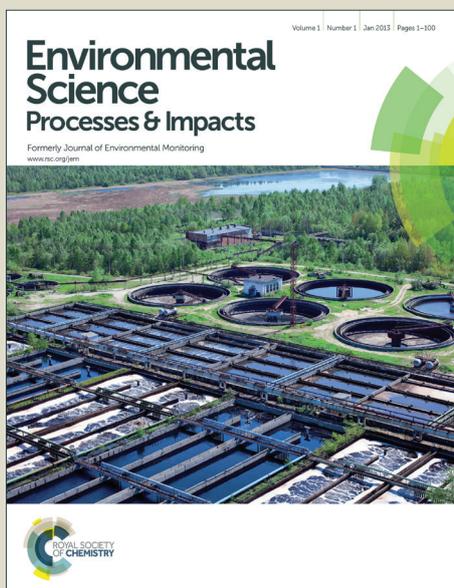


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Recovery of the Torna-Marcal river system after the Ajka red mud spill, Hungary

Environmental Impact Statement

An increasing quantity of bauxite processing residue (red mud), a by-product of alumina refining is produced globally each year. The largest documented environmental release of this residue occurred in western Hungary in 2010 after the failure of a retaining wall of a residue impoundment. The highly caustic, metal-rich slurry had major immediate environmental impacts on the receiving water courses. This paper highlights the rapid recovery of the affected rivers after the spill due to the physical nature of the spill material (fine grained which lends itself to downstream transport) and the extensive remedial efforts undertaken in affected reaches.

1 **Geochemical recovery of the Torna-Marcál river system after the Ajka red mud**
2 **spill, Hungary**

3

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14 ELECTRONIC SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Data file of total elemental
15 concentrations for the 2010 and 2013 surveys attached separately.

16

17 **ABSTRACT**

18 The failure of the Ajka red mud depository in October 2010 led to the largest single
19 release of red mud into the surface water environment. This study provides a
20 comparative assessment of stream sediment quality in the Torna-Marcál-Rába
21 catchment between post-disaster surveys (2010) and follow up surveys at an
22 identical suite of 21 locations in 2013. The signature of red mud apparent in initial
23 surveys with high Al, As, Cr, Na, V was only apparent at a small number of sample
24 stations in recent surveys. These constitute <1 km of stream, compared to the >20
25 km reach of affected sediments in the immediate aftermath of the spill.
26 Concentrations of red mud-derived contaminants are predominately associated with
27 fine fractions of the red mud (<8µm). This enhances transport out of the system of

28 red mud-derived contaminants and, along with extensive remedial efforts, has
29 substantially limited the within-channel inventory of potentially ecotoxic metals and
30 metalloids.

31

32 INTRODUCTION

33 There have been in excess of 100 major failures of primary ore extraction or
34 processing tailings facilities globally since 1960.¹ The vast majority of these failures
35 occur at active mining or processing sites² with the most common cause cited as
36 being extreme, or uncommon rainfall events prior to failure.² From a European
37 perspective, the tailings spills at Aznalcóllar in southern Spain in 1999³ and the Baia
38 Mare / Baia Borşa disasters in Romania in 2000⁴ played a major role in re-shaping
39 EU legislation on the management of tailings facilities. European Union Directive
40 2006/21/EC on the management of waste from extractive industries (the “Mining
41 Waste Directive”⁵) set out implementing measures to minimise the risk of further
42 disasters within Europe. These measures included initial inventories of sites posing
43 risk to the environment or human health and the development of disaster
44 management plans at recognised sites.⁵ Unfortunately, the implementation of the
45 Mining Waste Directive was not sufficiently advanced to prevent the release of
46 around 1 million m³ of highly alkaline, saline, metalliferous red mud from an
47 impoundment at Ajka in western Hungary in October 2010.⁶ Red mud (or bauxite
48 processing residue) is the fine fraction by-product of the Bayer process for refining
49 bauxite for alumina production. The nature of the material in the depository also
50 meant it did not fall under the auspices of other preventative legislature such as the
51 Seveso II Directive. This Directive aims to minimise and prevent the occurrence of
52 major disasters associated with certain hazardous chemical wastes. However, given
53 NaOH (as the key constituent of the red mud liquor) is not deemed a dangerous
54 substance at the concentrations it was present at the Ajka disposal site (category
55 R34 under annex 1 of the Dangerous Substances Directive; 67/548/EEC), it did not
56 fall under Seveso II reporting requirements.⁷

57 A number of failings in operational management and depository structure have been
58 highlighted in official reviews since the disaster,⁸ while a range of scientific studies
59 have assessed the impacts of the spill. Although there have been large spills of

60 alkaline wastes in the past,⁹ the Ajka disaster was the single largest release of highly
61 caustic waste to the water environment recorded, and as such, brought with it
62 considerable uncertainty about the short and long term environmental impacts of the
63 release. Since the disaster, a suite of studies have assessed a range of pathways
64 and receptors for the red mud spill, the findings of which are summarised below.

65 Some of the key findings of the work in the spill aftermath highlight the very fine
66 grained nature of the red mud, which as a fugitive dust puts it in a similar risk class
67 as urban dusts,¹⁰ while in aquatic systems lends itself to downstream transport and
68 dilution.¹¹ Furthermore, the red mud is rich in various metals and metalloids of
69 potential environmental significance.¹²⁻¹³ Geochemical studies have highlighted that
70 many of the metal(loids) immediately highlighted as a potential concern are not very
71 mobile under ambient conditions once the leachate is neutralised.^{11,13} However, in
72 common with other alkaline residues,¹⁴ the presence and potential mobility of
73 metal(loids) which form oxyanions has been highlighted. These include As, Cr, Mo
74 and V.^{11,13} Biological studies have highlighted impacts of red mud on plant
75 growth,^{12,15} primary producers,¹⁵⁻¹⁶ soil biota¹⁷⁻¹⁸ and genotoxic effects of vanadium
76 in higher plants.¹⁹ However, short term impacts on human health have not been
77 identified.²⁰⁻²¹ The difficulty in specifying any individual causal agent given the
78 concomitant high salinity, alkalinity, metal(loid) concentrations and fine particle size
79 which could all be stressors to a range of biota is highlighted in many studies.

