DIVISION S-5—PEDOLOGY

Pedogenesis of Vesicular Horizons, Cima Volcanic Field, Mojave Desert, California

K. Anderson,* S. Wells, and R. Graham

ABSTRACT

An existing model of desert pavement formation suggests desert pavement clasts rise vertically on an accreting eolian mantle and the underlying vesicular horizon coevolves with pavement formation. Results presented here support this model and provide a mechanism whereby eolian material is transported from the ground surface to ped interiors, thereby increasing the thickness of the vesicular horizon underlying desert pavements. Basaltic desert pavements in the Cima Volcanic Field are underlain by a vesicular horizon with strong coarse columnar and strong medium platy soil structure. Peds collected from three sites along a topographic gradient were subsampled into seven ped domains to quantify physical, chemical, and micromorphological properties within peds and along the topographic transect. Ped interiors have up to 40% clay and 12% CaCO₃, whereas sediments adhering to ped sides have <7% clay and 2% CaCO₃. Argillans and siltans lining platy surfaces in ped centers and bottoms indicate desert dust is translocated vertically along the macropores between peds and horizontally along platy boundaries to ped interiors. Once soils develop a strong columnar and platy structure, translocation to ped interiors is enhanced. Calibrated radiocarbon ages between 5440 and 5045 BP for Av ped centers suggest enhanced dust flux and pedogenesis occurred during the drier middle Holocene, an inference supported by luminescence dating and correlations with regional eolian chronologies.

VESICULAR SOIL HORIZONS commonly underlie desert pavements in the southwestern USA. The hypothesis that vesicular soils and associated desert pavements coevolve is supported by soil and stratigraphic field studies (McFadden et al., 1984, 1986; Wells et al., 1985, 1987; McDonald, 1994), geochemical and mineralogical investigations (McFadden et al., 1987), and cosmogenic dating procedures (Wells et al., 1995; Anderson and Wells, 1997). Fine-textured eolian material accumulating below surface clasts is pedogenically altered into a vesicular horizon. Continued eolian accumulation and pedogenesis leads to cumulic soil development below accretionary desert pavements. In the California Cima Volcanic Field, fine-textured desert dust is deposited on rubbly, basalt flow surfaces (Fig. 1). Through processes such as rain splash, surface wash, and translocation, dust continually accumulates below basaltic clasts, developing underlying vesicular horizons. Thus, pavement clasts have never been buried as was once assumed, but rather they rise upwards on a vertically accreting eolian mantle (Wells et al., 1987, 1995; McFadden et al., 1987). The processes by which dust is incorporated into vesicular horizons that underlie desert pavements are poorly understood. Chemical, physical, and micromorphological data on vesicular soil peds are presented here that help identify the processes of dust translocation and CaCO₃ accumulation within vesicular soil peds. Combining such data with age estimates of vesicular horizons provides insights into the mechanisms and timing of accretionary desert pavement formation.

The designation of vesicular horizons as Av does not easily conform to established criteria for horizon nomenclature. For example, although vesicular horizons have been designated Av since at least 1958 (Springer, 1958) and are presently designated as such in the soils literature (Peterson, 1980; McFadden et al., 1984, 1998), the Soil Survey Manual (Soil Survey Staff, 1993) reserves V for plinthite soil horizons. In addition, Av horizons exhibit complex properties commonly attributed to B horizons, such as enrichment in salts, CaCO₃, and translocated clay, but they also continuously incorporate new parent material from eolian additions, so might be designated as surface C horizons. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion and maintain convention, the Av designation is used here. Early models of pavement formation focused on the exhumation of clasts by deflation (Springer, 1958; Jessup, 1960; Sharon, 1962; Symmons and Hemming, 1968; Cooke, 1970; Cooke and Warren, 1973; Mabbutt, 1977) or the shrink and swell heave of clasts to the ground surface (Springer, 1958; Johnson and Hester, 1972; Mabbutt, 1977). More recently, the association of vesicular soils with desert pavements on many landscapes in the Southwest has been shown to support an accretionary mechanism of pavement development (McFadden et al., 1986; McDonald, 1994). The shift from assuming that desert pavements are zones of erosion to the realization that they can be zones of deposition has caused studies of landscape development in the Mojave Desert to refocus on dust accumulation and soil formation (McFadden et al., 1987; McDonald et al., 1994; Reheis and Kihl, 1995). Examples of accretionary desert pavements on basalt flows of the Cima Volcanic Field include up to 2 m of relatively clast-free, quartz-rich eolian sands between basalt flows and the overlying desert pavements. The uppermost horizon, generally an Av, represents an actively accreting physically and chemically complex layer.

