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1 **Retreat rates, modalities and agents responsible for erosion along the coastal chalk**
2 **cliffs of Upper Normandy: the contribution of terrestrial laser scanning**

3

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17

18 **Abstract:**

19 In order to follow all the changes affecting the coastal chalk cliff face in Upper Normandy and
20 improve knowledge about cliff erosion, repeated terrestrial laser scanning (TLS) surveys
21 were carried out frequently between 2010 and 2013 (every 4–5 months). They were
22 conducted at two sites with similar lithostratigraphic characteristics but different exposures to
23 marine actions (the former being an abandoned cliff and the latter an active cliff). They
24 provide a quantification of the production of debris with centimeter precision (from ± 0.01 to
25 0.04 m). These surveys provided three major outcomes: 1) cliff retreat rates were measured
26 at high spatial resolution with retreat values, unsurprisingly, 3-4 times higher for an active cliff
27 than for an abandoned cliff. This result highlights that marine actions should be seen as not
28 only a transport agent but also a particularly effective erosion agent; 2) a significant

29 proportion of debris fall production (about 25%) in the total active cliff retreat was identified;
30 and 3) one of the modalities of retreat was visualized as the creation of a basal notch, which
31 propagates instability towards the upper part of the cliff face. Later, this instability generates
32 rock falls coming from the whole cliff face.

33

34 Highlights:

- 35 • Two sites with similar lithology but different exposures to marine actions are studied.
- 36 • Cliff face changes over time and by location are examined using TLS.
- 37 • Marine actions are an effective agent of erosion.
- 38 • The proportion of debris fall production is about 25% in the active cliff retreat.
- 39 • A basal notch propagates instability towards the upper part of the cliff face.

40

41 Keywords: Coastal chalk cliff; Retreat rates; Retreat modalities; Agents for erosion;

42 Terrestrial laser scanning; Upper Normandy

43

44 **1. Introduction**

45 To understand the regressive dynamics of coastal cliffs, the knowledge of retreat rates at fine
46 scale and the study of agents leading to erosion are major challenges (Trenhaile, 1987;
47 Sunamura, 1992; Griggs and Trenhaile, 1994; Stephenson et al., 2013). Erosion is
48 traditionally quantified by studying the rates of retreat of a spatial object tracked over time,
49 often the cliff top (Bird, 2008). However, these average retreat rates are incomplete
50 information because they do not reflect the sudden nature of the hazard. This results in rock
51 falls that threaten populations located at the cliff top and at the cliff foot. Thus, retreat occurs
52 in “jerks”, generated by the interaction of both internal factors (e.g., rock strength and
53 structure) and external factors (e.g., rainfall, temperature variations, and wave action). The
54 contribution of the latter to triggering rock falls is difficult to determine (Letortu et al., in
55 press). “Rock fall” is used in this paper to describe movements of coherent rock (Varnes,
56 1978). From Varnes’ typology, two types of movement can be distinguished according to the

57 fallen volume: 1) debris falls describe the small-scale release of tiny blocks or flakes (up to
58 decimeter) from across the cliff face; and 2) rock falls describe large-scale movements from
59 all or part of the cliff face. The former are common on rocky slopes but are often omitted in
60 quantification due to their fine scale or unsuitable point of view. Far from negligible, their
61 participation is estimated at about 10% of the total retreat (May and Heeps, 1985; Hénaff et
62 al., 2002) and may be an early sign of instability. Monitoring these jerks requires a high
63 spatial and temporal resolution and a horizontal point of view that enables all changes to be
64 monitored (Young et al., 2009).

65 Due to unstable and subvertical cliff faces, quantification is difficult and sometimes
66 dangerous. For these reasons, remote sensing technologies are mainly used. Aerial images
67 can be used but the data accuracy is, at best, pluridecimeter and the point of view is
68 inappropriate (vertical or oblique). Recent advances in remote sensing technology, in
69 particular the improvement in the spatial resolution, may provide effective measurement
70 tools. They may also offer the opportunity of conducting surveys at higher temporal
71 frequency. Satellite data are interesting but their spatial resolution still appears insufficient for
72 monitoring debris falls. Photogrammetry is not used because its reliability is affected by the
73 height of the cliffs (Lim et al., 2005) but new developments are promising. Terrestrial Laser
74 Scanning (TLS) is particularly convenient because the temporal and spatial resolution, as
75 well as the point of view, can be defined by the user.

76 The TLS technique, described as "*one of the most promising surveying techniques for*
77 *rockslope characterization and monitoring*" (Abellán et al., 2009), has been widely used in
78 the study of mass transfers to:

79 1) identify structural and geomorphological characteristics of landslides (Oppikofer et al.,
80 2009; Sturzenegger and Stead, 2009; Rothmund et al., 2013), landslide mapping (Rowlands
81 et al., 2003) and displacement tracking (Delacourt et al., 2007; Oppikofer et al., 2008, 2012;
82 Teza et al., 2008; Travelletti et al., 2008, 2013; Abellán et al., 2009, 2010);

83 2) analyze rock falls including those affecting cliffs (Lim et al., 2005, 2010; Rosser et al.,
84 2005, 2013; Quinn et al., 2010; Dewez et al., 2013; Abellán et al., 2014; Kuhn and Prüfer,
85 2014);

86 3) analyze warning movements of falls (Rosser et al., 2007; Abellán et al., 2009, 2010;
87 Royán et al., 2014).

88 In our study, TLS is used for repeated surveys in order to observe the evolution of the cliff
89 face at two sites with a similar lithological context but subject to different marine forcing
90 (abandoned and active cliffs). The aim is to quantify erosion at fine scale, to visualize the
91 modalities of retreat and to contribute to the debate about the agents responsible for erosion
92 of the Upper Normandy chalk cliffs. This paper first explains the study area and details the
93 material and the TLS survey methodology. Then, the results of the cliff face monitoring are
94 described and discussed.

95

96 **2. Study area**

97 *2.1. Regional setting*

98 Upper Normandy is located in the northwestern part of France, on both sides of the 50th
99 northern parallel, along the English Channel (epicontinental sea, 86 m deep on average).

