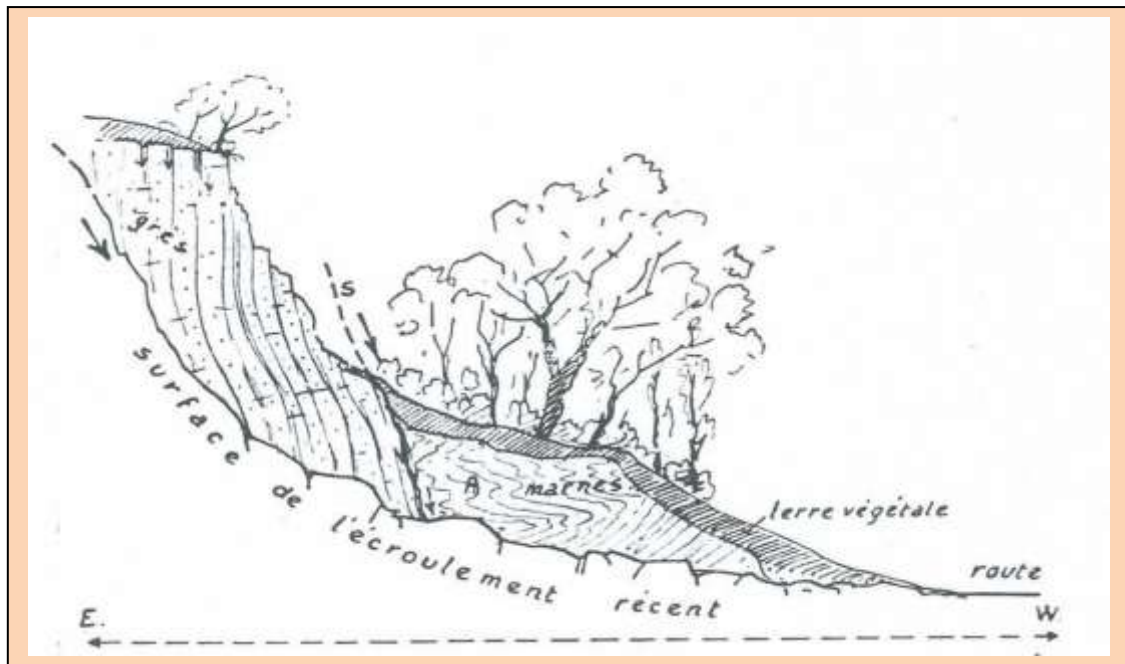


Landslides at “Tresserve Plage”

Cross-section of the hill made by Mr Léon Moret, owner of the new house destroyed by the landslide on 21/03/1934.



**Article by Jack Sports, from ‘l'Avenir d'Aix les Bains’
dated 23/03/1934.**

During the days of Tuesday 20 and Wednesday 21 March 1934, torrential rains poured down on the whole region and caused damage almost everywhere. Along the lakeside road, several apparently benign landslides blocked the road, notably at Quatre Chemins, Bonport and the modern laundry. The Public Services were alerted and cleared the road, which resumed normal traffic the same day.

But there was still one dark spot: according to the judgements and deductions of those in charge, the buildings to the right of the laundry building were

threatened by a landslide from the cliff, which was showing worrying signs of slipping. This delicate spot included a café occupied by Mr Duffaux and Mrs Callou, as well as a recently-built villa belonging to Mr Moret de Lyon that was still uninhabited.

During the night of Tuesday 21 to Wednesday 22 March, the rain had poured down in torrents, and a slimy, treacherous mud began to invade the area around the Duffaux café and the basements of the new villa belonging to Mr Moret de Lyon. All that had been done was to channel the sludge, which did not seem to indicate the terrible outcome of the following day.

The residents of the café were asked to leave their building while this sword of Damocles hung over them. But nothing could be done: advice from neighbours and ourselves failed to convince the strong-minded owner, Mr Duffaux, who told us on the afternoon of the disaster: 'I'll be spending the night here again. I'm not going to bed and I'm going to stay up! And in the reasoning of this tall, robust old man, nothing betrayed any imminent fear that others were trying to communicate to him. Our last meeting with this poor man was at 4 o'clock in the evening. An indefinable foreboding pervaded my colleague and me, in this place so sad in winter, on this road covered with yellowish mud. The clouds were racing across the sky in a dishevelled circle, stretching out their tragic shapes, and the greenish lake was pounding and pounding the shore with tireless monotony. Numerous streams, none of which had existed before, trickled down from the top of the quarry break, and the buildings seemed tiny beneath the straight, bare cliffs of the old molasse quarry.

