

1 Identification and analysis of large paleo-landslides at Mount 2 Burnaby, British Columbia

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7 Abstract

8 This paper presents a multi-scale and multidisciplinary study of large, late Pleistocene or early Holocene
9 slumps in Eocene sedimentary rocks at Mount Burnaby, just east of Vancouver, British Columbia (BC).
10 Airborne LiDAR and field data were integrated into a GIS to understand the origin, kinematics, and
11 subsequent history of the landslides. Products derived from the bare-earth LiDAR data include an
12 engineering geomorphology map, shaded relief maps, and several LiDAR slope profiles. To understand
13 the landslides better, we analyzed discontinuities and structural lineaments. The structure of the Eocene
14 rocks underlying Mount Burnaby was compared with trends of local lineaments, and the shape of the
15 coastline of Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm, and trends of regional faults and lineaments identified by
16 previous researchers working in southwest BC. Two main joint systems likely played a key role in
17 conditioning the north slope of Mount Burnaby for failure. The landslides probably happened during or
18 soon after deglaciation of the area at the end of the Pleistocene on the steep north face of Mount Burnaby
19 after a 200-m fall in relative sea level caused by glacio-isostatic uplift of the crust.

20 Keywords

21 Paleo-landslides, LiDAR, GIS, Engineering geomorphology

22 1 Introduction

23 In this paper, we document a previously unknown complex of large slumps in the Vancouver, British
24 Columbia (BC), metropolitan area. The slumps, which occurred on the steep north face of Mount Burnaby
25 at the edge of Simon Fraser University, are the largest known mass movement in south-coast British
26 Columbia. We were able to document and infer the cause of the landslides through an integrated study
27 involving field mapping, new LiDAR imagery, and data analysis within a multi-layered GIS.

28 The slumps are probably of late Pleistocene or early Holocene age, but given their size, questions arise
29 about whether or not similar landslides might occur in the future. If this were to happen, parts of Simon
30 Fraser University and an allied community (UniverCity), as well as a railway and highway at the base of
31 Mount Burnaby might be damaged.

32 Acquisition of a LiDAR point cloud of Mount Burnaby provided an opportunity to create thematic maps,
33 slope profiles, and an engineering geomorphological map that enabled an interpretation of the geometry

34 and original positions of slump blocks and sites subject to reactivation that could damage public works. In
35 this paper, we describe the multi-disciplinary approach we used to identify and characterize the slumps.
36 We also characterize the local and regional structural environment in which the slumps occurred, and
37 consider how likely it is that a similar slope failure might happen in the future.

38 **1.1 Study area**

39 Mount Burnaby is a small forested mountain (peak elevation 350 m asl) located approximately 10 km east
40 of Vancouver, BC, and just south of Burrard Inlet (Figure 1A). Simon Fraser University (SFU), which
41 opened in 1965, is situated at the top of the mountain.

42 The mountain is a remnant of formerly more extensive Eocene terrestrial sedimentary rocks that are part
43 of a Cretaceous-Cenozoic fill in the Georgia Basin, which lies between the Coast Mountains to the north,
44 the spine of Vancouver Island to the west, and the Cascade Range in Washington State, USA, to the
45 southeast (Armstrong 1990; Mustard and Rouse 1994; Turner et al. 1998). The rocks consist of
46 conglomerate, sandstone, and mudstone of alluvial and deltaic origin deposited in a subsiding structural
47 basin. There are few natural exposures of the rocks on Mount Burnaby, but the same sequence of rocks is
48 commonly exposed in building excavations in downtown Vancouver.

49 Mount Burnaby has a pronounced asymmetric north-south profile, reflecting the ca. 11° southerly dip of
50 the entire Eocene sequence (Figure 1B). A south-thickening wedge of Fraser Glaciation till and
51 glaciomarine sediments overlies the inclined bedrock surface on the southerly dip slope (Armstrong 1990;
52 Roddick 1965). The glacial sediments partially, but not completely, mask the underlying bedrock
53 structure. A series of steps on the south-facing slope, which are only evident in LiDAR images, reflect
54 daylighting beds of sandstone, conglomerate, and mudstone that have different resistances to erosion. In
55 contrast, the forest-covered north slope of the mountain is very steep and, for this reason, has not been
56 studied in the past.

57 **2 Methods**

58 Several tasks were completed to understand the geology of Mount Burnaby better. Specifically, we
59 created thematic maps and slope profiles, produced an engineering geomorphology map, identified major
60 structural lineaments visible in the LiDAR data, and analyzed coastline trends to determine if they might
61 be structurally controlled. The results were validated and integrated with stratigraphic and structural data
62 acquired through fieldwork. We pinpointed areas where relict slump blocks are prone to re-activation due
63 to human activity and, finally, compiled all data in a GIS database to interpret, visualize, and share the
64 data. Figure 2 is a flow chart summarizing the methodology used in this study.

65 **2.1 LiDAR and GIS analyses**

66 Airborne LiDAR data for the area shown in Figure 3A were provided in LASer (LAS) file format and
67 processed using the GIS software ESRI's ArcMap version 10.2. LAS was created and is maintained by
68 the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS); it is a standard file format for
69 the exchange of LiDAR data. Each LAS file contains records of all laser pulses recorded. The first returns
70 are typically associated with the highest features in the landscape, for example a treetop or the top of a
71 building, whereas the last return is from the ground surface. In this research, we filtered out all but the last

72 returns to produce a bare-earth layer, from which we built a 1-m-resolution DTM (digital terrain model)
73 of the mountain. Numerous authors have discussed the use of GIS in landslide and structural geology
74 investigations (e.g., Van Westen 1998; Xie et al. 2006; Francioni et al. 2014, 2015).

75 We produced and used three main thematic maps: hillshade, slope, and aspect (respectively Figure 3B-D).
76 A hillshade map (Figure 3B) was generated using a lighting effect based on differences in elevation
77 within the landscape. It provides synthetic three-dimensional views of the landscape. The light angle used
78 in Figure 3B has an azimuth of 315° (light cast from the northwest) and an inclination of 25°. The slope
79 map (Figure 3C) shows the steepness of the slopes. The aspect map (Figure 3D) shows the dip direction
80 of slopes and was used in this study to highlight abrupt changes in slope orientation.

81 **2.2 Engineering geomorphology map and slope profiles**

82 We produced an engineering geomorphology map (presented and described in section 3 of this paper) of
83 the north side of Mount Burnaby using guidelines in Cooke and Doornkamp (1990). We mapped: i) linear
84 terrain features, including concave and convex slopes, cliffs (terrain steeper than 45°), lineaments, and
85 gullies; and ii) landforms including debris flow fans and slump blocks. Faults, bedding, and joints were
86 represented as point values on the map. We also created topographic profiles across the north, west, and
87 south sides of Mount Burnaby to characterize its topography and geometry better.

88 **2.3 Structural analysis**

89 We measured trends of lineaments on Mount Burnaby (red lines in Figure 4). In addition, we measured
90 conspicuous linear sections of the coastlines of Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm in the vicinity of the
91 mountain (blue lines in Figure 4) to determine if their geometries might be structurally controlled and in
92 agreement with the lineaments on the mountain. The same approach was also used to measure the average
93 orientations of mapped faults in southwest BC (British Columbia Ministry of Energy and Mines 2014)
94 (Figure 5).

95 **2.4 Field survey**

96 All natural and man-made exposures on Mount Burnaby were documented to obtain as much information
97 as possible about the stratigraphy and structure of the mountain. Due to the presence of dense vegetation
98 and the inaccessibility of most of the steep north slope of the mountain, we could only document 11
99 outcrops in the area (Figure 6A). Figure 6B shows an example of geological characterization of one of the
100 outcrops (SFU2). The orientations of all discontinuities and faults exposed in outcrops were measured.
101 Finally, we also examined borehole logs and reports provided by BGC Engineering, which include
102 geotechnical information on foundation conditions at Simon Fraser University.

103 **2.5 Geodatabase and data sharing**

104 We developed a GIS database to manage the thematic maps, shape files, and field data (outcrop locations
105 and observations, and structural elements). LiDAR maps and Google Earth were used as base maps;
106 through hyperlinks it was possible to electronically link information to specific sites. The GIS was also an
107 important resource for sharing data with others, using the freeware platform ArcReader (ESRI 2014) and
108 Google Earth (2015).

109 3 Results

110 We rendered 3D visualizations of the 2D thematic maps, such as those shown in Figure 3B-D to identify
111 and interpret the paleo-landslides on the north side of Mount Burnaby. Figure 7 is an example of a 3D
112 representation of the aspect map that clearly shows back-tilted slump blocks on the north side of the
113 mountain. The faces of the back-tilted slump blocks are approximately parallel to the headscarp,
114 indicating that they detached from that area.

