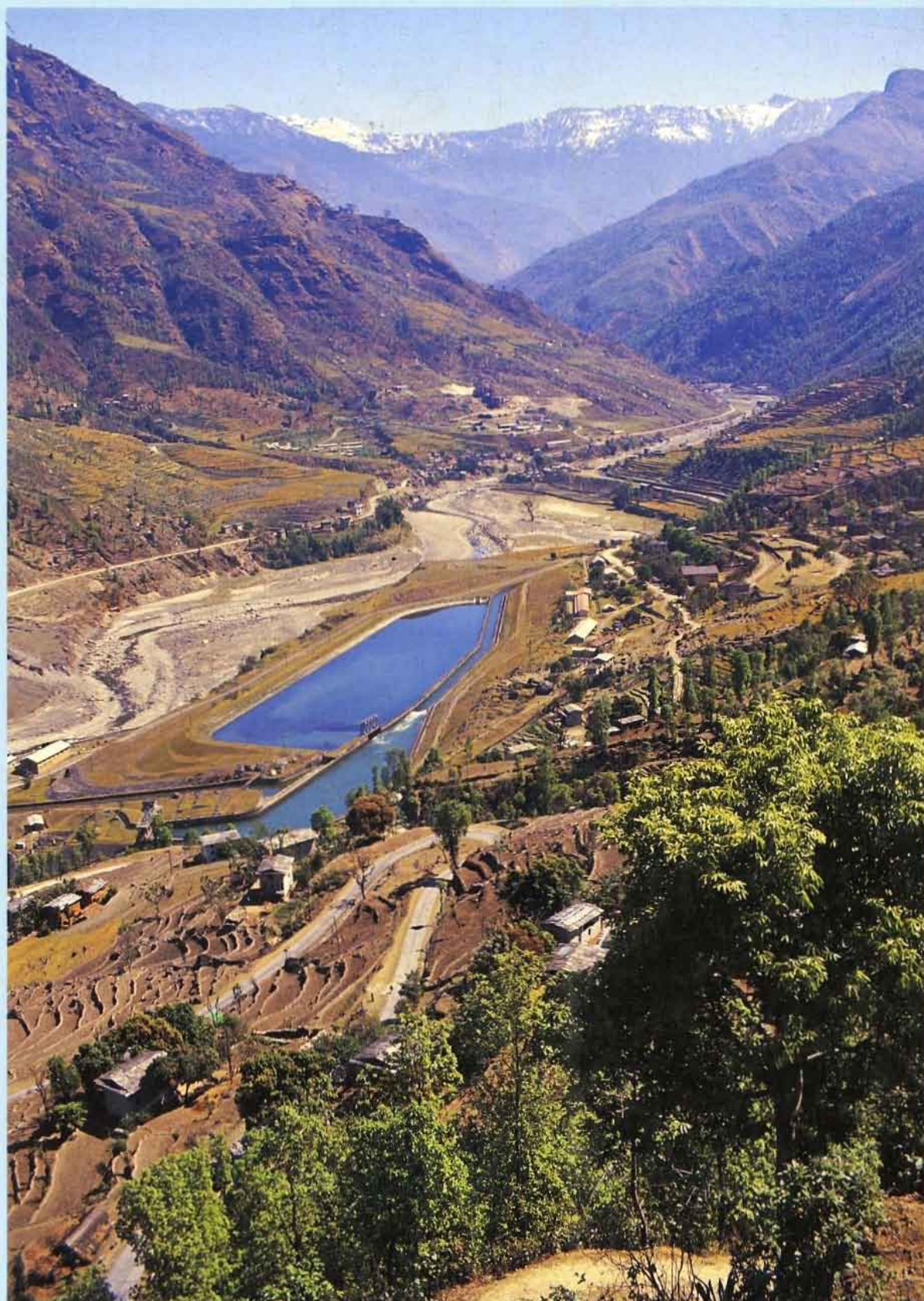


# MOUNTAIN RISK ENGINEERING HANDBOOK

## *SUBJECT BACKGROUND: Part I*



**Cover Photographs : B. Deoja**

**Front : Damages to a mountain road  
along a river.**

**Arniko Highway, Nepal, March 1991.**

**Back : A road blending with the  
environment - Lamosangu-Jiri Road.**



## **Mountain Risk Engineering Handbook - Part I**

**Subject Background**

*Principal Editors* : **B. Deoja, M. Dhital, B. Thapa, A. Wagner**

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## PREFACE

The progressive and effective development of mountain communities through an integrated approach is the principal perspective in ICIMOD's mandate. Infrastructural establishment, therefore, being one of the primary needs for development, has to be carried out, taking into consideration this integrated, holistic perspective. Notwithstanding, experiences indicate that integration of essential modern development technologies with effective and sustainable resource management has not received sufficient attention.