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Abbreviations: AMS, accelerated mass spectrometry; BP, before present; EC, electrical conductivity; MRT, mean residence time; TL, thermoluminescence.
Vesicular horizons were recognized by Marbut (1935) to be common in arid environments. Recently, because of the unique properties and stratigraphic position of Av horizons at the ground surface, investigations are focusing on their effects on decreasing infiltration and increasing runoff, thereby influencing plant-water relationships, soil development, surficial processes, and landscape evolution (Musick, 1973; Wells et al., 1984, 1987; McDonald, 1994). Many researchers have investigated the processes of vesicle formation. Springer (1958) reproduced vesicles from sieved Av material after only five wet and dry cycles. The original Av properties of sieved soils return after 20 to 30 wetting and drying cycles; additional cycles increase the number, size, surface area, sphericity, and continuity of pores (Miller, 1971; Figueira and Stoops, 1983; Figueira, 1984). Evenari et al. (1974) determined that vesicle formation was influenced by the following: texture, wetting front displacement of soil air, surface sealing by crusts or clasts, air trapped when wet, and thermal expansion of air bubbles. Bouza et al. (1993) found that a high exchangeable Na percentage (>15) is an important vesicle formation factor for Patagonian soils. Vesicle stability is aided by CaCO₃ (Evenari et al., 1971) and clay coatings (Sullivan and Koppi, 1991). Observations of Av horizons in the Cima Volcanic Field reveal strong columnar and platy soil structure, with individual peds exhibiting textural and chemical zonation from ped exterior to ped interior locations. Qualitative field properties include sandy, low-CaCO₃ ped exteriors, and clayey CaCO₃-rich ped interiors (McFadden et al., 1984). Using micromorphologic, physical, and chemical analyses, Anderson et al. (1994; this study) observed that vertical and horizontal translocation of fines and solute transport within the Av horizon increase the clay and CaCO₃ content of ped interiors.

**Radiocarbon Age Estimates**

Radiocarbon age estimates based on soil organic matter can be difficult to interpret, although interpretations can be enhanced using supporting independent data. Some researchers suggest that reliable radiocarbon dating of soils is possible (Scharpenseel, 1979; Goh et al., 1977), whereas others rely on the concept of mean residence time (MRT), where a radiocarbon age on soil organic matter is the mean age of all the organic C components added to the soil over time. The MRT concept assumes that younger C is continuously added to the soil, and that older C is lost by processes of decay, translocation, and mineralization. Mean residence time dates are minimum age estimates; soils are actually older than MRT ages suggest (Birkeland, 1999).

Because of the importance of determining soil age in geomorphic, pedogenic, and archeological settings, radiocarbon dating of soils continues to be used by many researchers. Wang et al. (1996) obtained model ages based on the ¹⁴C activity and rates of younger C additions. Scharpenseel (1979) determined that careful consideration of sample selection and analysis of specific organic matter fractions (humic, fulvic, humin, humic-clay, etc.) could greatly improve interpretation of the radiocarbon age. However, because of the physical and chemical variability of soil processes, it remains unclear which humus fraction is the most representative of the initiation of soil genesis for any particular soil (Stout et al., 1981). Anderson and Wells (1997) reported consistent stratigraphic trends in accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) radiocarbon ages of vesicular soils on an alluvial fan sequence in the Mojave Desert, suggesting that an age-dependent signature may be preserved in Av soils. Because of the uncertainties of AMS ages on soil organic matter, conservative interpretations using minimum mean residence times are useful within the context of supporting data, as discussed below.