115 Figure 8 illustrates the difference between the steep north face of Mount Burnaby, with slopes typically
116 ranging from 40° to 80°, and the much gentler south face inclined 5-15°, reflecting the ca. 11° southerly
117 dip of the Eocene sequence. The main gully that indents the north face of the mountain marks the border
118 between two different slope environments. East of the gully, a gentle, north-dipping slope separates the
119 top of the mountain from the steep landslide headscarp, whereas to the west, the mountain top abruptly
120 borders the steep north slope.

121 Barnet Highway extends across the toes of some of the slumps blocks (Figures 7 and 8). Since
122 construction of the highway in the early 1940s, there have been small slope failures at its margins, which
123 we attribute to reactivation of the slump blocks.

124 Figures 9 and 10 show the engineering geomorphology map of Mount Burnaby. We separated the north
125 side of the mountain into two areas to highlight geomorphic and geological features (Figure 9). Area 1
126 (Figure 10A) contains 14 slump blocks that are partially covered by fan deposits and might be connected
127 to one another below the surface. All fan deposits slope away from the cliff face. All except one of the
128 convex breaks of the slump blocks align with the cliff face, indicating their source and supporting the
129 interpretation drawn from the aspect map. Area 2 (Figure 10B) contains four slump blocks, one on the
130 north side of Barnet Highway and the other three south of the highway. The convex breaks in these blocks
131 align and are approximately parallel to the cliff face.

132 Numerous steep gullies extend down the north slope of the mountain. The largest gully, located at
133 northwest corner of Simon Fraser University (Figure 3B), has a northeast trend and a gradient ranging
134 from 40° to 85°; it has retrogressed towards the south much more than other gullies.

135 Representative slope profiles on the north, west, and south sides of the mountain were used to highlight
136 geomorphic features and slope geometries (Figure 11A). Profiles of the north slope show its steep upper
137 face and the presence and geometry of the slump blocks (Figure 11B). The west slope has a series of
138 topographic steps reflecting the alternation of sandstone, conglomerate, and mudstone units with different
139 resistances to erosion (Figure 11C). The steps are up to about 10 m high, have average gradients of 14-
140 24°, and are separated by treads with gradients of 3-6°. The slope on the south side of the mountain is
141 much more gentle, reflecting the ca. 11° southerly dip of the entire Eocene sequence (Figure 11D).

142 Several lines of evidence reveal two main sets of structures, both throughout the region and on and near
143 Mount Burnaby (Figure 12). First, regional faults extracted from the databases of the British Columbia
144 Ministry of Energy and Mines strike northeast-southwest (ca. N 046°) and northwest-southeast (ca. N
145 125°) (Figure 12A). Second, the shorelines of Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm are rectilinear, with ca. N

146 045° and N 125° trends (Figures 4 and 12B). Third, lineaments evident on thematic maps trend ca. N 55°
147 and N 145° (Figure 12C). Together, the two sets delineate the bimodal geometry of crest of the
148 escarpment on the north side of the mountain (Figure 4). Fourth, field measurements of fractures and
149 faults confirm these two main sets on an outcrop scale – one striking about 055° and the other 135°
150 (Figure 12D). Although there is strong structural control on the geomorphology of the mountain, we
151 found no evidence that any of the structures are currently active.

152 Field observations indicate that the exposed Eocene rocks are highly weathered rock and dense soils,
153 mainly of sand and gravel size. Using field techniques (Hoek and Brown 1997), we estimated the strength
154 of these rocks is estimated to be between 1 and 5 MPa. Rock cores recovered in four boreholes recently
155 drilled by BGC Engineering yielded Uniaxial Compressive Strength values of 19 MPa for mudstone, 10
156 MPa for sandstone, and 18 MPa for conglomerate (Schmid and Baumgard 2014). The difference between
157 unconfined compressive strengths of the deep rocks and those at the surface is due to weathering, which
158 has leached cement and matrix from rock in the near-surface environment (Clague et al. 2015).

159 Figure 13 shows the result of a slope profile analysis that helped us to define the geometry of the paleo-
160 landslides and interpret the failure mechanism better. Slope profile D-D' (Figures 13A and 13B) shows
161 three slump blocks sourced on the steep headwall of the mountain to the south. The headscarp reaches an
162 elevation of 200 m asl and has an average gradient of 51° towards the northwest. The slump block closest
163 to the headwall, which is the youngest of the three, has a back-tilted face dipping 38° parallel to the
164 headscarp. The base of the back-tilted face is about 100 m below the top of the headscarp and about 215
165 m away from it. The other two, older slump blocks are about 110 m and 160 m below the top of the
166 headscarp and 330 m and 585 m away from it. Again, the slump blocks are parallel to the headscarp and
167 dip backward at 12° and 18°. Slope profile E-E' (Figure 13C) shows two slump blocks 190 m and 220 m
168 below the top of the headscarp (270 m asl) and 475 m and 645 m from it. The headscarp has an average
169 gradient of 60°. The slump blocks dip 32° and 15° towards the headscarp. Slope profile F-F' (Figure 13D)
170 shows a single slump block 190 m below the top of the headscarp (230 m asl) and 460 m from it. The
171 headscarp has an average gradient of 65°. This slump block dips 20° towards the headscarp.

172 Figure 14 illustrates a possible failure mechanism for the landslides based on the maps produced in this
173 study. Measurements made using LiDAR slope profiles and the thematic maps allowed us to calculate the
174 length, width, and angle of the back-tilted face of the uppermost slump block (respectively 250 m, 50 m,
175 and 38°). Assuming that the surface of Mount Burnaby extended to the north beyond the headscarp with a
176 gradient similar to that of the present surface, we conclude that a block failed along a curved surface and
177 rotated 38° before coming to rest. We note, however, that post-landslide fan deposits partially envelop the
178 slump block, introducing uncertainties in our estimates of block dimensions and volume. Considering the
179 similarities in the geometry and orientation of all slump blocks on north side of the mountain (Figure 9),
180 we assume that the blocks were generated by the same failure mechanism.

181 The many gullies incising the north slope are evidence of the relative ease with which the sedimentary
182 rocks underlying the mountain are eroded. The main gully is likely located on a northeast-southwest
183 structure, possibly a fault, along which there has been enhanced erosion. Erosion along this and other
184 northeast-trending lineaments may have favoured the formation of lateral relief surfaces for the landslide.

185 4 Discussion

186 Airborne LiDAR is now widely used in landslide studies (e.g., Chen et al. 2006; Ventura et al. 2011;
187 Brideau et al. 2012; Haas et al. 2012) because it provides detailed georeferenced 3D models of the land
188 surface free of vegetation. In this paper, we feature the symbiotic integration of airborne LiDAR with GIS
189 techniques in a study of the Mount Burnaby paleo-landslide, as has been done successfully by other
190 landslide researchers in the past (Schulz 2007; Van Den Eeckhaut et al. 2012; Jebur et al. 2014).

191 The information obtained from the thematic maps and LiDAR interpretation were used to produce an
192 engineering geomorphology map of Mount Burnaby that could not otherwise have been made. This map
193 and the aspect map allowed us to define the position and geometry of the slump blocks and to suggest
194 their source and movement direction. Analysis of the engineering geomorphology map showed that fan
195 deposits overlie the slump blocks and are derived from the same source, but clearly postdate them.

196 LiDAR data were also critical for analysing Mount Burnaby slope profiles, which aided in understanding
197 the geometry of the mountain and the paleo-landslides. The steps reflecting the alternation of layers of
198 sandstone, conglomerate, and mudstone could not be seen in conventional aerial photographs and only
199 became obvious when we examined the LiDAR DEM. The slope profiles also supported the interpretation
200 of the geometry and source of the slump blocks.

201 Our analysis highlighted two main discontinuity systems that are likely a product of Paleogene or
202 Neogene tectonic deformation. Although we found no evidence of active (Holocene) faults in the area, the
203 consistent structure at all scales suggests that deformation related to these two main trends played an
204 important role in the evolution of both Mount Burnaby and Burrard Inlet. Lineaments with these trends
205 also define the main scarp and the main gully on the mountain.

