

Abstract Submitted
for the MAR13 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

Earthquakes in the Laboratory: Continuum-Granular Interactions ROBERT ECKE, DREW GELLER, CARL WARD, SCOTT BACKHAUS, Los Alamos National Laboratory — Earthquakes in nature feature large tectonic plate motion at large scales of 10-100 km and local properties of the earth on the scale of the rupture width, of the order of meters. Fault gouge often fills the gap between the large slipping plates and may play an important role in the nature and dynamics of earthquake events. We have constructed a laboratory scale experiment that represents a similitude scale model of this general earthquake description. Two photo-elastic plates (50 cm x 25 cm x 1 cm) confine approximately 3000 bi-disperse nylon rods (diameters 0.12 and 0.16 cm, height 1 cm) in a gap of approximately 1 cm. The plates are held rigidly along their outer edges with one held fixed while the other edge is driven at constant speed over a range of about 5 cm. The local stresses exerted on the plates are measured using their photo-elastic response, the local relative motions of the plates, i.e., the local strains, are determined by the relative motion of small ball bearings attached to the top surface, and the configurations of the nylon rods are investigated using particle tracking tools. We find that this system has properties similar to real earthquakes and are exploring these “lab-quake” events with the quantitative tools we have developed.

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Date submitted: 10 Dec 2012

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