Characterization of the highly fractured zone at the Grimsel test site based on hydraulic tomography

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Abstract. In this study, we infer the structural and hydraulic properties of the highly fractured zone at the Grimsel test site in Switzerland by a stochastic inversion method. The fractured rock is modeled directly as a discrete fracture network (DFN) within an impermeable rock matrix. Cross-hole transient pressure signals recorded from constant rate injection tests in different intervals provide the basis for the herein presented first field application of the inversion. The experimental setup is realized by a multi-packer system. The geological mapping of the structures intercepted by boreholes and data from previous studies that were undertaken as part of the in-situ stimulation and circulation (ISC) experiments facilitate the setup of the site-dependent conceptual and forward model. The inversion results show that two preferential flow paths between the two boreholes can be distinguished. One is dominated by fractures with large hydraulic apertures while the other path consists mainly of fractures with a smaller aperture. The probability of fractures linking both flow paths increases the closer we are at the second injection borehole. The results accord with the findings from other studies conducted at the site during the ISC measurement campaign and add new insights about the highly fractured zone at the prominent study site.

1 Introduction

Solid rocks such as in crystalline and bedrock formations typically have a compact matrix of low permeability. Water pathways are focused on mechanical discontinuities that separate individual rock blocks over multiple scales. Such fractures are commonly described as planar structures, which form a network that is hard to resolve at field sites. This is due to the high diversity and complexity of natural fracture networks, the difficulty to identify fracture connectivities and thus to interpret the hydraulic regime of an entire formation based on local fracture detection. Accordingly, fractured aquifer characterization represents a challenge, with relatively high costs for applying specialized field investigation techniques and for gathering a sufficient data set for reliable hydraulic description. The general poor understanding of how groundwater flows in fractured field sites is in contrast to the relevance of fractured environments that host elementary freshwater reservoirs worldwide (Chandra et al., 2019; Wilske et al., 2020; Spencer et al., 2021). Aside from this, adequate characterization of the properties of fractured field sites concerns many subsurface engineering applications, such as the planning and operation of enhanced geothermal systems (Vogler et al., 2017; Kittilä et al., 2020), the evaluation of potential sites for a nuclear waste repository (Follin et al., 2014; Li et al., 2022), or the description of an excavation-induced damaged zone around tunnels and openings (Armand et al., 2014; de

25 La Vaissière et al., 2015).

Depending on the chosen experimental setting and the available data, different interpretations of the hydraulic and structural properties of a fracture network are possible. A fractured site can be inspected locally by borehole data, e.g., core mapping and geophysical image logs such as optical or acoustic televiewer. The depth and orientation of structures intercepted by boreholes
30 characterizes fracture intensity and prevalent fracture orientations (Armand et al., 2014; Krietsch et al., 2018; Chandra et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2020; Yin and Chen, 2020; Pavičić et al., 2021), and by fitting probability distributions to the parameters a statistical analysis can be conducted (Barthélémy et al., 2009; Massiot et al., 2017). Single-hole and cross-hole flow and tracer tests are employed to infer permeability and connectivity between different borehole intervals (Le Borgne et al., 2006; Follin et al., 2014; de La Vaissière et al., 2015; Zha et al., 2015; de La Bernardie et al., 2018; Jalali et al., 2018; Brixel et al., 2020b, a;
35 Tan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022), the velocity distribution (Kang et al., 2015), or transport properties (Kittilä et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

Detailed insight about the properties of flow paths between adjacent boreholes can be gained by tomographic methods. The principle of all tomographic methods is perturbing the investigated system e.g., by an injection of fluid, a tracer, a thermal
40 anomaly, or an electric current, and recording the response at nearby receivers. In particular, geophysical tomographic methods are applied for the characterization of the rock properties, the identification of fractured, in particular highly fractured zones, and for the monitoring of flow pathways (Deparis et al., 2008; Dorn et al., 2012; Robinson et al., 2016; Doetsch et al., 2020). This is frequently done in combination with hydrogeological methods (Day-Lewis et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2006; Dorn et al., 2013; Voorn et al., 2015; Giertzuch et al., 2021b, a). A comprehensive portrayal of geophysical methods for the investigation
45 of fractured field sites and the potential target applications is given in Day-Lewis et al. (2017).