206 The presence on the north side of Mount Burnaby of multiple slump blocks with similar geometries and
207 orientations (Figure 11 and 13) suggests a series of retrogressive events that were closely spaced in time.
208 Although we were unable to determine the exact ages of the landslides, the large volume of fan material
209 overlying the slump blocks suggests that the failures happened during late Pleistocene or early Holocene
210 time, either during local deglaciation or shortly thereafter. The Vancouver area, including Mount Burnaby
211 was deglaciated about 13,500 years ago (Clague 1981); at that time relative sea level was about 200 m
212 higher than today and only the upper slopes of Mount Burnaby were above the sea surface (Mathews et
213 al. 1970; Clague et al. 1982). Shortly after deglaciation, and by no later than 11,000 years ago, glacio-
214 isostatic rebound rapidly lowered local sea level to below its present datum. Glacier retreat and glacio-
215 isostatic rebound may have contributed to the massive slope failures on the north side of Mount Burnaby.
216 The importance of glacier debuttressing as a cause of slope failure has been highlighted by Evans and
217 Clague (1994). Removal of ice confinement allows for kinematic failure, while the fall in sea level due to
218 rebound may have been accompanied by increased erosion of the toe of the slope. Earthquakes caused by
219 glacio-isostatic rebound may also be implicated in the landslides.

220 Recognition of the landslides on Mount Burnaby has raised concerns over the possibility that similar
221 failures in the densely populated Vancouver metropolitan area could happen in the future. In our view,
222 however, the Mount Burnaby slumps occurred in response to processes that no longer affect this area,

223 namely deglaciation and large and rapid sea-level change. Therefore, we consider it unlikely that a slump
224 like the ones we have documented will happen again in the Vancouver area.

225 **5 Conclusion**

226 Mount Burnaby consists of several hundred metres of Eocene sandstone, conglomerate, and mudstone
227 that dip about 11° to the south. The gently dipping south slope of the mountain is mantled by a
228 southward-thickening wedge of Pleistocene glacial and glaciomarine sediments. The surface Eocene
229 rocks are highly weathered and typically have the strength of soils (as the term is used in an engineering
230 sense of the word). Non-weathered rocks at depth have unconfined compressive strength properties
231 characteristic of indurated sedimentary rocks.

232 Our integrated study of LiDAR-derived thematic maps, slope profiles, a derived engineering
233 geomorphological map, and field observations show that the north slope of Mount Burnaby failed as a
234 series of large slump blocks that are now partially buried by coalescent debris flow fans sourced on the
235 steep slope to the south. Although the slump blocks at the base of the mountain are relicts of latest
236 Pleistocene or early Holocene landslides, they have spawned small reactivation failures along Barnet
237 Highway over the past 60 years. The identification of these previously unrecognized landslides is
238 significant in showing the power of a modern, integrated approach for analyzing the land surface, as well
239 as the implications that they can carry for managing landslide hazards in urban areas. We advocate the use
240 of thematic and engineering geomorphology maps to identify landslides prior to construction or
241 improvement of private and public infrastructure.

242 Our LiDAR-assisted interpretation of structural trends helped document two main fracture and fault sets,
243 one oriented NW-SE and the other NE-SW. Paleogene or Neogene deformation responsible for these joint
244 sets played a key role in creating the present landscape of the Vancouver metropolitan area. Field study
245 and an examination of LiDAR imagery revealed no evidence of Holocene faulting in the area, although
246 the limited exposure of rock on Mount Burnaby does not allow us to definitively preclude this possibility.

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253 improve the paper.

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326 **Figure Captions**

327 Figure 1. Mount Burnaby (Google Earth 2015). A) Location of Mount Burnaby in the Vancouver
328 metropolitan area (the inset shows the location of the study area in western Canada). B) 3D view of
329 Mount Burnaby and Simon Fraser University, situated at the top of the mountain. View to the southeast.

330 Figure 2. Flow chart showing steps followed in the Mount Burnaby study.

331 Figure 3. Mount Burnaby thematic maps (reference system: NAD 83 Zone 10N, Simon Fraser University
332 as reference). A) Satellite image (Google Earth 2015) showing the area where LiDAR and GIS analyses
333 were carried out. B) Hillshade map. C) Slope map. D) Aspect map.

334 Figure 4. Mount Burnaby lineaments (red lines) interpreted from thematic maps and linear shoreline
335 segments (blue lines; Dominion of Canada 1859).

336 Figure 5. Faults in southwest BC (from British Columbia Ministry of Energy and Mines 2014).

337 Figure 6. A) Hillshade map showing locations of investigated outcrops and boreholes. B) Exposure at
338 SFU 2 (shovel for scale). C, conglomerate; SS, sandstone; M, mudstone.

339 Figure 7. 3D representation of aspect map with back-tilted slump blocks on the north face of Mount
340 Burnaby, road cuts, and inferred slump headscarp.

341 Figure 8. 3D representation of the slope map.

342 Figure 9. Engineering geomorphology map of Mount Burnaby.

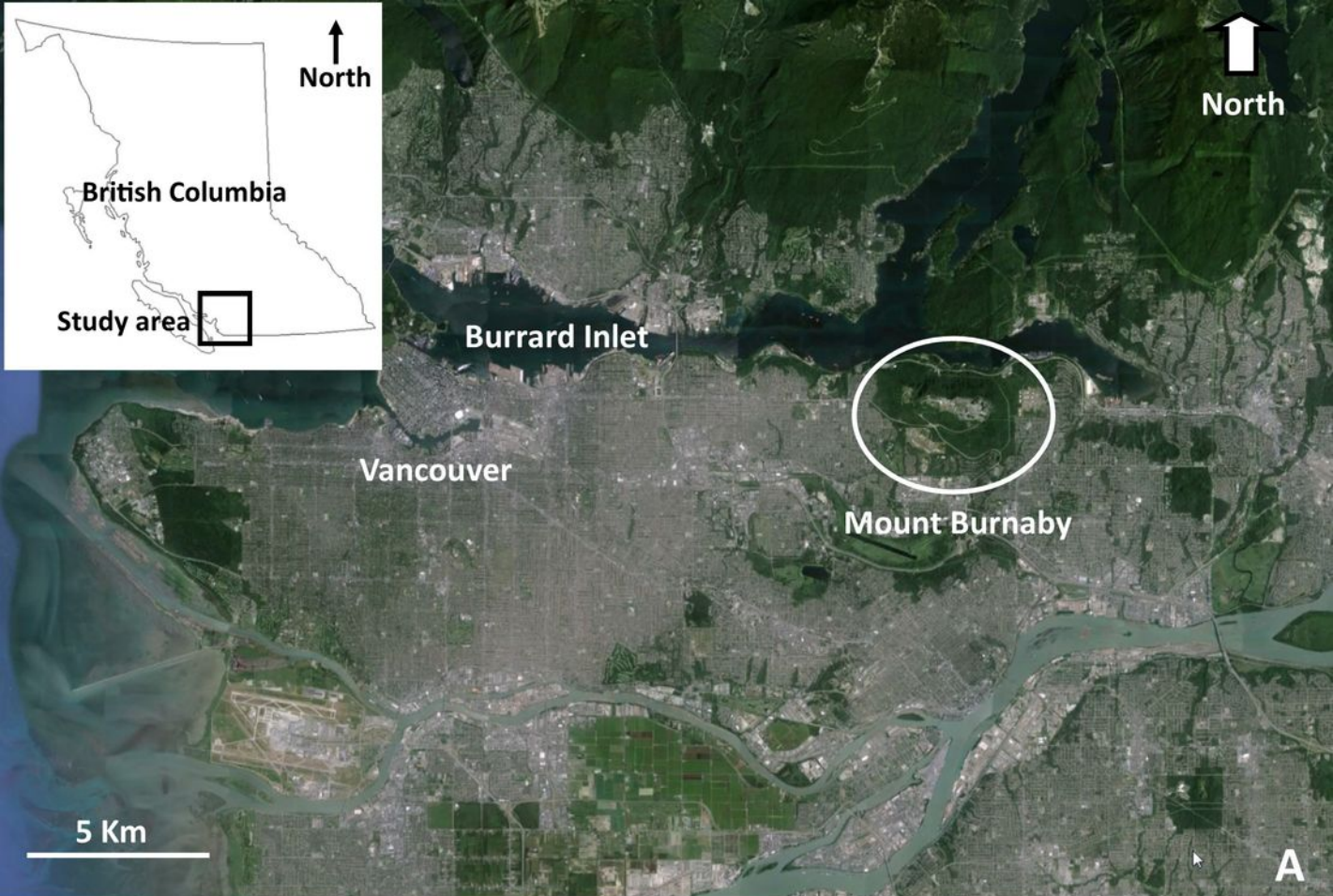
343 Figure 10. Engineering geomorphology maps of (A) area 1 and (B) area 2 (see Figure 9).