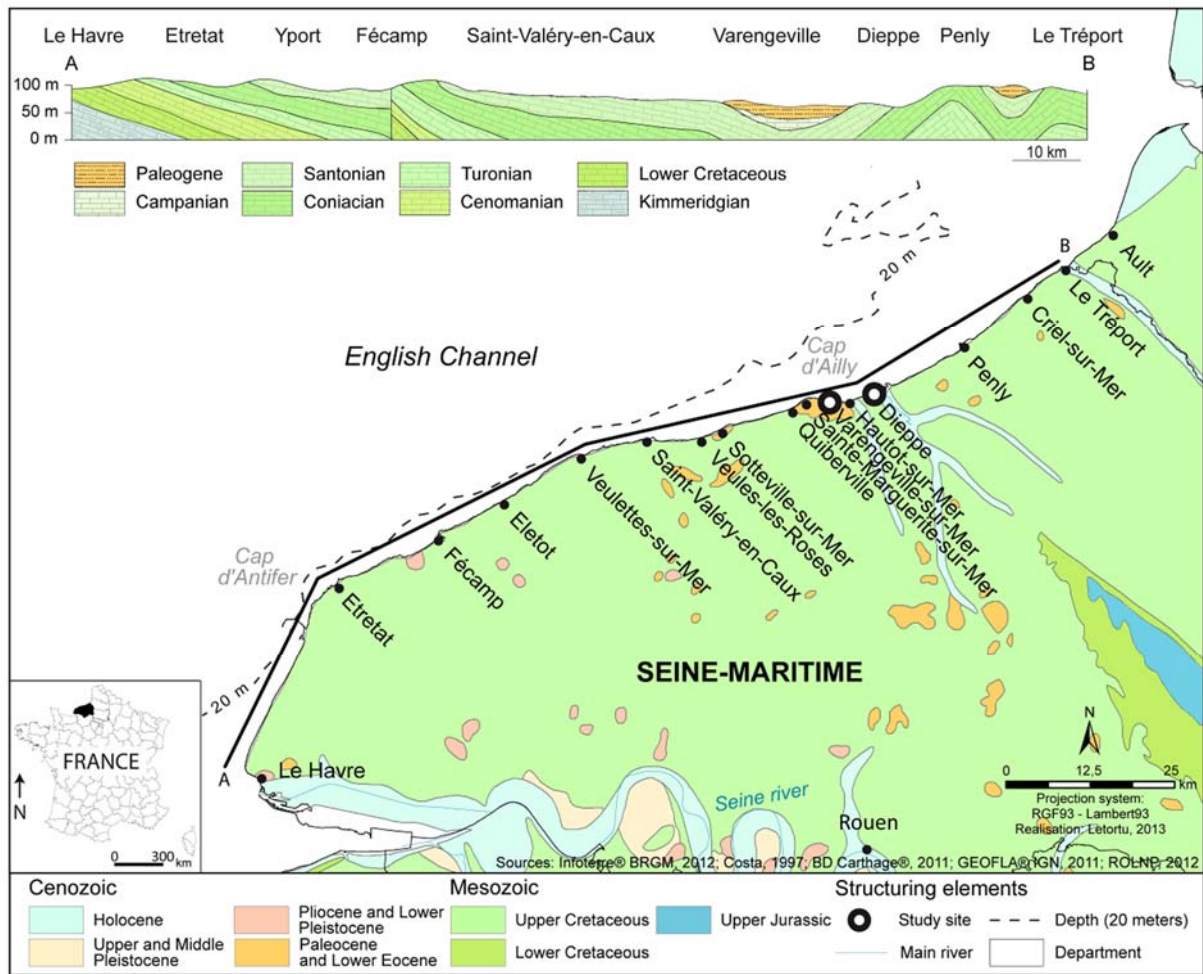
100 The environment is macrotidal with a tidal range of 8 m. Swell is limited but the wind sea can
101 reach a significant wave height of 4 m in Dieppe (annual return period). Upper Normandy has
102 a marine west coast climate. From Météo-France data (1971–2000), average winter
103 temperatures are positive but an average of 26 daily freeze/thaw cycles is recorded per year
104 (minimal temperature can reach -15°C). Rainfall is distributed over the year (≈ 800 mm)
105 although fall and winter are the wettest seasons (51 mm in August and 94 mm in November).
106 Daily rainfall can exceed 77 mm in October. The Upper Normandy cliffs, 60–70 m high on
107 average, extend 120 km from Le Havre (SW) to Le Tréport (NE) (Seine-Maritime) (Fig. 1). At
108 their foot, there is a marine erosion platform (from 150 to 350 m wide), hidden, at the upper
109 part of the beach, by a thin gravel beach. The cliffs are intersected by numerous drained or

110 dry valleys perpendicular to the coast, protected at their outlet by often wide (from 30 to 100
111 m) gravel beaches due to the presence of groins or harbor jetties.

112 At the northwestern end of the sedimentary Paris Basin and in contact with the English
113 Channel, the Upper Normandy cliffs between Cap d'Antifer and Le Tréport are made of chalk
114 with flints, dated as Upper Cretaceous (Pomerol et al., 1987; Mortimore and Duperret, 2004).
115 On this highly karstified frame (Rodet, 1991), there are residual flint formations and
116 Quaternary loess (Lautridou, 1985). The main tectonic deformations (NW–SE) have led to
117 the outcrop of various Upper Cretaceous geological strata (Fig. 1). The different stages of
118 chalk have slight variations in facies and fine sedimentary discontinuities, which generate
119 some subtle resistance contrasts (Juignet and Breton, 1992; Laignel, 1997; Lasseur, 2007).

120 From the oldest to the newest, Cenomanian chalk outcrops a few meters at the base of the
121 cliffs of Cap d'Antifer and Etretat, and east of Fécamp. It is heterogeneous, sometimes rich in
122 detrital components (clay and quartz), and may be glauconitic or nodular. Turonian chalk is
123 the overlying strata. It is composed of clayish, grayish to whitish chalk, with frequent nodular
124 beds and little or no flint. This stage outcrops from Cap d'Antifer to Etretat, from Fécamp to
125 Eletot, and from Puys (east of Dieppe) to Le Tréport. Turonian chalk is covered with
126 Coniacian chalk, outcropping between Cap d'Antifer and Saint-Valéry-en-Caux, and between
127 Dieppe and Le Tréport. The overlying stage, Santonian chalk, appears in the central part of
128 the study area between Saint-Valéry-en-Caux and Puys. Finally, Campanian chalk, the most
129 recent one, is only found between Quiberville and Pourville-sur-Mer (Hautot-sur-Mer). In
130 relation to geotechnical studies, Santonian and Campanian chalk seem more favorable to
131 weathering than other stages of the Upper Cretaceous (Laignel, 1997). Over these chalk
132 strata, a bed of clay and sand sediments about 10 to 30 m thick of Paleogene age (Bignot,
133 1962) replaces the usual residual flint formation (Laignel, 1997; Costa et al., 2006a),
134 especially in Sainte-Marguerite-sur-Mer, Varengeville-sur-Mer (these two towns are located
135 along Cap d'Ailly) and Sotteville-sur-Mer (Fig. 1).

136



137

138 Fig. 1: Presentation of the study area

139

140 The regressive dynamics of the Upper Normandy cliffs are expressed by instantaneous rock
 141 falls affecting all or part of the cliff. At the foot of the slopes, a fine gravel beach develops but
 142 the deposits are only a few meters thick. The tracking and distribution of these beaches are
 143 affected by rock falls and man-made structures (harbor jetties and groins), which are
 144 obstacles to longshore drift. The absence of a beach or a reduced amount of beach
 145 sediments at the cliff foot may alter the effectiveness of marine actions, and therefore the
 146 intensity and modalities of erosion (Costa et al., 2006b).

147 The regressive dynamics followed by the cliff top between 1966 and 2008 (photogrammetry
 148 and orthophotography) reveal a retreat rate of 0.15 m y^{-1} with high spatial variability in Upper
 149 Normandy (Costa et al., 2004; Letortu, 2013; Letortu et al., 2014). However, these average
 150 retreat rates provide only fragmentary information because they do not describe the sudden

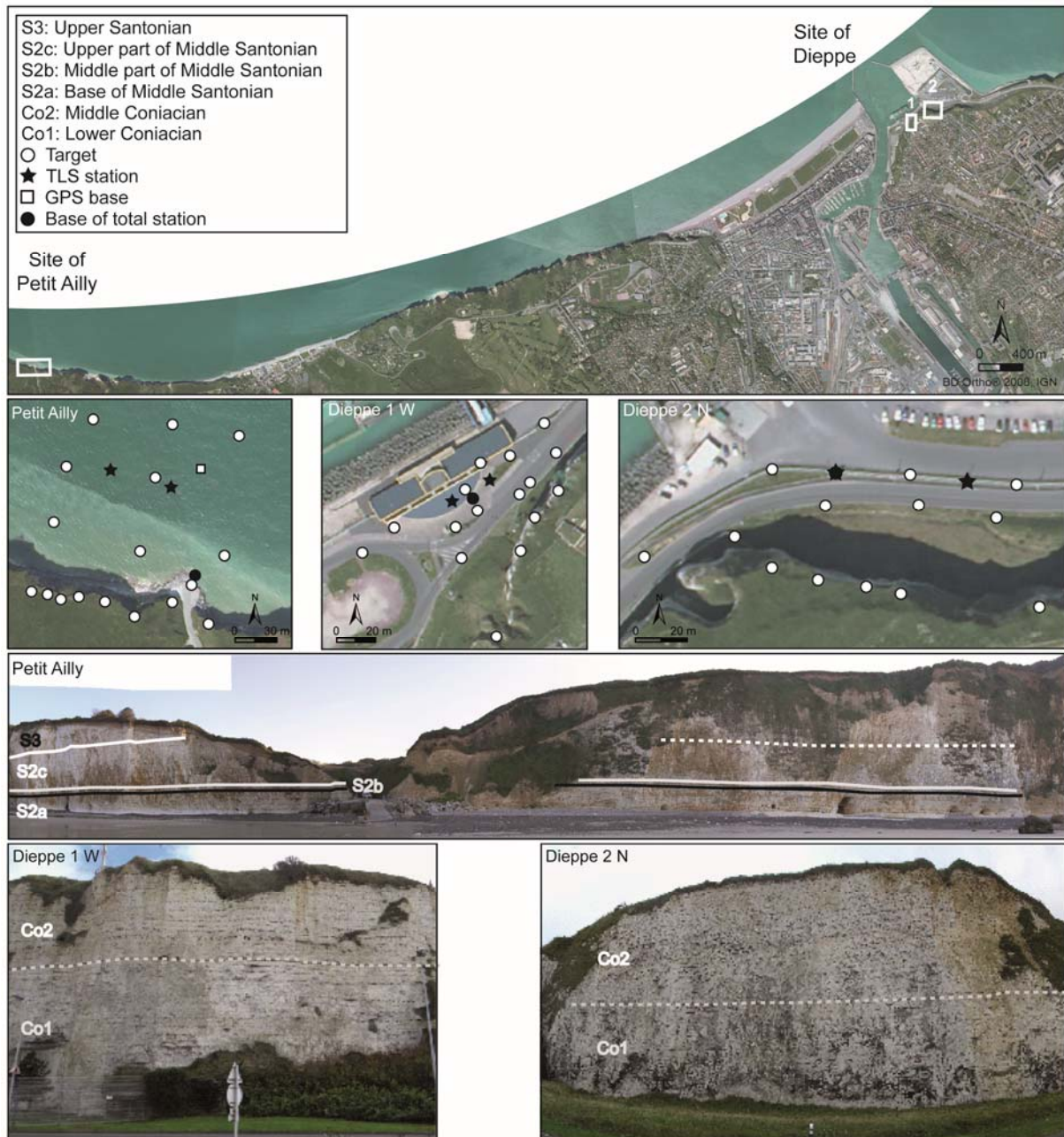
151 nature of the departure of material. For example, on 19 December 2012 in Dieppe, a rock fall
152 of approximately 100,000 m³ resulted in a cliff top retreat of 40 m in a few seconds while the
153 average annual retreat rate on this site is 0.21 m y⁻¹ (Letortu et al., 2014; Michoud et al.,
154 2014).

