Shifting microbial communities sustain multi-year iron reduction and methanogenesis in ferruginous sediment incubations

Marcus S. Bray[1], Jieying Wu[1], Benjamin C. Reed[1], Cecilia B. Kretz[2], Keaton M. Belli[2], Rachel L. Simister[3], Cynthia Henny[4], Frank J. Stewart[1,2], Thomas J. DiChristina[1,2], Jay A. Brandes[5], David A. Fowle[6], Sean A. Crowe[3], Jennifer B. Glass[1,2#]

[1]School of Biology, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, 30332, USA

[2]School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, 30332, USA

[3]Departments of Microbiology & Immunology and Earth, Ocean, & Atmospheric Sciences, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

[4]Research Center for Limnology, Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Cibinong, Indonesia

[5]Skidaway Institute of Oceanography, Savannah, GA, 31411, USA

[6]Department of Geology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 66045, USA

[#]Correspondence: 311 Ferst Drive Atlanta, GA; Telephone: 404-894-3942; Fax: 404-894-5638; Email: Jennifer.Glass@eas.gatech.edu

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Abstract

Reactive Fe(III) minerals can influence methane (CH_4) emissions by inhibiting microbial methanogenesis or by stimulating anaerobic CH_4 oxidation. The balance between Fe(III) reduction, methanogenesis, and methane oxidation in ferruginous Archean and Paleoproterozoic oceans would have controlled CH_4 fluxes to the atmosphere, thereby regulating the capacity for CH_4 to warm the early Earth under the Faint Young Sun. We studied CH_4 and Fe cycling in anoxic incubations of ferruginous sediment from the ancient ocean analogue Lake Matano, Indonesia over three successive transfers (500 days total). Iron reduction, methanogenesis, methane oxidation, and microbial taxonomy were monitored in treatments amended with ferrihydrite or goethite. After three dilutions, Fe(III) reduction persisted only in bottles with ferrihydrite. Enhanced CH_4 production was observed in the presence of goethite, highlighting the potential for reactive Fe(III)-oxides to inhibit methanogenesis. Supplementing the media with hydrogen, nickel and selenium did not stimulate methanogenesis. There was limited evidence for Fe(III)-dependent CH_4 oxidation, although some incubations displayed CH_4-stimulated Fe(III)-reduction. 16S rRNA profiles continuously changed over the course of enrichment, with ultimate dominance of unclassified members of the order Desulfuromonadales in all treatments. Microbial diversity decreased markedly over the course of incubation, with subtle differences between ferrihydrite and goethite amendments. These results suggest that Fe(III)-oxide mineralogy and availability of electron donors could have led to spatial separation of Fe(III)-reducing and methanogenic microbial communities in ferruginous marine sediments, potentially explaining the persistence of CH_4 as a greenhouse gas throughout the first half of Earth history.

INTRODUCTION

Elevated atmospheric methane (CH_4; 100-1000 ppmv vs. ~2 ppmv in the modern atmosphere) likely played an important role in the first half of Earth history by helping warm Earth's surface temperature enough to sustain liquid water under considerably lower solar radiation (Pavlov et al., 2000; Haqq-Misra et al., 2008; Kasting, 2005; Roberson et al., 2011). During this time, the main source of CH_4 was likely hydrogenotrophic methanogenesis ($CO_2 + 4\ H_2 \rightarrow CH_4 + 2H_2O$; (Ueno et al., 2006; Battistuzzi et al., 2004) from anoxic oceans, which were ferruginous for most of the Archean and Paleoproterozoic eons (Poulton & Canfield, 2011). In these seas, a "ferrous wheel" would have cycled iron from dissolved Fe^{2+} to Fe(III) oxides via microbial photoferrotrophy (and/or abiotic photo-oxidation; Kappler et al., 2005; Crowe et al., 2008a), and then back to Fe^{2+} via microbial Fe(III) respiration (Craddock & Dauphas, 2011; Johnson et al., 2008; Vargas et al., 1998; Konhauser et al., 2005).

Ferruginous oceans could have influenced CH_4 cycling by several mechanisms. It is well established that Fe(III)-reducing bacteria have higher affinity for H_2 than hydrogenotrophic methanogens, and will therefore outcompete them in the presence of poorly crystalline Fe(III) oxides (e.g. ferrihydrite; Lovley & Phillips, 1987; Lovley & Goodwin, 1988; Zhou et al., 2014) [note that Fe(III)-reducing bacteria also outcompete acetoclastic methanogens (Lovley & Phillips, 1986), but acetoclastic methanogenesis likely evolved much later in Earth history (Fournier & Gogarten, 2008)]. In addition, evidence is accumulating that Fe(III) oxides can mediate or stimulate microbial CH_4 oxidation, either as the direct oxidant (Ettwig et al., 2016; Gal'chenko, 2004), or indirectly by regenerating sulfate by oxidization of reduced sulfur compounds (Sivan et al., 2014).

The putative microbial metabolism of CH_4 oxidation coupled to Fe(III) reduction is thermodynamically favorable with ferrihydrite ($CH_4 + 8\ Fe(OH)_3 + 15H^+ \rightarrow HCO_3^- + 8Fe^{2+} + 21H_2O$; ΔG_r^0 = -571 kJ mol^{-1} CH_4) and goethite ($CH_4 + 8\ FeOOH + 15H^+ \rightarrow HCO_3^- + 8Fe^{2+} + 13H_2O$; ΔG_r^0 = -355 kJ mol^{-1} CH_4) as terminal electron acceptors (Caldwell et al., 2008; Zehnder & Brock, 1980). Based on the chemical equations and free energy yields above, we would expect to observe a stoichiometric ratio of 1 CH_4 oxidized per 8 Fe(III) reduced and preferential use of ferrihydrite over goethite as the electron acceptor. Accumulating geochemical evidence for microbial CH_4 oxidation coupled to, or stimulated by, Fe(III) reduction is widespread across modern anoxic ecosystems and anaerobic digester communities (Sivan et al., 2011; Segarra et al., 2013; Beal et al., 2009; Amos et al., 2012; Riedinger et al., 2014; Noroi et al., 2013; Crowe et al., 2011; Sturm et al., 2015; Egger et al., 2015; Zehnder & Brock, 1980; Sivan et al., 2014; Fu et al., 2016; Rooze et al., 2016), and a recent study reported simultaneous CH_4 oxidation and ferrihydrite reduction in a 1:8 ratio in an archaea-dominated enrichment culture (Ettwig et al., 2016).

Despite the possible importance of coupled Fe(III) and CH_4 cycling in the Archean and Paleoproterozoic Eon, long-term studies of Fe(III) reduction under low organic carbon and high CH_4 conditions remain sparse. Lake Matano, Indonesia is one of the only modern analogues for the ferruginous Archean ocean (Crowe et al., 2008a). Despite the abundance of Fe(III) oxides that might be expected to suppress methanogenesis, CH_4 accumulates to 1.4 mM in anoxic deep waters (Crowe et al., 2008a; Crowe et al., 2011; Crowe et al., 2008b; Crowe et al., 2007a; Kuntz et al., 2015). Methanotrophy is a key carbon fixation process in Lake Matano's oxic-anoxic transition zone, and the dearth of other oxidants (<100 nM nitrate and sulfate) suggests that Fe(III) might be the terminal electron acceptor in methanotrophy (Sturm et al., 2015; Crowe et

al., 2011). In this study, we examined the influence of CH_4 and Fe(III) mineral speciation on rates of Fe(III) reduction, methanogenesis, and CH_4 oxidation, and microbial community composition, over three successive dilutions (500 total days of incubation) of anoxic Lake Matano sediments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample collection and storage

A 15-cm sediment core from 200 m water depth in Lake Matano, Sulawesi Island, Indonesia (2°26′S, 121°15′E; *in situ* sediment temperature ~27°C) was sampled in November 2010 and sub-sampled at 5 cm increments. Sediments from 0-5 and 5-10 cm depth were fluffy and black, and 10-15 cm was dark gray. Sediments were sealed in gas-tight bags with no headspace (Hansen et al., 2000) and stored at 4°C until incubations began in March 2015.

