Development and deformation of Quaternary surfaces on the northeastern flank of the Jemez Mountains

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DEVELOPMENT AND DEFORMATION OF QUATERNARY SURFACES ON THE NORTHEASTERN FLANK OF THE JEMEZ MOUNTAINS

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INTRODUCTION

The eastern Jemez Mountains volcanic pile overlies the western margin of the Espanola Basin, one of three en-echelon basins forming the central portion of the Rio Grande rift. The Jemez Mountains have served as a major source of volcanics (between approximately 13 and 0.13 m.y. ago; Gardner and Goff, this guidebook) and volcaniclastic materials (from approximately 10 m.y. ago to present) into this portion of the basin. The local basin dynamics therefore reflects not only regional tectonic events related to the development of the central rift, but also the more localized volcanic and tectonic pulses within the Jemez Mountains. During the Pliocene and Quaternary, a sequence of erosional surfaces developed along the northeastern flank of the Jemez Mountains. Their surfaces slope away from the mountains and grade toward the axial streams (Rio Chama or Rio Grande) of the Espanola Basin.

Studies of the Quaternary development of the Espanola Basin include investigations by Bryan (1938), Manley (1976), Kelley (1979), and Dethier and Manley (in press). In this paper we present a progress report on a tectonic—geomorphic study of an area west of Hernandez, New Mexico, in the northeastern Jemez Mountains—northwestern Espanola Basin (Fig. 1).

QUATERNARY EROSION SURFACES

Surface Characteristics

The primary topographic features within the study area (Fig. 1) are three erosional surfaces that developed across this portion of the northeastern Jemez Mountains during the Quaternary. The surfaces gradually
descend in elevation, forming a series of three steps that slope northeast to east and cut across the upper Santa Fe Group (Chamita Formation and Ojo Caliente Member of the Tesuque Formation, Miocene), Puye Formation (Pliocene), and Bandelier Tuff (Quaternary). They are primarily erosional surfaces (including pediments) with a relatively thin gravel and sand veneer. The two lower surfaces also extend as terraces up major arroyos at elevations below the next higher (older) surface.

Remnants of the highest, and oldest, surface (Q,2) have the greatest areal extent, descending from elevations of 2,200 m near the mountains to 1,920 m along its eastern margin (Fig. 2). The surface, which cuts across the Bandelier Tuff, Puye Formation, and parts of the Santa Fe Group, is graded to the northeast with an average surface slope of 15 in/km (1.5%), which is significantly gentler than the slopes of the two younger surfaces (Fig. 3). Projection of this profile gradient east to the Rio Grande indicates base level was approximately 1,755 m during Q, time, 45 m above the present Rio Grande (Fig. 3). The Q, surface is capped by alluvial-fan and colluvial deposits along its western margin, while farther downslope to the east the erosional surface is veneered with gravel and sand deposits generally 3-6 m thick, with thicknesses of 10 m near the Rio Grande (Dethier and Manley, in press). The surface is displaced in several places by north-trending faults producing a series of steps, up

The Q, surface extends basinward from the foot of the dissected scarp (elevation of 1,840 m), which separates this surface from the Q, surface (Fig. 2). The Q, surface is cut into the Chamita Formation and Ojo Caliente Member, has an average width of 4 km, an elevation of 1,780 m at its basinward margin, and a surface gradient of 29 m/km (3%). Projection of this erosional surface to the Rio Grande indicates base level elevation was approximately 1,755 m during Q, time, 45 m above the present Rio Grande (Fig. 3). The Q, surface is capped by alluvial-fan and colluvial deposits along its western margin, while farther downslope to the east the erosional surface is veneered with gravel and sand deposits generally 3-6 m thick, with thicknesses of 10 m near the Rio Grande (Dethier and Manley, in press). The surface is displaced in several places by north-trending faults producing a series of steps, up

![Diagram of Quaternary surfaces](image)
to 30 m high, which step down to the east. Relief on the surface, not related to structure, is less than 10 m. Erosion by eastward-flowing streams incised the surface by 43 m (2 km west of the Rio Grande) before reaching grade during formation of the Qs surface. Narrow terrace remnants, which flank arroyos cut into the Qs surface and grade to Q2 remnants, are parts of these graded valley floors.

The Qs surface, cut primarily across the Chamita Formation, has the most limited areal extent of the three surfaces and generally lies basinward of the Qs surface (Fig. 2). The surface slopes eastward from maximum elevations of 1,795–1,735 m at its eastern margin. Surface gradients on the surface are 27 m/km and project to an elevation of 1,720 m at the Rio Grande, 10 m above present river level (Fig. 3). The Qs surface is erosional in its upper reaches and is generally capped by a veneer of sand and gravel less than 7 m thick. In its lower reaches the surface is aggradational, suggesting a rise in Rio Grande base level during its formation. Displacement of the Qs surface has occurred along various north-trending faults producing stepped topography similar to the Q and Qs surfaces.

