

LEGEND TO ACCOMPANY BIOPHYSICAL REGIONS MAPS 49C (Baumann Fiord) AND 59D (Graham Island)

Geological and geomorphological compilation by D.A. Hodgson, vegetation by B.A. Edlund; based on field work in 1974 and airphoto interpretation in 1974-75.

PURPOSE OF BIOPHYSICAL MAPS

In the eastern Queen Elizabeth Islands, there are too many combinations of the criteria used to form surficial materials units (see concurrent maps and legend) for such units to be used as the key to an interpretive legend. A new system, of biophysical units, was therefore devised to form a framework for the interpretive legend.

Units in surficial materials were considered the most important factor in drawing up the biophysical units, and thus the materials map is used as the base map for presentation (itself drawn on a topographic base). The maps and legend will be better understood if used in conjunction with the materials legend.

UNIT DESIGNATIONS

Units are grouped into areas of generally similar characteristics (particularly materials, genesis, topography). The groups are identified by whole numbers, and described in the first entry of each legend panel. Units within each group are identified as a decimal fraction. Numbers are assigned solely as identifiers, and although the same decimal fraction recurs in different groups, no relationship is intended to be drawn between them.

GLOSSARY

Terms not adequately defined in, or used here in a different sense from, standard texts such as the American Geological Institute Glossary (A.G.I., 1972) or the Encyclopedia of Geomorphology (Ed. by R.M. Rhodes; Reinhold, 1968).

Desiccation polygons: Cracks forming polygons generally 10 cm - 1 m diameter. These can form during either summer or winter desiccation, and are most prevalent on bare fine-grained materials. Cracks may extend below the active layer as thin (<5 cm) wedges.

Ice-wedge polygons: Ice wedges arranged in polygonal patterns. Polygon diameters commonly 5 - 30 m, wedges 5 m in width just below the active layer, tapering out at 3 - 10 m depth. In the upper 2 m of permafrost where ice-wedge polygons are present, wedge ice commonly represents 10-20% of the surficial material. The active layer above the ice wedge is undisturbed, making the presence of the wedge. More commonly, the surface is depressed to form a trough to 50 cm (exceptionally 2 m) deep, and to 2 m (exceptionally 5 m) wide, providing high-centre polygons. More rarely, the surface above the wedge is raised, to form low-centre polygons.

Seepage lines: Linear parallel or subparallel concentrations of surface run-off or moisture, on slopes >10°, in zones generally 0.25 to 2 m (occasionally >5 m) wide, generally spaced at intervals of 0.5 to 2 m (occasionally >5 m). Minor topographic expression (i.e., negligible erosion) is usually identified by downslope lineation of hummock troughs, or by conspicuous sorted or non-sorted stripes. Usually more densely vegetated than adjacent areas; often mossy. Flow or seepage may take place only during snowmelt or prolonged rainfall, or continue through the summer. Solifluction is ubiquitous on such slopes.

Solifluction: Is understood to be the slow flowing from higher to lower ground of masses of water saturated with water, after the original definition by Anderson (J.G. Anderson, J. Geol., v. 14, p. 91-122).

Solifluction lobes are evident on all types of unconsolidated material, but are most prominent on coarse materials. They may attain very large dimensions in this region, e.g., ice heights to 4 m, widths to 15 m, lengths to 50 m.

Thaw/thermokarst ponds: formed where melting of ground ice and the subsequent depression of the ground surface forms closed basins which trap water and accelerate the process. The water may drain or evaporate throughout the summer. Ponds are often initiated over ice wedges.

ndi: Broad flat-floored ephemeral watercourses, common in unconsolidated sand and silt.

FOOTNOTES

1. UNIT: Shown on biophysical regions map. The first entry is a general description of the group of units (e.g., 1); subsequent entries describe the individual units (e.g., 1.1, 1.2).

2. MATERIALS DESCRIPTION: A list of the main surficial material unit designations that occur within the biophysical group or unit. For explanation, see surficial materials legend.

3. TOPOGRAPHY: Each entry is headed by the range of relief in the group or unit. Values are given first in feet, as they were taken from a topographic map. Elsewhere in the legend, metric units are used.