155

156 *2.2. Site selection*

157 To decipher the relative contribution of marine and subaerial agents in the erosion rates, two
158 neighboring sites with similar lithological contexts (cliff made up of Coniacian and Santonian
159 chalk) but subject to different marine forcing were selected (Figs. 1 and 2). One site is an
160 abandoned cliff only affected by subaerial agents; the other site is an active cliff, which is
161 evolving under the influence of both subaerial and marine agents. The abandoned cliff face is
162 located in Dieppe. This site was divided into two areas with different cliff face orientations:
163 one corresponding to an exposure of 280°N (named Dieppe 1 W, 45 m long, 30 m high); and
164 the other corresponding to an exposure of 010°N (named Dieppe 2 N, 80 m long, 30 m high).
165 The site characterized by an active cliff face is along Cap d'Ailly. More precisely, it lies on
166 either side of the Petit Ailly dry valley in Varengeville-sur-Mer (exposure of 010°N, 250 m
167 linear, maximum height of 40 m) (Fig. 2).

168



169

170 Fig. 2: Location, lithostratigraphy and panorama of Petit Ailly and Dieppe (1 W and 2 N)

171

172 3. Material and methods

173 3.1. TLS surveys

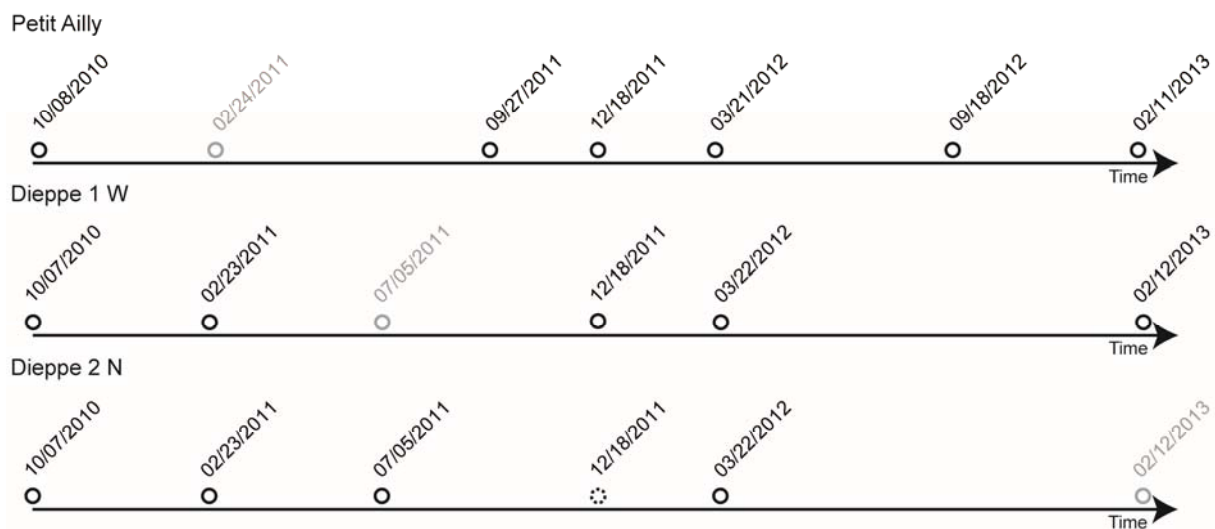
174 Terrestrial laser scanner is a measuring instrument that uses pulse laser technology to
 175 determine the distance from the device to the point to be measured. This distance is based
 176 on a non-contact and reflectorless acquisition of a point cloud and is measured by the time
 177 between the transmission of an infrared laser pulse and the return of the reflected pulse. The

178 instrument used in this study is a RIEGL LMS-Z390i emitting a wavelength of 1,550 nm,
 179 which records a single time-of-flight without any access to the complete signal form (full
 180 waveform). The theoretical range of this device is 400 m for an 80% reflective surface and
 181 140 m for a 10% reflective surface (RIEGL, 2007).

182 This technique is subject to use restrictions of two types: geometric and radiometric.
 183 Regarding the geometric limitations, Lichti (2007) demonstrated the influence of the
 184 incidence angle on the measurement accuracy. This method is also affected by radiometric
 185 limitations including environmental ones. The accuracy and resolution of the scan depend on
 186 the reflection of the scanned material and the atmospheric water content. During our
 187 surveys, meteorological conditions were often good: no rainfalls, clear visibility and low wind.
 188 A discussion on the principles of TLS and its performance is provided by Teza et al. (2007).
 189 The main parameter that controls the spatial resolution is the distance between the
 190 measured point and the TLS device. The area near the TLS device has a high spatial
 191 resolution (millimeter). The distance to the scanned object is dependent on the length of the
 192 coast being monitored and its height (the vertical swath of TLS is only 80°).

193 During repeated surveys at these two sites, 19 point clouds were acquired over 28 months
 194 (between 10/07/2010 and 02/12/2013), every 4–5 months (Fig. 3).

195



197 Fig. 3: Temporal distribution of point clouds between 10/07/2010 and 02/12/2013 (gray: point
198 clouds affected by a high error margin; dotted line: unusable point cloud)

199

200 The TLS station is 33 m from the abandoned cliff of Dieppe 1 W and 37 m from Dieppe 2 N.
201 For Petit Ailly, the TLS station is positioned at 80 m. For repeated surveys of high accuracy,
202 the process of data acquisition requires additional equipment (Fig. 2): targets, a total station
203 (TPS400 Leica TC410C) and a DGPS (Trimble with a base station 5,700 and a mobile
204 receiver 5,800). The total station, where the point of setup is previously known by DGPS
205 measurements, can replace the point cloud acquired in a relative coordinate system in an
206 absolute coordinate system (Lambert 93 and associated RGF93 and IGN69). Although the
207 TLS instrumental precision is ± 0.003 m to 50 m, the main source of error in data processing
208 comes from the georeferencing of the point cloud in an absolute coordinate system via the
209 targets (Jaud, 2011). The use of a large number of targets (16 at Dieppe 1 W, 13 at Dieppe 2
210 N, 17 at Petit Ailly) and the maximizing of their distance from the TLS, as long as they all
211 remain visible, reduce the alignment error of the point cloud.

212

213 *3.2. Data processing*

214 The main steps in the data processing are 1) georeferencing and point cloud assembly; 2)
215 point cloud cleaning; 3) meshing and interpolation to produce a Digital Elevation Model
216 (DEM); and 4) creation of a DEM of Difference (DoD) (Jaud, 2011). Retreat is calculated by
217 dividing the volume of change on the cliff face by the monitored area. The volume of change
218 does not include debris material after failure because this is generally quickly removed (in a
219 few days or weeks) at Petit Ailly, and quickly covered by vegetation at Dieppe. The retreat is
220 then divided by years to obtain the annual retreat rate.