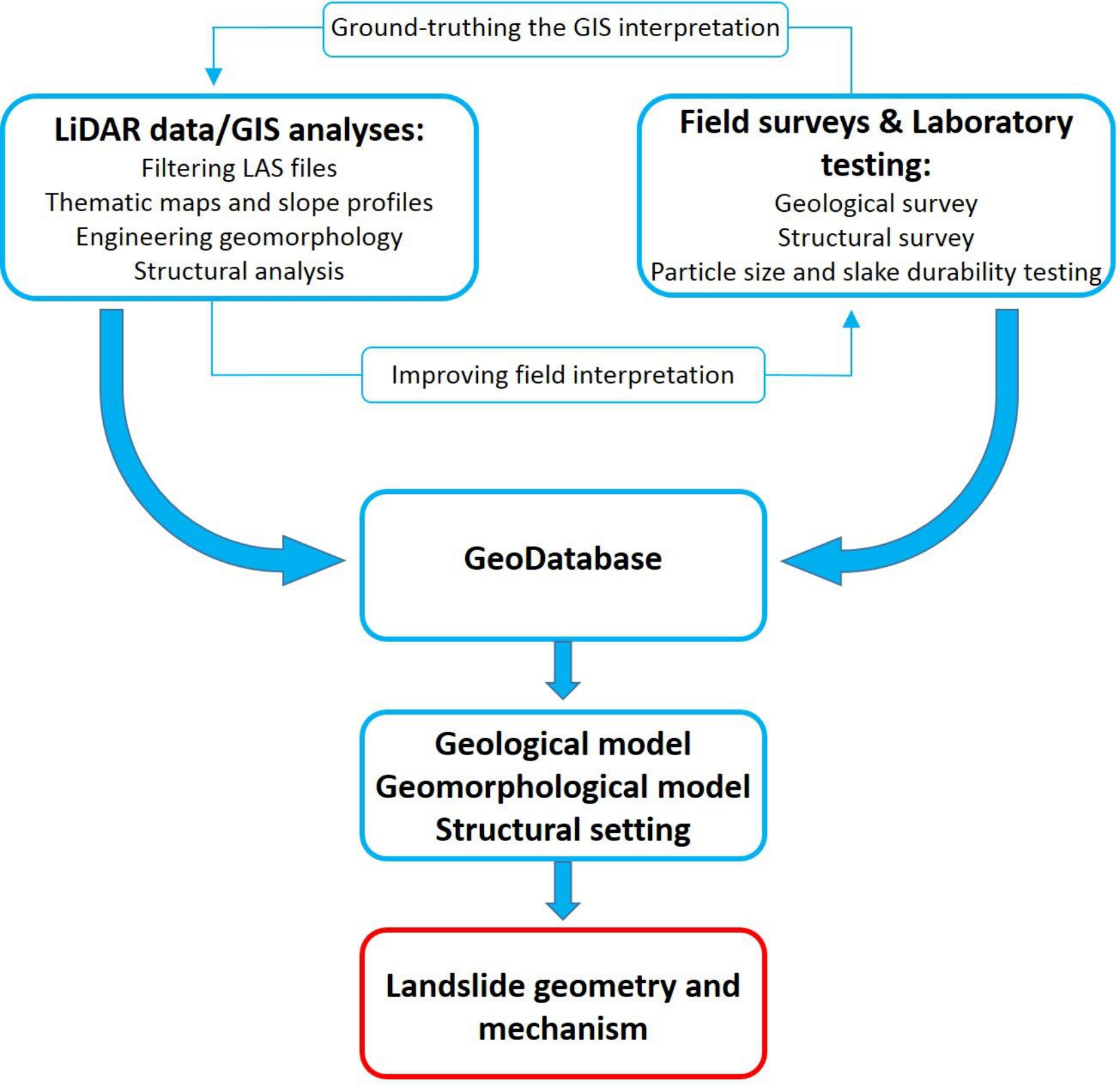
344 Figure 11 Slope profiles. A) Locations of slope profiles shown in B), C), and D). B) Slope profile A-A'.
345 C) Slope profile B-B'. D) Slope profile C-C'.

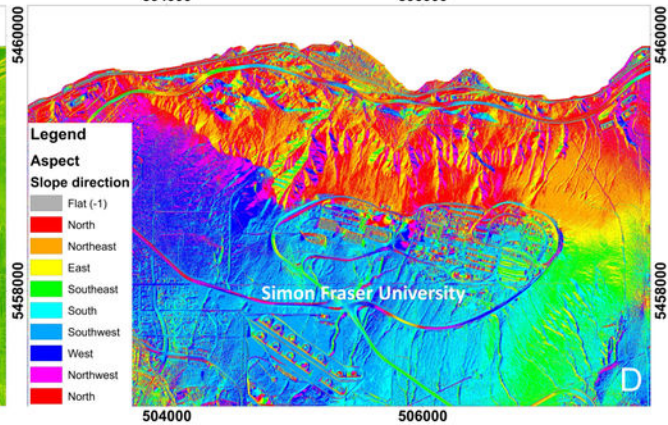
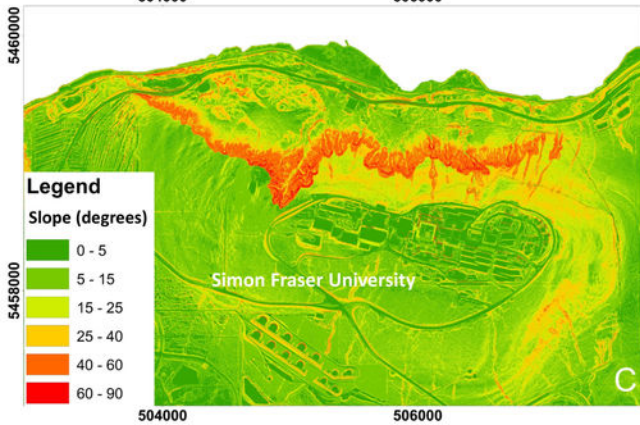
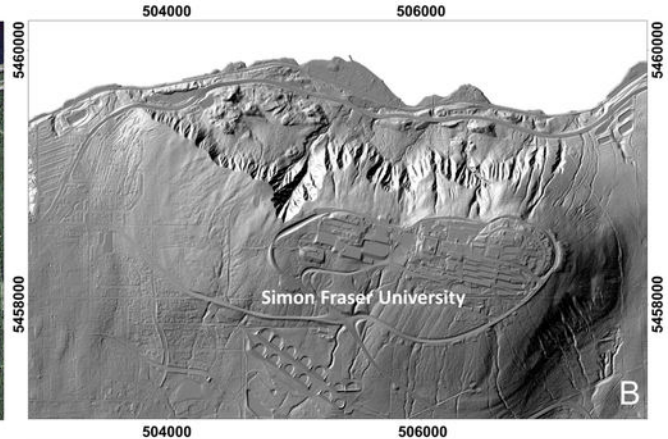
346 Figure 12. Rose diagrams showing the results of all structural analyses (rose diagrams created using DIPS
347 [Rocscience 2014]). A) Regional faults. B) Shoreline segments. C) GIS lineaments. D) Faults and
348 fractures measured in the field.

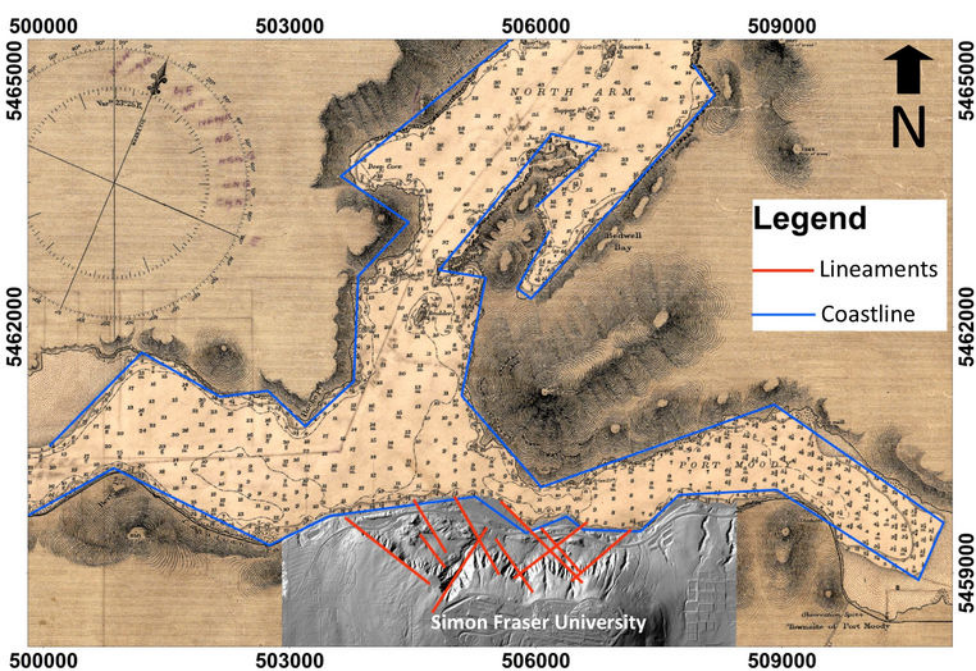
349 Figure 13. Slope profiles and paleo-landslide geometry. A) Slope map showing the locations of three
350 profiles across the north slope of Mount Burnaby. B) Slope profile D-D'. C) Slope profile E-E'. D) Slope
351 profile F-F'.