### Time of Formation of Erosional Surfaces

The time of formation for the oldest erosional surface (Qs) within the area can be estimated based on several lines of geologic evidence. For the two younger surfaces, 230Th–U dating has yielded absolute minimum dates of formation (see Appendix).

The Qs surface truncates both members of the Bandelier Tuff, thus establishing its maximum age as less than 1.1 m.y. Soils on the Qs surface have a well-developed horizon of carbonate accumulation. Gile and others (1966) have found that such carbonate accumulation in soils develops through a particular sequence of morphological stages that are time dependent (see Dethier and Demsey, this guidebook). Based on correlation with soils on dated geomorphic surfaces bordering the Rio Grande valley in the Albuquerque Basin (Bachman and Machette, 1977), the presence of such soil-carbonate stages can be used to obtain an approximate time of surface stabilization and beginning of soil development. The oldest soils found on the Qs surface within the study area contain a laminar carbonate horizon and thus would be classified as stage IV (Gile and others, 1966). The presence of such advanced soil horizons suggests that the Qs soil is a minimum of 250,000 years old (Bachman and Machette, 1977). Additional evidence for the minimum age of Qs-surface development can be derived from estimates of erosion rates. The Qs surface lies 90 m above the Q surface that in turn lies 43 m above the Qs surface. Utilizing the 230Th–U dates of formation for the two lower surfaces (discussed below), the 43 m of arroyo incision of the Q surface occurred in approximately 80,000 years. If equal incision rates are assumed (the authors realize that such an assumption is tenuous, at best) during dissection of the Q surface, then the Q surface formed approximately 170,000 years before the Qs surface, or 275,000 years ago. We believe that an age for the Qs surface of 275,000–500,000 years is likely. Such an age estimate is broadly correlative with the highest (Qs) surface of Dethier and Demsey (this guidebook) north of our area.

Soils on the Qs surface have a stage-III pedogenic carbonate horizon. Such a stage suggests a minimum age for this surface of approximately 100,000 years (Bachman and Machette, 1977). Carbonate coatings were extracted from pebbles from the K horizon of soils on this surface. ThU dating of the carbonate yielded an age of 103,000±17,000 years (see Appendix). This date for the Qs surface is consistent with other geologic data from the area, but does not correlate with any ages estimated by Dethier and Demsey (this guidebook) for surfaces to the north.

The youngest Quaternary erosional surface (Q) within the area is also capped by deposits with pedogenic horizons of carbonate accumulation. The more developed soils have carbonate-horizon morphologies similar to stage II of Gile and others (1966). Th–U dating of carbonate coatings from pebbles extracted from the Q surface soil shows that these coatings are 22,000 ± 3,000 years old. This age is consistent with geologic and soil data related to this surface and indicates our Q surface correlates with either the Qs or Qs surface of Dethier and Demsey (this guidebook).

### QUATERNARY TECTONICS

Several faults and fault zones have exerted an influence on the development of the present-day topography (Fig. 2). These include the Pajarito fault zone, Santa Clara fault zone (new name), and a series of north-trending faults. The Pajarito fault zone bounds the area on the west, and has normal, east-side-down displacement. The Santa Clara fault zone trends northeast and has had a complex history of oblique-slip motion in which the south side has moved down relative to the north side. A number of generally north-trending down-to-the-east normal faults are also present in this area.

Quaternary movement on the Pajarito and Santa Clara fault zones resulted in rotation of the Qs surface, decreasing its gradient and changing its slope direction from east to northeast. Evidence that the Qs surface was initially graded to the east and later rotated is derived from analysis of drainage channels cut into it (Fig. 4). Major arroyos incised into this surface trend east across the slope of the surface rather than parallel to the slope dip. If this surface formed with an original northeast slope, major arroyos should trend parallel to the slope direction. Most of the tributaries to the major east-draining arroyos, which head within the area of the Qs surface, trend northeast, parallel to the present-surface slope. Only a few tributaries enter the north side of the larger east-trending arroyos. This asymmetry may be the result of formation of the tributaries after tilting of the Qs surface to the northeast. Alternatively, the tributaries may have formed prior to rotation of the surface, but only those with courses approximately parallel to the new slope were not abandoned and destroyed. Evidence for deformation of the Qs surface by movement along the Santa Clara fault zone is the marked increase in gradient along the surface near the fault. In sections 1000–14 of T21N, R7E, the Qs surface is cut across beds of the Puye Formation. The base of the Puye at this location is at 1,890 m, while 0.5 km to the south its elevation is 1,920 m—a slope of 61 m/km. This slope on the base of the Puye differs in orientation and far exceeds its slope in other areas. The Qs surface along the same traverse has a surface gradient of 45 m/km, approximately three times its gradient away from the fault (Fig. 3). Projection of the lower-gradient portion of the Qs surface to the fault zone places the surface at an elevation approximately 50 m higher than that obtained by a similar projection of the portion with the steeper gradient. Thus, depression of the block southeast of the Santa Clara fault zone by about 40 m following formation of the Qs surface is indicated.