Enrichment medium and substrate synthesis

A modified artificial freshwater medium lacking nitrate and sulfate was developed based on the pore water composition of Lake Matano sediments (S.A. Crowe and D.A. Fowle, unpublished work). The medium contained 825 μM $MgCl_2$, 550 μM $CaCO_3$, 3 mM $NaHCO_3$, 3.5 μM K_2HPO_4, 5 μM Na_2HPO_4, 225 μM NH_4Cl, 1 μM $CuCl_2$, 1.5 μM Na_2MoO_4, 2.5 μM $CoCl_2$, 23 μM $MnCl_2$, 4 μM $ZnCl_2$, 9.4 μM $FeCl_3$ and 3 mM Na_2NTA, 0.07 μM vitamin B_{12}, 0.4 μM biotin, and 68.5 μM thiamine. Filter-sterilized vitamin solutions were added after autoclaving. Ferrihydrite ($Fe(OH)_3$) and goethite (FeOOH) were synthesized as described in Schwertmann & Cornell (1991) and added to enrichments to 10 mM as described below.

108

109 **Inoculation of enrichment and amendments**

110 The sediment was pre-treated for 36 days at 30°C in 100% N_2 headspace to deplete endogenous
111 organic carbon, electron donors, and reactive electron acceptors. After pre-treatment, sediment
112 from the 0-5 cm depth layer was inoculated in a ratio of sediment to medium of 1:5 (v/v) in an
113 anoxic chamber (97% N_2 and 3% H_2; Coy Laboratory Products, Grass Lake, MI, USA).
114 Sediment slurry (35 mL) was aliquoted into 70 mL sterile serum bottles, stoppered with sterile
115 butyl stoppers (Geo-Microbial Technologies, Ochelata, OK, USA; pre-boiled in 0.1 N NaOH),
116 and crimped with aluminum seals. Ferric iron was added either as ferrihydrite or goethite to 10
117 mM. Bottles were purged with 99.99% N_2 for 1 hr, and CH_4 amendments were injected with 10
118 mL 99.99% CH_4 and 5 mL 99% $^{13}CH_4$ (Cambridge Isotope Laboratories, Tewksbury, MA,
119 USA). Controls were autoclaved at 121°C for 1 hr on day 0 and again on day 6 of the 1°
120 enrichment. All treatments were duplicated, and bottles were incubated in the dark at 30°C with
121 shaking at 200 rpm.

122 After 50 days, the volume of all cultures was reduced to 5 mL, and 30 mL of fresh media
123 was added to each bottle, constituting a 6-fold dilution. These 2° enrichments were amended
124 with approximately 10 mM of either ferrihydrite or goethite. All bottles were purged with
125 99.99% N_2 for 1 hr, and all bottles except N_2 controls were injected with 8 mL 99.99% CH_4 and
126 2 mL 99% $^{13}CH_4$. Controls were autoclaved again at 121°C for 1 hr. DL-Methionine (10 μM)
127 was added as a sulfur source. After 303 days, cultures were diluted 10-fold with fresh media into
128 new serum bottles (3° enrichment) with the same substrate and headspace composition as the 2°
129 enrichment. A schematic of the incubation and dilutions is shown at the top of Figures 1-3.

After an additional 220 days, goethite-amended N_2 cultures were diluted 25-fold with fresh anoxic media into new serum bottles. Cultures received either 10 mM goethite or no Fe(III). A subset of cultures received 5 mL of 99.99% H_2 (20% headspace) while all others had 100% N_2 headspace. Controls were autoclaved at 121°C. After 48 days, an anoxic solution of nickel (Ni) and selenium (Se) was added to all bottles, yielding final concentrations of 1 μM Ni and 1 μM Se.

HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} and Fe^{3+} and soluble Fe^{2+}

Samples were taken from each bottle in the anoxic chamber using a 21-gauge needle (BD PrecisionGlide™) and plastic syringe. Plasticware was stored in the anoxic chamber for at least 24 hr to minimize O_2 sample contamination. For HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} analyses, 100 μL of sediment slurry was extracted with 400 μL 0.5 N HCl in the dark for 1 hr, followed by centrifugation at 10,000 x g for 1 min, injection of 10 μL of supernatant into 990 μL of 10 mM FerroZine reagent in 46 mM HEPES (pH 8.3), and measurement of absorbance at 562 nm (Stookey, 1970). For HCl-extractable Fe^{3+}, 100 μL of sediment slurry was incubated overnight in 0.5 N HCl and 0.25 M NH_2OH-HCl in the dark, followed by centrifugation and measurement as above, and subtraction of HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} as in Kostka & Luther (1994).

Methane oxidation

Samples were collected for δ^{13}C-DIC analysis by 0.2 μm membrane filtration of medium into crimp top autosampler vials (Thermo Scientific National Target LoVial) and analysis as described in Brandes (2009). Rates of $^{13}CH_4$ oxidation to ^{13}C-DIC were calculated over the linear period of δ^{13}C-DIC increase based on the method in Scheller et al. (2016). First, the δ^{13}C-DIC

153 values were converted into fractional abundances ($^{13}F = (^{13}C/^{12}C+^{13}C)$), and then DIC production
154 from CH_4 oxidation was calculated using the following formula:

155 $$\Delta[DIC] = (([DIC]_n(^{13}F_n)) - ([DIC]_0(13F_0))/^{13}F_{CH4})$$

156 Where $[DIC]_n$ and $^{13}F_n$ are equal to the total DIC concentration (mM) and fractional abundance
157 of ^{13}C in the DIC at time n respectively. $[DIC]_0$ and $^{13}F_0$ are the total DIC concentration (mM)
158 and fractional abundance of DIC at time 0 respectively, and $^{13}F_{CH4}$ is the fractional abundance of
159 ^{13}C in the CH_4.

160

161 **Headspace methane**

162 Headspace (50 µL) was sampled using a gastight syringe and injected into a gas chromatograph
163 (SRI Instruments 8610C, Torrance, CA, USA) with a HayeSep N column and flame ionization
164 detector to measure headspace CH_4 concentrations. A CH_4 standard (1000 ppm, Airgas, USA)
165 was used for calibration.

166

167 **Inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry**

168 Total dissolved Ni and Se concentrations were measured using inductively coupled plasma mass
169 spectrometry (ICP-MS). In order to determine the amounts of Ni and Se supplied by the media
170 and Fe(III) oxides, aliquots of media were dispensed in serum bottles, purged with 99.99% N_2,
171 and amended with 10 mM goethite or ferrihydrite in the same manner as enrichments. Stoppers
172 were penetrated multiple times with 21 gauge stainless steel needles (BD PrecisionGlide™) to
173 mimic the effect of sampling on enrichment cultures. All samples for ICP-MS were filtered
174 through 0.2 µm pore polypropylene syringe filters and diluted in 2% trace metal grade HNO_3
175 (Fisher Scientific, Inc.) containing scandium and yttrium as internal standards to account for

176 instrument drift. Calibration standards were prepared from certified stock solutions of Ni
177 (CertiPREP) and Se (BDH), and a blank and calibration standard were measured periodically as
178 quality controls. The measurement detection limits, calculated as 3 times the standard deviation
179 of the blank (n=8), were 7 and 128 nM for Ni and Se, respectively.