352 Figure 14. A possible failure interpretation for paleo-landslides on the north slope of Mount Burnaby. The
353 slump block used in this example has a length of 250 m and a 50-m back-tilted face.











British Columbia

Vancouver Island

SFU
↙

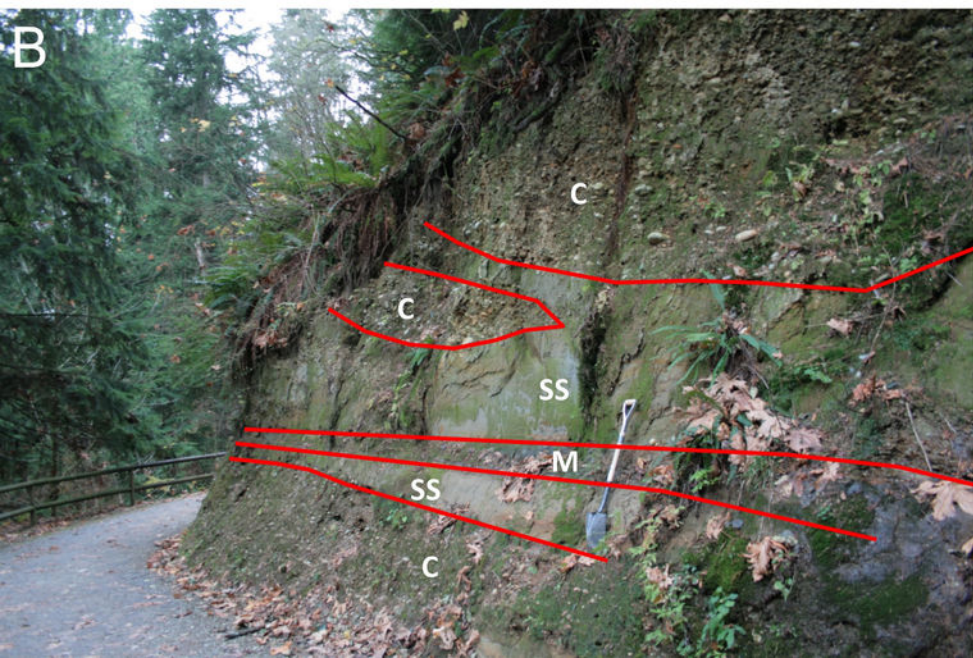
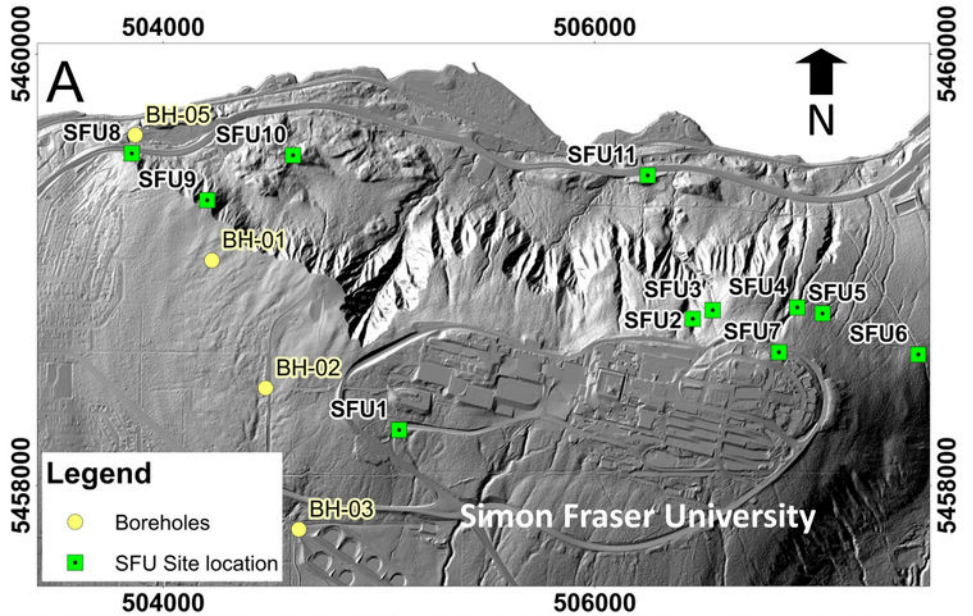
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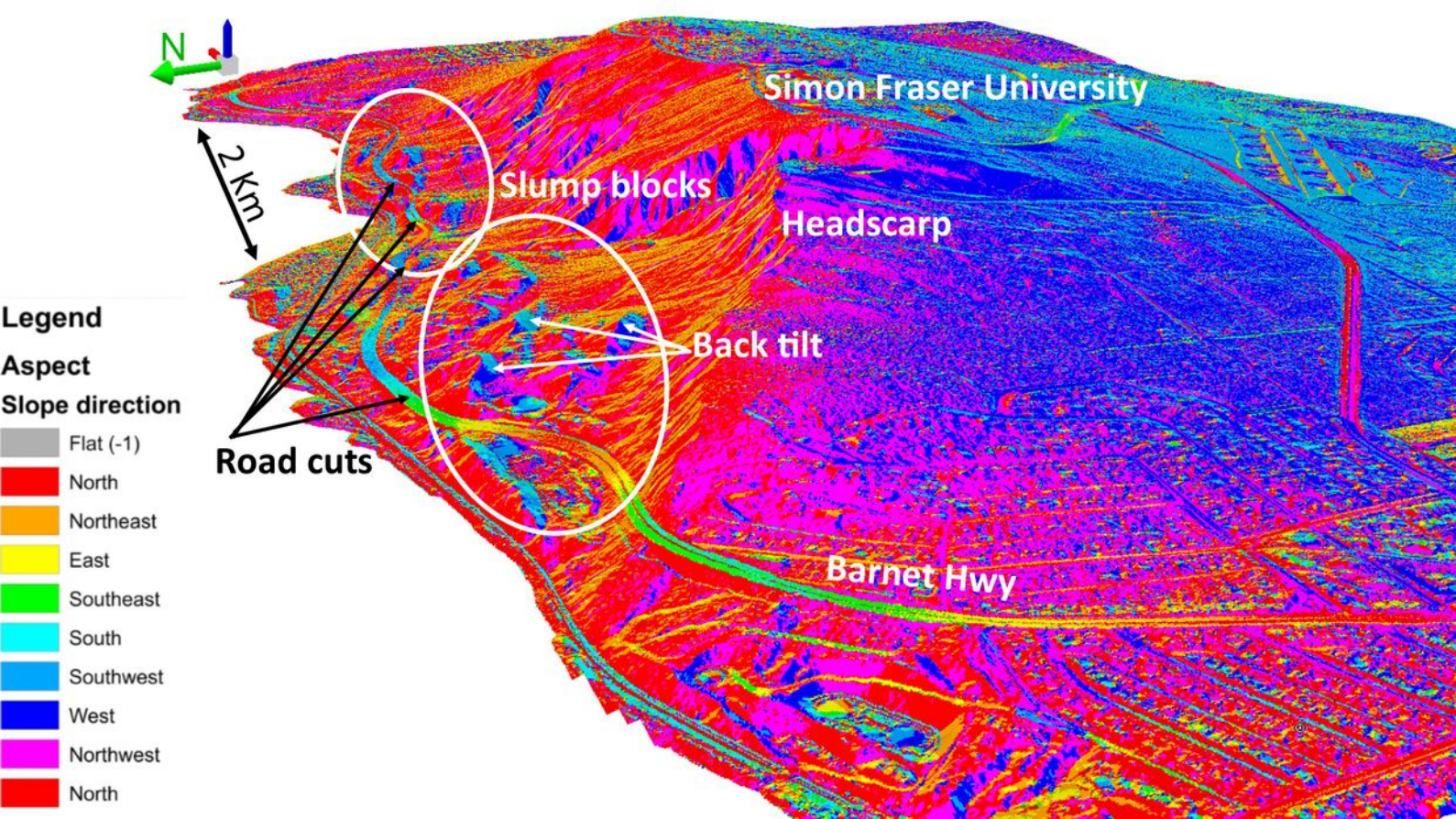
Legend
— B.C. Faults

