

Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology and Hydrogeology

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Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology and Hydrogeology (ISSN 1470-9236) is published in February, May, August and November by the Geological Society Publishing House for the Geological Society, London. The Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0JU.

Subscription rates 2014 (volume 47, 4 parts). More information about subscription options can be found at <http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/LyellCollection>. Journal Subscriptions Department, Geological Society Publishing House, Unit 7, Brassmill Enterprise Centre, Brassmill Lane, Bath, UK, BA1 3JN (tel 01225 445046; fax 01225 442836; e-mail: sales@geolsoc.org.uk). The subscription prices for 2013 to institutions and non-Fellows is: UK, £440+VAT (online only), £517+VAT (online + print); EU, £492+VAT (online only), £579+VAT (online + print); Rest of World, £492 (online only), £579 (online + print).

Outside Europe, the Journal is dispatched by various forms of airspeeded delivery. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156–15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431. US Postmaster: send address corrections to the Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology and Hydrogeology, Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156–15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Back numbers are normally dispatched by surface mail.

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Cover Photograph. The mountainous landscape of SW Gansu Province in China is prone to a wide variety of geohazards. The landscape was created through the uplift of the Tibetan plateau and the associated incision by the Yellow River, amongst other processes; most importantly there is a widespread and often thick cover of loess (aeolian silts). River terraces and undulating bedrock surfaces are masked by a drape of this light-brown, fine-grained material. Level surfaces of this fertile soil are intensively farmed. However, interaction with water can result in the structural collapse of these deposits. River terrace edges such as here at Heifangtai along the Yellow River, some 60 km west of Lanzhou, have been significantly affected by large, fast moving flow slides. The collapsing ground surface shown in the photo provides a good indication of the scale of deformation occurring within these deposits that starts with small scale particle rearrangement and gradually progresses to form internal cavities and the kind of surface features caused by the collapse of the cavities. The fissures shown in this image range in width at the surface from a few centimetres to a few tens of centimetres. The surface cavity visible in the centre is approximately three metres across.

Words by Dr Tom Dijkstra, image by Dr Mike Winter who are grateful to Professor X Meng of the Lanzhou University who hosted their visit to Gansu in September 2012.