180 **16S rRNA gene amplicon sequencing**

181 Samples (2 mL) of sediment used for inoculating incubations (hereafter, "sediment inoculum")
182 were taken in February 2015 (prior to pre-treatment) and after incubation for 15 days (1°
183 enrichment), 72 days (2° enrichment) and 469 days (3° enrichment). Nucleic acid was extracted
184 and purified using a MO BIO PowerSoil Isolation Kit following the manufacturer's protocol and
185 MO BIO UltraClean® 15 Purification Kit. 16S rRNA gene amplicons were synthesized from
186 extracted DNA with V4 region-specific barcoded primers F515 and R806 (Caporaso et al., 2011)
187 appended with Illumina-specific adapters according to Kozich et al. (2013) using a Bio-Rad
188 C1000 Touch Thermocycler and QIAGEN Taq PCR Master Mix. Thermal cycling conditions
189 were as follows: initial denaturing at 94°C (5 min), 35 cycles of denaturing at 94°C (40 sec),
190 primer annealing at 55°C (40 sec), and primer extension at 68°C (30 sec). Amplicons were
191 checked for correct size (~400 bp) on a 1% agarose gel and purified using Diffinity RapidTips.
192 Amplicon concentrations were determined on a Qubit™ (ThermoFisher) fluorometer. Amplicons
193 were pooled at equimolar concentrations (4 nmol), and sequenced on an Illumina MiSeq running
194 MiSeq Control software v.2.4.0.4 using a 500 cycle MiSeq reagent kit v2 with a 5% PhiX
195 genomic library control, as described by Kozich et al. (2013). Sequences were deposited as
196 NCBI accession numbers SAMN04532568-04532641 and SAMN05915184-05915222.

197

198 **16S rRNA gene amplicon sequence analysis**

199 Demultiplexed amplicon read pairs were quality trimmed with Trim Galore (Babraham
200 Bioinformatics) using a base Phred33 score threshold of Q25 and a minimum length cutoff of
201 100 bp. Reads were then analyzed using mothur (Schloss et al., 2009) following its MiSeq
202 standard operating procedure. High quality paired reads were merged and screened to remove
203 sequences of incorrect length and those with high numbers of ambiguous base calls. Merged
204 reads were dereplicated and aligned to the ARB SILVA database (release 123; available at
205 http://www.mothur.org/wiki/Silva_reference_alignment). Sequences with incorrect alignment
206 and those with homopolymers longer than 8bp were filtered out. Unique sequences and their
207 frequency in each sample were identified and then a pre-clustering algorithm was used to further
208 de-noise sequences within each sample. Sequences were then chimera checked using UCHIME
209 (Edgar et al., 2011). Reads were clustered into OTUs at 97% similarity based on uncorrected
210 pairwise distance matrices. OTUs were classified using SILVA reference taxonomy database
211 (release 123, available at http://www.mothur.org/wiki/Silva_reference_files). Chao 1 (species
212 richness), phylogenetic diversity, and Shannon index (species evenness) estimates were
213 generated using mothur after normalization to 4000 sequences per sample.
214

215 **RESULTS**

216 **Iron reduction**

217 *1° enrichment*. Over the first 10 days of incubation, HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} increased from 10 to 25
218 mM in ferrihydrite treatments (Fig. 1a) and from 10 to 20 mM in goethite treatments (1-2 mM d^{-}
219 ^{1}; Fig. 1b). From day 6 to 10, HCl-extractable Fe^{3+} (7 and 12 mM in ferrihydrite and goethite
220 treatments, respectively) was completely consumed in all bottles except autoclaved controls with
221 ferrihydrite (data not shown). Iron reduction rates were identical with and without CH_4 (Fig. 1a,
222 b). Initial autoclaving did not suppress Fe(III) reduction. A second round of autoclaving on day 6

223 slightly suppressed further activity. From day 10-28, HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} fluctuated in
224 ferrihydrite treatments (Fig. 1a) and declined slightly in goethite treatments (Fig. 1b). Soluble
225 Fe^{2+} was consistently <1% of HCl-extractable Fe^{2+}, and sediment-free controls did not reduce
226 Fe(III) (data not shown).

227 *2° enrichment*. After 1:6 dilution and 10 mM ferrihydrite addition on day 50, HCl-extractable
228 Fe^{2+} increased from 3 to 4 mM over two days, and then remained constant through the final time
229 point (day 497) in bottles with and without added CH_4 (Fig. 1a). After 10 mM goethite addition
230 on day 50, HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} increased from 2 to 3 mM after a two-day lag period. Thereafter,
231 HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} rose to 4 mM by day 497 in goethite treatments with added CH_4; without
232 CH_4, HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} dropped back to 2 mM (Fig. 1b). Autoclaved controls had no activity.
233 Black magnetic minerals formed in all ferrihydrite treatments except autoclaved controls (Fig
234 1a). No magnetic minerals formed in goethite treatments (Fig. 1b).

235 *3° enrichment*. After 1:10 dilution and addition of 10 mM ferrihydrite on day 352, HCl-
236 extractable Fe^{2+} doubled in the first week in N_2 treatments and bottle CH_4-1 (Fig. 1a). Bottle
237 CH_4-2 displayed similar activity after a two-week lag period. Over an additional 100 days (day
238 466), HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} increased to 2 mM. Goethite treatments and autoclaved controls had
239 minimal activity (Fig. 1b). As in the 2° enrichment, magnetic minerals formed in the presence of
240 ferrihydrite (Fig. 1a), but not goethite (Fig. 1b).

241

242 **Trace metal concentrations**

243 Total dissolved Ni averaged 41 ± 20 nM in fresh basal growth media, and was neither affected
244 by Fe(III) oxide additions nor by puncturing of stainless steel needles through stoppers into
245 culture liquid (Table S1). Dissolution of ferrihydrite in HNO_3 liberated significant Ni (2.5 μM;

Table S1). Nickel was higher in enrichment cultures than in basal media: 96-286 and 54-134 nM with ferrihydrite and goethite, respectively; Table S2). Selenium was consistently below the detection limit (<128 nM) in growth media and enrichments culture.

Methane production

Goethite treatments consistently displayed higher CH_4 production than those with ferrihydrite (Fig. 2). In the 1° goethite enrichment, methanogenesis (13-19 μM CH_4 d^{-1}) coincided with the period of Fe(III) reduction, and stopped after HCl-extractable Fe^{3+} was completely consumed on day 10. Methanogenesis persisted throughout the 3° goethite enrichment (3 μM CH_4 d^{-1}). Negligible CH_4 was produced in the presence of ferrihydrite, except for the final timepoint for bottle N_2-2 in the 3° enrichment.

In an additional 4° enrichment (day 571-663), we tested the effect of H_2, Ni, and Se amendments, as well as no Fe(III) controls, on CH_4 production in goethite treatments (Fig. S1). As in previous enrichments, Bottle 1 consistently produced more CH_4 (17 μM CH_4 d^{-1}) than Bottle 2. There were no significant differences in CH_4 production with and without 20% H_2 headspace and 10 mM goethite. Like in previous enrichments with goethite, minimal Fe(III) reduction was observed (data not shown). No CH_4 was produced in any of the treatments between day 619, when 1 μM Ni and Se were added, and day 663.

Methane oxidation

1° enrichment. ^{13}C incorporation into DIC began on day 6 in both ferrihydrite and goethite treatments and continued for the remainder of the sampling period (Fig. 3a,b). Ferrihydrite treatments showed lower ^{13}C-DIC enrichment but higher total DIC production (totaling to 1-2

μM CH_4 oxidized d^{-1}) than goethite treatments, which had greatest $\delta^{13}C$ enrichment but decreasing DIC concentrations, making calculation of CH_4 oxidation rates impossible. Autoclaved controls showed neither ^{13}C incorporation nor DIC production.

2° enrichment. Both ferrihydrite treatments displayed ^{13}C enrichment (Fig. 3a), but declining DIC, precluding calculation of CH_4 oxidation rates. Initial pH of 8 declined to 7.6, 6.7 and 6 in the autoclaved, N_2 and CH_4 treatments, respectively. DIC in goethite treatments with CH_4 dropped to undetectable values within three weeks, suggesting sampling or analytical error, which precluded accurate isotopic measurement at these time points. These data are thus not considered further. Autoclaved and N_2 controls did not show pH changes.

