



INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM CNRS

PETROLOGY OF WEATHERING  
AND SOILS

July, 4-7, 1983  
PARIS - FRANCE

Poster Presentation

WATER-INDUCED SEALING FEATURES IN AN ALLUVIAL SOIL  
FROM A SUB-DESERTIC AREA (AGADECZ - NIGER)

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24 OCT. 1983

O. R. S. T. O. M. Fonds Documentaire

N° : 3508

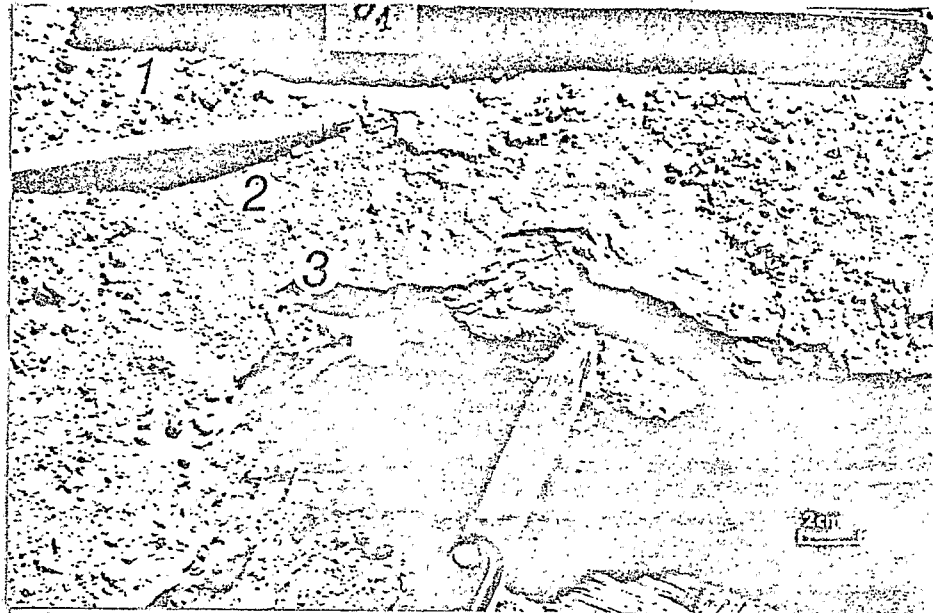
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# INTRODUCTION

SURFACE SEALING AND LAMINATED LAYERS CAN BE OBSERVED IN A SANDY ALLUVIAL SOIL LOCATED IN THE SOUTHERN FRINGE OF THE SAHARA (AGADECZ). MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSES COUPLED WITH AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES WERE ATTEMPTED IN ORDER TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE MECHANISMS OF FORMATION OF SUCH FEATURES.



↑ SOIL SURFACE MICRO-PROFILE OF THE  
NATURAL PLOT

- ① Loose gravel and coarse sand
- ② Cemented fine sand and vesicles
- ③ Thin cohesive surface seal
- ④ Thin seals interbedded with  
sand microlayers

DEEP SOIL (60 cm - 100 cm)



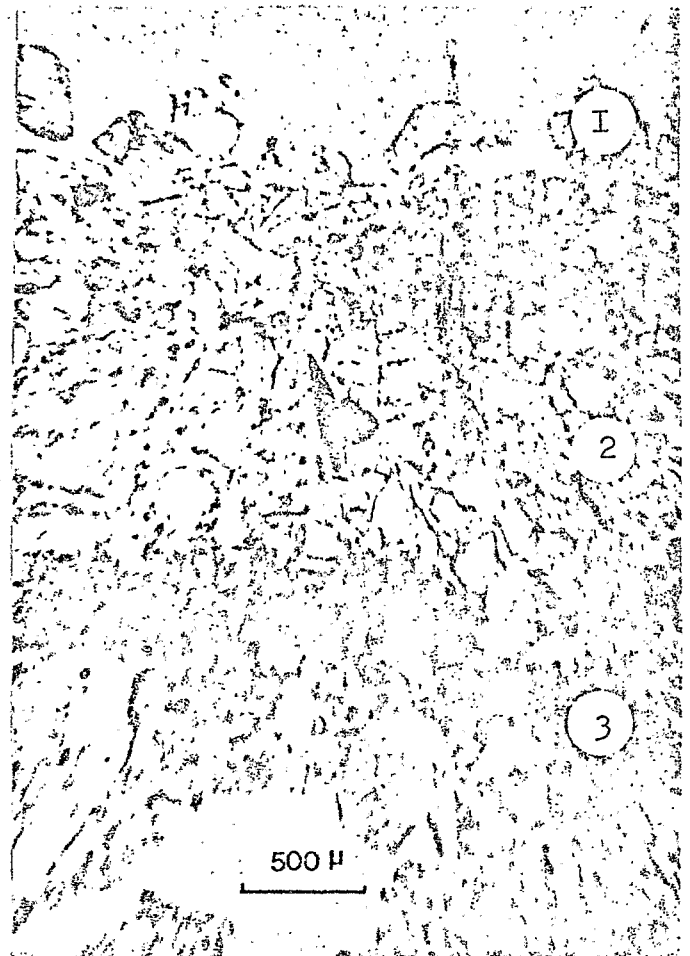
Burled laminae are interbedded  
with loose coarse sand and gravel