As the evening wore on, the rain resumed its downpour on the town with the same violence it had shown the previous few days.

Mr Léger, a driver from Le Bourget du Lac, arrived in Aix at a quarter to ten and saw nothing out of the ordinary, but when he drove past half an hour later, the road was invaded by huge, shapeless heaps, tragically illuminated by the headlights of his car.

He returned to raise the alarm in Aix, from where rescue workers set off to begin clearing away the debris. But the rescuers' task was not made any easier by the rain, which fell in cataracts from an ink-black sky, leaving no visibility for the brave men of the first hour. A few vague and uncertain acetylene lamps

illuminated a picture full of distress and horror. The new building crouched in the middle of the road, with a pile of earth, stones and mud next to it, completely burying what had once been the Duffaux café.

The work was resumed with more activity during the day because it was safer for the workers, as the large chimney in the laundry could come down at any moment.

Early in the morning, the departments organised the initial work and enquiries were made as to the whereabouts of Mr Duffaux and Mrs Callou. Everyone clung to this hope: 'Perhaps they left during the night before the accident!

But after confirmation we had to face the sad reality that these poor people had not been seen anywhere during the late night and early morning, so they must have been under the rubble of their house, which was completely covered in stones and mud.

A gigantic crack dominates the disaster, straight as a wall, the earthy molasse rises above these shapeless heaps that were once houses and under which two people lie crushed.



Huge blocks of shale are embedded in the ground, held in place by other blocks that have piled up on top of each other in the mudslide. The large chimney of the laundry room is covered with traces of silt that must have spurted out during the collapse.

A small stone building with a tiled roof, adjacent to the laundry, is also crushed by the pressure of the debris.



It's an impressive sight, this superimposition of dreadful details forming a tragic whole, and at the base of which workmen are busy clearing away the upper materials to find the two unfortunate men buried.

The grim news spread rapidly to Aix and Chambéry, and from these two centres flocked many visitors, curious to see the extent of the disaster. In cars, on bicycles and on foot, there was a constant stream of curious onlookers eager for information and keen to follow the rescue operations. Teams of workers, smeared with the mud in which they were carrying out their clearing work, came, loaded lorries, cleared away with shovels and by hand under the direction of Mr Diès, the engineer, and the heads of private companies and city departments.

In the afternoon, the crowds were so great that the security service set up by the gendarmerie struggled to contain the ever-increasing numbers of people, who sometimes even interfered with the work of the lifeguards.

Among the VIPs present were Mr Campion, prefect of Savoie, Mr Augé, Mr Le-Hanneur, highway engineer; Messrs Simond, Rubod, Duranton and other Aix town councillors; Mr Bugnard, mayor of Tresserve, Mr Montagnole, mayor of Viviers, Mr Ferru, captain of the gendarmerie; Mr Sennebié, public prosecutor in Chambéry and his deputy, Mr Bellau. Canon Jullien, the parish priest of Aix-les-Bains, and Mr Soyer, the gendarmerie commander, followed shortly

afterwards. Mr Gianre, the contractor, who was taking an active part in the work; Mr Boschetto, as well as other personalities who were following with saddened fascination the clearing of the material covering the corpses.

It was nearly three o'clock when the workers unearthed the body of Mrs Callou, who was lying on the ground with her head mutilated. The body was immediately wrapped and transported to one of the laundry rooms before being removed by the mortuary van.

Removing Mr Duffaux proved to be a much trickier task. A mechanical shovel had to clear away this motley heap, under which a mutilated body was sure to be found.

You have to dig down to road level to see the upper part of the body, while a rock covers the legs. This part of the work is excruciatingly painful, and it takes a lot of effort to pull out a man who has literally been crushed by the boulders covering him. His position indicates that he was standing on the doorstep at the time of the disaster, and also shows the suddenness of the landslide, which did not give this man, who was dressed to get out, the time he needed to flee the disaster. A little before six o'clock, the mutilated body was transported on a lorry and the crowd that had been waiting for this last discovery left on their own and returned to the town, commenting on this terrible accident.

The work was not continued during the night. As these lines are being drawn, work to clear the road is being actively pushed forward in order to free up this busy thoroughfare.

This tragic event was and still is the talk of Aix. People remember the deceased and their lives, and this is easy to deduce, as Mr Duffaux was very well known in Aix and throughout the region.

He wrote some witty pages in patois in our colleague 'L'écho de Savoie'. It is therefore a very painful impression to hear the details of this misfortune.

Without wishing to echo certain rumours which, by their exaggerated pessimism, distort the facts, let us hope that such a disaster.....foreseeable however.....will encourage everyone to act with reflection and moderation.

Photos by Léon Moret