3° enrichment. Bottle CH_4-2 with ferrihydrite was the only treatment with significant ^{13}C incorporation into DIC over the first 15 days (Fig. 3a). Over the same interval, DIC increased in both ferrihydrite-amended bottles (yielding CH_4 oxidation rates of 32 and 7 μM d^{-1} in bottle 1 and 2, respectively) and pH dropped from 8.2 to 7.1 and 7.9 in bottles 1 and 2, respectively. By day 470, ^{13}C enrichment and DIC concentrations in both ferrihydrite-amended bottles had returned to a level similar to that at the start of the 3° enrichment. Autoclaved controls did not exhibit any change in DIC and pH. Goethite treatments had initial DIC concentrations (3-5 mM) higher than those in previous enrichments. In the goethite-amended autoclaved controls and bottle CH_4-1, DIC concentrations dropped over the 3° enrichment. Only goethite-amended bottle CH_4-2 increased in DIC, without concurrent ^{13}C enrichment. Large DIC variability implies that reported rates may be underestimates if declining pH led to outgassing of ^{13}C-DIC into the headspace CO_2 pool.

292 **Microbial taxonomy**

293 *Inoculum*. 16S rRNA gene amplicons from the sediment inoculum were dominated by
294 Bathyarchaeota (25%), formerly Miscellaneous Crenarchaeotal Group (MCG) and unclassified
295 Archaea (11%; Fig. 4).

296 *1° enrichment*. Species richness, evenness and phylogenetic diversity decreased relative to the
297 inoculum in all treatments (Fig. 4). Geobacteraceae (Deltaproteobacteria) became dominant (22-
298 36%) in all ferrihydrite treatments (Fig. 4a); the dominant OTU had 97% similarity to
299 *Geothermobacter* sp. Ferrihydrite-amended bottle CH_4-1 was enriched in the Betaproteobacteria,
300 specifically Comamonaceadeae (17%) and Rhodocyclaceae (9%; Fig. 4a). Bathyarchaeota
301 persisted in goethite treatments (11-25%; Fig. 4b).

302 *2° enrichment*. All treatments declined further in species richness, evenness, and phylogenetic
303 diversity. Unclassified Desulfuromondales dominated both ferrihydrite and goethite enrichments
304 (34-68%). The dominant OTU had 98% similarity to *Geobacter hephaestius/Geobacter lovleyi.*
305 Geobacteraceae declined in ferrihydrite enrichments (2-18%; Fig. 4a). Campylobacteraceae
306 (Epsilonproteobacteria), a trace constituent of the inoculum and 1° enrichment, were enriched in
307 goethite treatments with CH_4 (23-40%); the dominant OTU had 98% similarity to
308 *Sulfurospirillum barnesii* (Fig. 4b). The most abundant methanogenic Euryarchaeota family,
309 Methanobacteriaceae, comprised 1-2% and 6-7% of sequences in ferrihydrite and goethite
310 treatments, respectively; the dominant OTU had 100% similarity to *Methanobacterium flexile*.
311 Bathyarchaeota were depleted compared to the 1° enrichment (Fig. 4).

312 *3° enrichment*. Species richness, evenness, and phylogenetic diversity continued to decline (Fig.
313 4a,b). Unclassified Desulfuromondales dominated goethite treatments (32-76%; Fig. 4b), and
314 were less abundant in ferrihydrite treatments (18-38%); as in the 2° enrichment, the dominant

315 OTU had 98% identity to *Geobacter hephaestius/Geobacter lovleyi*. Rhodocyclaceae were more
316 abundant in ferrihydrite treatments with CH_4 (14-15%) than with N_2 (2-4%; Fig 4a); the
317 dominant OTU had 100% similarity to *Azospira oryzae/Dechlorosoma suillum*. Peptococcaceae
318 (Firmicutes) were most abundant in bottle CH_4-2 with ferrihydrite (30%); the dominant OTU had
319 96% similarity to uncultured members of the genus *Thermincola*. Syntrophaceae
320 (Deltaproteobacteria) were enriched in all ferrihydrite treatments (11-16%) and goethite
321 treatments with N_2 (8-15%); the dominant OTU had 97% similarity to *Smithella propionica*.
322 Methanobacteriaceae comprised 1-4% of sequences in goethite treatments and were absent from
323 ferrihydrite treatments; as in the 2° enrichment, the dominant OTU had 100% identity to
324 *Methanobacterium flexile*.
325

326 **DISCUSSION**

327 **Fe(III) reduction rates in long-term ferruginous sediment incubations**

328 Initial rates of HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} production (1-2 mM d^{-1}) in the 1° enrichment were similar to
329 those from freshwater wetlands with organic carbon as the electron donor (Roden & Wetzel,
330 2002; Jensen et al., 2003; Kostka et al., 2002). Despite replenishment of Fe(III) substrates,
331 activity declined with each successive transfer, likely reflecting organic carbon limitation. The
332 next most thermodynamically favorable electron donor, H_2, could have been supplied by
333 fermenters (such as Syntrophaceae in the 3° enrichment), but would ultimately still require a
334 source of organic carbon. Some of our incubations display evidence for CH_4, the next most
335 thermodynamically favorable electron donor, as a source of electrons for Fe(III) reduction (e.g.
336 higher Fe^{2+} yields with CH_4 addition with ferrihydrite in 1° and 3° enrichments, and with
337 goethite in the 2° enrichment; see further discussion below).

338 Higher Fe(III) reduction rates were maintained on ferrihydrite than goethite, consistent
339 with its higher energetic yield and (typically) greater surface area. Magnetic mineral formation
340 was likely due to adsorption of Fe^{2+} onto ferrihydrite followed by solid-state conversion of
341 ferrihydrite to magnetite (Hansel et al., 2003). Since the HCl-extraction method does not dissolve
342 magnetite and magnetite-adsorbed Fe^{2+} (Poulton & Canfield, 2005), it is possible that our Fe(III)
343 reduction rates based on HCl-extractable Fe(II) production were underestimates of the total
344 Fe(III) reduction.
345
346 **Fe(III) oxide mineralogy controls methane production and methanogen taxonomy**
347 Our observation of higher rates of methanogenesis in goethite vs. ferrihydrite amendments is
348 consistent with prior results showing that bacteria that reduce ferrihydrite better outcompete
349 methanogenic archaea for H_2 and acetate than those that reduce more crystalline Fe(III) oxides,
350 including goethite (Lovley & Phillips, 1987; Lovley & Goodwin, 1988; Zhou et al., 2014; Hori
351 et al., 2010; Roden & Wetzel, 1996). This out competition is also broadly supported by
352 taxonomic shifts in our enrichment cultures. In particular, anaerobic heterotrophs such as
353 *Geothermobacter sp.* (Kashefi et al., 2003) were enriched in ferrihydrite treatments by day 15
354 and may have outcompeted other microbes for organic carbon sources.
355 Higher abundances of Methanobacteriaceae (0.1-1% and 1-4% on days 15 and 469,
356 respectively) in goethite than ferrihydrite treatments (≤0.1%) suggest that CH_4 in goethite
357 treatments came from the substrates used by Methanobacteriaceae (H_2/CO_2, formate, or CO).
358 Addition of H_2 did not stimulate additional methanogenesis in the 4° amendment, implying
359 another limiting substrate or growth condition. The ferrihydrite treatment (bottle 2) that produced
360 CH_4 by day 469 contained 3% Methanosaetaceae; the most dominant OTU had 98% similarity to

361 *Methanosaeta concilii,* in agreement with observations from the Lake Matano water column
362 (Crowe et al., 2011). *Methanosaeta* spp. produce CH_4 from acetate, or from H_2/CO_2 via direct
363 interspecies electron transfer with *Geobacter* (Rotaru et al., 2014).
364

365 **Fe(III)-dependent CH_4 oxidation**

366 Enrichments were established under conditions thought to be favorable for Fe(III)-dependent
367 CH_4 oxidation, with Fe(III) oxides and CH_4 as the most abundant electron acceptors and donors,
368 respectively. In the 1° enrichment, incorporation of $^{13}CH_4$ into DIC overlapped with the second
369 phase of Fe(III) reduction (days 6-10), but calculating the stoichiometry of CH_4 oxidized to
370 Fe(III) reduced posed a challenge due to similar rates of Fe(III) reduction with and without
371 added CH_4 and in autoclaved controls. ^{13}C-DIC enrichment from the back reaction of
372 hydrogenotrophic methanogenesis (Zehnder & Brock, 1979) was ruled out because CH_4
373 oxidation continued after Fe(III) reduction and methanogenesis stopped at day 10. Therefore,
374 CH_4 was likely oxidized by an electron acceptor other than Fe(III) (e.g. O_2, Mn(IV), NO_x^-, SO_4^{2-})
375 in the 1° enrichment, likely supplied by residual sediment or inadvertent introduction of air.