# NATURAL FEATURES

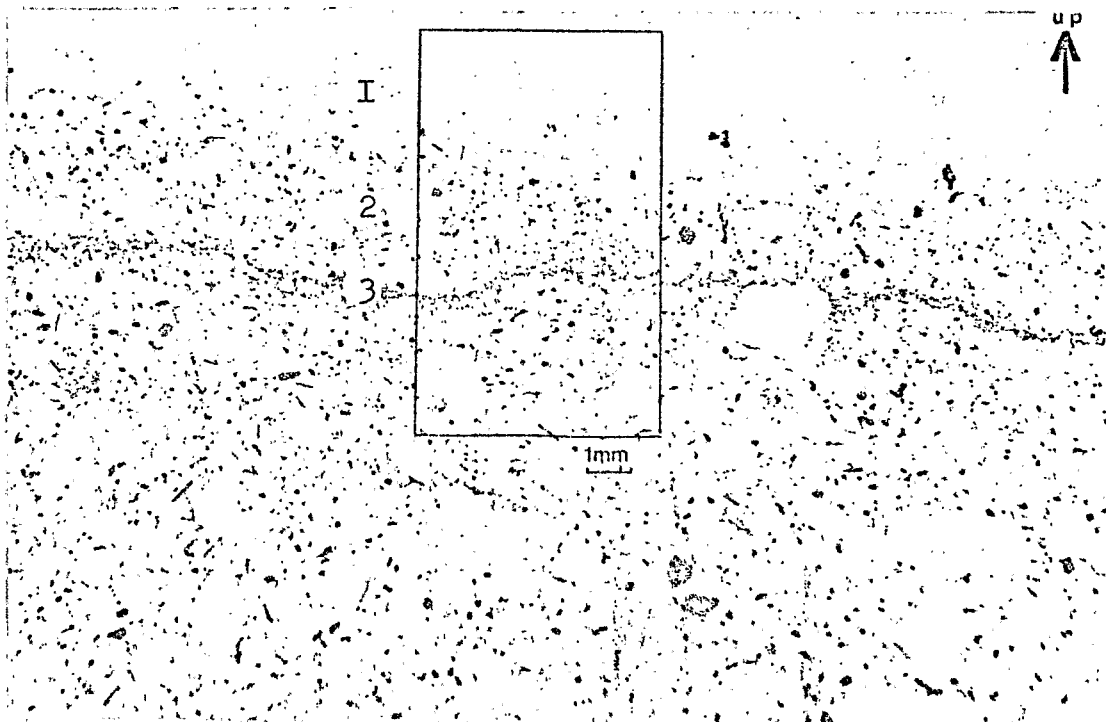
THE NATURAL MICRO-PROFILE OF THE SOIL SURFACE IS STRATIFIED. EACH STRATUM COMPRISES THREE TYPICAL MICRO-LAYERS:

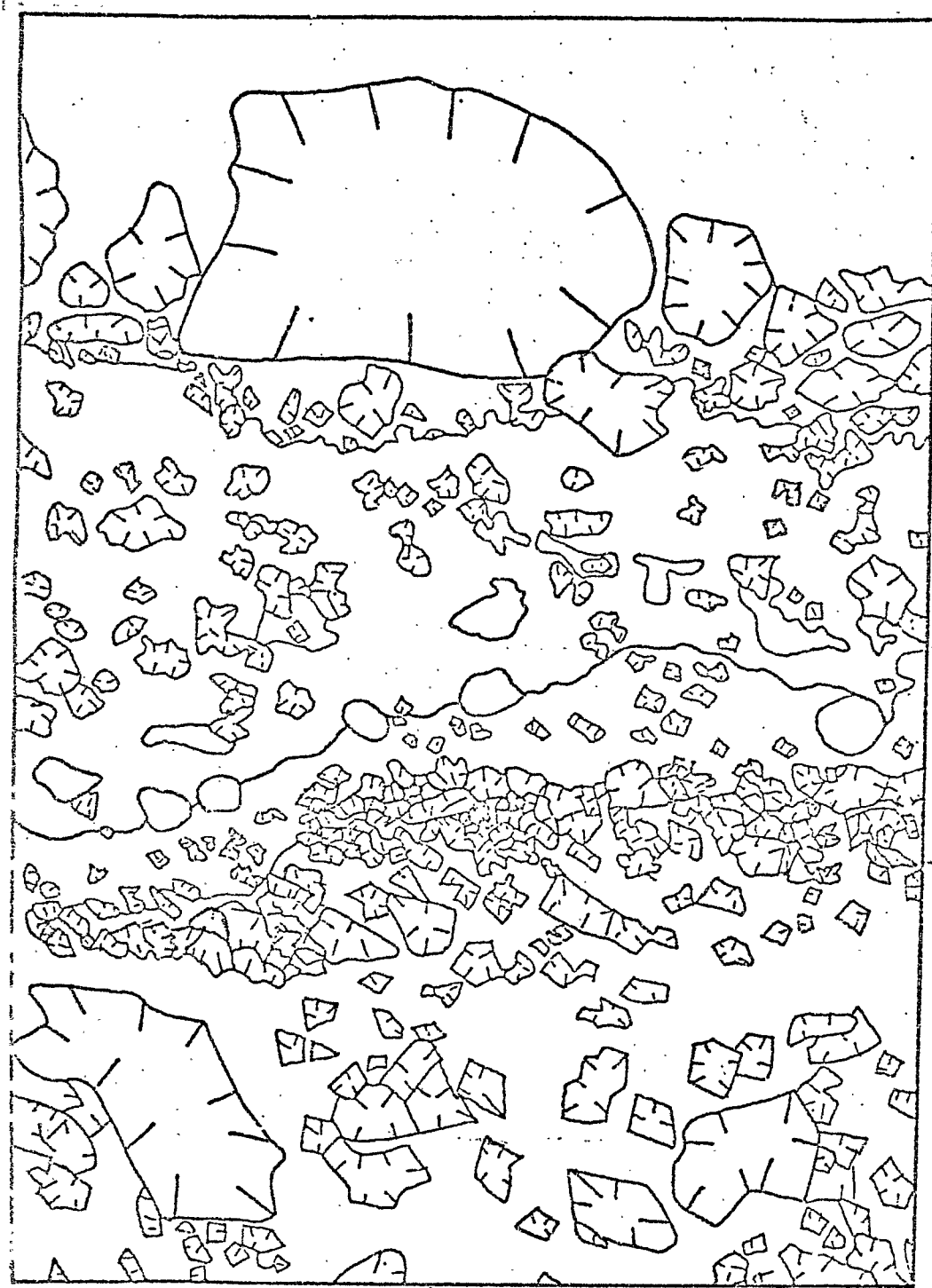
- (1) LOOSE GRAVEL AND COARSE SAND,
- (2) CEMENTED FINE SAND,
- (3) A THIN SEAL OF COHESIVE PLASMA.

VESICLES OCCUR MAINLY IN THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE FINE SANDS AND THE SEAL.

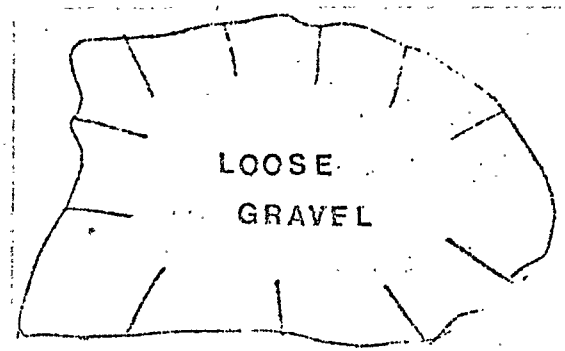


THIN SECTIONS OF THE UPPER MICROLAYERS OF THE NATURAL PLOT





500 M



LOOSE  
GRAVEL

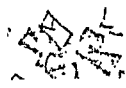


COARSE  
SAND

CIMENTED  
FINE SAND



VESICLE  
COHESIVE  
PLASMA



COMPACTED  
SAND

	Gravel	Coarse Sand	Fine Sand	Plasma
LOOSE GRAVEL	58	38	4	—
CIMENTED FINE SAND	—	29	71	—
VESICLE COHESIVE PLASMA	—	11	9	80
COMPACTED SAND	—	71	29	—