80 The Hungarian government invested 38 million Forint (~€127 million) in demolition,
81 reconstruction and environmental remediation in the aftermath of the spill.²²
82 Immediate interventions included acid dosing at source, the addition of around 10
83 000 tonnes of gypsum to affected rivers and the building of check dams to
84 encourage buffering of waters and sedimentation.²³ Longer term measures included
85 channel dredging and the removal of red mud from affected floodplain areas.
86 Extensive monitoring by regulatory agencies was also carried out in the year after
87 the disaster²⁴⁻²⁵ while routine biological monitoring suggested wildlife recovered in
88 the affected systems according to government press releases.²² Recent studies
89 based on ambient water quality monitoring data have however highlighted the
90 persistence of As and Ni in high concentrations in the water column in the two years
91 after the disaster.²⁶ Many other studies also caution of the need for longer term
92 monitoring of affected systems for a more comprehensive risk assessment,²⁷ for

93 example from the effects of sodification of soils or slow leaching of oxyanionic
94 contaminants under ambient conditions.

95 Fluvial sediments provide a good indication of the long term exposure of a river
96 system to both aqueous and particulate contaminants as well as identifying sinks of
97 contaminants that could be potentially remobilised to the water column in the future.
98 In the aftermath of major base metal mining tailings failures elsewhere, sediment
99 studies have highlighted the longevity of the pollution issues and also the timescales
100 for recovery of the systems. In a review of river system recovery after major
101 sediment spills, Bird et al.²⁸ highlight how local geomorphology and remedial efforts
102 can have a major influence on long term sediment concentrations. In affected river
103 systems confined to narrow valleys, sediment metal concentrations can rapidly
104 recover to pre-spill conditions within a year.²⁸ However, in systems with larger
105 floodplain systems, episodic reworking of floodplain sediments means that sediment
106 contamination after major spills can remain readily identifiable 2-3 years after the
107 major spill, as was highlighted in the Vişeu River, Romania, after the Baia Borşa and
108 Novat-Roşu tailings failures in 2000.²⁸⁻²⁹ Surveys of the Ríos Agrío and Guadiamar
109 over a year after the Aznalcóllar spill in southern Spain highlighted the signal of the
110 metal and sulphide-rich tailings in fluvial sediments³⁰ while other studies also
111 highlighted the bioaccumulation of As, Cd, Cu and Pb in grasses to potentially toxic
112 levels 18 months after the spill.³¹ However in the Aznalcóllar case, the extensive
113 removal of contaminated material from floodplain areas is thought to have aided
114 recovery relative to other spills.²⁸

115 This study aims to assess the changes in sediment quality across the river systems
116 affected by the spill, the Torna Creek, Marcal River, Rába River and Mosoni-Duna,
117 which form a major tributary of the Danube. Through comparative assessment of
118 sediment quality this study aims to (a) highlight the distribution of any residual red
119 mud-derived contaminants in the Torna-Marcal system, and (b) assess the
120 effectiveness of both the natural attenuation and remedial efforts in the system since
121 the disaster.

122

123

124 **METHODS**

125 *Study site*

126 Sample stations along the course of the Torna Creek, Marcal, Rába and Mosoni-
127 Duna rivers were sampled as in ¹¹ (Figure 1). These sample locations covered
128 reference sites on the Torna Creek (code: T2), Marcal (M1) and Rába (R1) rivers as
129 well as 18 sample stations directly affected by the spill as it propagated downstream.
130 Bedrock geology in the upper catchment is dominated by dolomites and limestones
131 of Triassic age which lie beneath a sequence of fluvial marls, slates and interbedded
132 sands of Miocene age.³² Land use in the catchments is predominantly agricultural
133 with some heavy industry in the towns of Ajka and Győr, while the Torna, Marcal and
134 Rába are all extensively channelised with levees minimising the extent of floodplain,
135 particularly downstream of Pápa.

136

137

138 *Sediment samples*

139 At each station triplicate bulk ($\approx 500\text{g}$) sediment samples were collected by
140 aggregating three randomly collected sub-samples from a 12m^2 area of stream bed
141 (9 separate locations sampled at each reach to give three replicates). Sediments
142 were homogenized, air-dried, disaggregated gently and sieved (2mm aperture) prior
143 to microwave-assisted total digestion (aqua regia and HF) following standard
144 methods.³³ Elemental concentrations in digests were analysed using a Perkin Elmer
145 Elan Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emission Spectrometer (Optima 5300 DV
146 ICP-OES) for all elements quoted hereafter. Selected dried and disaggregated
147 samples were also prepared for particle size analysis.

148

149 Particle size distributions on selected samples were determined through taking
150 approximately 0.2g sample which was then shaken with 5ml DIW in a 10ml tube. The
151 sample was then ultrasonicated for 30 mins, soaked for 24 hours and ultrasonicated
152 again for 30 minutes before analysis on a Malvern Mastersizer 2000E laser
153 granulometer. Prior to each sample addition background laser intensity ($> 80\%$) was
154 determined separately and subsequently subtracted from sample data. For analysis
155 the dispersed slurry was then added dropwise to a Malvern Hydro SM small sample
156 dispersion unit (pump speed 1500 rpm) until a laser obscuration value of 10-12%

157 was achieved. Sample data were calculated from the mean of three separate scans.
158 Particle size data were analysed using the GRADISTAT v.4 program.³⁴

159

160 *Statistical and spatial analyses*

161 All statistical analyses were undertaken in Minitab v15. Data were not normally
162 distributed even after log-transformation (Kolmogorov-Smirnov $p > 0.05$) so non-
163 parametric methods were used to compare sediment metal(loid) concentrations
164 between years and explore relationships between metal(loid) concentration and
165 particle size. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was undertaken on standardized
166 sediment element concentration data.