In the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) Region, failures and washouts of roads, irrigation canals, and power plants have resulted in considerable losses of life and property. In addition, the vulnerability of mountain ecosystems has been exacerbated by the techniques applied in establishing infrastructure. Development with conservation is, therefore, essential.

The impacts of artificial structures and human interventions on mountain slopes can only be understood adequately within the context of a broader-based knowledge and understanding of the inherent properties of the materials constituting the mountains themselves and the dynamics that influence the surface and sub-surface processes and environments. Traditional civil engineering education and practices are not adequate to fulfill this requirement.

Geology, the science of the earth, can help to provide the requisite understanding so that civil engineers will have a clear picture of what can be done to keep a structure in place throughout its expected life. This knowledge, however, is only useful to the engineer provided the time horizon, material, and process characterisation provided by geology are adequately scaled, quantitatively ascertained, and clearly presented to facilitate their direct input into civil engineering analysis and design.

The application of engineering-geological inputs is not new in the case of major projects such as dams, tunnels, and mines, but in the case of linear infrastructure, such as roads and canals, scant attention has been paid to engineering-geological inputs, especially in the developing countries. As the pressure of population increases in the mountains, there will be a need for more roads and canals throughout these areas. The additional impacts caused by their construction are bound to accelerate natural destabilization and processes caused by people will add to the forces of nature. This presents us with a choice, i.e., people as a positive force, friendly to nature, or as a negative force that is hostile to nature.

The devegetation and deforestation associated with infrastructural establishment have created an extremely important role for soil conservation, forestry, and ecology so that establishment of plantations and vegetation within the watershed areas that influence roads has become an integral part of normal engineering practice. Long-term, sustainable protection of mountain slopes influences infrastructural stability and, in this respect, plantations and vegetation are crucial because engineering solutions alone are neither cost-effective nor hospitable to mountain ecosystems.

Infrastructural development is no longer the domain of a single discipline, i.e., civil engineering, and mountain infrastructural engineering cannot be separated from a basic knowledge of the geology, environment, and other related disciplines. The Mountain Risk Engineering (MRE) Programme introduced by ICIMOD is a step forward in the process of the integration of various disciplines in order to induce the establishment of sustainable mountain infrastructural institutions.

This handbook is a synthesis of selected practical experiences and up-to-date literature, and its objective is to provide a working basis for training institutions and practising engineers and geologists involved in the development of infrastructure in mountainous areas, in general, and in the mountainous areas of developing countries, in particular.

The question arises, in the case of developing countries with low per capita income, of the additional costs incurred by MRE approaches. How much room is realistically available in fragile mountain terrains for site selection? how compatible is the concern for resource conservation over the long term with the immediate needs of a subsistence economy? and so on.

A comprehensive response to all of these concerns is outside the scope of this Handbook. Nevertheless, experience has shown that there is ample room for the minimisation of hazards and that the cost of rehabilitating failed infrastructures will easily offset the one or two per cent of additional expenditure needed for proper investigation and analysis. In addition, the benefits accruing from soil loss reduction and reduction in the loss of productive land, caused by hazards incurred by infrastructures designed within a narrow framework, are additional bonuses.

This handbook is a combination, of an earlier draft version and incorporates inputs and comments received from several resource persons and institutions, both in the Region itself and from other parts of the world. For this reason, and because of the limited time period permitted for its completion, the general spelling style has, by and large, had to follow the most common usage prevailing in the case of each term and word. Had we standardised to one of the principal dictionary styles (Websters or Oxford) the document would not have been completed within the time-frame required, given the facilities available. In short, the amount of material to be edited, and the degree of editing prohibited by this, is a fact regretted by the editor.

The complete MRE approach has been used to conduct a feasibility study for, and to design a road project in, Nepal. Obviously, there will be more inputs of this nature in future and the Handbook will need revision from time to time until Mountain Risk Engineering establishes itself as a discipline in its own right and until it is fully institutionalised within the infrastructural agencies of the developing mountain nations. In this respect, an Expert Group Meeting, International Consultative Meeting, Pilot Training, and individual visits from academicians, policy makers, and donor agencies have served to indicate the sizeable degree of enthusiasm already existing as a result of the establishment of the Mountain Risk Engineering Project.

