that its minor edge approaches the helix surface, making the minor groove very shallow and the major groove cavernously deep. In Z-DNA, it is the major edge of each base pair that is pushed toward the surface, so that the minor groove is deep and the major groove is so shallow as hardly to be characterized as a groove at all. It is sometimes stated that 'Z-DNA has no major groove', but space-filling stereos, such as Fig. 1 of reference Z6 or Fig. 3 of Z23 reveal the shallowest of major grooves running around the helix cylinder, flanked by very slightly higher phosphate backbones.

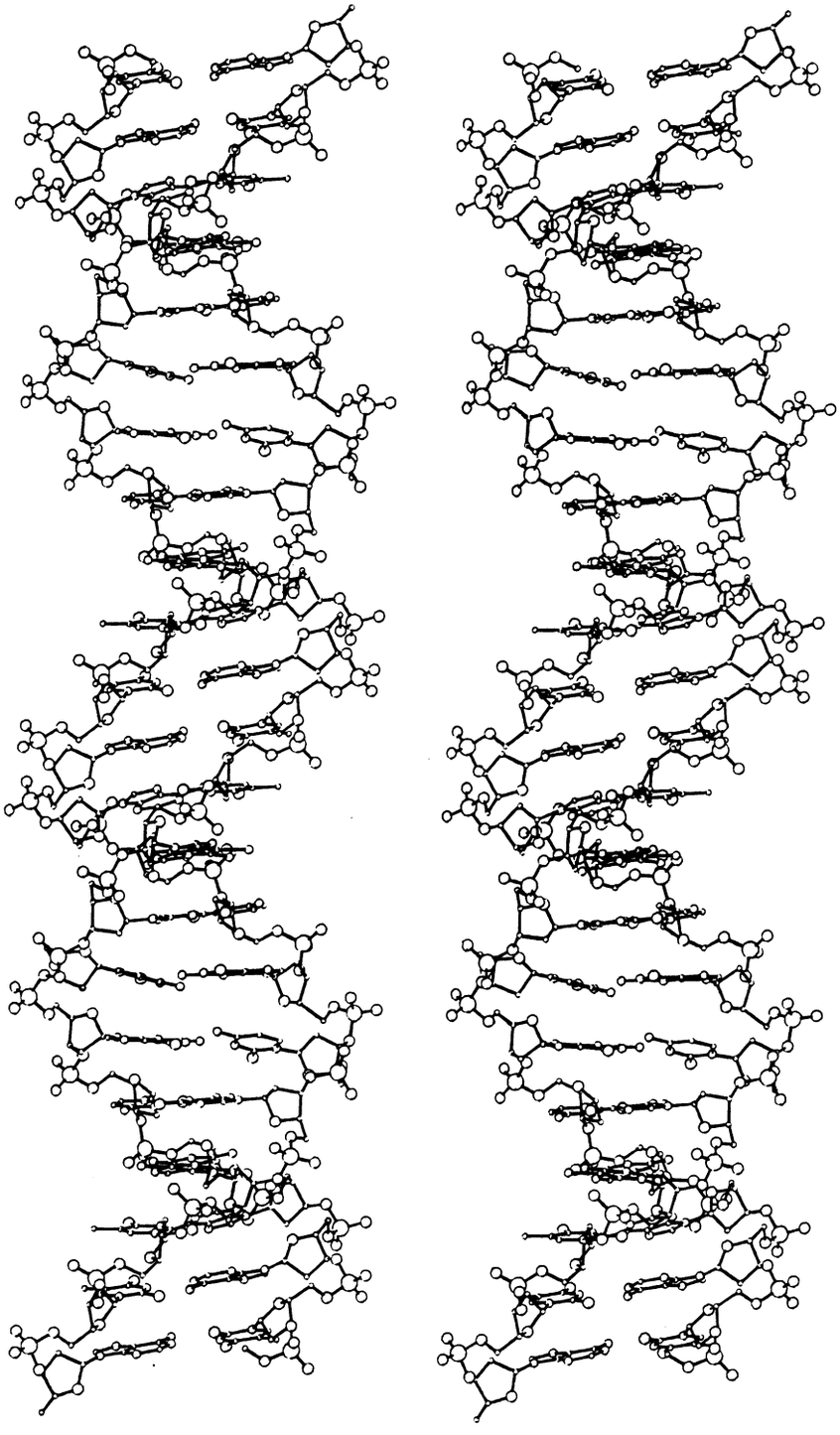

Fig. 23.3.3.2. The B-DNA stereo pair drawing from which Fig. 23.3.1.3 was derived, with repeating sequence -(G-C-G-A-A-T-T-C-G-C)$_n$-. The variation of minor groove widths on the front and back sides of the helix is striking. (From Dickerson, 1983.)

23.3.3.2. *Glycosyl bond geometry*

In both A- and B-DNA, all glycosydic bonds are *anti*, with sugar rings swung to either side away from the minor groove, as in Fig. 23.3.3.4(*a*). As mentioned earlier, when viewed into the minor groove, the backbone chains describe a clockwise rotation, with the chain on the right running downward, and that on the left upward, as in Fig. 23.3.2.1. In Z-DNA, both chains run in the *opposite* direction, leading to a counterclockwise rotation sense viewed into the minor groove. But Z-DNA has yet another striking (and defining) feature. Purines and pyrimidines alternate along each chain. G and C are most strongly favoured by far, but A and T can substitute intermittently at a price in stability. Breaking the strict alternation of purines and pyrimidines is even more unfavourable and is rarely encountered in crystal structures (Table A23.3.1.3). At each purine base, the glycosyl bond is rotated into the minor groove to the *syn* position, as in Fig. 23.3.3.4(*c*). This causes the local backbone directions, defined by sugar ring atoms C4′ and C3′, to be parallel in the two strands. Z-DNA avoids becoming a parallel-chain helix by performing a local chain reversal at each pyrimidine. In Fig. 23.3.3.4(*c*), although the local C4′–C3′ chain direction at the cytosine sugar is downward, the double loop in backbone chain gives it a net upward orientation. In stereo Fig. 23.3.3.3, the ascending backbone chain rises smoothly past each guanine, with a chain path parallel to the helix axis. However, the chain bends abruptly at right angles when passing a cytosine, in a direction tangential to the helix cylinder. Guanine sugar rings point their O4′ oxygen atoms in the backward chain direction (as is also true for all bases in A- and B-DNA), but cytosine sugars point their oxygens in the forward direction. This 'up at G, across at C' pathway and inversion of sugar rings is what produces the zigzag backbone pathway that leads to the name Z-DNA. The O4′ atom of each cytosine sugar is stacked on top of the guanine ring of the subsequent nucleotide, and this stacking of a polar O (or N) on top of a polarizable aromatic ring contributes to the stability of the Z helix, as it does to many other base–base interactions to be discussed later (Bugg *et al.*, 1971; Thomas *et al.*, 1982; B32).

23.3.3.3. *Sugar ring conformations*

Sugar ring conformations in A- and B-DNA have a logical structural basis. The B-DNA backbone is more extended than the A-DNA backbone, with P–P distances of *ca* 6.6 Å along one chain, compared with *ca* 5.5 Å in A-DNA. In turn, C2′-*endo* is a more extended ring conformation than C3′-endo, demonstrable in Fig. 23.3.2.4 by a greater distance between C5′ and O3′ atoms. Hence, it is logical that

references