221 Of the 19 point clouds acquired, one was unusable (12/18/2011 at Dieppe 2 N) (Fig. 3,
222 dotted line). Observation of the point cloud highlighted artifacts including the rain, which
223 absorbed the laser pulse. Three other point clouds did not have good georeferencing (error
224 from 0.04 to 0.08 m). Two point clouds (07/05/2011 at Dieppe 1 W and 02/12/2013 at Dieppe

225 2 N) were certainly disturbed during acquisition as a docking cross-Channel ferry created
226 significant temporary vibrations. The other one (02/24/2011 at Petit Ailly) was probably
227 disturbed by depression of the TLS during acquisition on a wet sandy foreshore. These three
228 point clouds were not used to quantify the rate of retreat, but only to study the spatial
229 distribution of material departures (Fig. 3, dates in gray). In February 2013, human activities
230 (clearing work and setup of safety nets) disturbed measurements in Dieppe. All human
231 impacts were removed in the calculations and tables to monitor the “natural” evolution of the
232 chalk cliff in Dieppe.

233

234 3.3. Error margin

235 To quantify the error between the DEM, fixed areas were selected, such as urban furniture in
236 Dieppe or groin at Petit Ailly in each original point cloud (just after georeferencing, step 1
237 previously described). These fixed areas are equivalent to approximately 7,000 points. These
238 data were processed with the same methodology previously mentioned in order to obtain a
239 DEM about fixed areas at each site. The final DoD revealed the margin of error of
240 measurement. The lowest margin of error was ± 0.01 m in Dieppe 2 N. At Petit Ailly, the
241 accuracy was ± 0.03 m. In Dieppe 1 W, it was ± 0.04 m. These differences were mainly due
242 to the quality of topometric data. The greatest difference was located in Dieppe 1 W because
243 topometric measurements were temporarily disturbed by a docking cross-Channel ferry and
244 renovation of the passenger terminal (building visible in Fig. 2).

245

246 4. Results

247 4.1. Retreat rates and spatial distribution of erosion

248 During the repeated surveys, in Petit Ailly, the total retreat of the cliff face was 0.57 m (± 0.03
249 m), corresponding to an annual retreat rate of 0.24 m y^{-1} . Dieppe 1 W receded by 0.08 m y^{-1}
250 while Dieppe 2 N receded by 0.06 m y^{-1} (Fig. 4). Between both orientations of Dieppe, the
251 retreat rate differences are within the margin of error. These first results highlight that the site
252 of Petit Ailly had a more intense retreat than Dieppe (0.24 m y^{-1} against $0.06\text{--}0.08 \text{ m y}^{-1}$),

253 marked by sudden accelerations (up to 1.16 m y^{-1} for the DoD F, Fig. 4). Unsurprisingly,
254 abandoned cliffs receded more slowly than active cliffs (3–4 times slower). This difference
255 confirms the strong influence of marine actions on the regressive dynamics of the chalk cliffs.
256 For both sites, the retreat rates were higher for the period including all or part of winter than
257 other seasons. For example, in Petit Ailly during winter 2011/2012, the retreat rate was 0.17
258 m y^{-1} while during spring and summer 2012, it was 0.06 m y^{-1} .
259 TLS surveys provide a fine location of erosion – the cliff foot corresponds to the first third of
260 the cliff height and the cliff top is the rest. The cliff top receded faster than the cliff foot, at
261 both cliffs, the active (Petit Ailly) and the abandoned ones (Dieppe): 1) 0.25 m y^{-1} at the cliff
262 top against 0.21 m y^{-1} at the cliff foot at Petit Ailly; and 2) $0.07\text{--}0.10 \text{ m y}^{-1}$ at the cliff top
263 against $0.02\text{--}0.03 \text{ m y}^{-1}$ at the cliff foot in Dieppe (Fig. 4).
264

Petit Ailly in the context of an active cliff (error margin: ± 0.03 m)

Previous DEM	Next DEM	Time gap (month)	Name of DoD	Retreat rate ($m\ y^{-1}$)
10/08/2010	02/24/2011	4.5	A	0.00
02/24/2011	09/27/2011	7.0	B	0.09
09/27/2011	12/18/2011	3.0	C	0.00
12/18/2011	03/21/2012	3.0	D	0.17
03/21/2012	09/18/2012	6.0	E	0.06
09/18/2012	02/11/2013	4.5	F	1.16
10/08/2010	02/11/2013	28.0	Total	0.24

Cliff top erosion: $0.25\ m\ y^{-1}$
Cliff foot erosion: $0.21\ m\ y^{-1}$

Dieppe 1 W in the context of an abandoned cliff (error margin: ± 0.04 m)

Previous DEM	Next DEM	Time gap (month)	Name of DoD	Retreat rate ($m\ y^{-1}$)
10/07/2010	02/23/2011	4.5	A	0.07
02/23/2011	07/05/2011	4.5	B	0.06
07/05/2011	12/18/2011	5.5	C	0.03
12/18/2011	03/22/2012	3.0	D	0.24
03/22/2012	02/12/2013	10.5	E	-
10/07/2010	03/22/2012	17.5	Total	0.08

Setup of safety net disturbing measurements
Cliff top erosion: $0.10\ m\ y^{-1}$
Cliff foot erosion: $0.03\ m\ y^{-1}$

Dieppe 2 N in the context of an abandoned cliff (error margin: ± 0.01 m)

Previous DEM	Next DEM	Time gap (month)	Name of DoD	Retreat rate ($m\ y^{-1}$)
10/07/2010	02/23/2011	4.5	A	0.10
02/23/2011	07/05/2011	4.5	B	0.00
07/05/2011	12/18/2011	6.5	C	
07/05/2011	03/22/2012	8.5	D	0.04
03/22/2012	02/12/2013	10.5	E	-
10/07/2010	03/22/2012	17.5	Total	0.06

Setup of safety net disturbing measurements
Cliff top erosion: $0.07\ m\ y^{-1}$
Cliff foot erosion: $0.02\ m\ y^{-1}$

265

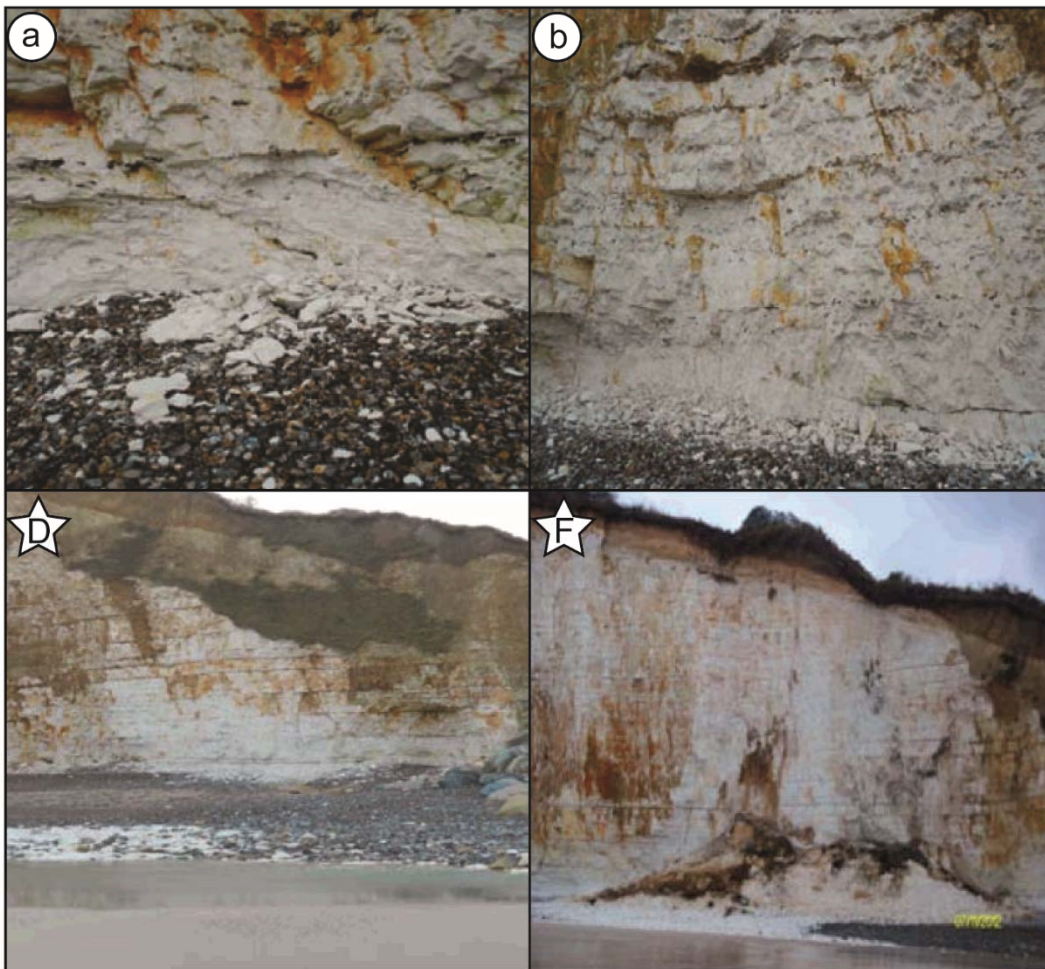
266 Fig. 4: Successive retreat rates as a function of DoD (gray DEM: affected by a high error
267 margin)