Thanks are due to all those who helped us to achieve this task; those who inspired ICIMOD and who became inspired by ICIMOD about Mountain Risk Engineering. The mountains, which remained seemingly silent, but nonetheless dynamic, will give more to mountain inhabitants than they will receive provided we handle them with care.

These mountains, seemingly silent but truly dynamic, have a lot to give to the people of the mountains as well as to the people of the plains provided we start to understand and appreciate them. MRE, thus, begins this process.

Birendra Deoja

MRE Project Coordinator

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook on Mountain Risk Engineering (MRE) is the product of the contributions of many people. I am grateful to all of them. In particular, I wish to record my deep appreciation and thanks to Dr. Colin Rosser, the Previous Director, for the initiation of Mountain Risk Engineering (MRE) work at ICIMOD and Dr. E. F. Tacke, the current Director, for his encouragement and untiring support throughout the work on the completion of MRE Phase I and for initiating MRE Phase II which has resulted in the first full-scale publication of this Handbook.

The generous financial support of the Commission of the European Economic Community (EEC), for Phase I, and the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and German Technical Assistance (GTZ), for Phase II, are gratefully acknowledged. This is indicative of their growing concern for the deteriorating mountain environment and the increasing impoverishment of its inhabitants.

Alexis Wagner of ITECO International, Switzerland, Dr. Mahesh Banskota, Chief Programme Coordinator, Mr. Surendra Shrestha, the Chief Administrator, and Dr. M. Abdullah, the former Head of the Mountain Infrastructure and Technology Division of ICIMOD, assisted in the development of the project proposal and also helped in many ways in the completion of this work. Similarly, N.D. Sharma, Director General of the Department of Roads, HMG, Nepal provided his enthusiastic support and guidance. There were also several institutions that have been supportive throughout the whole period and a few of these are: The Department of Roads, HMG, Nepal; ITECO International, Switzerland; The University of Roorkee, India; The Transport and Road Research Laboratory (TRRL), U.K.; The Public Works' Department, Bhutan; The Ministry of Communication, NWFP, Pakistan; The Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing; Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu; The Department of Mines and Geology, HMG, Nepal; and ITECO-Nepal, Kathmandu.

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The Handbook would never have been completed, within the short period of time given, without the untiring efforts of its team of contributors, Dr. R. Anbalagan, Dr. Dominique Chapellier, Dr. M. Dhital, Tom Heah, K.C. Manandhar, Dr. Tej Partap, Urs Schaffner, Dr. Bhawani Singh, Bhaskar Thapa, and Alexis Wagner.

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Greta Rana, the editor of ICIMOD, undertook the task of editing this voluminous manuscript in such a short period of time and made our task easier in preparing this manuscript which is now lucid and readable.

The figures for the handbook have been painstakingly prepared by three excellent draughtsmen, Bipin Ghimire, P.B. Shaky, and S. B. Phainju.

There are many others who have given their support both within and outside ICIMOD and, although they have not been listed here because of paucity of space, they are gratefully and duly acknowledged. Finally, we are grateful to all those authors whose generous contributions have made it possible to bring out this Handbook on Mountain Risk Engineering.

Birendra Deoja

MRE Project Coordinator

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## FOREWORD

Infrastructural development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region is a formidable task with considerable problems caused by washouts and failures resulting from landslides, erosion, and gullyng. Such problems are, to a significant extent, triggered by faulty planning and designing of mountain infrastructure which also have ramifications on their construction and maintenance. These problems are compounded by mass movements caused by natural processes, deforestation, and other human interventions. They constitute a huge challenge for the building and maintenance of sound physical infrastructure. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop guidelines for the construction of infrastructure that is ecologically stable and economically viable. It is in this context that the mountain risk engineering programme was started in January 1988 with financial support from the European Economic Community (EEC).

The first draft manual on Training in Mountain Risk Engineering was tested during a nine week pilot training programme from February-April 1989. Twenty participants, mainly engineers and geologists from Bhutan, China, Nepal, and Pakistan, participated in the training sessions. Subsequently the manual was revised and put into folder form for convenient distribution. The preparation of the manual was undertaken by ICIMOD staff in close collaboration with short-term professional inputs from Europe and the Regional countries.