East-draining arroyos near (within 1 km) the Santa Clara fault zone, which head in the Puye, have extensive gravelly valley fills. These fills are preserved as terraces composed mostly of cobble-sized gravel in the upper reaches and pebble-sized gravel downstream. The surfaces of these terraces grade downstream to remnants of the Qs surface. Arroyos farther to the south of the fault zone do not contain such fills. These gravelly valley fills probably resulted from reduction of gradients along the east-trending arroyos by downwarping of the area during movement along the Santa Clara fault zone following formation of the Qs surface. Later, these fills were regraded to the Qs surface level as that surface formed. There apparently has been no appreciable movement on the Santa Clara fault zone since the development of the Qs surface.

#### Normal Faults

North-trending normal faults cut all three surfaces. Movements along these normal faults, which generally trend perpendicular to surface slope, have created a series of stepped surface segments, most of which are down-to-the-east. As none of the faults completely cross the area, the number and location of steps along east–west profiles differs at various locations. Most of these north-trending faults show Quaternary displacement, some in excess of 10 m. Recent displacement along several of these faults is indicated. One north–northwest-trending fault, showing several recurrent movements, has displaced a basalt boulder gravel formed on the Qs surface (22,000 ± 3,000 years) a minimum distance of 10 m. Soil profiles across the fault are significantly different, suggesting latest movement was quite recent. Other north-trending faults within the area also indicate similar recent movements. The down-to-the-east movement on these faults probably increased gradients and...
erosive ability along the east-trending arroyos. The periods of arroyo incision that marked the termination of development of the Q<sub>1</sub> surfaces were significantly influenced by displacements on the north-trending faults.

DISCUSSION

Tectonic—geomorphic analysis along and south of the Santa Clara fault zone permits a general reconstruction of Quaternary geomorphic and tectonic events affecting this portion of the northeastern Jemez Mountains and central Rio Grande rift.

The oldest erosional surface (Q<sub>1</sub>) is believed to have formed within the interval from 275,000 to 500,000 years B.P. Prior to the formation of this surface, significant movement had occurred along the Santa Clara fault zone. Analysis of slickensides indicates this movement was dominantly oblique slip. South of the fault, the Puye Formation overlies the Chamita Formation (upper Santa Fe Group); however, 2 km north of the fault a Puye (?) outcrop directly overlies the Ojo Caliente Member (middle Santa Fe) at an elevation of 2,040 m (Dethier and Manley, in press). Adjacent to the fault on the downdropped block the Chamita-Ojo Caliente contact is at 1,980 m, thus suggesting that a minimum of 60-m uplift with an unknown amount of lateral displacement occurred following deposition of Santa Fe Group sediments, but prior to deposition of the Puye. This time interval (4.5-3.0 m.y.) represents an erosional episode leading to the development of an erosion surface called the Ortiz by Bryan (1938). Continued motion on the Santa Clara fault zone during and following deposition of the Puye Formation is indicated. The thick (>100 m) wedge of Puye beds south of the fault zone differs markedly from the few scattered outcrops to the north. The latter are elongated outcrops that occur adjacent to major arroyos and generally parallel their trend. These deposits may represent gravel fills in paleochannels cut in the erosional surface. If true, this suggests that either the wedge-like Puye deposits were never deposited north of the fault or, more likely, the upper Puye beds were so thin north of the fault zone that they eroded away between 2.1 and 1.5 m.y. ago. In either case an elevated area must have existed north of the fault zone following formation of the pre-Puye erosion surface. Although the amount of uplift that occurred between the beginning of Puye deposition and formation of the Q<sub>1</sub> surface is not known, it was certainly of a much greater magnitude.
QUATERNARY SURFACES OF JEMEZ MOUNTAINS

lesser magnitude than that which immediately followed deposition of the Santa Fe Group.

Both the Pajarito and Santa Clara fault zones were active following formation of the Q surface (275,000-500,000 years B.P.). Deformation of the Q surface along the Santa Clara fault zone indicates approximately 40 m of downwarping of this surface by movement on the fault.

The period of erosion that led to the dissection of the Q surface terminated in the development of the Q surface, culminating prior to 103,000 years ago. Deformation of this surface has been dominated by motion along the north-trending normal faults. Displacements on these faults have segmented the surface producing a sequence of steps (up to 25 m in height) generally down-to-the-east. No strong evidence exists for significant vertical motion on the Santa Clara fault zone during or following formation of the Q surface. This is not clear if the initiation of dissection of the Q surface was related to lowering of base level along the axial drainage by movement on faults near the southern margin of the Espanola Basin. The possibility of this having happened seems reasonable. Certainly, dissection of the Q surface within the study area was markedly influenced by movement along the north-trending faults.