167

168 Spatial patterns in sediment metal(loid) concentrations were assessed using spatial
169 interpolation (kriging) tools in ArcGIS v.9.3. This allowed estimates of the length of
170 channel reach above a range of published threshold values to be computed for each
171 of the sample years.

172

173 **RESULTS**

174 The downstream trends in selected elements enriched in red mud at the Ajka site are
175 shown in Figure 2 for the two respective survey years. The general patterns
176 apparent for all elements are that the exceptionally high concentrations of red mud-
177 derived elements in source areas (K1-3: 0-5km from the spill site), areas of
178 preferential deposition in the Torna Creek (T5-6) and the upper Marcal River (M2-3)
179 in 2010 (25-30km downstream of the spill site) are not apparent in the 2013 survey.
180 For V and As, which were both highlighted as highly mobile in the affected rivers
181 shortly after the spill,¹¹ the total sediment concentrations in the lower parts of the
182 Marcal and Raba are consistently lower (and often close to detection limits for As) in
183 the present survey than in 2010. Only for Na, do sediment concentrations in the
184 lower reaches of the Marcal appear to be higher in 2013 than in the post-spill
185 surveys (Figure 2).

186

187 Comparison of sediment metal(loid) concentrations with sediment quality
188 guidelines³⁵⁻³⁶ shows that far shorter reaches of channel are in breach of potential
189 ecotoxicological thresholds in 2010 than 2013. Table 1 shows the length of the river

190 system affected by the spill in breach of a range of target values based on spatial
191 interpolation between successive sample locations. The Threshold Effects Levels
192 (TEL) and Predicted Effects Levels (PEL³⁶) are being used in some EU states as
193 informal guidance on fluvial sediment quality. The TEL marks the lowest
194 concentration at which negative effects on aquatic biota are apparent in toxicological
195 tests, while the higher Predicted Effects Levels (PEL) gives the concentration above
196 which negative impacts on sediment-dwelling organisms would be anticipated.³⁶
197 However, red mud is characterised by potential contaminants for which such formal
198 fluvial sediment contamination guidelines have not been formulated such as Co and,
199 notably, V which has been highlighted as a particular concern given its solubility in
200 pentavalent form as vanadate under the ambient, circum-neutral pH conditions of the
201 affected systems.¹³ For these elements, initial screening against the Dutch
202 Intervention Values for contaminated soils, which are generally less precautionary
203 than the TEL/PEL approach. It must be stressed that these guidelines offer nothing
204 more than simple screening tools for total sediment metal(loid) concentrations and
205 offer no indication of whether negative impacts on aquatic biota would occur in this
206 system, given that is dependent on the form and bioavailability of the contaminants,
207 alongside the nature of exposed communities and their local physico-chemical
208 environment. However, they are useful in assessing relative enrichment of certain
209 metal(loids) in the system and the temporal trends since the spill. For most
210 thresholds, a substantial decrease in the length of the system exceeding guideline
211 values is apparent between the two survey years (Table 1). For example, some of
212 the key contaminants of concern in the Ajka red mud such as V and As show falls
213 from around 20km of stream being affected in initial surveys, to less than 1km of
214 channel being in breach of Dutch Intervention Values in 2013. When comparing
215 against the TEL and PEL values, it is also apparent that overall reaches above
216 prescribed thresholds has fallen for the majority of contaminants listed in Table 1.
217 However, the TEL values should be used with caution in this case, given thresholds
218 are exceeded for As, Cr, Pb and Ni at some of the reference sites in the system.

219

220 Principal component analysis (PCA) was found to be a useful tool in highlighting the
221 end members of sediment elemental composition in the immediate aftermath of the
222 spill¹¹ and is useful here in highlighting the change in chemical signature of the fluvial

223 sediments over time. In updated analysis, incorporating all samples from 2010 and
224 2013, three important factors are identified, which account for 73.0% of the variance
225 in the data (from scree analysis and taking a 10% variance threshold³⁷). The
226 signature of the red mud is apparent through enrichment of a range of major and
227 minor elements. Na, Al, Fe and Ti are all in relatively high concentrations in red mud,
228 while enrichment of V, Cr, As, Ni, Co, Ga and Zr are apparent here. The red mud is
229 apparent as one end member of the sediments in the Torna-Marcál system; plotting
230 to the right hand side of Figure 3 with high values for factor 1. The series of samples
231 that plot along the line roughly parallel to PCA 1 represent mixing of red mud with the
232 unaffected sediments in the catchment which plot to the left hand side of Figure 3.
233 The only sample sites in the recent survey that suggest red mud enrichment are
234 those from locations M1 and M2 in the upper Marcal River. The former is something
235 of a curiosity given this site on the Marcal River upstream of the confluence with the
236 Torna Creek (in which the slug of red mud passed). However, consultation of 10m
237 Digital Terrain Models indicates the possibility of the spill material backing up to this
238 location given the low gradient nature of the system. Such a signal was not apparent
239 in initial surveys at M1.