The manual was sent to international experts in this field for their comments. This was followed by the organisation of an International Consultative Meeting on Mountain Risk Engineering in February 1990 in Kathmandu. Some 40 experts, representing government agencies, consultants, donor agencies, and university professors, participated and commented on the content and utility of the manual. There was a general consensus that the MRE Manual was an extremely useful document in the context of providing guidance for sound infrastructural development and that its wider application is urgently needed. It has already been used by the Department of Roads and several foreign consultants in Nepal. As a follow up to the recommendation of the Consultative Meeting, the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) were approached for funding for the preparation of this Handbook for wider dissemination and for the organisation of an eight week training programme in Kathmandu on Mountain Risk Engineering; and this they have generously supported.

This Handbook is being produced in two parts and will provide useful reference materials to field engineers engaged in building ecologically and economically sound infrastructure in the mountains. It can also provide useful course material for students who are being trained as civil engineers and geologists.

Finally, Mr. Birendra Deoja, Coordinator of this activity deserves special mention, along with his colleagues, who worked extremely hard to bring out this very useful Handbook on Mountain Risk Engineering.

Dr. E. F. Tacke

Director

# LIST OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	Page (i)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(iii)
FOREWORD	(v)
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 MOUNTAIN RISK ENGINEERING (MRE)	1
1.2 PURPOSE OF THE MRE HANDBOOK	1
1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE MRE HANDBOOK	2
1.4 CONTENTS OF THE MRE HANDBOOK	2
1.5 EVOLUTION OF THE MRE HANDBOOK	3
1.6 USING THE MRE HANDBOOK	4
1.6.1 Users of the MRE Handbook	4
1.6.2 Use of the MRE Handbook	4
1.7 TRAINING CURRICULUM	5
1.7.1 Field-based Practical Training Using Application Guide	5
1.7.2 Equipment and Trainers Required for MRE Training	6
Chapter 2: GEOLOGICAL PROCESSES	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION	
2.1.1 Branches of Geology	7
2.1.2 The Earth's Outer Zones	8
2.1.3 The Earth's Inner Zones	8
2.1.4 The Shape of the Earth	9
2.1.5 Isostasy	9
2.1.6 Plate Tectonics	11
2.1.7 The Geological Time Scale	13
2.2 EXOGENOUS AND ENDOGENOUS PROCESSES	14
2.2.1 Exogenous Processes	14
2.2.2 Endogenous Processes	15
2.3 WEATHERING	15
2.3.1 Physical Weathering	16
2.3.2 Chemical Weathering	16

Tables and Figures are with their relevant sections and are not listed here. The index and references are included in Part II Applications.

2.4	<b>GEOLOGICAL ACTION OF RIVERS</b>	18
2.4.1	<i>River Erosion</i>	18
2.4.2	<i>Transport of Particles</i>	18
2.4.3	<i>Accumulation</i>	19
2.4.4	<i>Geomorphological Features of Rivers</i>	19
2.5	<b>GEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY OF GLACIERS</b>	22
2.5.1	<i>Types of Glacier</i>	22
2.5.2	<i>Deposits of a Glacier: Moraines</i>	22
2.6	<b>HYDROGEOLOGY</b>	22
2.6.1	<i>Types of Water in Rocks</i>	24
2.6.2	<i>Water Tables</i>	24
2.6.3	<i>Reservoir Properties of Rocks</i>	24
2.6.4	<i>Aquifer</i>	25
2.6.5	<i>Spring</i>	25
2.6.6	<i>Water and Soil Slope Movements</i>	26
2.7	<b>ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION OF SOIL</b>	28
2.7.1	<i>Alluvium</i>	28
2.7.2	<i>Alluvial Fan or Delta</i>	30
2.7.3	<i>Eluvial Soils or Regoliths</i>	30
2.7.4	<i>Colluvium</i>	31
2.7.5	<i>Moraine</i>	31
 <b>Chapter 3: MINERALOGY AND PETROLOGY</b>		
3.1	<b>MINERALS AND THEIR PROPERTIES</b>	33
3.1.1	<i>Properties of Rocks</i>	33
3.2	<b>PETROLOGY</b>	40
3.2.1	<i>Igneous Rocks</i>	40
3.2.2	<i>Metamorphic Rocks</i>	44
3.2.3	<i>Sedimentary Rocks</i>	50
 <b>Chapter 4: STRUCTURAL GEOLOGY</b>		
4.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	53
4.2	<b>DEFINITIONS</b>	53
4.2.1	<i>Strike and Dip</i>	53
4.2.2	<i>Trend and Plunge</i>	53
4.3	<b>PRIMARY STRUCTURES</b>	53
4.4	<b>SECONDARY OR TECTONIC STRUCTURES</b>	57
4.4.1	<i>Folds</i>	57
4.4.2	<i>Fractures</i>	59
 <b>Chapter 5: TECTONIC SETTING OF THE HIMALAYA</b>		
5.1	<b>GANGETIC PLAIN</b>	64
5.2	<b>MAIN FRONTAL THRUST (MFT)</b>	64