268

269 4.2. Proportion of rock falls and debris falls in the retreat

270 Understanding the evolution of cliff faces depends on the frequency of surveys and the
271 erosive dynamics of cliffs. Their frequency (every 4–5 months) does not ensure that a
272 starting area that appears homogeneous in the DoD is the result of a single rock fall.

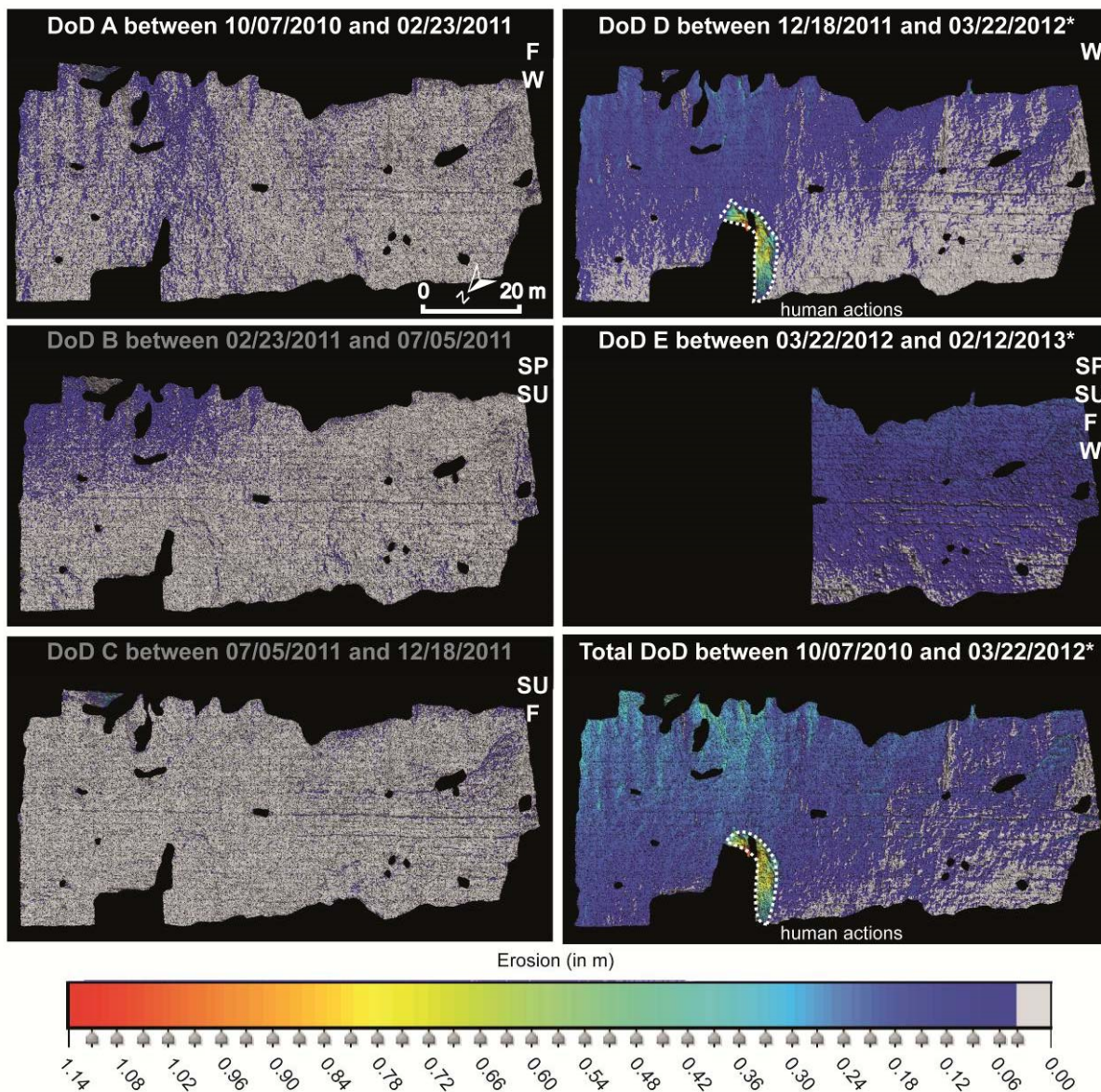
273 Successive rock falls may be located at the same place. However, these different dynamics
274 could be determined thanks to an inventory of falls collected weekly by the non-profit
275 organization ESTRAN on the coastline studied (Letortu et al., 2014, in press). Due to the
276 centimeter accuracy of the data and the high spatial resolution of the TLS, it is possible to
277 separate debris falls (Fig. 5, photographs a and b) and rock falls (Fig. 5, photographs D and
278 F).
279



280
281 Fig. 5: Examples of debris falls (circles a and b) and rock falls (stars D and F) at Petit Ailly
282 identified by TLS in Fig. 8 (ESTRAN organization, 2012)

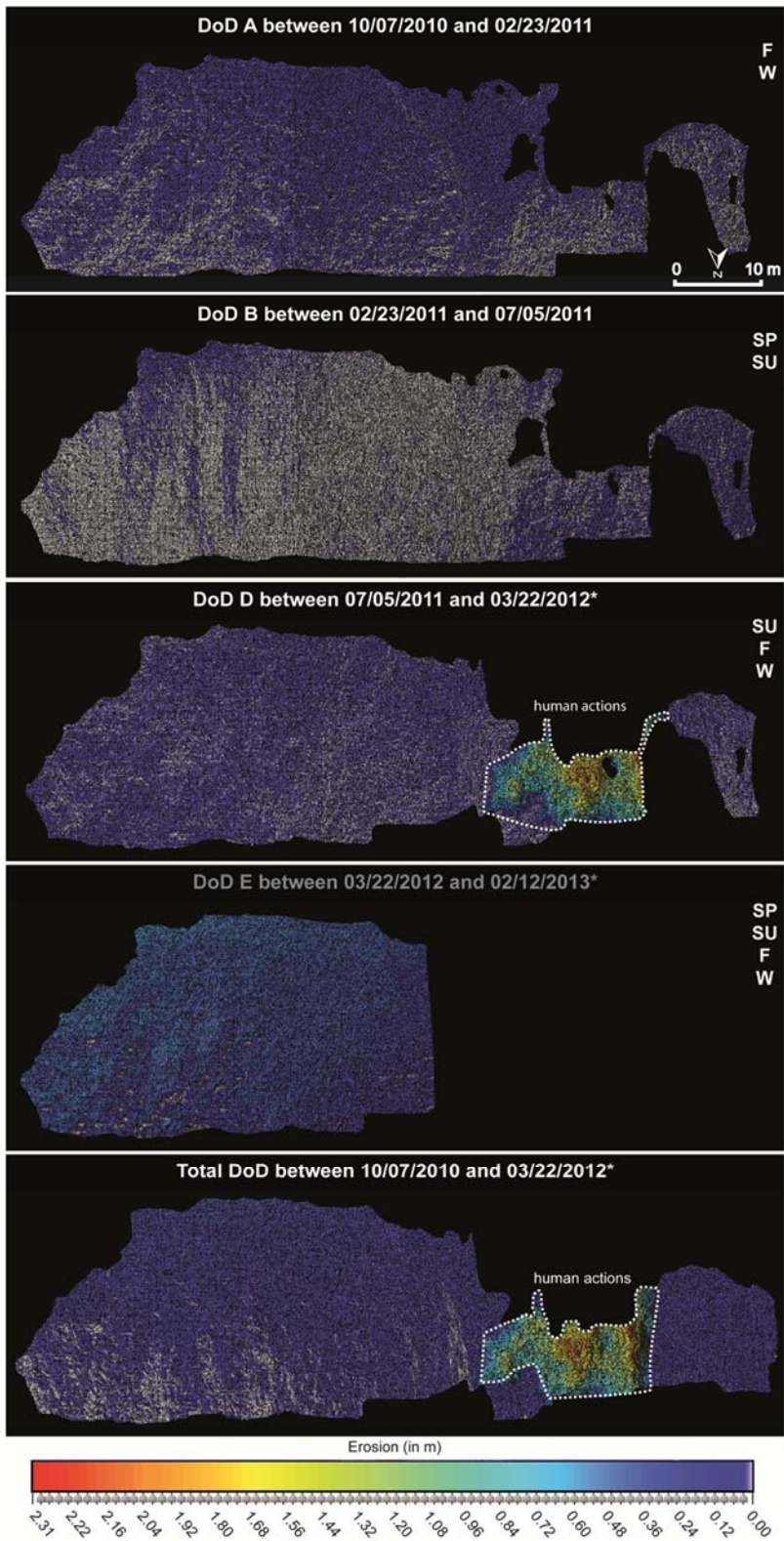
283
284 Over the period studied (October 2010–February 2013), the abandoned cliff was only
285 affected by debris falls (blue in electronic version of Figs. 6 and 7). The active cliff was
286 affected by debris falls (dark blue in electronic version of Fig. 8) and rock falls (from light blue