376 During the first 15 days of the 3° enrichment, rates of CH_4 oxidation and HCl-extractable
377 Fe^{2+} production were similar (~10-20 μM d^{-1}) and roughly consistent with the low rates
378 presented in Ettwig et al. (2016) that yielded a 1:8 ratio. However, the lack of multiple time
379 points for the interval of simultaneous Fe(III) reduction and CH_4 oxidation, as well as similar
380 initial rates of Fe(III) reduction with and without CH_4 throughout this interval, prevent us from
381 attributing this activity to Fe(III)-dependent CH_4 oxidation with high confidence.

382 It is notable that the two incubations with the highest rates of CH_4 oxidation (ferrihydrite
383 bottle 1 in 1° and 3° enrichments) were also the only treatments with very different microbial

384 community compositions relative to other bottles in the same enrichment. In the 1° enrichment,
385 ferrihydrite bottle-1 was enriched in Betaproteobacteria (Comamonadaceae and
386 Rhodocyclaceae). In the 3° enrichment, the CH_4-1 sample had less Peptococcaceae than other
387 ferrihydrite incubations. By day 469, the betaproteobacterium *Azospira oryzae/Dechlorosoma*
388 *suillum*, a member of the Rhodocyclaceae family, was more abundant in both of the CH_4 vs. N_2
389 treatments. The potential role of this microbe in CH_4 cycling remains unclear, as laboratory
390 cultures of this species are not known to oxidize CH_4. Notably, related members of the
391 Betaproteobacteria, including the genera *Azospira* and *Comamonas* found here, are typically
392 facultative anaerobes that can use alternative electron acceptors like NO_3^-, NO_2^- or perchlorate
393 (Willems, 2014; Reinhold-Hurek & Hurek, 2015). As such, these Betaproteobacteria are poised
394 to respond to enhanced electron acceptor supply that accompanies pulse of O_2. Anecdotally,
395 Betaproteobacteria are frequently associated with environments that are characterized by
396 fluctuating redox conditions and periodic exposure to O_2 (Converse et al., 2015). Thus, their
397 growth in our incubations may be a response to trace O_2 introduction. It is also possible that the
398 growth of novel organisms capable of high rates of Fe(III)-dependent CH_4 oxidation was
399 inhibited by other unidentified factors, potentially related to the batch-style incubations, the use
400 of butyl rubber stoppers (Niemann et al., 2015), or the lack of a critical substrate in the
401 enrichment medium.
402

403 **Effect of Fe(III) oxide and carbon substrates on microbial community diversity**

404 The microbial community underwent multiple shifts over the 500-day incubation, with an overall
405 decrease in species richness, evenness, and phylogenetic diversity, likely in response to declining
406 organic carbon. By the 3° enrichment, species evenness was consistently lower in each goethite-

407 amended treatment than in the respective ferrihydrite-amended treatment. This could mean that
408 the greater energetic yield of ferrihydrite reduction fosters higher diversity, or that the higher
409 reactivity of ferrihydrite allowed it to be utilized by more organisms than goethite.

410 All of the most enriched taxa in our enrichments comprised ≤0.1% of the inoculum
411 community and have relatives that reduce Fe(III) in laboratory cultures. Within those taxa, the
412 most abundant OTUs were closely related to organisms capable of Fe(III) reduction
413 (*Geothermobacter sp.*, *Geobacter hephaestius/Geobacter lovleyi*, *Thermincola sp.*, and
414 *Sulfurospirillum barnesii*) (Kashefi et al., 2003; Zavarzina et al., 2007; Stolz et al., 1999).
415 Desulfuromonadales was the only metal-reducing taxon that was continuously present in all
416 enrichments (3-11%, 34-53%, and 18-76% in the, 1°, 2°, and 3° enrichment respectively). Other
417 taxa differed significantly in their abundance over the course of incubation. Geobacteraceae was
418 enriched at day 15 with ferrihydrite (22-36%) but had declined in abundance by day 72 (8-18%).
419 Still other taxa, including Rhodocyclaceae and Peptococcaceae, were enriched in the presence of
420 ferrihydrite at day 469. In goethite treatments, Campylobacteraceae (23-40%) were enriched at
421 day 72, but were minimal at day 469. The succession of different metal-reducing taxa may be
422 due to the changing availability of electron donors (e.g. H_2 and organic C). Enrichment of
423 Syntrophaceae, known for their synthrophic fermentative interactions, suggests the establishment
424 of syntrophy in the 3° enrichment in response to depletion of electron donors.

425

426 **Nickel sources**

427 Enrichment cultures contained ~2-10x more total dissolved Ni than the basal growth medium.
428 The inoculum (~60 nM in Lake Matano deep water; Crowe et al., 2008b) would not have
429 significantly contributed to the Ni pool past the 1° enrichment, and repeated needle exposure had

no effect on Ni concentrations. The Ni source to enrichment cultures was likely partial ferrihydrite dissolution, since ferrihydrite readily scavenges Ni from solution (Zegeye et al., 2012), while its dissolution liberates Ni (Table S1; Crowe et al., 2007b). Slow Ni leaching from silicate glass during extended contact between microbes and the serum bottles could have contributed another source of Ni in microbial enrichments vs. abiotic controls (Hausrath et al., 2007).

Geobiological implications

Our results point to a mineralogical control on Fe(III) reduction, methanogenesis, and microbial community composition and diversity, under conditions of severe organic carbon limitation. These conditions likely existed in Archean and Paleoproterozoic oceans with relatively low amounts of primary production (Knoll et al., 2016; Farquhar et al., 2011). We posit that the relative abundance and distribution of Fe(III) phases in marine sediments would have impacted methanogenesis rates in the Archean and Paleoproterozoic. Sediments below shallow water columns were likely fed by abundant amorphous Fe(III) from photoferrotrophic activity, resulting in rapid sedimentation of amorphous Fe(III) phases (e.g. ferrihydrite). These Fe(III) oxides could have supported diverse Fe(III)-reducing communities that outcompeted other taxa such as methanogens for limited carbon and nutrients.

Conversely, slow deposition and aging of ferrihydrite to goethite could have limited both the abundance and diversity of Fe(III)-reducing microbes in sediments, allowing for more organic carbon remineralization via methanogenesis than Fe(III) reduction, as recently calculated for Lake Matano (Kuntz et al., 2015; Crowe et al., 2011). In the open ocean, organic carbon and Fe(III) would likely have been consumed before reaching sediments, leaving behind more

crystalline Fe(III) phases. Importantly, the role of Fe(III)-driven CH_4 oxidation appears limited given our experimental results, although we cannot rule out this pathway given that some of our data suggest it may operate at low rates.

Availability of trace metal nutrients is another important consideration in potential controls on ancient CH_4 and Fe cycling. Measurements of Ni/Fe ratios in ancient marine sediments indicate that total dissolved Ni decreased from ~400 nM before 2.7 Ga to 200 nM between 2.7-2.5 Ga, to modern levels of 2-11 nM at ~0.5 Ga, assuming that the Fe(III) minerals in Archean sediments were of biological origin (Konhauser et al., 2009; Eickhoff et al., 2014; Konhauser et al., 2015). It is likely that abundant Ni would have been bound and sequestered in Fe(III)-oxide rich sediments. Rapid and widespread Archean redox cycling of Fe(III) could have served as constant source of Ni for methanogenic communities. The influence of changing availability of Se (Stüeken et al., 2015) and other trace nutrients on methanogenesis rates through time remains open for further exploration.

Overall, our results support a model for a sustained CH_4 greenhouse in the Archean and Paleoproterozoic due to emissions from ferruginous oceans with spatially segregated habitats of bacterial reduction of reactive Fe(III) oxides and methanogenesis in the presence of less reactive Fe(III) phases. Rates of Fe(III) deposition, aging, and recrystallization may thus have played an important role in regulating the preservation of sedimentary Fe(III), the production of CH_4, and the ecology and diversity of the biosphere during the first half of Earth history. By the mid-Proterozoic, rising seawater sulfate likely stimulated anaerobic CH_4 oxidation, thereby minimizing marine CH_4 emissions and the CH_4 greenhouse (Olson et al., 2016).