5.3	SIWALIKS	64
5.4	MAIN BOUNDARY THRUST (MBT)	65
5.5	THE LESSER HIMALAYA	65
5.5.1	<i>The Sedimentary Belt</i>	65
5.5.2	<i>The Metamorphic Belt</i>	67
5.6	MAIN CENTRAL THRUST (MCT)	68
5.7	THE HIGHER HIMALAYA	68

## Chapter 6: THE GEOLOGICAL COMPASS AND ITS FIELD USES

6.1	THE GEOLOGICAL COMPASS	70
6.2	MAGNETIC DECLINATION	70
6.2.1	<i>Definition</i>	70
6.2.2	<i>Adjustment for Declination</i>	70
6.3	FIELD MEASUREMENTS	70
6.3.1	<i>Bearing (or Azimuth)</i>	71
6.3.2	<i>Measuring Geological Structures</i>	72

## Chapter 7: STEREOGRAPHIC PROJECTION

7.1	INTRODUCTION	77
7.2	PROJECTION OF A LINE	77
7.3	PROJECTION OF A PLANE	83
7.4	PROJECTION OF A CONE	83
7.5	PLOTTING TECHNIQUES	83
7.5.1	<i>Plotting a Line</i>	85
7.5.2	<i>Plotting a Plane</i>	85
7.5.3	<i>Plotting a Line Contained in a Plane</i>	88
7.5.4	<i>Plotting a Pole</i>	88
7.5.5	<i>Plotting the Line of Intersection of Two Planes</i>	90
7.5.6	<i>Determination of the Angle between Two Lines</i>	90
7.5.7	<i>Plotting the Line of Intersection of Two Planes from Their Poles</i>	91
7.6	POLE NET	93
7.6.1	<i>Plotting the Pole on a Pole Net</i>	93
7.7	CONTOURING FIELD DATA AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS	93
7.8	DETERMINATION OF EXTENT OF SCATTER AROUND THE MEAN POLE OR GREAT CIRCLE POSITION	99



## **Chapter 8: AERIAL PHOTO INTERPRETATION**

<b>8.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>ELEMENTS OF AERIAL PHOTO INTERPRETATION</b>	<b>101</b>
8.2.1	<i>Topography</i>	101
8.2.2	<i>Drainage</i>	101
8.2.3	<i>Gray Tone</i>	102
8.2.4	<i>Erosion</i>	102
8.2.5	<i>Vegetation</i>	103
8.2.6	<i>Miscellaneous Features</i>	103
<b>8.3</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION OF ROCK TYPES</b>	<b>103</b>

## **Chapter 9: SOIL MECHANICS**

<b>9.1</b>	<b>DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>109</b>
9.1.1	<i>Solid-Air-Water Phase Relationship</i>	109
9.1.2	<i>Gradation of Soils</i>	110
9.1.3	<i>Plasticity of Fine-grained Soils</i>	111
9.1.4	<i>Soil Density</i>	112
9.1.5	<i>Flow of Water</i>	113
9.1.6	<i>Stresses in a Soil Mass</i>	115
9.1.7	<i>Shear Strength</i>	116
9.1.8	<i>Consolidation</i>	116
9.1.9	<i>Bearing Capacity</i>	117
9.1.10	<i>Lateral Earth Pressure</i>	117
<b>9.2</b>	<b>FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF SOILS</b>	<b>118</b>
9.2.1	<i>Test Methods</i>	118
<b>9.3</b>	<b>UNIFIED CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM</b>	<b>125</b>
9.3.1	<i>Soil Properties Used in Classification</i>	125
9.3.2	<i>Definition of Soil Components</i>	125
9.3.3	<i>The Plasticity Chart</i>	128
9.3.4	<i>Summary of the Unified Classification System</i>	128
<b>9.4</b>	<b>ENGINEERING PROPERTIES</b>	<b>130</b>