240

241 The unaffected sediments are relatively enriched in K, Mg and Ba which are
242 indicative of lithogeneous weathering in the catchment which is underlain by Triassic
243 dolomites. Extensive gypsum smothering of benthic habitats was apparent after the
244 spill as part of emergency remediation efforts. These sediments comprise gypsum as
245 well as carbonate-dominated secondary precipitates³⁸ that in original surveys formed
246 a distinct population of fluvial sediment samples that plot to the upper left of Figure 3
247 with high values on factor 2. This population is characterised specifically by elevated
248 S content (142-152 g/kg). While Ca is abundant in the gypsum (and associated
249 secondary carbonates), it is a poor predictor of gypsum smothering given it is also
250 present in red mud (concentrations in the region of 50 g/kg) as well as unaffected
251 sediments in the system (range 10-50 g/kg). Figure 3 also shows two of the more
252 recent samples in a very small tributary of the Torna Creek from close to the red mud
253 impoundment appearing geochemically distinct to the lower centre of the plot. These
254 samples were characterised by enrichment of many elements indicative of

255 unaffected sediments (e.g. Ba and Mg) but are enriched in Mo (range: 60-119
256 mg/kg), albeit at levels lower than Dutch Intervention Values (200 mg/kg).

257

258 *Particle size*

259 Analysis of grain size of the sediments also highlights the physical distinctiveness of
260 the red mud from reference sediments in the system. Figure 4 shows a bimodal
261 particle size distribution in the red mud which can be classified as a poorly sorted
262 mud.³⁹ This contrasts with reference sediments upstream of the Ajka site which are
263 categorised as unimodal, poorly sorted muddy sands, with a D_{50} of $83\mu\text{m}$ and
264 comprising predominantly silicates.¹¹ The bulk (94.9%) of the distribution of
265 reference sediments is across fractions coarser than $8\mu\text{m}$ (Figure 4). The affected
266 sediments in the Torna Creek system show a markedly different particle size
267 distribution between the two sample occasions, with significantly (Mann Whitney: W :
268 876, d.f.: 46, $P < 0.001$) larger D_{50} in the recent survey (median: $84.4\mu\text{m}$, range: 7.5
269 – $516.5\mu\text{m}$) than in 2010 (median: $4.1\mu\text{m}$; range: $1.8\mu\text{m}$ – $8.6\mu\text{m}$; Figure 5). Caution should be
270 heeded when assessing differences in particle size distribution between two isolated
271 sampling campaigns, especially given the different sample months (November 2010,
272 September, 2013). However, given the average flow conditions at the time of
273 sampling ($11.5\text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ in 2010 compared with $5.5\text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ in 2013 at a permanent gauging
274 station at M7) were more conducive to fines transport in 2010, the patterns are likely
275 controlled by the red mud in the system shortly after the spill.

276

277 The contrasting particle size distributions between the red mud source term and
278 reference sediments (Figure 4) allows particle size distribution to be used as an
279 additional tracer of the dispersal and legacy of red mud across the Torna-Marcal
280 catchment. There are very strong (Spearman Rank correlation coefficients: r_s : 0.69-
281 0.86) and significant ($P < 0.001$) positive relationships between the proportion of
282 sample that is fine fraction and metal(loid) concentration across all sample sites and
283 sample years. These are displayed in Figure 6, with the percentage of fine material
284 in the sample (taken in this case as being fine silt and finer, $<8\mu\text{m}$: given this covers
285 94.9% of the particle size distribution of red mud, and only 6.1% of reference

286 samples: Figure 3) plotted against metal(loid) concentrations. The aggregated data
287 for the two sample years also reinforces the patterns of generally higher metal(loid)
288 concentration in the earlier 2010 survey.

289

290 **DISCUSSION**

291 The hotspots of red mud deposition in initial (2010) surveys were typically in the
292 lower Torna Creek and upper Marcal River. These were reaches characterised by a
293 largely natural channel planform, slow flow and dense riparian and marginal
294 macrophytes (dominated by *Phragmites australis*) conducive to deposition of fine
295 sediments. This was unlike the upper Torna Creek which is heavily channelized
296 (straight engineered channel with trapezoidal cross section) and velocity typically two
297 to three times that of the lower Torna Creek.¹¹ The sites where red mud accumulated
298 in the lower Torna Creek and upper Marcal were subject to intensive red mud
299 removal and dredging.²³ Around 80km of the Torna Creek and Upper Marcal were
300 subject to dredging which was completed by the end of 201,^{23, 40} and removed
301 around 60,000 m³ of red mud and red mud-contaminated sediments from the
302 affected rivers.²³

303 Previous workers have highlighted the characteristic fine nature of the red mud, with
304 Gelencser et al.¹⁰ showing the distribution of resuspended red mud peaking
305 marginally above a 1µm aerodynamic diameter. Other analyses of red mud from the
306 impoundment shortly after release showed a peak of particles centring on 0.7µm
307 corresponded with nano-particulate hematite aggregates,^{11,13} while the coarser
308 peak (centring on 3µm) was identified as cancrinite, a common sodium
309 aluminosilicate mineral in red mud.⁴¹ These fractions are typically finer than those
310 documented in systems impacted by tailings spills from base metal refining. For
311 example, sediment-borne contaminants are concentrated in fractions of the order of
312 10-500µm after the Aznalcóllar spill in southern Spain in 1999³⁰ and the signal of
313 metal contamination remained in the river system several years after the spill.⁴²

314 The strong, significant correlations between metal(loid) concentration and proportion
315 of fines in the sample (Figure 6) demonstrate: (a) the significance of metal(loids)
316 within the fine fraction of the sediments, and (b) that the fine fraction red mud is the

317 predominant source term and vector for many contaminants through the system.
318 Previous analyses showed many contaminants (notably As, Co and Cr) to be
319 associated with residual hard-to-leach fractions of the red mud-affected sediments
320 which is likely to limit and therefore are less likely to be remobilised from the fine
321 fraction red mud.¹¹ Other workers¹³ found Cr to be present predominantly in trivalent
322 form substituted into haematite in source material, so while Cr is present in total
323 concentrations in sediments that are above contamination screening guidance
324 values, under the ambient circum-neutral pH of the Torna-Marcál system,¹¹
325 remobilisation to the water column would be minimal. As such, while the red mud will
326 be readily entrained in the water column, the impacts of contaminated sediments
327 during transit and on downstream systems is likely to be tempered significantly by
328 the limited bioavailability of many of the contaminants present in the red mud.

