects, while l-Pro-A83586C51,71 was a much less potent tumour growth inhibitor. Significantly, all four of these molecules were powerful inhibitors of β-catenin/TCF4-mediated transactivation from the TCF4 promoter in HCT116 human colon cells after 24 h of exposure (IC50s = 3–5 nM), but l-Pro-A83586C51,71 was approximately 100-fold less active as an inhibitor of transcription.51

In the case of the A83586C-citropeptin and A83586C-GE3 hybrid molecules 218 and 210, our colleague at Queen’s University Belfast, Dr Mohamed El-Tanani, very kindly validated the β-catenin/TCF4 inhibition results for us by examining the simultaneous expression of β-catenin and a relevant known β-catenin/TCF4 downstream target gene, osteopontin (Opn), in Rama-37-Opn cells. The latter is a highly metastatic rat mammary epithelial cell line that has been genetically engineered to specifically overexpress Opn. Opn is a tumour- and metastasis-promoting protein that is generally significantly overexpressed in the most aggressive and highly metastatic of human tumours; its overexpression is normally correlated with patient demise and mortality.73 Significantly, the El-Tanani group demonstrated51, by quantitative real-time PCR, that while 218 and 210 can markedly downregulate over-expressed Opn at 10 nM drug concentration,
β-catenin levels are always maintained, confirming that blockade of this protein-protein interaction with target DNA must be occurring. We have thus jointly demonstrated that small molecule disruption of the β-catenin-TCF4 protein-protein transcription-activating interaction is a viable drug intervention strategy for downregulating Opn in metastatic tumours.\(^{51}\)

By way of contrast, 4-epi-A83586C\(^{72}\) only had very weak antitumour properties against different human tumour cell lines; it having an IC\(_{50}\) = 46 \(\mu\)M vs. the WI-38 VA13 (SV40 virus transformed) human lung fibroblast cell line and an IC\(_{50}\) = 28 \(\mu\)M vs. HCT-116 and HT-29 human colon carcinoma cell lines. TOP-FLASH/FOP-FLASH TCF4-luciferase assaying\(^{54}\) of 4-epi-A83586C likewise demonstrated that high micromolar concentrations were required for this molecule to inhibit β-catenin/TCF4 protein-protein-mediated transactivation. The latter result reinforces the idea that significant changes to the southern hemisphere of A83586C-type cyclodepsipeptides are not beneficial to antitumour potency nor their β-catenin/TCF4/Opn inhibiting ability.

Scheme 29 Synthesis of the GE3 cyclodepsipeptide and its subsequent use in the synthesis of the A83586C-GE3 hybrid.\(^{210,69}\)

Scheme 30 Synthesis of the citropeptin cyclodepsipeptide and its subsequent use in the synthesis of the A83586C-citropeptin hybrid.\(^{218}\)
In this regard, our NMR and molecular modelling studies on 4-epi-A83586C have indicated that it contains a cis-amide linkage in the southern hemisphere (3R)-Piz residue, which is quite different from its (3S)-Piz-configured natural product congeners, which each have a trans-amide linkage in this region. No doubt as further analogues are prepared, even more detailed SAR data will be built up. For now, however, our group is concentrating its efforts on the synthesis of various biotinylated probes of this class for use in future oncological target isolation work. It seems likely that other biological targets will also be modulated by molecules of the A83586C/kettapeptin/GE3 class and, hopefully, such affinity chromatography work will, in the future, lead to the discovery of new oncologically relevant proteins of similar significance to the cyclins and their associated cyclin-dependent kinases in cancer onset and progression.

Conclusions

In this article, we have given a broad overview of our group’s synthetic efforts on molecules of the A83586C, kettapeptin and azinothricin class over the period 1991–2009. Not only have we demonstrated that all three natural products can be readily synthesised through a novel chemoselective coupling strategy that merges unprotected pyran and cyclodepsipeptide fragments at the final stages, we have also proven that our approach can be used to build up all sorts of non-natural A83586C congeners. Moreover, with the molecules that we have fashioned to date, we have provided fascinating new insights into the mechanism of antitumour action of this class. Specifically we have shown that A83586C-type molecules are able to function as powerful nM disrupters of β-catenin/TCF4 protein/protein-mediated Wnt signalling without causing downregulation of β-catenin expression, which is quite distinct behaviour from other highly potent β-catenin/TCF4 inhibitory natural products such as (−)-agelastatin A. In so doing, we have also demonstrated that they switch off the expression of β-catenin/TCF4-regulated metastasis- and tumour-promoting genes such as Opn. We have also provided new insights into how members of this family function as potent E2F/DP transcription factor inhibitors. Specifically, we have produced evidence which suggests that they do this by an indirect mechanism wherein downregulation of E2F1 protein expression occurs alongside induction of pRb-dephosphorylation. No doubt A83586C/kettapeptin/azinothricin-type molecules will emerge as important new chemobiological tools over the coming years now that these significant biological discoveries have been made (Fig. 3).

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Notes and references


a K. J. Hale, V. M. Delisser, L.-K. Yeh, S. A. Peak, S. Manaviazar


For a recent paper that discusses some less potent E2F inhibitor small molecule and their effects, see: Y. Ma, C. A. Kurtyka, S. Boyapalle, S.-S. Shung, H. Lawrence, W. Guida and W. D. Cress, Cancer Res., 2008, 68, 6292. In this paper, a small molecule downregulator of E2F4 protein expression is described that promotes apoptosis, and simultaneously inhibits proliferation and invasion of A375 melanocytes.


