

Synthesis of Podophyllum Lignans *via* an Isolable *o*-Quinonoid Pyrone

David W. Jones* and Adrian M. Thompson

Department of Organic Chemistry, The University, Leeds LS2 9JT, U.K.

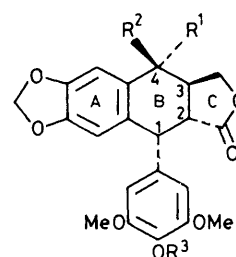
The 2-benzopyran-3-one (**7**) is a stable, isolable, and useful Diels–Alder diene; its adduct (**10**) formed with dimethyl fumarate is transformed in three steps into methyl epipodophyllate (**14**) which gives epipodophyllotoxin (**2**) (81%) by direct lactonisation (ZnCl₂–tetrahydrofuran–4 Å molecular sieves).

The synthesis of podophyllotoxin (**1**) and epipodophyllotoxin (**2**) is a subject of continuing interest.¹ This stems in part from the use of etoposide (VP-16) (**3**) and teniposide (VM-26) (**4**) in the treatment of bladder and lung cancer,² and in part from the fascinating problem of assembling efficiently, and *maintaining*, the stereocentres in ring B.

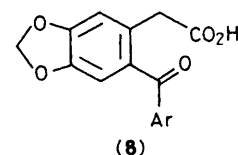
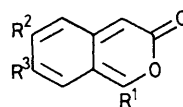
The 2-benzopyran-3-ones (**5**) and (**6**) generated as reactive intermediates by acetic anhydride dehydration of *o*-formylphenylacetic acid and 2-formyl-4-methoxyphenylacetic acid, respectively, are useful building blocks in the synthesis of aromatic steroids.³ Accordingly, the tetrahydronaphthalene units in (**1**) and (**2**) should be accessible *via* the pyrone (**7**). Brief heating of (**8**)[†] in boiling acetic anhydride led to *quantitative* conversion into the pyrone (**7**); unlike (**5**), (**6**), and (**9**),^{4a} compound (**7**) is isolable and has a good shelf-life. Reaction of (**7**) with dimethyl fumarate in boiling benzene gave the adducts (**10**) and (**11**) in a ratio of *ca.* 3 : 1. This ratio rose to 5 : 1 when the reaction was conducted in MeCN at 50 °C (bath temperature); (**10**) was then isolated in 76% yield by crystallisation of the adduct mixture from EtOH. Predominant formation of (**10**) in which the CO₂Me group at C-2 is *exo* and that at C-3 is *endo* agrees with the addition of dimethyl fumarate to (**9**) in boiling Ac₂O which gave adducts corresponding to (**10**) and (**11**) in a 3 : 1 ratio.^{4b} This stereoselectivity agrees with the effect of α,α' -aryl substitution in promoting *exo*-addition to *o*-quinodimethanes, an effect first noted by us in 1973 and attributed to a steric effect.^{4c} Accordingly, in the addition of fumarate to (**7**) or (**9**), addition to give an *endo* CO₂Me at C-2 should be suppressed as is observed.

Hydrogenolysis of (**10**) over 10% Pd–C in acetic acid at 50 °C (bath temperature) proceeded with predominant inversion at C-1 to give (**12**) in 50% recrystallised yield. Oxidative decarboxylation of (**12**) [Pb(OAc)₄, tetrahydrofuran (THF)–HOAc (5 : 1), 20 °C] gave (**13**) (61% yield by crystallisation of the crude product from Et₂O). With lithium triethylborohydride in dry THF at –20 °C, (**13**) gave methyl epipodophyllate (**14**) (65%). Rajapaksa and Rodrigo⁵ developed an interesting strategy for the conversion of (**14**) into epipodophyllotoxin (**2**). This involved conversion of (**14**) into an acetonide which unlike (**14**) did not epimerise at C-2 during alkaline hydrolysis of the methyl ester. Removal of the 'protecting' acetonide group from the resulting acid gave epipodophyllic acid (**15**) which readily lactonised to epipodophyllotoxin with dicyclohexylcarbodi-imide. Other lignan syntheses have followed this lead.^{1b,6} However the protection–deprotection sequence is unnecessary as (**14**) is found to undergo rapid, clean, and efficient (81%) direct lactonisation to epipodophyllotoxin (**2**) upon heating with zinc chloride and 4 Å molecular sieves in THF. This procedure is based on the observation⁷ that ZnCl₂–MeOH equilibrates podophyllotoxin and methyl podophyllate (60% of the former and 16% of the latter) with only minor formation of neopodophyllotoxin (8%) and picropodophyllotoxin (4%).

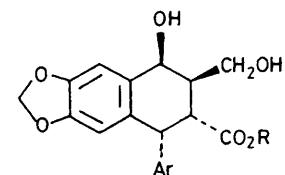
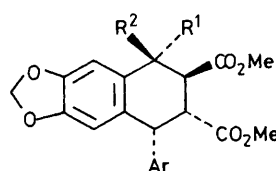
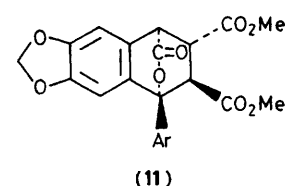
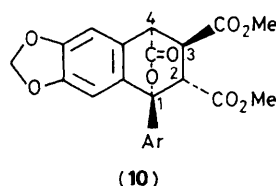
Methyl epipodophyllate (**14**) was readily epimerised at C-4 by heating in HCl–H₂O–THF to give methyl podophyllate (63%). The latter was lactonised to podophyllotoxin (**1**) (*ca.* 75%) using our ZnCl₂–THF–molecular sieves procedure.



- (1) R¹ = OH, R² = H, R³ = Me
 (2) R¹ = H, R² = OH, R³ = Me
 (3) R¹ = H, R² = β -D-4,6-O-ethylideneglucose, R³ = H
 (4) R¹ = H, R² = β -D-4,6-O-thienyldieneglucose, R³ = H



- (5) R¹ = R² = R³ = H
 (6) R¹ = R² = H, R³ = OMe
 (7) R¹ = 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenyl; R², R³ = OCH₂O
 (9) R¹ = Ph, R² = R³ = H



- (12) R¹ = CO₂H, R² = H
 (13) R¹ = H, R² = OAc
 (14) R = Me
 (15) R = H

Ar = 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenyl

[†] Prepared from the corresponding methyl ester in turn obtained from methyl 3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl acetate, 3,4,5-trimethoxybenzoyl chloride, and either ZnCl₂ or SnCl₄.

Thus both podophyllotoxin and epipodophyllotoxin are readily prepared from the fumarate adduct (**10**) of the pyrone (**7**). The direct lactonisation of methyl podophyllate and its C-4 epimer considerably simplify existing syntheses of podophyllum lignans.

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