329 While the dominant trends are similar between contaminants considered in Figure 6,
330 there are some subtle differences between elements, which may reflect their
331 occurrence or behaviour in the Torna-Marcál system. For example, the correlation
332 between As concentration and the percentage of very fine silt fraction is slightly
333 noisier than or other red mud-derived contaminants. This may suggest a more
334 widespread occurrence of As throughout lithogeneous sediments in the catchment or
335 possibly increased mobility and cycling of As within the fluvial system given the As
336 elevations are not consistent with other red mud-derived elements. The former would
337 be anticipated given the presence of the Csabpuszta bauxite deposits and Ajka Coal
338 Formation (Cretaceous) in the upper catchment,⁴³ which can have modest to high As
339 concentrations. The latter would be consistent with the elevated aqueous As
340 concentrations observed in the Marcál catchment since pre-spill conditions²⁶ which
341 may be a consequence of leaching of As from red mud affected soils (e.g. the
342 reductive dissolution of As in organic-rich sediments). This has been shown in
343 experimental conditions to be enhanced by mixing red mud with organics (for
344 example where thin layers of red mud were ploughed into topsoil); a release that is
345 largely dependent on the final pH of the soil after mixing with red mud.⁴⁴

346 One of the other key characteristics of the fluvial sediments in the immediate
347 aftermath of the spill, was the signal of gypsum amendment (to aid neutralisation of
348 the highly alkaline leachate). These gypsum affected reaches were apparent around
349 source areas (K2-3) but most notably in the middle reaches of the Marcál system

350 (samples M7, M10-M11: Figure 3) from where neutralisation operations were
351 coordinated. Scavenging of mobile metal(loids) from the water column in secondary
352 neo-formed carbonate precipitates, which were a product of gypsum dosing, was
353 highlighted as being at least a transient sink for As and V in previous studies.^{13,38}
354 Coupled with the lack of evidence of any persistence of gypsum-dominated
355 sediments in the system (Figure 3), the low As and V concentrations in these
356 gypsum-dosed reaches in the recent surveys suggests that risks of remobilisation of
357 large inventories of metal(loids) from remediated sediments is not a long term issue.
358 Given that many sediment sample sites were in the vicinity of the road bridges over
359 the streams which were also the deployment locations for gypsum dosing, the lack of
360 high Ca and S sediments in these reaches is good evidence that the remedial efforts
361 themselves have left no lasting negative legacy on the system. Furthermore, there
362 were no observable hardpans at any of the sample stations in 2013. Concerns were
363 raised for example of the effects of carbonate hardpan formation¹⁵ which can limit
364 oxygen diffusion through benthic sediments and negatively affect invertebrate
365 communities as has been demonstrated in other freshwater systems subject to
366 benthic smothering with mineral precipitates and fines.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷

367

368 *Conclusions and management implications*

369 Given the scale of the red mud release from the Ajka site, and the international
370 concern surrounding the potential long term environmental impacts of the spill,⁴⁷ it is
371 encouraging that recent surveys show that the geochemical signal of the red mud is
372 largely absent from the affected downstream river systems. This is also consistent
373 with official monitoring data on water quality and biological indices of river system
374 health.²³ The extensive and rapid remedial efforts at Ajka, led by Hungarian
375 scientists and authorities, served to neutralise and contain residual water releases
376 from the site in the short term, while longer term within-channel dredging and
377 recovery of thick red mud deposits in riparian areas has significantly limited the
378 prospect of remobilisation of contaminated floodplain sediments. The recovery of the
379 Torna-Marcál system has been assisted by the fine-grained nature of the red mud,
380 and importantly the concentration of most contaminants of concern in the red mud
381 (e.g. As, Cr, Ni, V) within the very fine fraction of red mud. As studies immediately

382 after the spill suggested, the fine-grained nature of the spill material lends itself to
383 downstream transport and dilution.¹¹ The very strong relationship between particle
384 size and metal(loid) content highlighted here reinforces this notion. Ongoing
385 monitoring of the system would still be prudent and should focus on (1) the risks
386 associated with potential increased salinity and alkalinity of affected soils and waters
387 (e.g. sodification), (2) the fate of metal(loids) in areas where red mud was ploughed
388 into soils, and (3) any long-term biological response to red mud exposure. However,
389 the recent surveys undertaken here highlight the rapid removal of much of the
390 contaminated material released from the Ajka red mud spill through either remedial
391 efforts or dilution. As such the long term impacts of contaminant metal(loids)
392 released into the Torna-Marcal system are unlikely to be as recalcitrant as in other
393 systems subject to notable tailings impoundment failures.