## **Chapter 10: ROCK MECHANICS**

<b>10.1</b>	<b>SHEAR STRENGTH OF ROCKS</b>	<b>136</b>
10.1.1	<i>Peak and Residual Shear Strength</i>	137
10.1.2	<i>Shear Strength of Rocks with Single Discontinuity - Plane Surface</i>	138
10.1.3	<i>Shear Strength of Single Discontinuity</i>	139
10.1.4	<i>Shear Strength of Filled Discontinuities</i>	143
10.1.5	<i>Shear Strength of Closely Jointed Rock Mass</i>	143
<b>10.2</b>	<b>DETERMINATION OF SHEAR STRENGTH</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>10.3</b>	<b>ROCK MASS CLASSIFICATION</b>	<b>146</b>

## Chapter 11: GEOPHYSICS

11.1	INTRODUCTION	153
11.2	SEISMIC REFRACTION METHOD	154
11.2.1	<i>Uses of Seismic Refraction</i>	154
11.2.2	<i>Definitions</i>	154
11.2.3	<i>Data Acquisition</i>	156
11.2.4	<i>Seismic Wave Propagation</i>	160
11.2.5	<i>Parallel Interfaces</i>	161
11.2.6	<i>Analysis of Time-distance Graphs</i>	162
11.2.7	<i>Examples of Geological Models Inferred from Seismic Refraction</i>	166
11.3	ELECTRICITY RESISTIVITY METHOD	175
11.3.1	<i>Resistivity of Rocks</i>	175
11.3.1a	<i>The Quality of the Electrolyte</i>	175
11.3.1b	<i>The Quantity of Electrolyte</i>	175
11.3.2	<i>Darcy's Law</i>	176
11.3.3	<i>Point Current Electrode on Homogeneous Earth</i>	177
11.3.4	<i>Apparent Resistivity</i>	179
11.3.5	<i>Current Penetration</i>	179
11.3.6	<i>Depth of Investigation</i>	179
11.3.7	<i>Heterogeneous Medium</i>	180
11.3.8	<i>Electrical Profiling or Mapping</i>	180
11.4	ELECTRICAL SOUNDING	183
11.4.1	<i>Field Procedure</i>	183
11.4.2	<i>Plotting</i>	183
11.4.3	<i>Quantitative Interpretation</i>	184
11.4.4	<i>Interpretation by Curve Matching</i>	187

## Chapter 12: MASS WASTING

12.1	INTRODUCTION	188
12.2	TYPES OF MASS MOVEMENT	188
12.2.1a	<i>Falls</i>	188
12.2.1b	<i>Topples</i>	188
12.2.1c	<i>Slides</i>	188
12.2.1d	<i>Spreads</i>	189
12.2.1e	<i>Flows</i>	189
12.2.1f	<i>Complex Movements</i>	190
12.3	CAUSES OF LANDSLIDES	191
12.3.1	<i>Natural Factors</i>	191
12.3.2	<i>Anthropogenic Factors</i>	191
12.4	MAIN TRIGGERS OF MAJOR LANDSLIDES AND THEIR CONTROL	192
12.4.1	<i>Earthquake-induced Landslides</i>	192
12.4.2	<i>Rainfall-induced Landslides</i>	192
12.5	PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF LANDSLIDES	193
12.6	LANDSLIDE-DAMS	194
12.6.1	<i>Causes of Landslide-Dams</i>	194
12.6.2	<i>Failure of Landslide-Dams</i>	195

12.6.3	<i>Floods from Landslide-Dam Failure</i>	195
12.6.4	<i>Methods of Preventing Landslide-Dam Failure</i>	195
12.7	<b>GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOODS</b>	196

## Chapter 13: STABILITY ANALYSIS OF SLOPES AND PROBABILITY OF SLOPE FAILURE

13.1	<b>PURPOSE OF SLOPE STABILITY ANALYSIS</b>	200
13.2	<b>LEVELS OF SLOPE STABILITY ANALYSIS</b>	200
13.2.1	<i>Network Level Planning</i>	200
13.2.2	<i>Project Level Planning</i>	201
13.2.3	<i>Implementation Level</i>	201
13.3	<b>STABILITY ANALYSIS OF SOIL SLOPES</b>	201
13.3.1	<i>Total Stress and Effective Stress</i>	202
13.3.2	<i>Analysis of Infinite Slope and Plane Translation Failures</i>	202
13.3.3	<i>Debris Flow</i>	207
13.3.4	<i>Finite Slope Failure on Curved Surface</i>	208
13.3.5	<i>Soil Slope Analysis by Method of Slices</i>	211
13.4	<b>ROCK SLOPE STABILITY</b>	227
13.4.1	<i>Plane Failure</i>	228
13.4.2	<i>Wedge Failure</i>	237
13.5	<b>LANDSLIDES</b>	248
13.5.1	<i>Causes of Landslides</i>	257
13.5.2	<i>Mechanics of Landslides</i>	259
13.5.3	<i>Back Analysis of Landslides</i>	260
13.5.4	<i>Design Factors of Safety</i>	260