There are indications that the period from 120,000 to 100,000 years ago was a time of extension within the central rift. Machette (1978) found that movement occurred along the County Dump fault in the north Albuquerque Basin 120,000 years ago. McCalpin (1982), based on analysis of offsets in various-age glacial deposits, reported that displacements occurred on a number of faults along the west flank of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Colorado (western margin of San Luis Basin) about 120,000 years ago. Apparently, movement on the north-trending faults west of Hernandez also occurred at this time.

Formation of the Q surface was completed by about 22,000 years ago. Movement on several of the north-trending faults occurred during and subsequent to this time. During the formation of this surface the lower reaches of Arroyo de la Presa extended across the Santa Clara fault zone. The Arroyo de la Presa no longer follows this portion of its Q channel, but instead turns north around an outcrop of a steeply dipping basalt flow, following a longer course to the Rio Grande than its Q channel. We suggest that recurrent movement on the north- and northwest-trending faults increased gradients along the Q paleochannel, causing rapid incision. The stream occupying the paleochannel was hindered by the presence of a resistant basalt flow cropping out across the channel. Increased gradient along an adjacent arroyo permitted rapid headward extension of the stream at an elevation below that of the Q paleochannel. This stream eventually captured the Arroyo de la Presa stream, rerouting it north around the margin of the flow. Arroyo incision of the Q surface has continued for the past 22,000 years at more rapid rates than those which existed earlier in the Quaternary, except for periods in the Holocene when alluvial terraces were formed (see Dethier and Demsey, this guidebook). Stratigraphic and geomorphic (soils) evidence indicates that recurrent movements are still occurring on the north-trending normal faults.

The ultimate cause of incision and abandonment of the Quaternary erosional surfaces is not certain. The role of climate in the development, or termination in development, of geomorphic surfaces is difficult to assess. Episodic climatic shifts which occurred during later Quaternary time, and the attendant changes in vegetation and discharge of water and sediment, must have produced a pronounced effect on surface development. Gile and others (1981) found that in the Las Cruces area of New Mexico times of climatic change from semiarid to arid conditions (associated with change from pruvial to interpluvial intervals) were marked by valley incision and a concomitant increase in landscape instability. The arid conditions were characterized by significant decreases in effectiveness of vegetative cover and increases in erosion and sedimentation. Climatic shifts from arid to semiarid climates were times of increasing landscape stabilization and more continuous vegetative cover (Gile and others, 1981).

Comparison of the timing of late Quaternary surface development and valley incision in the northeast Jemez Mountains to the Las Cruces area indicates that these areas have virtually the same landscape-evolution chronology. Valley incision in the Las Cruces area, which initiated dissection of the Tortugas and Picacho surfaces (<150,000 and <25,000 years, respectively), generally coincides with the beginning of valley

incision into the Q2 and Q surfaces in the Espanola area. This coincidence in timing of late Quaternary landscape development suggests that climatic changes had a significant influence on the formation of surfaces within the northeast Jemez Mountains.

It is not clear whether climatic influences or basin-margin tectonics were the predominant cause of surface dissection. However, there are strong evidence that the terminations in development of the Q and Q surfaces were significantly influenced by recurrent movements along the north-trending faults.

APPENDIX

U-Th ages of pedogenic-carbonate rinds from the underside of pebbles were determined by T. L. Ku. Activity ratios of 235U/238U and 232Th/238U were calculated from the radiochemical data in Table A-1. The ages derived from these ratios indicate the time elapsed since carbonate illuviation began. Uncertainties given represent one standard deviation derived from counting statistics.

Sample 2-84-MJA, 36°03′05″N, 106°07′20″W, Q surface. San Juan Pueblo 7/2 quadrangle, New Mexico. Activity ratio 1.31 ± 14 .Th/238U = 0.632 ± 0.65. Age 103 ± 17 Ka.

Sample 4-84-MJA, 36°03′13″N, 106°07′57″W. Q surface. Chili 7/2 quadrangle, New Mexico. Activity ratio 235U/238U = 1.19 ± 11, 2311/234L .185 ± 0.19. Age 22 ± 3 Ka.

REFERENCES

Table A-1. Radiochemical data on leachate (L) and residue (R).

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The San Luis Valley Southern train at Jaroso in 1955. The grain elevator and the Conoco terminal in the background constitute the industrial district of Jaroso (photo by Bob Richardson).

Looking east at Jaroso today. The San Luis Valley Southern tracks ran across the street in front of the big tree. The railroad depot was located to the right, next to the Conoco station.