394

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FIGURES

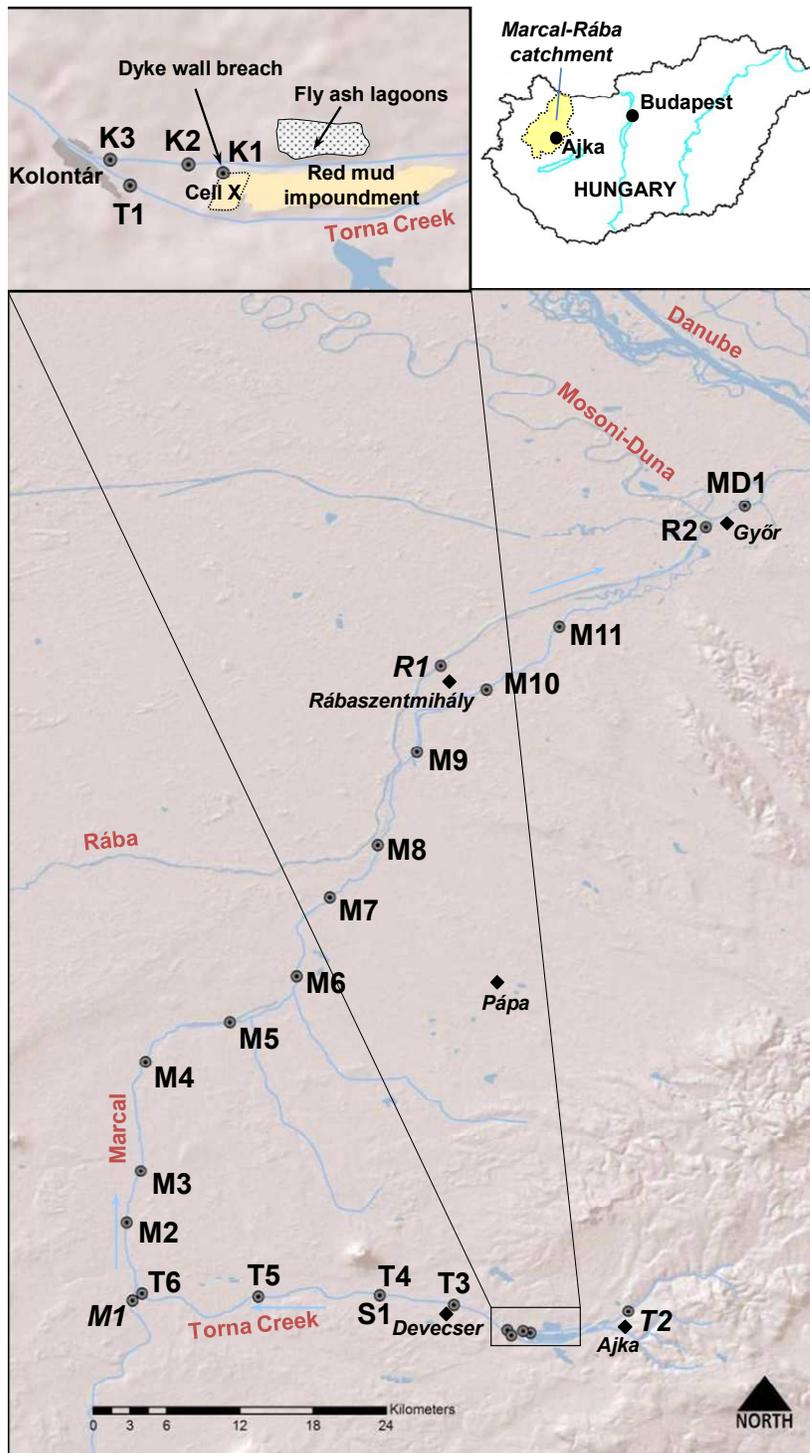


Figure 1. Location map of sample stations throughout the Torna Creek (sample prefix T), Marcal River (M), Raba (R) and Mosoni-Duna (MD). Location of K1 (source sample) is Lat $47^{\circ}05'20\text{N}$ Long $14^{\circ}29'43\text{E}$.

Figure 2. Downstream trends in concentrations of key major and minor elements through the Torna-Marcal system between 2010 and 2013 surveys