EVALUATION OF THE SIZE  
DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE NATURAL  
UPPER MICROLAYERS

# ARTIFICIAL SEALING

## 1. EQUIPMENT AND PROCEDURES

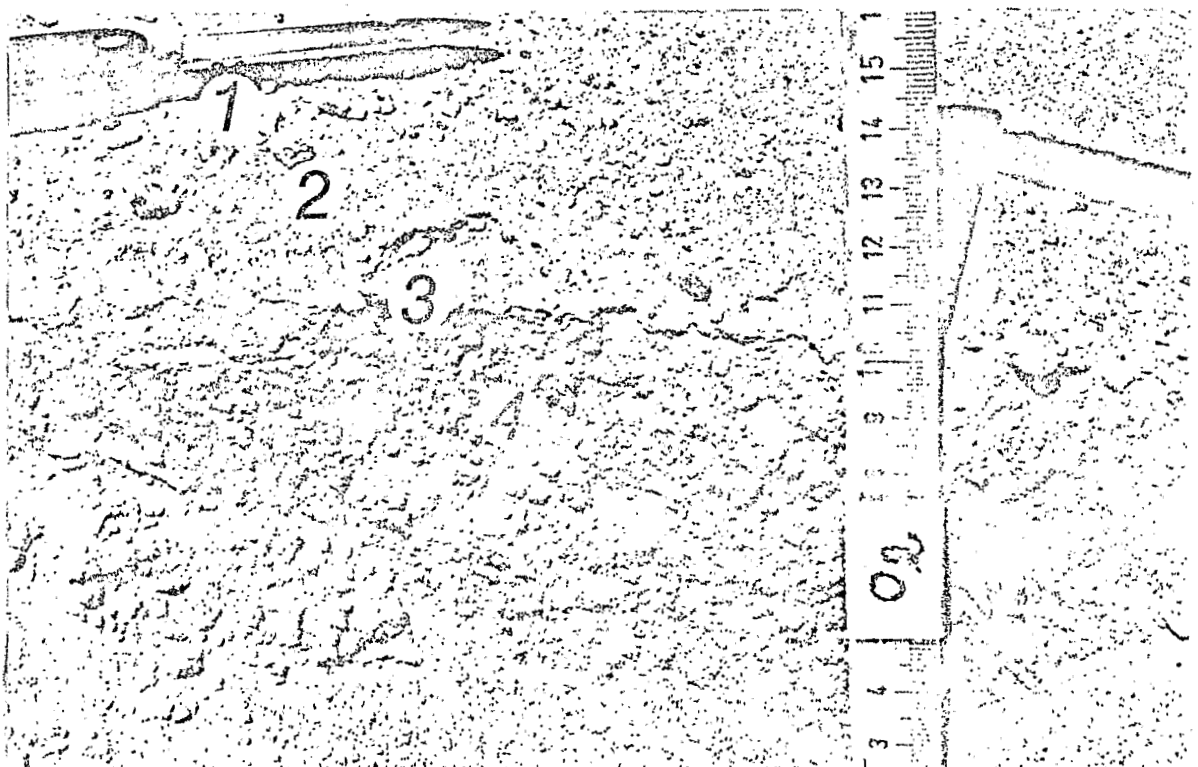
MANUAL SHALLOW PLOUGHING (0.1m) WAS PERFORMED AND NATURAL FEATURES WERE THEREBY DESTROYED. RAINFALL SIMULATION WAS THEN CONDUCTED WITH A SPRINKLING INFILTROMETER (1) IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CLIMATIC DATA PREVAILING IN THE STUDY AREA, NAMELY RAINFALL AMOUNTS, DURATIONS, INTENSITIES AND KINETIC ENERGIES. SAMPLES WERE COLLECTED AT VARIOUS STAGES FOR SCANNING ELECTRON MICROSCOPY AND FOR MICRO-MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CRUST STRENGTH WAS MEASURED WITH A PENETROMETER AND RUNOFF WAS RECORDED ON 1 M<sup>2</sup> PLOTS.