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674

675

676 **Figure Captions**

677 **Figure 1. HCl-extractable Fe^{2+} for sediment enrichments with (a) ferrihydrite and (b)**
678 **goethite over 497 days**. Timeline at top shows transfer dates and dilution ratios. "A" represents
679 days that controls were autoclaved. Red and black symbols represent treatments with and without
680 CH_4, respectively. White symbols represent autoclaved controls. All treatments were run in
681 duplicate (circle and triangle symbols). Photos depict 2° and 3° enrichment bottles on day 497
682 with evidence for magnetic mineral formation in live treatments amended with ferrihydrite.

683 **Figure 2. Accumulation of CH_4 in the headspace of sediment enrichments.** Timeline at top
684 shows transfer dates and dilution ratios. Solid and dotted lines represent ferrihydrite and goethite
685 treatments, respectively. All treatments were run in duplicate (circle and triangle symbols).
686 Original headspace was 100% N_2.

687 **Figure 3. Dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) isotopic composition and concentration for**
688 **sediment enrichments amended with $^{13}CH_4$ and either (a,c) ferrihydrite or (b,d) goethite.**
689 Timeline at top shows transfer dates and dilution ratios. "A" represents days that controls were
690 autoclaved. Red and white symbols represent live treatments and autoclaved controls,
691 respectively. Errors bars represent standard deviation of triplicate measurements. Calculated
692 methane oxidation rates for the 1° enrichment were 1.7 and 1.1 μM CH_4 d^{-1} ferrihydrite bottles 1
693 and 2, respectively and 0.2 and 0.8 μM CH_4 d^{-1} for goethite bottles 1 and 2, respectively. Isotopic
694 data are not plotted for DIC concentrations 0.5 mM. Rate calculations were not possible for the
695 2° enrichment due to low/variable DIC.

696 **Figure 4. 16S rRNA gene diversity and phylogenetic diversity for inoculum and sediment**
697 **enrichments amended with (a) ferrihydrite and (b) goethite.** Samples were taken on day 15

698 (1° enrichment), 72 (2° enrichment) and 469 (3° enrichment). Red and black symbols represent
699 treatments with and without CH_4, respectively. Gray diamonds represent inoculum samples. All
700 treatments were run in duplicate (circle and triangle symbols). Species richness, phylogenetic
701 diversity, and species evenness for the sediment inoculum and enrichments normalized to 4000
702 sequences per sample are shown to the right of bar charts.

703 **Figure S1. Accumulation of CH_4 in the headspace during the 4° enrichment (days 571-663).**
704 All treatments were run in duplicate (circle and triangle symbols). The arrow represents addition
705 of 1 μM Ni and Se on day 619. Original headspace was 100% N_2 (black symbols) or 80 N_2 / 20%
706 H_2 (blue symbols). White symbols represent autoclaved controls. Solid and dashed lines
707 represent goethite and no Fe(III) treatments, respectively.

708

709 **Table S1. Total dissolved Ni (nM) in basal media with and without Fe(III) oxides.** Samples
710 were prepared in the same manner as enrichment cultures. A subset of samples was acidified in
711 HNO_3^- prior to filtering and measurement. Error is reported as the standard deviation of triplicate
712 measurements. "n.d." indicates not detectable.

Number of needle exposures	Medium	Medium +10 mM ferrihydrite	Medium +10 mM goethite	Medium +10 mM ferrihydrite + HNO_3	Medium +10 mM goethite + HNO_3
1	41 ± 20	32 ± 1	50 ± 36	2365	65*
2	44 ± 13	33 ± 11	52 ± 31	n.d.	n.d.
4	39 ± 9	30 ± 17	33 ± 10	n.d.	n.d.
6	41 ± 18	22 ± 19	33 ± 15	2385	605
8	41 ± 12	40 ± 19	42 ± 23	n.d.	n.d.
10	46 ± 16	38 ± 27	35 ± 4	n.d.	n.d.

713 *Counts for this measurement were below detection limit of the instrument.

714

715 **Table S2. Total dissolved Ni (nM) in 2° and 3° enrichment cultures.**

Treatment		Enrichment	
		2°	3°
Ferrihydrite	CH_4-1	130	241
	CH_4-2	150	118
	N_2-1	202	96
	N_2-2	286	254
Goethite	CH_4-1	104	101
	CH_4-2	56	117
	N_2-1	53	134
	N_2-2	54	90