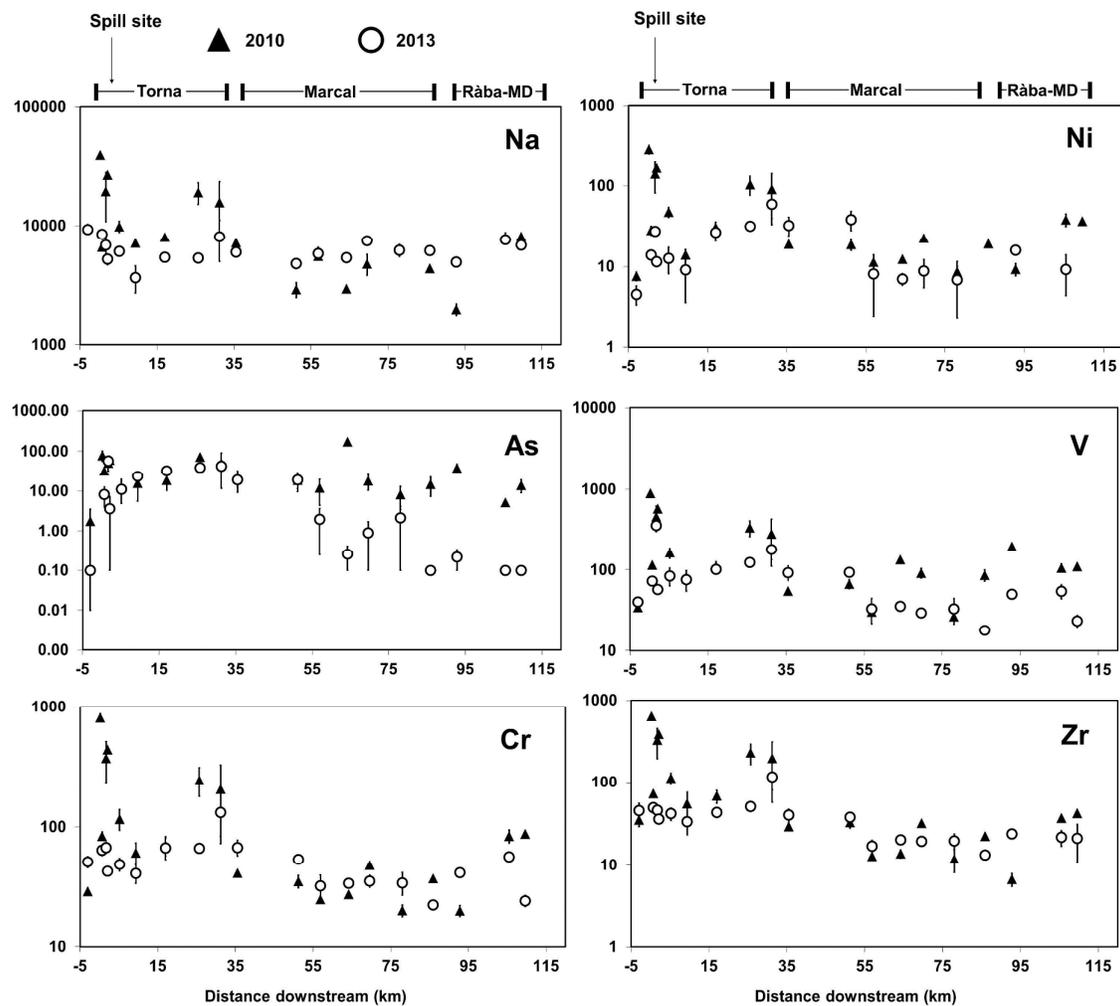


Figure 3. Principal Component Analysis of elemental concentrations in sediments in 2010 and 2013 surveys by site (left panel) with eigenvectors for key elements (right panel).

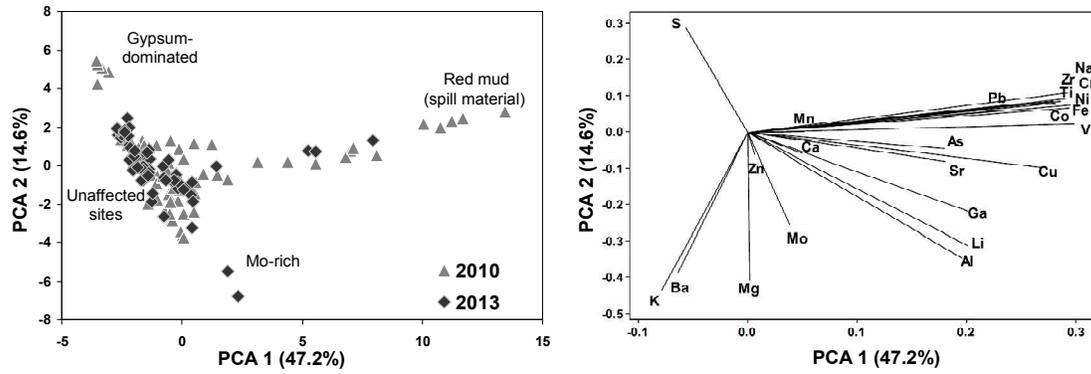


Figure 4. Mean particle size distribution of red mud (sample K1) and reference sediments in the Torna Creek (sample T2). Error bars show standard deviation ($n = 3$). Where not visible error bars are plotted within the sample symbols.

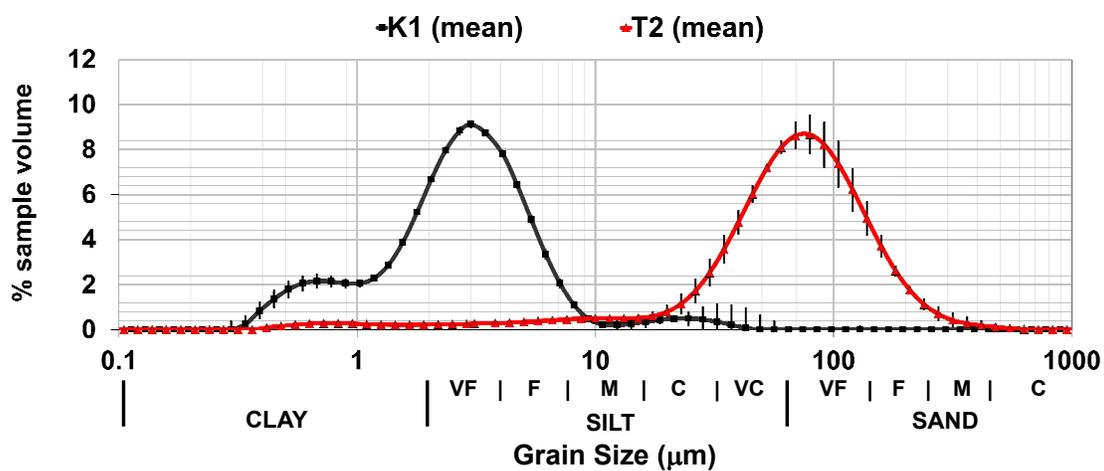


Figure 5. Distribution of D_{50} values for sediments in the Torna Creek in 2010 and 2013 surveys ($n = 24$ for each year).

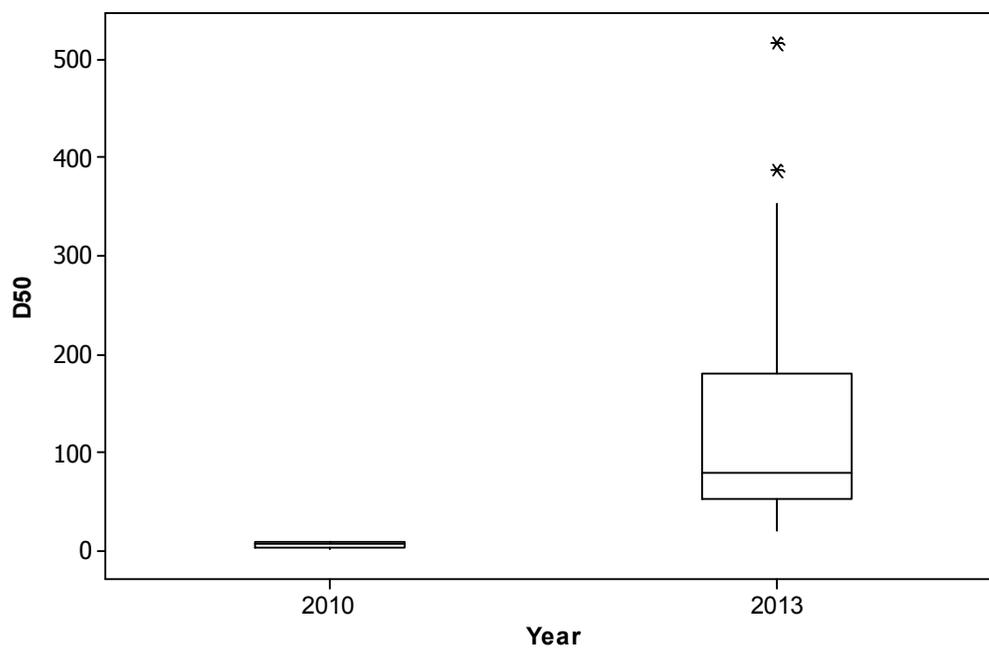


Figure 6. The relationship between the proportion of very fine silt (<8 μ m) in fluvial sediments and metal(loid) concentrations through the Torna-Marcal system in 2010 and 2013.