The objectives of the research presented in this paper are to (i) identify the physical and chemical properties of Av peds underlying desert pavements and to (ii) determine the processes active within the Av horizon that may affect desert pavement formation. Detailed physical, chemical, and micromorphological analyses of Av peds enhance understanding of vesicular ped formation and the influence of Av horizon genesis on the development of accretionary desert pavements. Radiocarbon age estimates provide preliminary chronologic control in understanding the timing and rate of Av soil genesis for (i) comparisons with other dated soils, (ii) correlation with potentially important climatic periods, and (iii) determining whether Av horizons form during discrete periods of the geologic past, e.g., Pleistocene or Holocene.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Site Characteristics**

The study area is on a basalt flow in the Cima Volcanic Field, in the eastern Mojave Desert, that has been K-Ar dated...
to 580 000 ± 160 000 yr old (Turrin et al., 1984). This flow was chosen for the following reasons:

1. Previous work provides a reliable pedological framework (McFadden et al., 1987).
2. The thick (up to 2 m) eolian sheet and strongly developed columnar-structured vesicular horizon underlying the desert pavement provides a spectacular example of the accretionary model of desert pavement formation.
3. Age control for the underlying bedrock provides a maximum age for soil formation.

The basalt flow is 700 m above sea level and grades <2° to the west. The flow surface lies 10 m above the local base level as an erosional remnant (Fig. 1). Vegetation includes creosote bush [Larrea tridentata (Sessé & Moc. ex DC.) Coville], brittle bush [Encelia farinosa], mormon tea (Ephedra trifurca), and joshua tree (Yucca brevifolia Engelm.). Mean annual precipitation is between 12 and 25 cm and the mean annual temperature is 16 to 18°C (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], 1978, p. 570). The basalt flow overlies Pleistocene alluvial fan gravels. A mantle of desert dust overlies the basalt flow (Fig. 1, Tables 1 and 2). Overlying the soil is a tightly interlocking desert pavement mosaic with millimeter-scale distances between well-varnished basaltic boulders and cobbles (McFadden et al., 1989). The <5-mm interclast spaces consist of basaltic fragments derived from local salt weathering of larger clasts and loose quartz-rich sand, silt, and clay eolian deposits. In some locations a thin, cohesive crust has formed. Pebble to cobble-size clasts generally rest on the surface, whereas larger cobbles can be embedded in the Av horizon up to several centimeters. Poorly preserved pavement fabric occurs in areas where plant growth and animal activity are high. Relief across the surface is generally low, except where bedrock highs are exposed or where drainages have incised.

### Sampling and Analysis

The Av horizon exhibits strong columnar parting to platy soil structure, allowing cohesive, columnar pebbles to be sampled individually. Three sample sites were chosen 25-m apart along a 50-m transect. Site II is downslope from Site I and upslope from Site III (Fig. 1). After pavement characteristics were described, pavement clasts were removed, which allowed collection of surface eolian material. Removal of surficial material revealed polygonal ped tops (Hunt et al., 1966; McFadden et al., 1987), ranging in both diameter and thickness from <1 to >10 cm. The soil at Site II, judged to be similar to the soils at Sites I and III, was described in detail (Soil Survey Staff, 1992, 1993); it is a Typic Natragid consisting of Avt-Btvk-Btk-Bk-Bky1-Bky2 horizons (Fig. 1, Tables 1 and 2). The Av horizon has the following characteristics: 10YR hue, high value, and low chroma, reflecting the low organic matter content and slight oxidation; high silt and clay content; columnar and platy soil structure; horizon thickness between 5 and 10 cm; and numerous vesicular and channel pores. Ten to 12 pedds from each site were collected and stored separately.