In contrast to geophysical exploration techniques, hydraulic, pneumatic or tracer tomography is based on a fluid or tracer injection at a source well. The response is recorded at different adjacent boreholes at different depth intervals. In most cases, the pressure signals or tracer arrival curves are evaluated by a continuous hydraulic conductivity distribution based on an equiv-
50 alent porous media (EPM) concept (Illman et al., 2009; Sharmeen et al., 2012; Zha et al., 2015; Zhao and Illman, 2017; Zhao et al., 2019; Kittilä et al., 2020; Tiedeman and Barrash, 2020; Poduri et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Thereby, detected high conductivity zones correspond with the locations of fractures or faults. Further insights about the fracture properties and improved results can be gained by particle tracking simulations (Tiedeman and Barrash, 2020), binary priors representing either fracture or matrix (Poduri et al., 2021), or by generating synthetic models with similar features like
55 the field site (Zha et al., 2015). Geostatistical methods apply a stochastic EPM and different realizations of the subsurface are evaluated (Park et al., 2004; Blessent et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2017). Here, different facies represent different levels of fractured or intact rock, for which hydraulic conductivities are calibrated. In contrast to the EPM approach, the properties of the fracture network are inferred more directly by calibrating a connectivity pattern (Fischer et al., 2018b, a; Klepikova et al., 2020).

60   Our inversion approach differs from previous studies insofar as the fractured rock is represented explicitly as a discrete fracture network (DFN) and the hydraulic and structural parameters of the fractures are inferred directly. The validity of the approach was demonstrated for synthetic test cases in two dimensions (2D) (Somogyvári et al., 2017; Ringel et al., 2019) and three dimensions (3D) (Ringel et al., 2021). In this study, the new inversion method is applied to field data for the first time. We use transient pressure signals from hydraulic tomography experiments conducted as part of the in-situ stimulation

65   and circulation (ISC) experiments at the Grimsel test site in Switzerland (GTS). Based on this application, the objective of this paper is to reveal the feasibility and capability of 3D DFN inversion in practice under well-explored field conditions.

The paper is structured as follows: In the first part, we describe the site and the hydraulic tomography experiments to be used for the inversion. The implementation of the inversion is elaborated in the second part. We review the forward modeling

70   procedure and the general inversion framework developed in previous work with synthetic test cases. We then explain the site-dependent inversion setting, i.e., the conceptual model and the prior parameter distributions that serve as basis for a stochastic inversion procedure. The inversion results are interpreted and compared with findings from related ISC experiments.

2   Experimental setting

2.1   Test site

75   The GTS is an underground rock laboratory located in the Aar Massif in the Swiss Alps. The ISC experiments that serve as basis for this study utilized 15 boreholes of $20\,\mathrm{m}$ to $50\,\mathrm{m}$ depth, including two injection boreholes (INJ1 and INJ2). The other boreholes are used for stress and strain measurement, seismic, pressure, and temperature monitoring during the hydraulic stimulation phases (Krietsch et al., 2018). A general overview of the site with the persistent structures and the boreholes is shown in Fig. 1a. A summary of the experiments conducted during the ISC measurement campaign and their results are given

80   in Amann et al. (2018) and Doetsch et al. (2018).