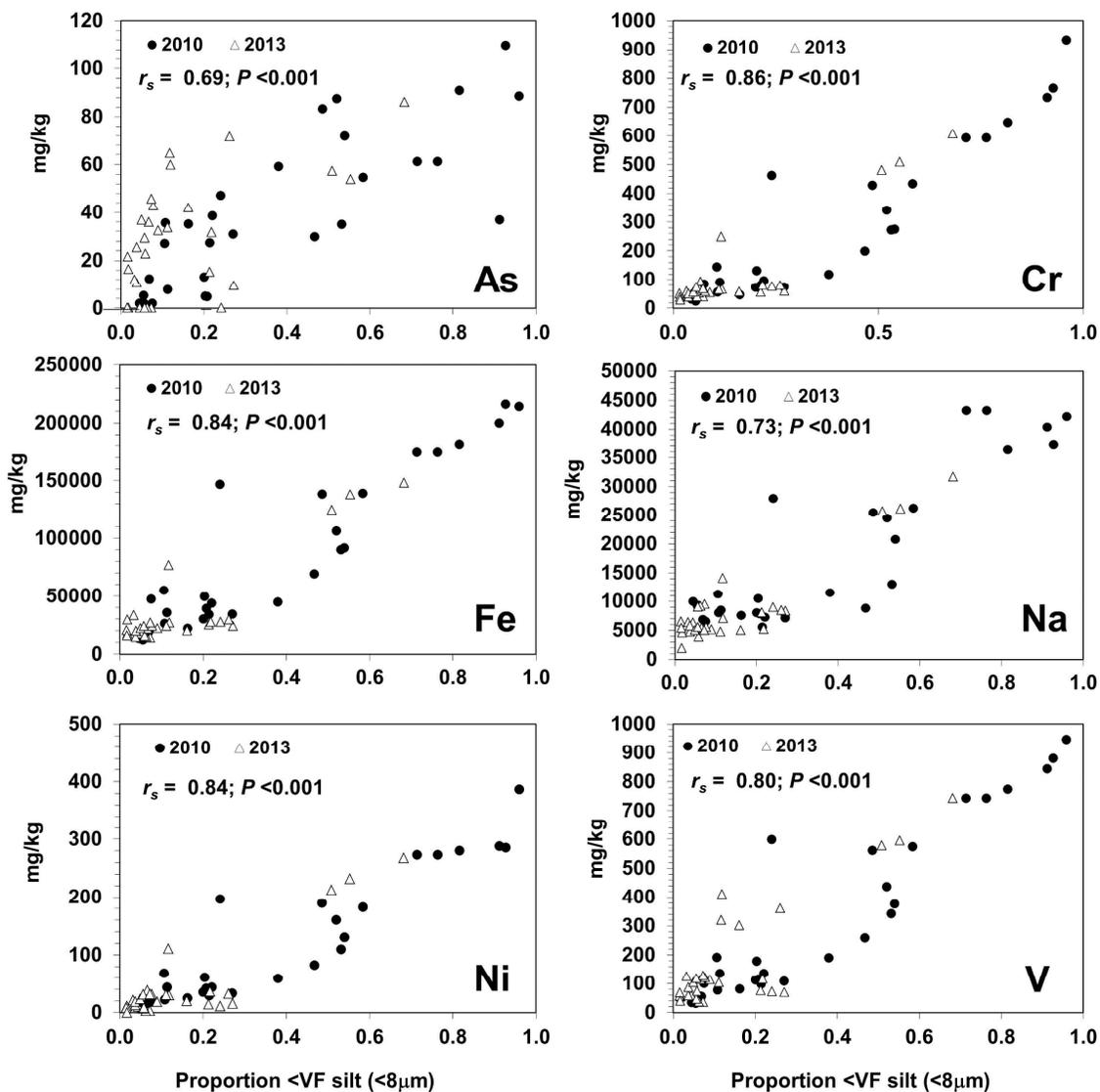


Table 1. The length of stream channel with average sediment metal(loid) concentrations in excess of standard soil and sediment contamination screening guidance in 2010 and 2013. (-): no prescribed threshold value.

		As	Co	Cr	Cu	Ni	Pb	V	Zn
Dutch Intervention Values (mg/kg)		55	240	380	190	210	530	250	720
PEL (mg/kg)		17	-	90	197	36	91.3	-	315
TEL (mg/kg)		5.9	-	37.3	35.7	18	35	-	121
2010 (km)	Dutch	23.1	0	1.1	0	0.2	0	18.3	0
	<i>PEL</i>	<i>71.8</i>	-	<i>31.1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>33.8</i>	<i>2.2</i>	-	<i>0</i>
	TEL	105.2	-	68.2	2.0	64.4	40.2	-	1.8
2013 (km)	Dutch	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0.4	0.6
	<i>PEL</i>	<i>45.7</i>	-	<i>12.4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>19.0</i>	<i>1.7</i>	-	<i>0</i>
	TEL	54.1	-	56.6	0	43.5	18.4	-	0.7