## 2. RESULTS

### A. Morphological Analysis

SOIL SURFACE MICRO-PROFILE  
OF THE TILLED PLOT AFTER  
SIMULATED RAINFALL

- ① Loose gravel and coarse sand
- 2 Cemented fin<sup>e</sup> sand
- ③ Thin cohesive seal
- ④ Compacted tilled layer

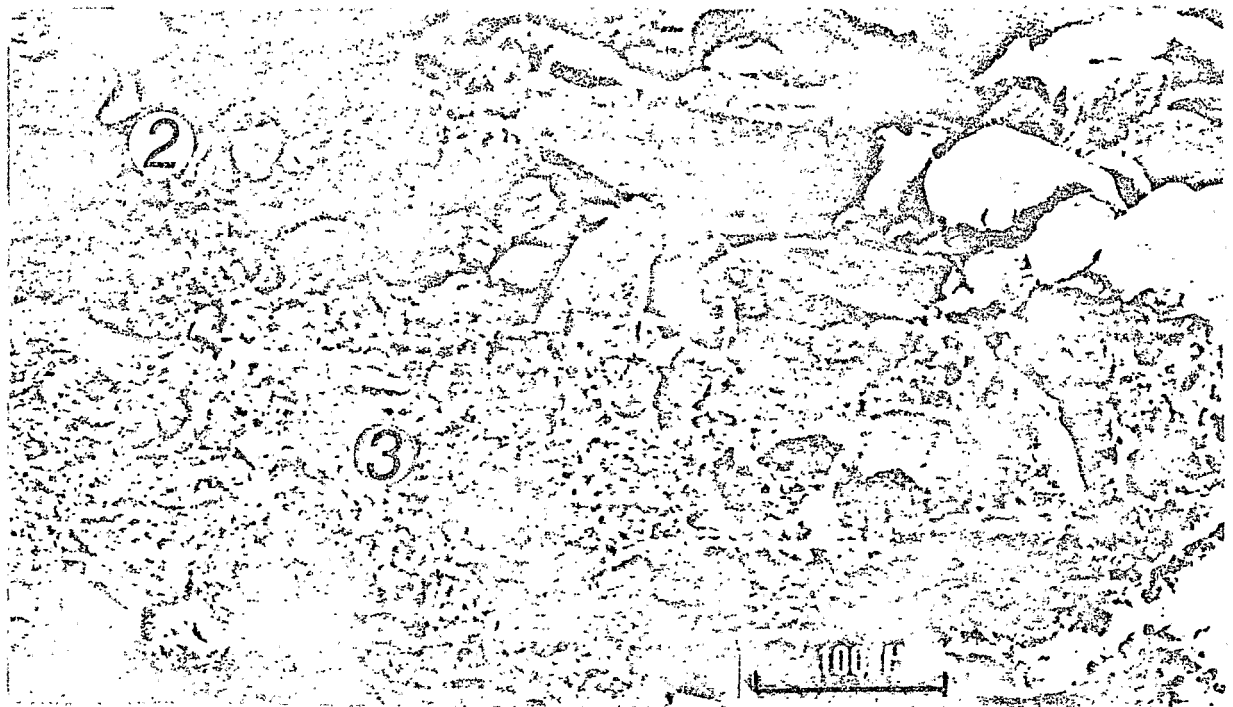


THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE CRUSTS FORMED BOTH UNDER NATURAL CONDITIONS AND UNDER RAINFALL SIMULATION ARE VERY SIMILAR. A VERY THIN AND DENSE SKIN IS COVERED WITH COARSE PARTICLES. POROSITY IS RESTRICTED TO FEW VESICLES.

