

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES IN STUDYING AN EXTREME EVENT: THE BIESCAS CAMPSITE DISASTER AS A CASE STUDY

J.M. Garcia-Ruiz (1), C. Marti-Bono, (1) and S.M. White (2)

(1) Instituto Pirenaico de Ecología, CSIC, Campus de Aula Dei, Apartado 202, 50080-Zaragoza, Spain.

(2) School of Civil Engineering, University of Durham, U.K.

e-mail: humberto@ipe.csic.es

The Biescas campsite disaster occurred in August, 1996 in the upper Gallego Valley, Central Spanish Pyrenees, causing the death of 87 people. A very intense rainstorm was the origin of a large peak flow (between 300 and 500 m³ s⁻¹ for a 18 km² catchment, which destroyed 31 check-dams and the artificial canal located in the final stretch of the ravine, immediately before of arriving to the alluvial fan. This phenomenon has been studied by many authors (from the field of Geology, Geography and Meteorology), though deep disagreements exist among them in relation to the peak of discharge, the type of sediment transport (hyperconcentrated and debris flow) and even the main cause of the disaster. The Biescas disaster serves as an example of the limitations against which the experts face in studying extreme events and confirms the uncertainties of any temporal or spatial prediction.