In the laboratory, ped domains were defined according to macroscopic characteristics such as Munsell color, texture, carbonate nodules, and soil structure. Peds were subsampled according to the defined domains to quantify physical and chemical variations within peds (Fig. 2). Based on variations in soil properties, the following seven distinct ped domains were identified and sampled: (1) material adhering to ped

### Table 1. Soil physical properties of Pedon II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horizon</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Consistence§</th>
<th>Structure†</th>
<th>dry</th>
<th>moist</th>
<th>wet</th>
<th>HCl reaction∥</th>
<th>Clay films#</th>
<th>Pores††</th>
<th>Boundary‡‡</th>
<th>Other‡§</th>
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<td>cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0–0.5</td>
<td>10YR 7/3</td>
<td>lo</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>lo</td>
<td>lo</td>
<td>sp,po</td>
<td>eo</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>as</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avt</td>
<td>0.5–7</td>
<td>10YR 7/3</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>3,c,crp-2,l,fl</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>fr</td>
<td>s,p</td>
<td>e-es</td>
<td>pin</td>
<td>eo</td>
<td>pex</td>
<td>4,n,po</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Btvk</td>
<td>7–9</td>
<td>7.5YR 5/4</td>
<td>s,cl</td>
<td>3,c,crp-2,l,fl</td>
<td>sh-h</td>
<td>fr</td>
<td>s,p</td>
<td>3,po,br,co</td>
<td>2,es,3,yf,m,v,in</td>
<td>es</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Btk</td>
<td>9–16</td>
<td>7.5YR 5/4</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>1,m,abk</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>sr</td>
<td>s,s</td>
<td>e,mat.</td>
<td>ev</td>
<td>nod.</td>
<td>1,m,plf</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bk</td>
<td>16–27</td>
<td>7.5YR 5/4</td>
<td>sl</td>
<td>1,abk</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>fr</td>
<td>s,s</td>
<td>e,mat.</td>
<td>ev</td>
<td>nod.</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bky1</td>
<td>27–40</td>
<td>7.5YR 5/6</td>
<td>sl</td>
<td>1,abk</td>
<td>lo</td>
<td>fr</td>
<td>s,s</td>
<td>e,mat.</td>
<td>ev</td>
<td>nod.</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bky2</td>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>7.5YR 5/6</td>
<td>sl</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>lo</td>
<td>fr</td>
<td>s,s</td>
<td>ve</td>
<td>mat.</td>
<td>e, nod.</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
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</table>

† ls, loamy sand; l, loam; sicl, silt, loamy sand; sl, sandy loam; na, data not available.
‡ m, massive; 3, strong; c, coarse; epr, eolian; 2, moderate; f, fine; pl, platy; 1, weak; abk, angular blocky.
§ lo, loose; h, hard; sh, slightly hard; so, soft; fr, friable; so, non-sticky; p, plastic; ss, slightly sticky; ps, slightly plastic.
∥ eo, no reaction; ve, very slightly effervescent; e, slightly effervescent; es, strongly effervescent; p, violent effervescent; p, plastic.
# na, data not available; 4, many, n, thin; po, in pores; 2, few; br, bridges; pf, ped faces.
†† 3, many; yg, very fine; m, medium; v, vesicular; t, tubular; in, inped.
‡‡ a, abrupt; s, smooth; c, clear; w, wavy.
§§ c, common; i, fine; int, interior; vh, very hard; ev, violent effervescent.

### Table 2. Soil chemical and physical properties of Pedon II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horizon</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>EC†</th>
<th>CaCO₂</th>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>Silt</th>
<th>Clay</th>
<th>Silt + Clay</th>
<th>Texture‡</th>
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<td>cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0–0.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>sl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avt</td>
<td>0.5–7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>cl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Btvk</td>
<td>7–9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>cl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Btk</td>
<td>9–16</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Bk</td>
<td>16–27</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bky1</td>
<td>27–40</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>sl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bky2</td>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>cl</td>
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</table>

† Electric Conductivity.
‡ ls, loamy sand; l, loam; sicl, silt, loamy sand; sl, sandy loam; na, data not available.
Micromorphic analysis focused on properties of vesicles and channel pores, cutans, and carbonate accumulations. Evidence of plant and animal activity can be seen in thin sections, although rootlets, obvious animal burrows, and identifiable plant and animal remains are rare. Spherical vesicles occur in the sandy loam material that occupies exterior positions of ped tops and sides. Vesicles are not lined with clay or carbonate but are bounded by sand grains. Interior positions of ped tops, ped sides, and ped centers are dominated by irregularly shaped vesicles, compressed vertically and elongated horizontally. Many vesicles in these domains have subrounded to angular borders.