## Chapter 14: HAZARDS AND RISKS

14.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	262
14.1.1	<i>Natural Variability</i>	262
14.1.2a	<i>Measurement Errors</i>	262
14.1.2b	<i>Simplification Errors</i>	262
14.2	<b>HAZARDS</b>	262
14.3	<b>RISKS</b>	263
14.4	<b>USE OF HAZARDS AND RISKS IN DECISION-MAKING ON HILL ROADS</b>	263
14.4.1	<i>Prefeasibility and Feasibility Assessments</i>	263
14.4.2	<i>Detailed Design Stage Assessments</i>	264
14.5	<b>ASSESSMENT OF HAZARDS AND RISKS</b>	268

## Chapter 15: CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

15.1	<b>PURPOSE AND USES OF AGGREGATES</b>	271
15.1.1	<i>Aggregates Used without the Addition of a Cementing Material</i>	271

15.1.2	<i>Aggregates for Bituminous Pavement Layers</i>	271
15.1.3	<i>Aggregate in Fresh, Plastic Concrete</i>	272
15.1.4	<i>Aggregates in Hardened Concrete</i>	272
15.2	<b>AGGREGATE QUALITIES OF CONCERN</b>	273
15.2.1	<i>Test for the Evaluation of the Quality of Aggregates</i>	273
15.2.2	<i>Maximum Size Aggregate in Concrete</i>	276
15.3	<b>PROPERTIES OF AGGREGATES</b>	282
15.3.1	<i>Physical Properties</i>	283
15.3.2	<i>Chemical Properties</i>	287
15.4	<b>SPECIFICATIONS AND PROPERTIES</b>	288
15.4.1	<i>Local Specifications and Their Importance</i>	289
15.4.2	<i>Quality Requirements for Aggregates</i>	289
15.5	<b>AGGREGATE CALCULATIONS</b>	293
15.5.1	<i>Sieve Analysis Data</i>	293
15.5.2	<i>Combining Aggregate Gradings</i>	293
15.5.3	<i>Two Graphical Methods for Blending Aggregates</i>	295
15.6	<b>AGGREGATE PROPERTIES AND BEHAVIOUR PECULIAR TO BITUMINOUS MIXTURES</b>	299
15.7	<b>SUMMARY OF PHYSICAL PROPERTIES, ENGINEERING PROPERTIES, AND MINERAL COMPOSITION OF ROCKS (See Tables 15.10, 15.11, and 15.12)</b>	308
15.8	<b>SOME COMMONLY USED GEOLOGICAL AND MINERALOGICAL TERMS</b>	311

## Chapter 16: ECOLOGY AND BIOTECHNICAL STABILIZATIONS

16.1	<b>ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS OF ROADSIDE PLANTATIONS</b>	314
16.1.1	<i>Introduction</i>	314
16.1.2	<i>Contributions for Restoration, Maintenance, and Conservation of Ecosystems</i>	316
16.1.3	<i>Contributions Supporting the Sustainability of Agroecosystems</i>	318
16.1.4	<i>Contributions to Maintain the Quality of Physical Health of Ecosystems</i>	321
16.1.5	<i>Pattern of Changes in Roadside Plantation Approaches</i>	323
16.1.6	<i>Engineering Angles on the Orientation of Plantation</i>	324
16.1.7	<i>Choice of Species for Planting</i>	325
16.2	<b>BIOTECHNICAL STABILIZATION</b>	341
16.2.1	<i>Introduction</i>	341
16.2.2	<i>Surface Erosion</i>	341
16.2.3	<i>Increase in Shearing Strength</i>	356
16.2.4	<i>Moisture Content and Groundwater Table Reduction</i>	368

## Chapter 17: RETAINING WALLS

17.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	377
17.2	<b>LATERAL EARTH PRESSURE</b>	377
17.2.1	<i>Equations for Static Conditions for Stresses in a Two-dimensional Case</i>	380
17.2.2	<i>Lateral Earth Pressure for At-rest Condition</i>	381
17.2.3	<i>Active and Passive Earth Pressure</i>	384