SEM MICROGRAPH OF THE UPPER LAYER OF THE TILLED SOIL AFTER SIMULATED RAINFALL

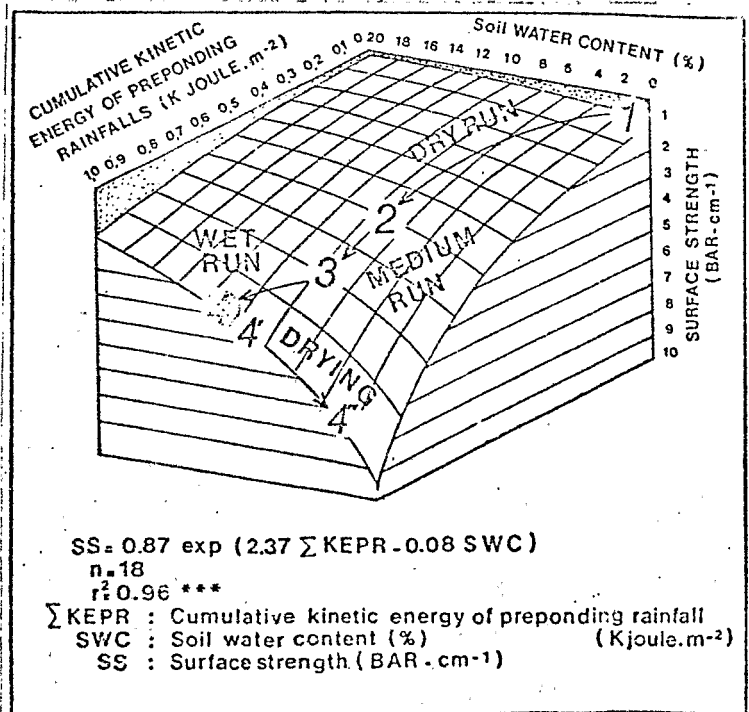
② Cemented fine sand

③ Cohesive soil



### B. Soil Surface Strength

SURFACE STRENGTH INCREASES MOSTLY BEFORE RUNOFF OCCURANCE AND DURING DRYING. KINETIC ENERGY OF PREPENDING RAINFALLS CAN THEREFORE BE CONSIDERED AS A PREVAILING FACTOR OF SEALING FOR SANDY SOILS.



## C. Hydraulic Properties

AFTER THE FIRST RAIN, PREPONDING RAINFALLS AND INFILTRATION RATES ARE GETTING SIMILAR FOR BOTH PLOTS, NATURAL AND PLOUGHED. ONLY A SMALL RAINFALL IS REQUIRED FOR SEALING TO OCCUR ON THE PLOUGHED SURFACE, AND THUS TO REDUCE INFILTRABILITY TO A LOW LEVEL, DESPITE THE COARSE TEXTURE OF THE MATERIAL ( FINE SAND: 37 %, COARSE SAND: 53 % ).

	PREPONDING RAINFALL INFILTRATION RATE			
	( CM )		( CM/H )	
	NATURAL	PLOUGHED	NATURAL	PLOUGHED
DRY RUN	0.8	2.5	4.1	5.0
MEDIUM RUN	0.3	0.4	2.5	2.7
WET RUN	0.2	0.2	2.1	2.1

## DISCUSSION

MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS, SOIL STRENGTH AND HYDRAULIC PROPERTIES STUDIES SHOW THAT THE PROCESSES OF SEALING ARE MOST EFFECTIVE BEFORE THE OCCURANCE OF RUNOFF. THE COMPARISON OF THIN SECTIONS AT VARIOUS STAGES INDICATES THAT CLOUDS COLLAPSE RAPIDLY WHEREAS THE SAND FRACTION IS AFFECTED BY SPLASH AND FALLS AGAIN ON THE UPPERMOST MICRO-LAYER. FINE PARTICLES ARE MICRO-ILLUMINATED AND ACCUMULATE ABOVE THE ZONE BEING COMPACTED BY RAINDROPS WHILE AIR IS ENTRAPPED (2).

## CONCLUSION

BOTH FEATURES AND PROPERTIES OF NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL SEALS SUGGEST SIMILAR MECHANISMS OF FORMATION, NAMELY SEGREGATION OF PLASMA AND SKELETON UNDER RAINFALL. THEIR ARRANGEMENTS ARE THUS CONTRARY TO THE TYPICAL SEQUENCE OF SEDIMENTED MATERIALS. OWING TO THE SIMILARITY WITH SURFACE FEATURES BURIED LAMINAE CAN ALSO BE CONSIDERED AS SEDI- AND PEDO-RELICS, i.e. AS SEDIMENTED MATERIALS SUBMITTED TO SEALING AFTER DEPOSITION AND COVERED LATER BY THE FOLLOWING FLOODS. THESE FEATURES CAN BE THEREFORE ASCRIBED TO SURFACE PROCESSES IN GEOLOGICAL TIMES.

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