Channel pores are absent from exterior positions of ped tops and ped sides. Interior positions of ped tops, sides, and centers have interconnected channel pores, but they are commonly filled with sediment. In the lower positions of ped centers, ped lower sides, and ped bottoms, channel pores are common. Channel pores are often connected to the macropores between ped faces, forming a continuous conduit from the ground surface to interior ped domains. Channel pores in ped bottoms can be interconnected to a great extent, forming platy soil structure. Argillans and siltans commonly line the lower surfaces of platy structure, whereas the upper surfaces may have a coating of CaCO₃, called calcitans (Fig. 3).

Physical and Chemical Analysis

Macroscopically delineated domains within peds provide a basis for interpreting genetic processes from measured physical and chemical properties. General trends in particle-size distribution show that materials adhering to ped tops and sides have the lowest clay content, whereas ped centers have the highest (Table 3). Material adhering to ped tops and ped faces (Domains 1 and 2) consistently have the coarsest texture, sandy loam, with 2 to 7% clay. Ped top (Domain 3) textures range from silt loam to loam, having 19% clay and 45 to 50% silt, the highest silt concentration within the ped. Ped center textures range from loam to clay, with the highest clay (27 to 40%) and silt plus clay (70 to 71%) concentrations. Ped bottom textures are loam to clay loam, with generally the second highest clay concentrations. Upper-side textures are loam, with consistently low clay and high silt concentrations. Lower-side textures are clay loam and loam, illustrating an increase in clay concentration compared with upper sides.

The CaCO₃ content was determined for 18 subsamples, although this was not determined for material adhering to ped faces (Domain 2) because of small sample recovery (Table 3). The general trend is that material adhering to ped tops has the lowest CaCO₃ content and ped centers have the highest. Materials adhering to ped tops (Domain 1) have a CaCO₃ content ranging from 0.4 to 1.5%, and ped tops (Domain 3) range from 3.0 to 5.5%. Ped centers have a CaCO₃ content ranging from 6.0 to 12.1%, and those of ped bottoms are nearly as high, ranging from 6.1 to 8.6%. Upper and lower ped sides have similar CaCO₃ contents, with the lowest being 1.1% and the highest 3.3%.

Trends in particle-size distribution and CaCO₃ content also occur along the topographic transect, from Site I to Site III. The silt + clay content for material adhering to ped tops increases from 34% at the upper site (Site I) to 40% at the lower site (Site III). Similarly, the silt + clay content of material adhering to ped faces increases from 40 to 45% and the clay content for ped centers
increases from 27 to 40% between Site I and Site III. An increase in CaCO₃ content in downslope positions is noted for some peds in Domains 1, 3, and 4.

The results of pH and electrical conductivity (EC) analysis indicate alkaline and saline conditions (Table 3); the pH values are 9.2 or greater. No noticeable pat-
tern in pH values occurred within peds or along the topographic transect. The EC values indicate saline conditions (EC > 4 dS cm⁻¹) for many of the subsampled domains. Electrical conductivity of <2 dS m⁻¹ occurs at all sites for material adhering to ped tops. The highest EC, 9.4 dS m⁻¹, is in the ped center of the lowest topographic position, Site III.

**Radiocarbon Ages**

Accelerator mass spectrometry radiocarbon analysis of fine-grained bulk soil samples from two subsampled ped centers provides similar age determinations. Conventional, uncalibrated radiocarbon ages are 4530 ± 50 BP (Beta-93902) at Site I, and 4570 ± 50 BP (Beta-91527) at Site II, 25 m apart. The two sigma (95% probability) tree-ring calibrated radiocarbon age estimate from Site I ranges from 5315 to 4995 years before present (BP), whereas the age from Site II ranges from 5440 to 5045 years BP. The calibrated radiocarbon ages, interpreted as MRTs, are comparable with a 5000 ± 1000 BP thermoluminescence age obtained from an Av horizon from a similar-aged basalt flow nearby (McFadden et al., 1998). They are also useful for discussing relationships with regional climatic (Spaulding, 1991) and eolian chronologies (Clarke, 1994).