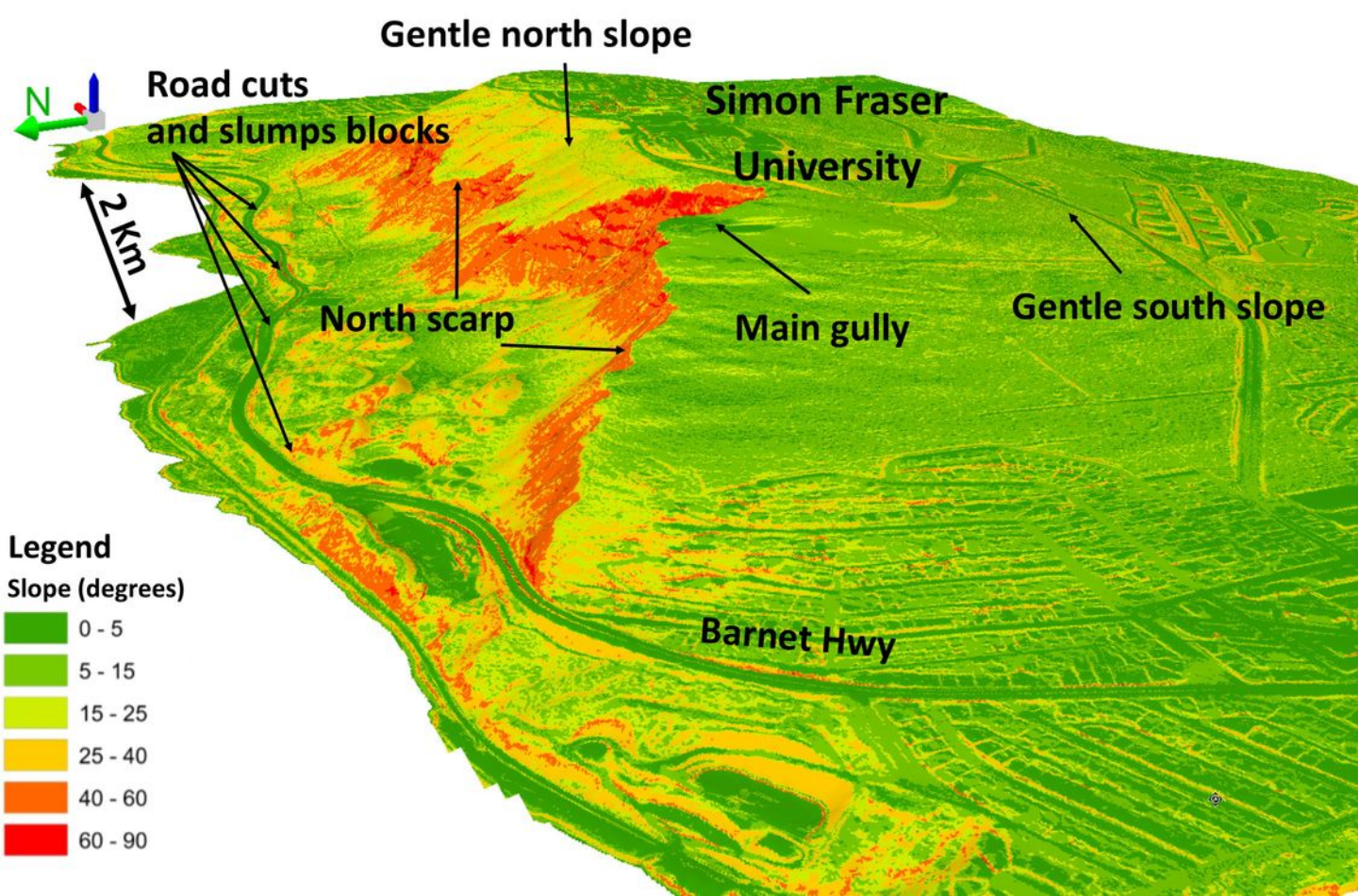
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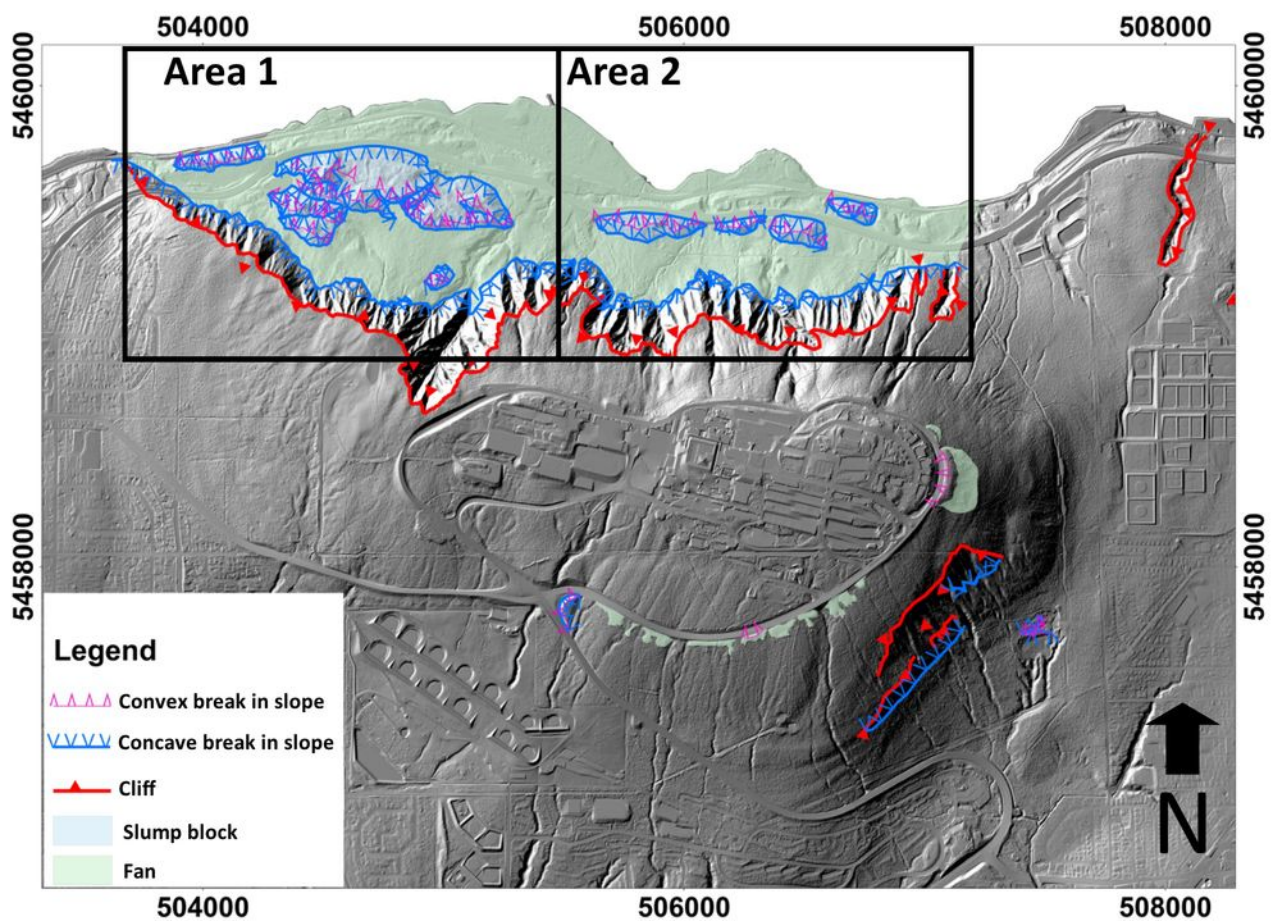
NAD83 UTM Zone 10N
Projection: Transverse Mercator