287 to red in electronic version of Fig. 8). Rock falls (10 cases were identified from 10 to 1,636
 288 m³) generated local significant retreats, especially on the eastern cliff face (up to 4.71 m
 289 deep). However, the largest ones (1,636 m³ for rock fall F and 194 m³ for rock fall G) were
 290 observed on the DoD F between 09/18/2012 and 02/11/2013 (Fig. 8).
 291



292
 293 Fig. 6: DoDs of the cliff face at Dieppe 1 W between 10/07/2010 and 02/12/2013 (gray title:
 294 DoD affected by a high error margin; F: fall, W: winter, SP: spring, SU: summer; *: with
 295 human actions)

296

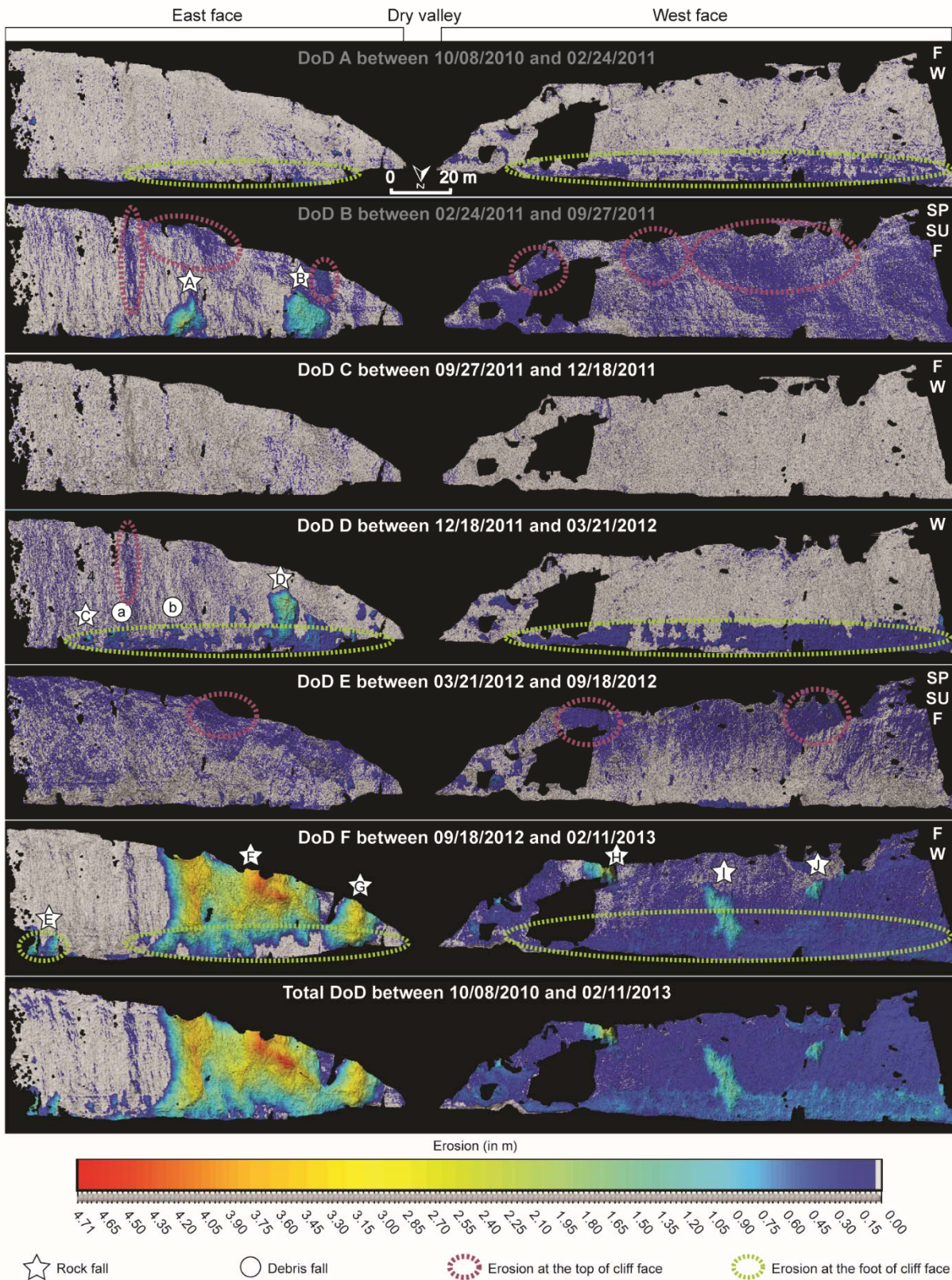


297

298 Fig. 7: DoDs of the cliff face at Dieppe 2 N between 10/07/2010 and 02/12/2013 (gray title:

299 DoD affected by a high error margin; F: fall, W: winter, SP: spring, SU: summer; *: with

300 human actions)