**DISCUSSION**

**Interpretation of Processes**

The micromorphic characteristics of Av peds suggest that pore shape and continuity control the movement of material to ped interiors. Pore shapes include a variety of nonmatrix and interstructural pores (Soil Survey Staff, 1993). Nonmatrix pores occur as many very fine to medium (<0.5-5 mm) and occasionally coarse to very coarse (5–10 mm) elliptical and channel shapes. Elliptical pores may coalesce to form interconnected channels, which in turn may coalesce laterally to create platy soil structure. Platy structure in the center and bottom of columnar peds forms conduits connected to interstructural macropores between the columnar peds (Sullivan and Koppi, 1991). Interstructural pores are generally <0.5 cm wide and <10 cm long. Continuous conduits between interstructural macropores, and the channels and platy structure within the columnar peds, allow movement of sediment and water from the ground surface to ped interiors (Anderson et al., 1994). Incorporation of fine material within the ped probably occurs in two ways: transport in suspension by flowing water and matric suction. Flowing water transports the fines down vertical boundaries between peds and inward along the horizontal platy boundaries where clays accumulate as layered argillans. Further evidence for the transport of coarser material occurs in the form of microbedding, where millimeter-size channels contain deposits fining upward from sand to silt size. Matric suction draws water, solutes, and colloids to ped interiors and, as evapotranspiration dries the soil, CaCO₃ precipitates and clay remains. Anderson et al. (1994) indicated that sediment movement may be enhanced by the dispersive properties at the soil surface under high Na concentrations, and the flocculating properties of ped interiors and bottoms because of higher CaCO₃ concentrations.

Peds contain two domains of low clay and CaCO₃ content and five domains of higher clay and CaCO₃. Domains 1 and 2 have consistently lower clay and CaCO₃, and higher sand and silt content than the other domains. Ped centers have higher clay and CaCO₃ contents than all other ped domains, with up to 15 times the CaCO₃ concentration of exterior domains. Also, micromorphic investigations show argillans and calci-

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**Table 3. Properties of subsampled vesicular horizon peds, Cima Volcanic Field.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>EC†</th>
<th>CaCO₃</th>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>Silt</th>
<th>Slay</th>
<th>Silt + Clay</th>
<th>Texture†</th>
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<tr>
<td>on ped top</td>
<td>1</td>
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† Electrical conductivity.
‡ Is, loamy sand; l, loam; s, silty clay loam; sl, sandy loam.
tans lining horizontal channels and platy structural features in the lower portions of ped centers. Numerous irregular argillaceous and skeletal glaebules, and sand-filled granulotubes in the upper portions of ped centers, indicate that this domain is relatively inactive with regard to the lateral translocation of sediment. Pedotubes filled with sandy material suggest that as upper ped centers become filled with sediment, the active zone of translocation shifts to lower ped domains, such as ped bottoms, where platy structures dominate.

Ped bottom domains have calcitans and layered argillans that represent distinct episodes of lateral clay translocation. Fining upward microbedding of silt and sand in ped bottoms indicates lateral sediment transport by suspension along the platy structure, which represents the active domain of lateral clay, silt, and sand translocation (see Fig. 3). Particle-size distribution, CaCO\textsubscript{3} content, and micromorphology of Av peds indicate that soluble and easily translocated constituents are preferentially removed from the outer two domains, consequently accumulating in the ped center, upper-side, lower-side, and bottom domains.

From a landscape-scale perspective, the CaCO\textsubscript{3} and clay data may provide insights into processes involved in the progressive reduction of relief on desert pavement surfaces. Incipient desert pavement landscapes have high constructional relief because of irregular topography inherited during initial emplacement, whereas mature pavement landscapes (middle to early Holocene and late Pleistocene) have reduced constructional relief (Wells et al., 1984; Bull, 1991). As pavements develop, topographic highs are reduced by salt weathering, rain splash, and colluviation, and topographic lows are filled with slopewash colluvial and eolian material. A measurable increase in both fines and CaCO\textsubscript{3} occurs from Site I to Site III (see Fig. 1). Site III, at the topographically lowest position, has consistently higher silt and clay contents for many ped domains, and clayey, CaCO\textsubscript{3}-rich ped centers. Processes related to eolian deposition, surface transport of fines via overland flow, and subsurface transport of solutes to lower topographic positions may be responsible for the observed increase. The amount of clay and CaCO\textsubscript{3} incorporated into the topographically lower soils may increase the volume of material in these positions at a greater rate than slightly higher positions, thereby aiding in relief reduction of increasingly older desert pavement surfaces.