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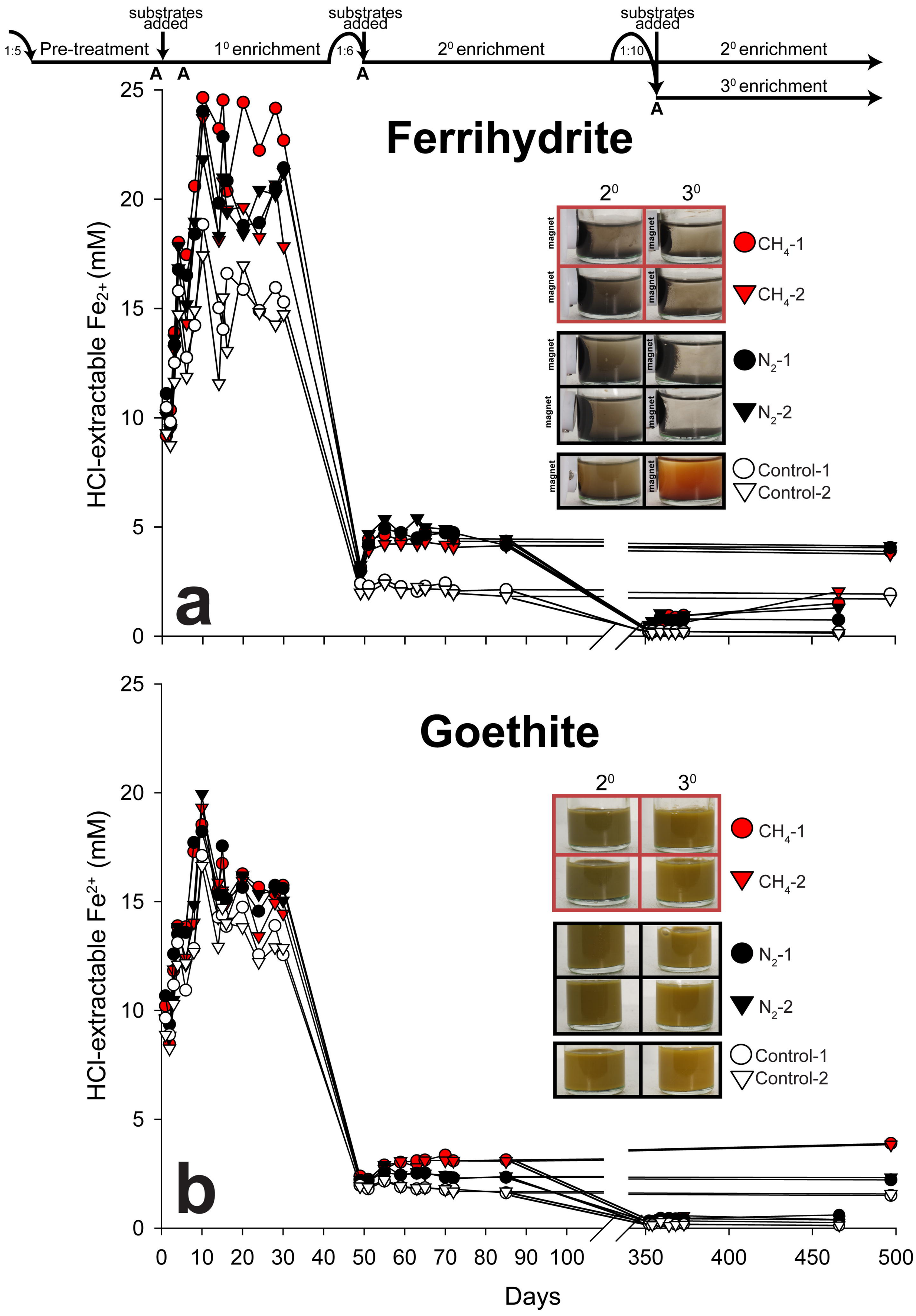
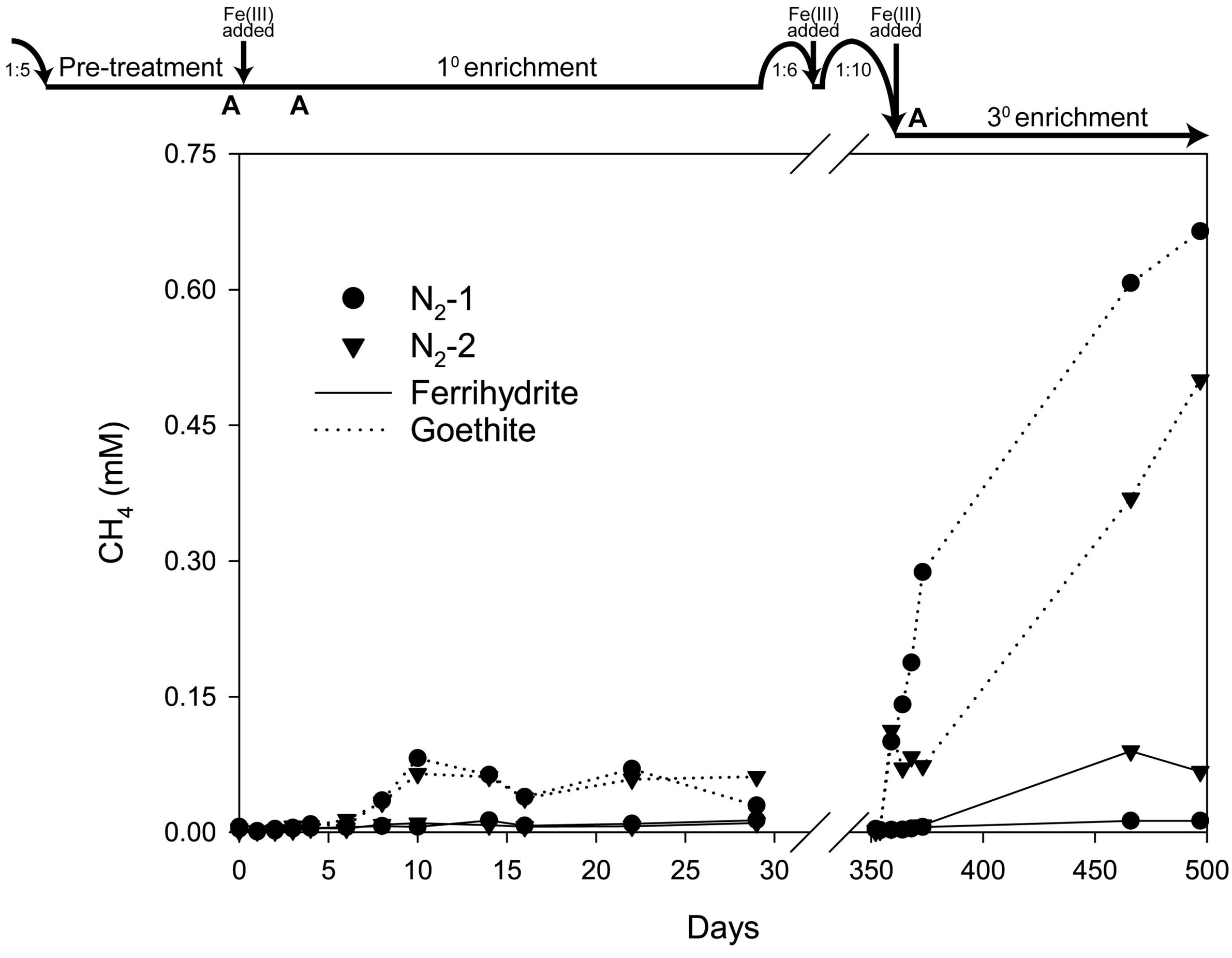
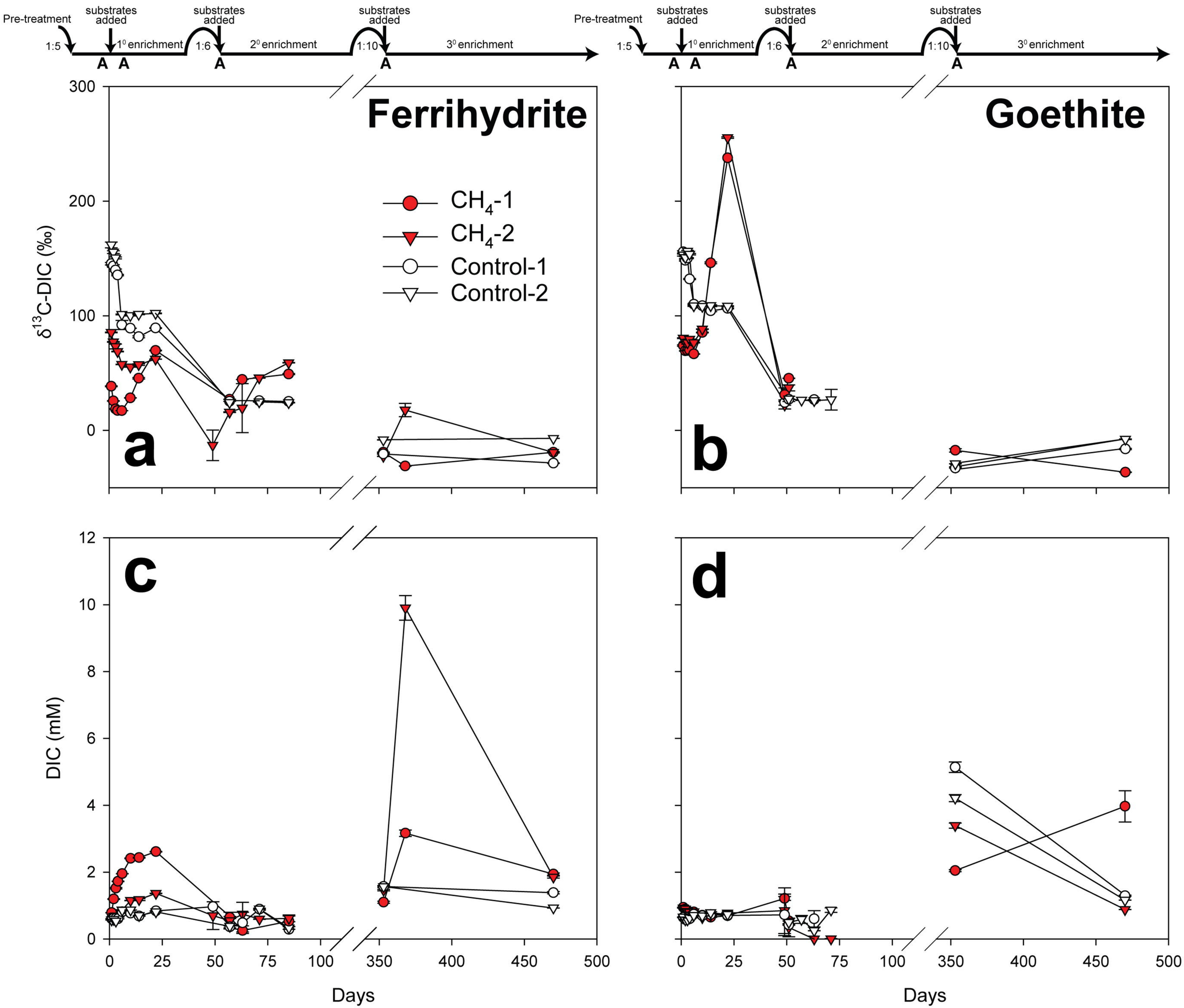
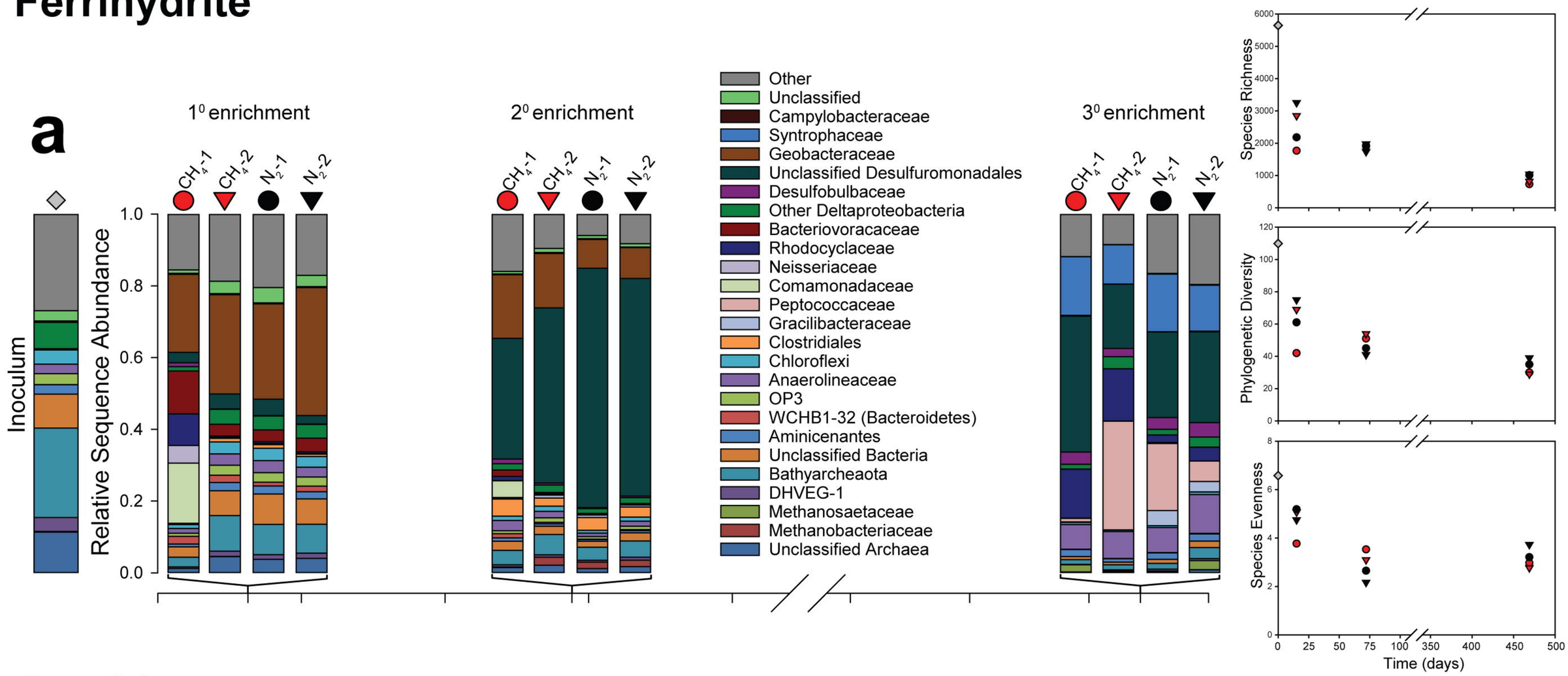
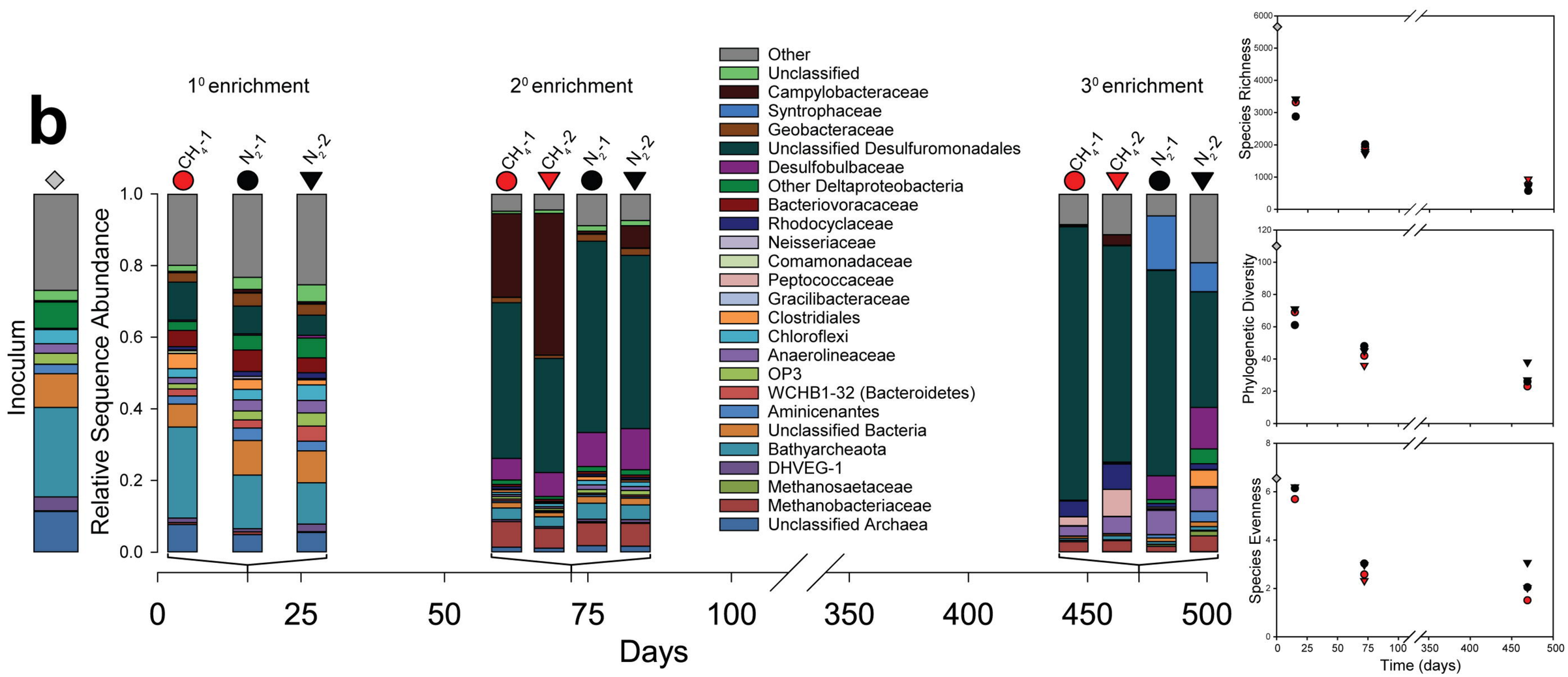
717


substrates added
1:5
Pre-treatment
1⁰ enrichment
1:6
2⁰ enrichment
1:10
2⁰ enrichment
3⁰ enrichment
A
Ferrihydrite
HCl-extractable Fe2+ (mM)
2⁰
3⁰
magnet
CH4-1
CH4-2
N2-1
N2-2
Control-1
Control-2
a
Goethite
b
Days


Fe(III) added
Fe(III) added
Fe(III) added
1:5
Pre-treatment
1⁰ enrichment
1:6
1:10
A
A
A
3⁰ enrichment
0.75
0.60
0.45
0.30
0.15
0.00
CH4 (mM)
N2-1
N2-2
Ferrihydrite
Goethite
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
350
400
450
500
Days


Pre-treatment
substrates added
1:5
1⁰ enrichment
1:6
2⁰ enrichment
1:10
3⁰ enrichment
A A
A
A
Ferrihydrite
Goethite
CH4-1
CH4-2
Control-1
Control-2
δ13C-DIC (‰)
DIC (mM)
Days
a
b
c
d

Ferrihydrite



Goethite