17.3	RIGOROUS DESIGN OF RETAINING WALLS	389
17.3.1	<i>Design of Gravity Type Retaining Wall</i>	389
17.3.2	<i>Crib Walls</i>	403
17.3.3	<i>Tieback Wall</i>	404
17.3.4	<i>Design of Reinforced Earth Walls-Empirical Method</i>	406

## Chapter 18: PAVEMENT DESIGN

18.1	TRAFFIC CONVERSION TO EQUIVALENT SINGLE AXLE LOAD	411
18.2	LAND DISTRIBUTION OF TRAFFIC	414
18.3	DESIGN LOAD	414
18.4	DESIGN METHODS	415
18.4.1	<i>CBR Method</i>	415
18.4.2	<i>U.S. Corps of Engineers' Method</i>	416
18.4.3	<i>The TRRL Method</i>	416
18.4.4	<i>R-Value Method</i>	416
18.4.5	<i>Structural Number (AASHTO 1985) Method</i>	416
18.4.6	<i>Mechanistic Empirical Method</i>	417
18.4.7	<i>Criteria for Failure</i>	417
18.4.8	<i>Advantages of Disadvantages of Mechanistic Design</i>	417
18.4.9	<i>Existing Computer Programmes for Layered-Elastic Analysis</i>	418
18.5	EXAMPLE OF NEW PAVEMENT DESIGN BY DIFFERENT METHODS	424
18.5.1	<i>Corps of Engineers CBR Method</i>	424
18.5.2	<i>TRRL Road Note 31</i>	424
18.5.3	<i>TRRL Road Note 29</i>	424
18.5.4	<i>Structural Number (SN) - AASHTO, 1985, Method</i>	424
18.5.5	<i>Asphalt Institute Method</i>	426
18.5.7	<i>TRRL Laboratory Report 1132</i>	427
18.5.7	<i>Mechanistic - Empirical Design Using CHEVPC Computer Programme</i>	427
18.5.8	<i>R-Value Method</i>	427
18.6	OVERLAY DESIGN	458
18.6.1	<i>Overlaying Design by Component Analysis Based on the Asphalt Institute</i>	459
18.6.2	<i>Overlay Design Based on AASHTO Design Guide</i>	465
18.6.3	<i>Overlay Based on Deflection Criteria</i>	465
18.6.4	<i>Overlay Design by Mechanistic Analysis</i>	469

## Chapter 19: DRAINAGE

19.1	INTRODUCTION	486
19.2	HYDROLOGY	486
19.2.1	<i>Intensity, Frequency, and Duration of Rainfall</i>	486
19.2.2	<i>Design Flood and Its Frequency</i>	488
19.2.3	<i>Method of Runoff Prediction</i>	489
19.3	HYDRAULICS	495
19.3.1	<i>Hydraulics of Drainage Channels</i>	495
19.3.2	<i>Hydraulic Design of Culverts</i>	505

## Chapter 20: TRANSPORTATION ECONOMICS

20.1	INTRODUCTION	524
20.2	BASIC CONCEPTS	524
20.2.1	<i>Time Value of Money</i>	524
20.2.2	<i>Common Terms in Economic Analysis</i>	525
20.2.3	<i>Costs and Benefits</i>	526
20.2.4	<i>Methods of Economic Evaluation</i>	529
20.2.5	<i>Terms Related to Cash Flow Analysis Method</i>	532
20.2.6	<i>Equations Relating to Cash Flow Analysis</i>	533
20.2.7	<i>Sensitivity Analysis and Risk Analysis</i>	538
20.3	ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ECONOMIC ANALYSIS USING LONG-RUN ECONOMIC PLANNING (LREP)	539
20.3.1	<i>Long-Run Economic Planning (LREP)</i>	539
20.4	CASH FLOW ANALYSIS AND REVISED RULES FOR THE IRR METHOD	
20.4.1	<i>Revised IRR Decision Rules for Determining Project Acceptability</i>	549
20.4.2	<i>Revised Procedure for Ordering Mutually Exclusive Alternatives</i>	554
20.4.3	<i>Revised Decision Rules for Determining the Best Alternative</i>	555
20.4.4	<i>Determining the Best Acceptable Alternative</i>	556
20.5	GENERALIZED HEURISTICS	557