**Ages of Av Peds**

The processes of soil organic matter turnover and the subsequent addition of younger C to the soil system do not conform to the basic assumption that “carbon isotopic ratios have not been altered except by \(^{14}C\) decay since the sampled material ceased to be an active part of the carbon reservoir” (Taylor, 1987). Because surface soils are an active part of the C reservoir, that is, younger C continues to be added to the soil during pedogenesis, they are very difficult to interpret. Radiocarbon ages on soils result from a mixture of material being added daily to fractions already in the soil, perhaps for thousands of years (Birkeland, 1999). Ages determined by bulk soil radiocarbon analysis are the average ages of all organic constituents in the soil, excluding those removed through pretreatment processes. In this context, MRTs do not represent steady-state systems because (i) the rates of additions and removals from the soil system may exhibit considerable temporal variation, and (ii) organic matter steady states are not attained in desert soils for a very long time (perhaps 300,000 yr) because of the relatively slow rates of organic matter additions and removals (Wang et al., 1996). Although such age determinations can be problematic (Stout et al., 1981), limited interpretations can be made using MRTs as minimum ages (Martel and Paul, 1974; Goh et al., 1977; Scharpenseel, 1979). Some researchers think that specific organic fractions can provide reliable oldest ages, and therefore the closest to the inception of soil genesis (Goh et al., 1977; Holiday et al., 1985), while others have determined that results are neither repeatable nor predictable from one soil to another (Gilet-Blein et al., 1980).

Most studies of soil radiocarbon ages identify the potential source of young organic C as continued growth and decay of in situ organic matter; few studies have attempted to account for organic matter additions from eolian sources, even though Reheis and Kihl (1995) measured up to 23.5% organic matter from dust traps in the Cima Volcanic Field and 45% in other portions of the Mojave Desert. Given that Av soils in the Cima Volcanic Field have eolian origins (McFadden et al., 1984, 1987, 1998), and that >20% of desert dust consists of organic matter, it must be assumed that a significant portion of organic matter added to desert soils is from eolian sources. Therefore, radiocarbon ages determined on any soil fraction must take this into account. Although the origin of organic C for bulk AMS analysis of the sampled Av peds remains unclear and only speculative, the possible sources, and interpretations, must attempt to explain the contributions from both in situ organic matter production and eolian additions.

A conservative interpretation of the AMS ages of Av peds can be made by comparing them with (i) an independent thermoluminescence (TL) age on Av soils, (ii) regional eolian activity, and (iii) periods of regional aridity. Preliminary inferences can thus be made regarding increased aridity, eolian activity, and enhanced vesicular soil formation during the middle Holocene.

Because the radiocarbon ages are interpreted as minimum age estimates, Av soil genesis probably began sometime prior to the 5440 to 4995 BP period. The 5000 ± 1000 BP TL age on quartz sands from an Av soil ped on a nearby 560 ka basalt flow (McFadden et al., 1998) supports these ages. The TL age on eolian quartz sand suggests an influx of eolian material onto the basalt flows in the Cima Volcanic Field during the middle Holocene, influencing vesicular soil formation by adding eolian fines to the developing Av horizon. Considering the organic matter data from Reheis et al. (1995) discussed above, it is possible that increased amounts of eolian organic matter were also added to the soil system during this time. This might explain the
correspondence between AMS and TL dating methods. Resulting ages from both methods could be interpreted as MRTs, given the dynamic processes active in the Av horizons, where organic matter and quartz grains are introduced to ped centers by the processes described earlier. Perhaps enough eolian organic matter was added during this time to lower the MRT age towards the ~5000-BP period.

