

The Salzach Valley overdeepening: A most precise bedrock model of a major alpine glacial basin

Johannes Pomper (1), Bernhard Salcher (1), and Christoph Eichkitz (2)

(1) Department of Geography and Geology, University of Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria (bernhard.salcher@sbg.ac.at), (2) Geo5-Geophysical Services, Leoben Austria (christoph.eichkitz@geo-5.at)

Overdeepenings are impressive phenomena related to the erosion in the ablation zone of major glaciers. They are common features in glaciated and deglaciated regions worldwide and their sedimentary fillings may act as important archives for regional environmental change and glaciation history. Sedimentary fillings are also important targets of geotechnical exploration and construction including groundwater resource management, shallow geothermal exploitation, tunneling and the foundation of buildings. This is especially true in densely populated areas such as the European Alps and their foreland areas, regions which have been multiply glaciated during the last million years. However, due depths often exceeding some hundreds of meters, the overall knowledge on their geometry, formation and sedimentary content is still poor and commonly tied to some local spots.

Here we present a bedrock model of the overall lower Salzach Valley, one of the largest glacial overdeepenings in the European Alps. We utilized seismic sections from hydrocarbon exploration surveys and deep drillings together with topographic and modelling data to construct a 3D bedrock model. Through the existence of seismic inline and crossline valley sections, multiple drillings reaching the bedrock surface, log and abundant outcrop data we were, as far to our knowledge, able to create the most accurate digital bedrock topography of an alpine major overdeepening. We furthermore analyzed the sedimentary content of the valley as recorded by driller's lithologic logs.

Our results suggest that the valley is far from being a regular U-shaped trough with constant depth, rather highlighting highs and lows of different magnitude and underground valley widths of variable extent. Data also indicates that the largest overdeepening of bedrock, reaching around 450 m below the alluvial fill, is not situated after a major glacial confluence following a prominent bedrock gorge but shifted several km down the valley. The sedimentary succession, representing multiple cycles of massive gravels and lacustrine fines, indicate that the valley was not fully excavated during the last glacial coverage at the LGM.

Through its model accuracy related to a comprehensive geodatabase and a relatively homogenous rock erodibility, the Salzach Valley overdeepening might be a highly suitable testing site for future numerical simulations.