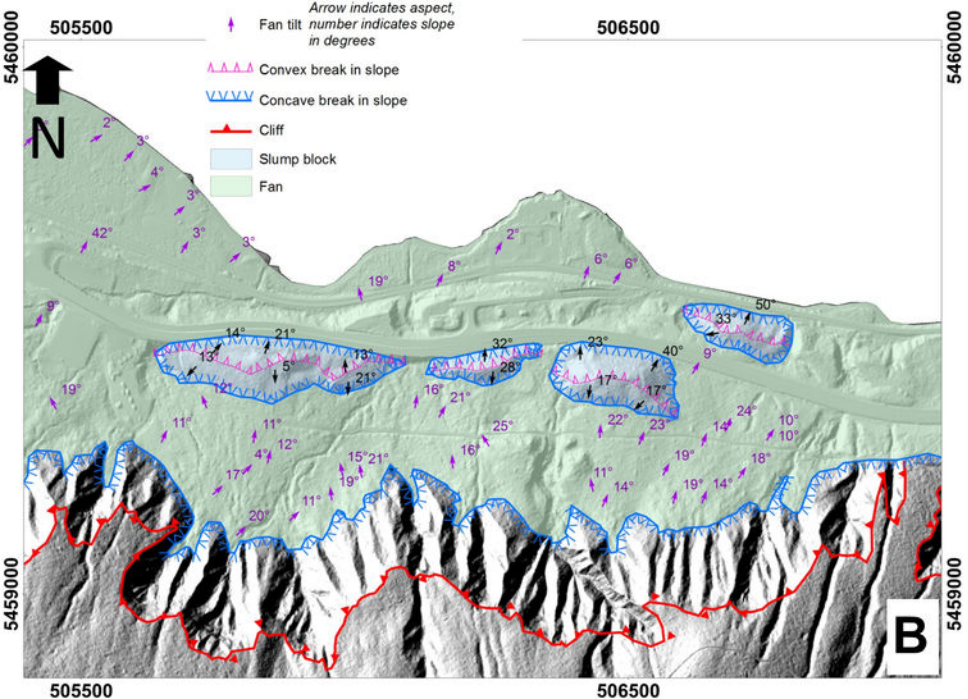
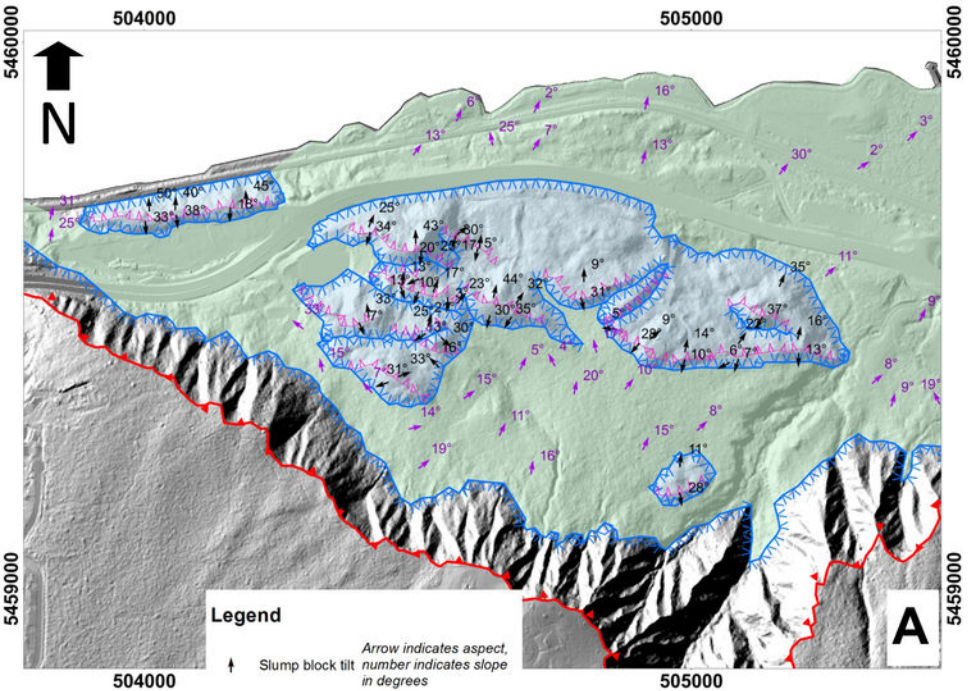