The AMS and TL ages correspond to middle Holocene eolian activity at Silver Lake playa, 20 km upwind from the Cima Volcanic Field, where an eolian deposit is bracketed by 8350- and 3620-BP radiocarbon ages (Wells et al., 1989). Eolian deposits at the Kelso sand dunes, 10 km south of the project area, have been dated using optically stimulated luminescence to between 8420 and 3500 BP (Clarke, 1994). Spaulding (1991), using packrat midden data, suggested that a period of increased aridity occurred between ~8000 and 4000 BP in portions of the Mojave Desert.

The correspondence between AMS and TL dated Av horizons, with periods of increased eolian activity and regional aridity, suggests that the Av horizons investigated in this study may, in part, be influenced by a middle Holocene increase in eolian sediment and organic matter mobilization, deposition, and incorporation into surface Av soils. Wells et al. (1984, 1987) and McFadden et al. (1984, 1986) have suggested that desiccation of Silver Lake at the end of the Pleistocene dramatically increased the supply of dust to the Cima Volcanic Field, greatly affecting soil genesis and clast fracturing by increasing the amount of salt-rich eolian fines. They postulated that Av horizon development on the basalt flows in the Cima Volcanic Field may have been initiated or enhanced during the Pleistocene to Holocene transition and its increased eolian activity. The results from chemical, physical, and chronologic analyses presented above suggest that the middle Holocene may also have been a time of increased eolian deposition, affecting pedogenic development of the already formed Av horizon, with a corresponding influence on desert pavement formation.

**Implications for Desert Pavement Formation**

The processes of sediment incorporation below desert pavement on well-developed soils include clay and CaCO₃ accumulation in the upper several centimeters of the vesicular soil, causing horizon thickening and vertical accretion. Pavement clasts above this accreting Av horizon ride upward as material below continues to accumulate. Translocation and subsequent storage of eolian fines and salts in ped interiors provides a mechanism for cumulic soil development below pavement clasts, whereby material is added to the soil via lateral macropore conduits.

The initial phase of the process of eolian accumulation and pavement development remains speculative, but is probably influenced by adhesion and surface tension forces as water and sediment act to form laminar surface crusts that adhere to clast bottoms (Fig. 4). A second phase includes continued eolian influx and CaCO₃ accumulation, allowing formation of incipient vesicles.

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**Fig. 4. Hypothesized phases of eolian accumulation and vesicular soil formation emphasizing the influence of pedogenic processes on lifting clasts and consequent formation of accretionary desert pavements. Size of largest clast shown is ~20 cm.**
and pedogenic alteration. When soil properties reach certain physical and chemical thresholds—based largely on clay type and amount, and salt and Na concentration—shrinking and swelling processes may enhance clast lifting. A critical third phase of development is related to the formation of well-defined soil structure by shrink-swell activity, where vertical pores between columnar peds are connected to platy structure at ped bottoms. When this phase is attained, further colian material can be added to both the ped tops and ped interior positions. An increase in clay and CaCO₃ in Av horizons in topographic lows suggests that rates of cumulative soil development and associated pavement-clast lifting are accelerated in lower topographic positions, increasing the rate of relief reduction. In addition, as Av horizons continue to accumulate material, underlying soil horizons continue to develop as well, although the relationships between Av genesis and subsoil development remain poorly understood. McFadden et al. (1987) found evidence that subsoil Btk morphologies support the idea of the transformation of Av's to B horizons. However, increasing Av thickness with time on alluvial fan chronosequences seem to indicate rather long periods of Av stability and continued development (Anderson, 1999; McDonald, 1994). McDonald (1994) finds evidence that the Av horizon may, in fact, also rise vertically as material accumulates below both the pavement clasts and the existing Av layer.

Organic matter is continuously added to the soil by both in situ processes and eolian deposition. Preliminary interpretations of radiocarbon age estimates, and correlation with regional chronologies, suggest that the middle Holocene was a period of increased additions of datable material to the soil, notably quartz sand and organic C. Such an increase may provide enough material to cause a decrease of the mean residence time AMS and TL age-estimates, moving towards concordant chronologies. These concordant AMS and TL ages on Av pedds correspond to a period of increased aridity and eolian activity throughout the Mojave Desert during the middle Holocene, with important influences on Av soil genesis and desert pavement development.

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