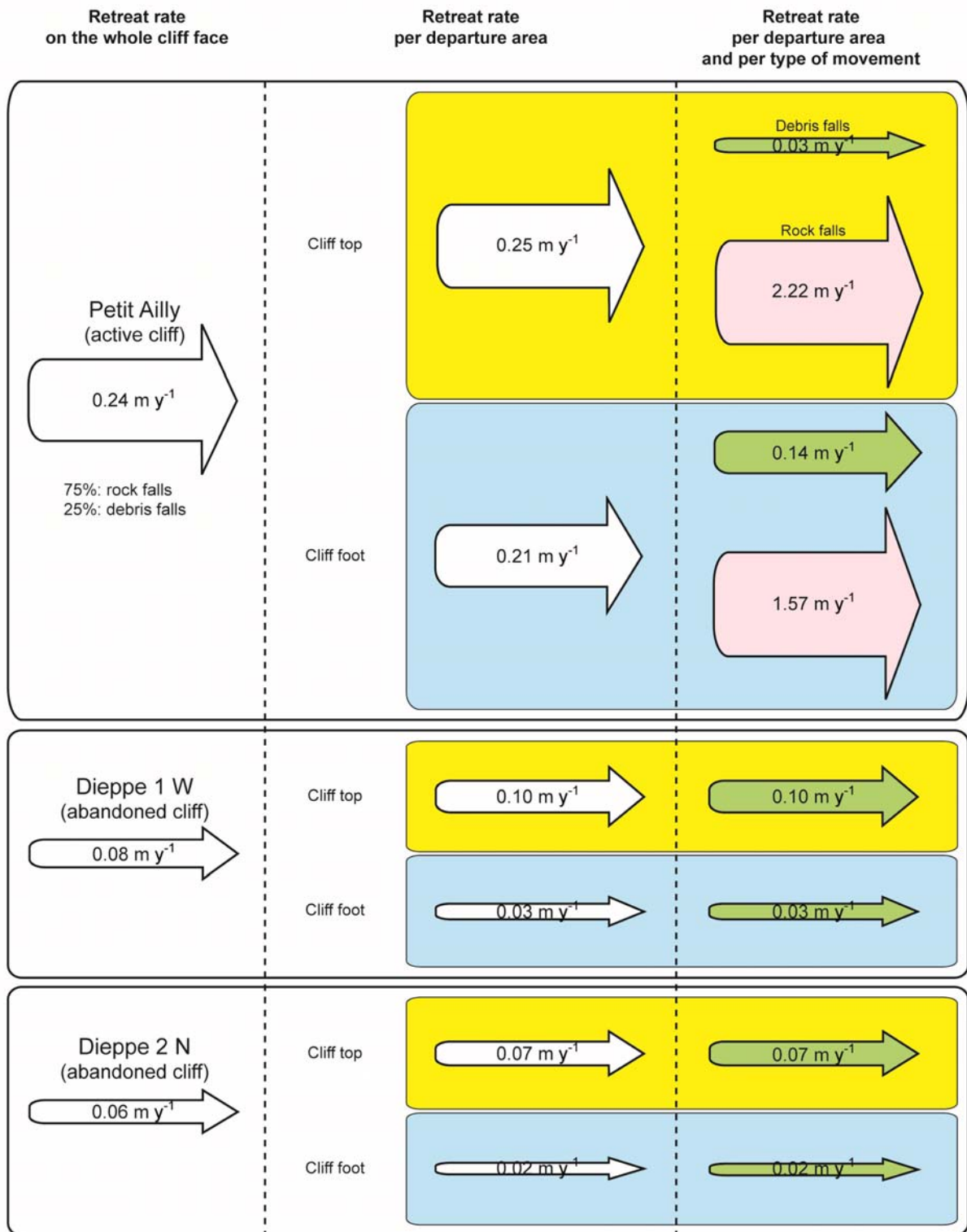
301

302 Fig. 8: DoDs of the cliff face at Petit Ailly between 10/08/2010 and 02/11/2013 (gray title:

303 DoD affected by a high error margin; F: fall, W: winter, SP: spring, SU: summer)

304 Thus, on the active cliff, debris falls represented 25% of the total retreat over the period
305 studied (Fig. 9). Debris falls are responsible for a retreat of 0.06 m y^{-1} , against 0.18 m y^{-1} for
306 rock falls over 28 months under a total retreat rate of 0.24 m y^{-1} . The rate related to debris
307 falls is consistent with the retreat rate for the abandoned cliffs ($0.06\text{--}0.08 \text{ m y}^{-1}$) where only
308 debris falls were observed (Fig. 9).

309



310

311 Fig. 9: Retreat rates as a function of departure area and type of movement

312

313 4.3. One of the modalities of cliff retreat highlighted

314 The DoD B in Fig. 8 shows departures of rocky material at the active cliff foot (east face).
315 These departures occur by two rock falls, which have various depths. Rock fall A generates a
316 maximal basal notch of 2.26 m (59 m³) while rock fall B creates a maximal notch of 1.61 m
317 (89 m³). Later, in the DoD D (Fig. 8), debris fall b (0.61 m maximum deep, 2 m³) and rock fall
318 D (2.05 m maximum deep, 86 m³) occur near these initial notches. Notches seem to
319 propagate instability gradually at their periphery and often towards the top of the cliff. A few
320 months later (DoD F), rock falls of the whole cliff face are observed at or next to these
321 locations (rock falls F and G with a volume of 1,636 m³ and 194 m³, respectively). This study
322 highlights one of the retreat modalities: the creation of a basal notch that, by overhanging,
323 will gradually destabilize the top of the cliff to generate a rock fall of massive volume from the
324 whole cliff face.

325

326 **5. Discussion**

327 Due to its centimeter precision and high temporal frequency, monitoring by TLS has provided
328 a new understanding of the retreat of chalk cliff faces at the study sites. Some of the results
329 generate discussion, which is organized in four points: 1) the spatial distribution of the retreat
330 over the short and long terms; 2) the proportion of debris falls in retreat; 3) the modality of
331 cliff retreat; and 4) the determination of possible agents and processes responsible for
332 erosion.

333 Over 28 months of repeated surveys, the cliff top retreated faster than the cliff foot for both
334 active and abandoned cliffs. At the abandoned cliff, this result seems to be a normal
335 evolution because, since the polder construction in the early 1980s, the slope has evolved
336 exclusively under subaerial agents. These agents are particularly efficient at the cliff top.
337 Over a longer timescale, the retreat rates should not converge. The final result should be a
338 terrestrial slope. In contrast, this situation may appear surprising at the active cliff of Petit
339 Ailly. The foot of the active cliff should be more eroded due to a combination of marine and
340 subaerial agents. This result can be explained by the lithology and the timescale of our study.
341 This active cliff has a specific morphostructural context: the chalk has overlying Tertiary

342 strata. In these strata, there are water tables from where runoff may affect the chalk cliff top.
343 This process may create a temporarily high retreat of the chalk cliff top. Over a longer
344 timescale, the retreat difference between the foot and the top of the cliff should change.
345 Indeed, there is a “*disconnect in the timescale of our monitoring and the cliff morphology*”
346 (Rosser et al., 2013). On the active cliff, these two rates should evolve to fit with the sub-
347 vertical profile of the current cliff (Fig. 10). Otherwise, the form of the cliff should change.



348
349 Fig. 10: Sub-vertical cliff profiles and basal notches in Sainte-Marguerite-sur-Mer (Cap
350 d'Ailly)

351
352 Our study also highlights that debris falls correspond to 25% of the total retreat of the active
353 cliff. They are responsible for a retreat rate of 0.06 m y^{-1} , while rock falls are responsible for a
354 retreat rate of 0.18 m y^{-1} during the 28 months. This share is much greater than those
355 reported by May and Heeps (1985) and Hénaff et al. (2002) (10% and 11%, respectively).
356 Nevertheless, as suggested by Costa (1997), this proportion of debris falls is highly variable
357 in time and may be quickly removed. Costa (1997) measured a retreat of 0.02 m for a single
358 event (a rapid thaw on 31 December 1995) along the same coastline. Fortunately, these
359 debris falls were observed but were removed at high tide. Our repeated surveys by TLS and
360 the resultant visualization of erosion in the centimeter scale better quantify these debris falls.
361 These surveys over 28 months also enable one of the modalities of cliff retreat to be
362 identified. On the east side of the dry valley at Petit Ailly, the upward propagation of failure

363 from a destabilizing notch at the cliff foot is observed. This recalls the usual scenario
364 (sometimes considered simplistic) of a basal notch (Sunamura, 1988, 1992; Trenhaile, 1987;
365 Stephenson et al., 2013; Trenhaile et al., 2013) leading to larger rock falls named
366 overhanging movements (Hantz et al., 2003; Andriani and Walsh, 2007). Our work reveals,
367 like Rosser et al. (2013) along the cliffs of the North York Moors National Park (UK), that
368 departure areas evolve over time around their periphery with a dominant upward direction
369 (vertical and subvertical). Thus, the authors stated that the distribution of rock falls may not
370 be random: "*there is clear spatial clustering indicative of propagation when rock falls are*
371 *considered as cumulative through time*". These notches (created by debris falls or rock falls)
372 are visible in many places along the Upper Normandy coast (Costa, 1997), especially along
373 Cap d'Ailly (Fig. 10). They may be a warning sign of more massive failure (the date is still
374 difficult to predict) which can cover the whole cliff face (Young et al., 2009). As Terzaghi
375 (1950) suggested, slow surface movements precede catastrophic landslides. He added, "*if a*
376 *landslide comes as a surprise to the eyewitnesses, it would be more accurate to say that the*
377 *observers failed to detect the phenomena which preceded the slide...*". Further investigations
378 are needed to understand better the link between preparatory phenomena and rock falls.
379 The combination of knowledge about the location, the time of cliff retreat, and the type of
380 movement (debris falls and rock falls) may provide hypotheses about the agents (marine or
381 subaerial) and processes responsible for erosion. Debris falls affect both sites (Dieppe and
382 Petit Ailly) and are present on the whole cliff faces. A large production of debris falls was
383 observed at the foot of the Petit Ailly active cliff (green circles in electronic version of Fig. 8).
384 The location of erosion is specific: it occurs only at the first 10 m of the cliff face. This erosion
385 is not found at the base of the abandoned cliffs in Dieppe. These features raise questions
386 about the agents and processes responsible for erosion. This basal erosion of the active cliff
387 may be induced by the water table, which saturates the chalk with water, prone to
388 hydroclasty and cryoclasty. However, the abandoned cliffs where there is the water table and
389 other subaerial agents should also have this basal erosion. Thus, marine actions may lead to
390 basal erosion by debris falls. The first 10 m of erosion at the cliff foot are consistent with the