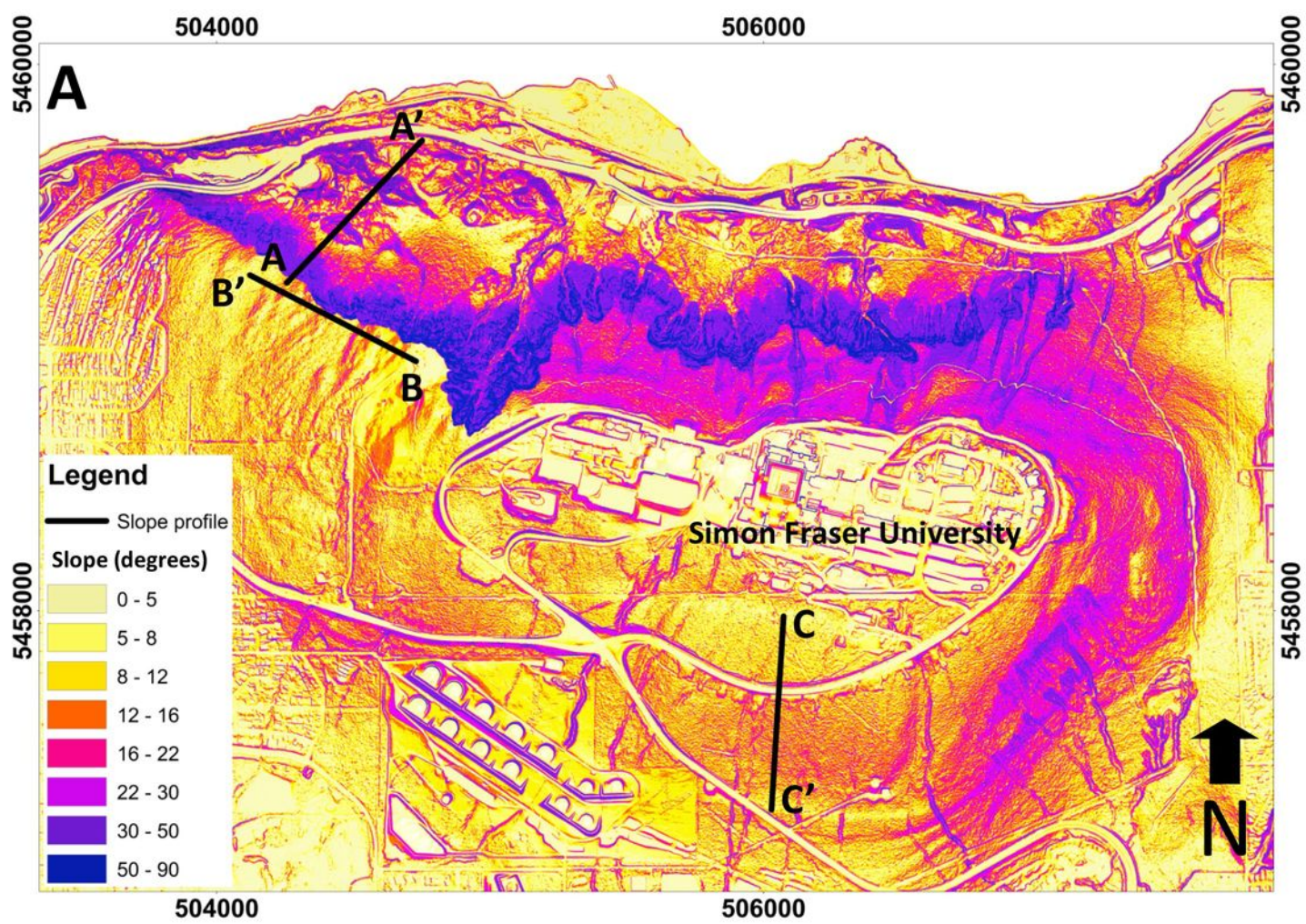




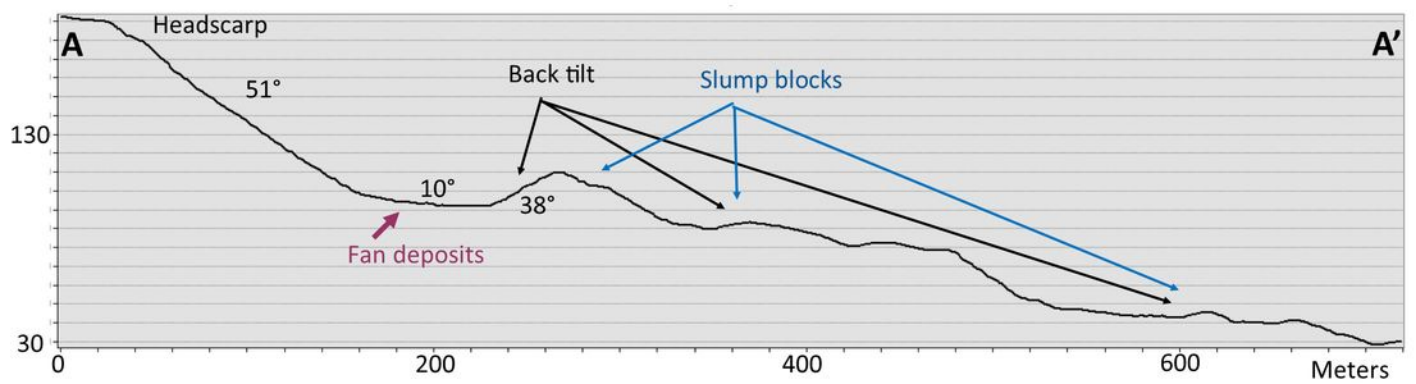




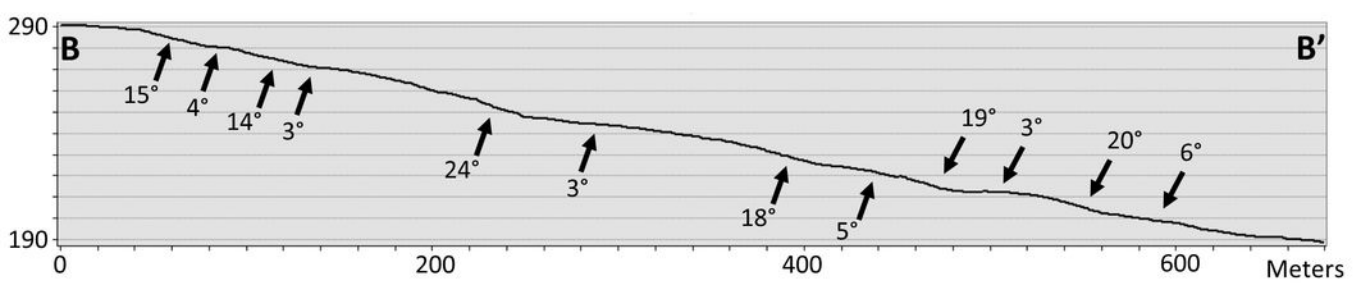




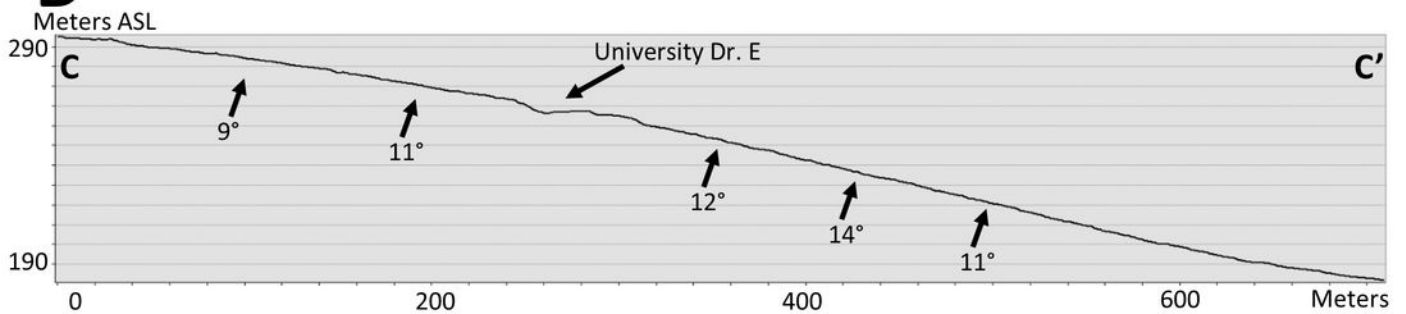
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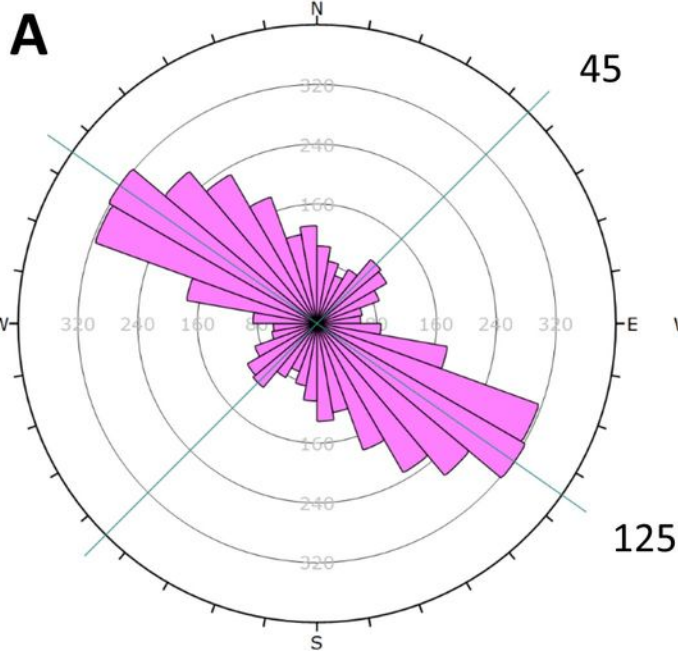
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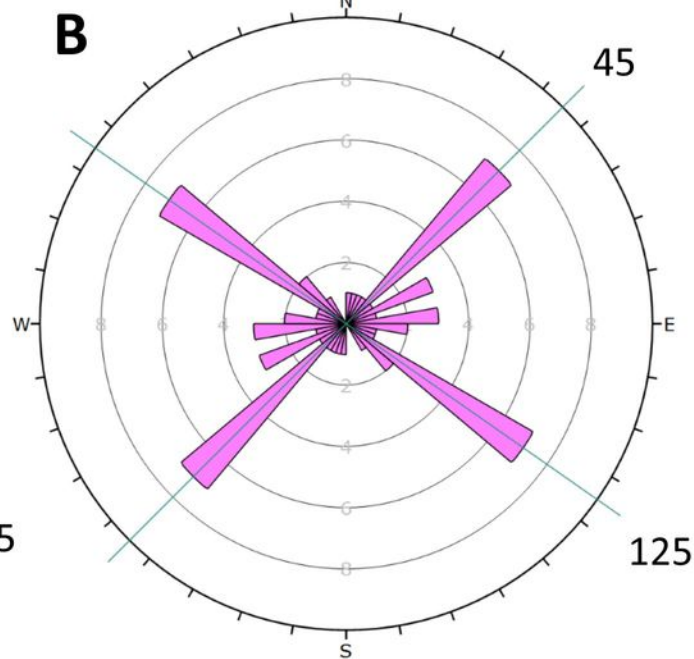
D



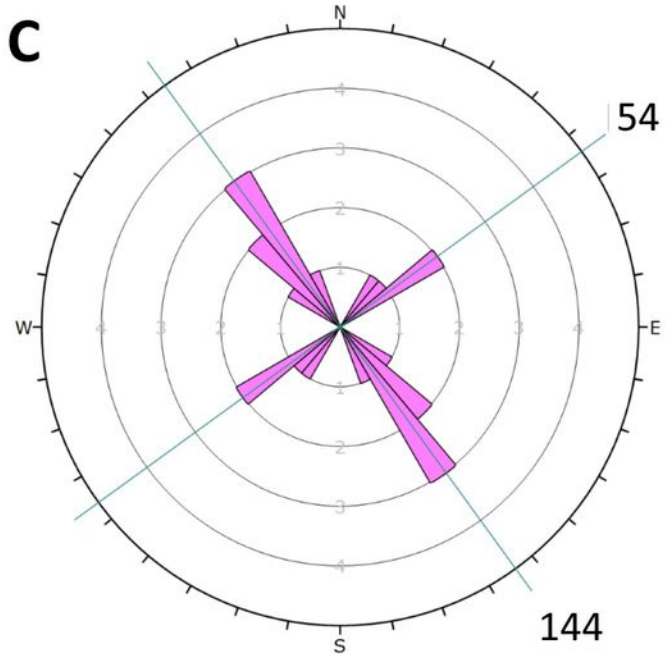
Regional faults



Shore lines



GIS lineaments



Faults and fractures