4. SUBSURFICIAL MATERIALS: For greater detail, see surficial materials underlay and legend.

5. GROUND ICE: Observations in the field area were restricted to near natural exposures, and to 15 shallow (<2 m) holes drilled with a CREEP-type barrel in a few fine-grained units. Comments are based mainly on experience gained during a more extensive drilling program carried out on the Fosheim Peninsula of Ellesmere Island in 1973.

6. VEGETATION: Broad plant communities are generally named for the dominant vascular plants. The estimated composition and cover of each community is shown in fraction form. The upper stratum (the muscivora), is composed of vascular plants: grasses, sedges, rushes, dwarf shrubs and herbs. The lower stratum (the denominator), often just a thin surface veneer, is cryptogamic. When the denominator is missing, there is an absence of a lower stratum. Examples: 10C Carex stans-Eriophorum 70% mosses.

7. SENSITIVITY AND TRAFFICABILITY RATINGS: Tentative ratings of each unit have been made. Ratings are commonly based on field observations of disturbed areas or of vehicle movements in similar areas of the Fosheim Peninsula, rather than in map areas 49C or 59D where there have been few vehicle passes. Three periods of the year are recognized in the ratings. Winter: Temperature of surficial materials is below freezing-point. Snow cover general, though some areas may be blown clear. Summer: Period of snow ablation by melting, with air temperatures consistently above freezing-point. Generally from mid-June to mid-July for this region, but variable areally and by altitude, and may only extend over 1-2 weeks at any one location. Can extend through the summer below permafrost. The active layer is shallow, with a high moisture content, often supersaturated. Iron gravels may be near a fluid state, and most mass-movement takes place in this period. Autumn: From the end of snowmelt to the onset of the winter freeze-up in late August. Generally a period of evaporation from the active layer, especially from the upper 5 cm in unvegetated areas, and desiccation of fine-grained materials. Precipitation mainly rain; usually light or of short duration, on rare occasions heavy (ca. >5 mm in a 24-hour period). Total precipitation for June-August ca. 50 mm.

FOOTNOTES

7. SENSITIVITY: This is considered to be the susceptibility of an area to disturbance, where disturbance is a man-initiated change in surface characteristics. Disturbance may be caused by direct action of man, or occur subsequent to such action as a result of a change in the equilibrium of natural processes. In the latter case, the most physical changes of the surface take place during the summer, even if the initiating activity occurred in winter. Original surface conditions may be naturally restored, though it is more likely that changes will be permanent. Magnitude - the probability of disturbance occurring, and the degree to which it occurs.

1. LOW: probably medium, locally high, during snowmelt or prolonged rainfall. No disturbance or minor at other times.

2. MEDIUM: probably high during snowmelt or prolonged rainfall. Disturbance of part or all of the area of activity, but processes not expected to expand disturbance beyond this area.

3. HIGH: disturbance of all or substantial part of area of activity, and processes likely to expand disturbance beyond this area. Expected to hinder continued activities.

4. Disruption of surface drainage, especially by: (i) Concentration, leading to erosion (e.g., culverting only a small percentage of the seepage lines or gullies which cross a road route); (ii) Ponding, leading to an overflow and thus erosion; (iii) Thermal erosion: initiation or acceleration of ground ice melt, especially critical over massive ground ice or ice wedges. Caused by stripping vegetation, excavation, ponding water.

5. Slope failure: instability potential, after excavating or loading. Includes areas where mass-movement processes very active.

Asterisk * indicates only part of the unit affected: e.g., slope failure on stream banks, thermal erosion of ice wedges which cover only part of the unit.

8. TRAFFICABILITY: Assessment of terrain in terms of performance of arctic tracked vehicles. Roughness or grade. 1. Easily traversible in all directions. 2. Traversible, but with difficulty locally or in some directions. 3. Difficult or impossible.

Fracture - includes assessment of ability of surface to bear the vehicle. First value for snow-melt and heavy rain periods / Second value for summer. 1. Easily traversible. 2. Traversible, with slight or local difficulty. 3. Difficult.

Table for Baumann Fiord (49C) showing biophysical units, materials, and ratings. Columns include Unit No., Materials, Topography, Substratum, Sensitivity, and Trafficability.

Table for Graham Island (59D) showing biophysical units, materials, and ratings. Columns include Unit No., Materials, Topography, Substratum, Sensitivity, and Trafficability.

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