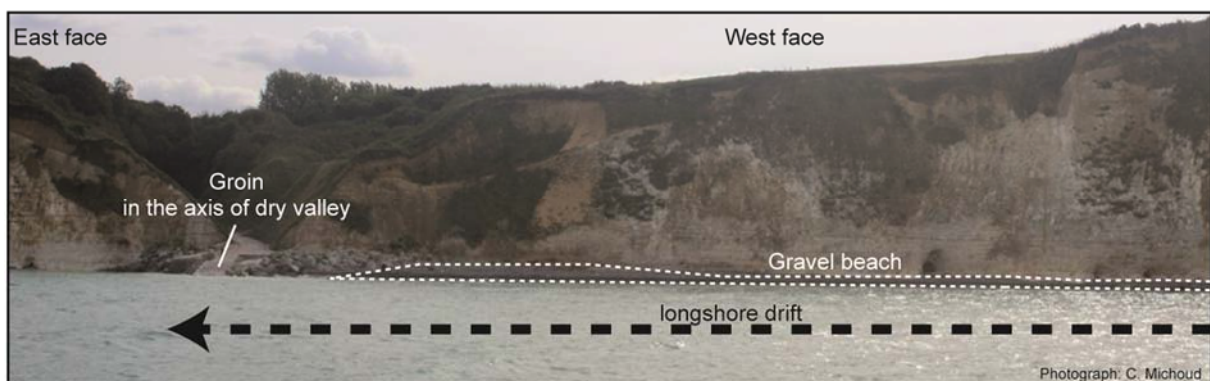
391 height of the waves that can reach it locally. Erosion due to marine actions may be quantified
392 by deduction. At the foot of the abandoned cliffs, the annual retreat rate related to debris
393 falls, and exclusively due to subaerial agents, is 0.03 m y^{-1} . Along the active cliff, the retreat
394 rate related to debris falls is 0.14 m y^{-1} (Fig. 9) but includes subaerial and marine agents.
395 Marine actions may be responsible for a retreat rate by debris falls of 0.11 m y^{-1} of the
396 observed 0.14 m y^{-1} . Thus, at the active cliff foot, marine actions may generate a retreat by
397 debris falls four times higher than subaerial actions. This simple (perhaps simplistic)
398 deduction may provide the first elements of quantification of marine actions. Again, marine
399 actions may be an efficient agent of erosion.

400 The marine actions may not be uniform at the active cliff foot (Fig. 8). The sides of the dry
401 valley evolve differently. The west face has higher debris fall retreat at the cliff foot than the
402 east face. This difference at fine scale may be due to the presence of a man-made structure,
403 a groin, located in the axis of the dry valley. Indeed, this structure leads to an accumulation
404 of gravels at the west face. As Robinson (1977) observed an increase in cliff erosion by a
405 factor of 18 when beach sediments were present compared to when they were not, we
406 suggest these gravels may be used as projectiles by the swell and may explain the high
407 abrasion by debris falls at the cliff foot on the west face (Fig. 11). On the east face, waves
408 breaking without projectiles may be less effective. These observations converge towards
409 model results (Sunamura, 1982, 1992; Limber and Murray, 2011; Kline et al., 2014).

410 Sunamura (1982, 1992) showed in laboratory experiments that cliffs and beaches exhibit
411 internal feedbacks. The amount and configuration of beach material can bring positive
412 feedback with higher wave erosive efficacy by providing abrasive agents (Sunamura, 1992).

413 Kline et al. (2014) studied the role of mechanical abrasion by beach sediments in
414 cliff/platform/beach evolution over a long timescale (up to 1,000 years). They suggest that
415 "*mechanical abrasion is a feasible mechanism of cliff and platform evolution*". However, on
416 the whole cliff face scale at Petit Ailly, the east face has a higher retreat rate than the west
417 face (0.39 m y^{-1} against 0.12 m y^{-1}). This is due to numerous rock falls that occur on the east
418 face but rarely on the west face. Dewez et al. (2013) also observed rock falls at the cliff foot

419 at the downdrift side of the groin of Criel-sur-Mer (20 km north of Dieppe). They mentioned
420 the caving effect of waves by hydraulic forces including water hammer and air compression,
421 particularly effective without a beach (gravel transit is blocked by the 120 m-long groin). At
422 the Petit Ailly, this effect is possible due to the lack of beach on the downdrift side of the
423 groin. There is no protecting gravel beach. When a rock fall occurs, most fallen rocks are
424 quickly removed. Therefore, water hammer and air compression may be more intense and
425 may generate rock falls. This suggestion underlines the role of marine actions as an erosion
426 agent and the dual role of a gravel beach, which can protect the cliff foot or attack it (Costa et
427 al., 2006b). Future TLS surveys here will be valuable to provide complementary information
428 over a longer timescale, leading to a better understanding of the roles of marine actions and
429 gravel beaches.
430



431
432 Fig. 11: Mid-tide (coefficient 106) at Petit Ailly and position of gravel beach

433
434 The departure of debris falls at the active cliff top, and sometimes reaching the mid-cliff, is
435 visible on the DoDs B and E (purple circles in electronic version of Fig. 8) during off-winter
436 periods, thus without frost. In the context of an abandoned cliff, the location of debris falls
437 also highlights linear shapes (Figs. 6 and 7). The often linear shapes of the departure areas
438 and their concentration in dihedrons seem to be runoff zones, and thus subaerial actions.
439 Subaerial actions may not be negligible in the context of an active cliff.
440 In this paper, erosion agents have been discussed – marine actions with mechanical
441 abrasion, water hammer, air compression, and subaerial agents with runoff. These

442 hypotheses open up research perspectives about the quantification of their action. Beyond
443 increasing the temporal representativeness of monitoring, reducing the time interval between
444 each survey and conducting surveys before/during/after specific weather and sea conditions
445 including freeze/thaw cycles and storms, supplementary measurements will be carried out to
446 1) monitor the behavior of water tables that could affect the stability of the cliff; 2) obtain a
447 fine acquisition of rainfall, thermal and swell data; and 3) quantify the role of marine actions
448 in the destabilization of the chalk massif.

449 It is necessary to focus not only on the external agents of erosion but also on internal factors
450 such as chalk fracturing, which alters material resistance and often predetermines the extent
451 of rock falls. To deal with the problem of spatial representativeness and check if our results
452 are replicable, other lithologies of cliff faces are currently under study.

453

454 **6. Conclusions**

455 In Upper Normandy, the repeated surveys over 28 months on two sites with similar
456 lithostratigraphic characteristics but different exposures to marine actions, highlight that cliff
457 retreat is highly variable in time, location, its modalities, and the agents/processes involved.
458 The active cliff of Petit Ailly (Varengeville-sur-Mer) has regressive dynamics 3–4 times
459 greater than the abandoned cliffs of Dieppe (0.24 m y^{-1} against $0.06\text{--}0.08 \text{ m y}^{-1}$). This
460 difference highlights the importance of marine actions in erosion dynamics. Whereas the
461 abandoned cliff recedes only with debris falls, the active cliff has a combination of debris falls
462 (25% of the retreat) and rock falls (75%). On both sites, a spatial variation in retreat rates can
463 be observed over this short timescale: the cliff top recedes faster than the cliff foot.
464 Moreover, due to the fine location of the retreat obtained by our methodology, one of the
465 modalities of retreat is detected. Precursory movements creating a basal notch later
466 generate massive rock falls on the whole cliff face. These results indicate that TLS can be
467 very useful for the spatial prediction of rock falls and for contributing to the debate about the
468 agents and processes responsible for erosion.

469

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473

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