The crystalline rock at the southern part of the GTS (ISC experiment volume) has been moderately fractured. Ductile (S1) and brittle-ductile (S3) shear zones can be distinguished through the investigated rock volume (Fig. 1a) (Krietsch et al., 2018). The shear zones consist of a fault core, a damage zone and an unperturbed host rock (Wenning, 2018). A $4\,\mathrm{m}$ to $6\,\mathrm{m}$

85   highly fractured zone with fracture density (P10) around $3\,\mathrm{m}^{-1}$ is present between the fault cores of the two S3 shear zones, which is displayed in Fig. 1b. The fractures can be distinguished in wall damage zones adjacent to the S3 faults and linking damage zones, i.e., fractures connecting both fault cores (Brixel et al., 2020b). Testing campaigns on the connectivity between several intervals of the injection boreholes revealed that the best response occurs between the intervals 3 and 4 of both injection boreholes, which are located in the aforementioned highly fractured zone. Therefore, this is not only a highly fractured zone

90   but also the most permeable region with conductive fractures (Jalali et al., 2018). For this reason, the characterization of the hydraulic and structural properties of this region (Fig. 1b) is the target of this study. The geological mapping of the structures intercepted by the boreholes and tunnels provides the basis for the setup of the conceptual model (Krietsch et al., 2018).
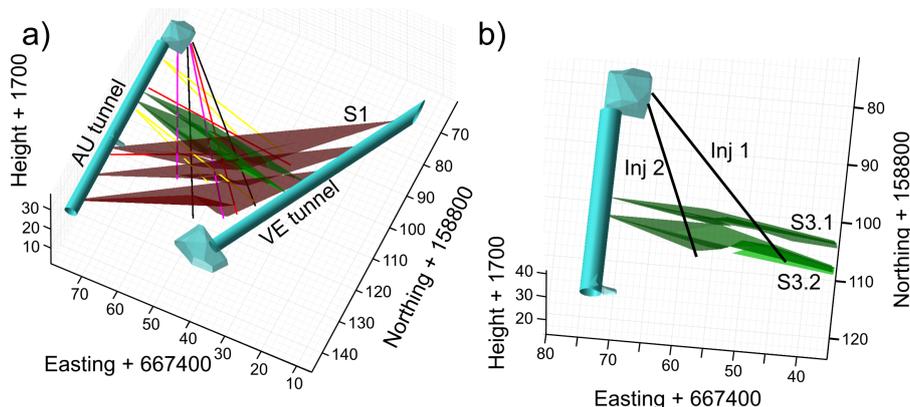
Figure 1. a) General overview of the ISC experiments site with the tunnels, all boreholes, and the two types of shear zones (Krietsch et al., 2018) and b) the volume that is investigated in this study, i.e., the zone between the two S3 faults.

Table 1. Parameters of the packer intervals and the hydraulic tomography experiments.

Interval	Interval depth [m]	Injection flow rate [ml min^{-1}]	Injection time [min]
Inj1-Int3	$30 - 34$	60	60
Inj1-Int4	$27 - 29$	400	30
Inj2-Int3	$25 - 29$	60	60
Inj2-Int4	$22 - 24$	400	12

2.2 Hydraulic tomography data

The hydraulic tomography tests that are applied in this study are part of the characterization phase of the ISC experiment. We
95 utilize transient pressure signals from constant rate injection tests in the intervals 3 and 4 of the injection boreholes INJ1 and
INJ2. The different intervals are isolated by a multi-packer system. The properties of the packer intervals and the parameters
of the injection are summarized in Table 1. Between each injection experiment, pressure recovery was possible. The pressure
response of the fluid is measured using piezoresistive pressure transducers. The resolution of the pressure response data is in
the range of $0.5\,\mathrm{kPa}$. The minimum principal stress is in the order of $8\,\mathrm{MPa}$. Since the injected fluid pressure is much below the
100 minimum principal stress, the coupling between hydraulic and mechanical effects can be neglected in the forward modeling of
the experiment. The fluid pressure is measured with $\Delta t = 2\,\mathrm{s}$. In general, we use similar hydraulic tomography experiments as
applied by Klepikova et al. (2020) except for a shorter injection time (Table 1) for computational reasons. The pressure signals
are shown in Fig. 2 for each injection interval. The noisy pressure response data can be applied directly for the inversion
without the necessity of smoothing or filtering the signals.
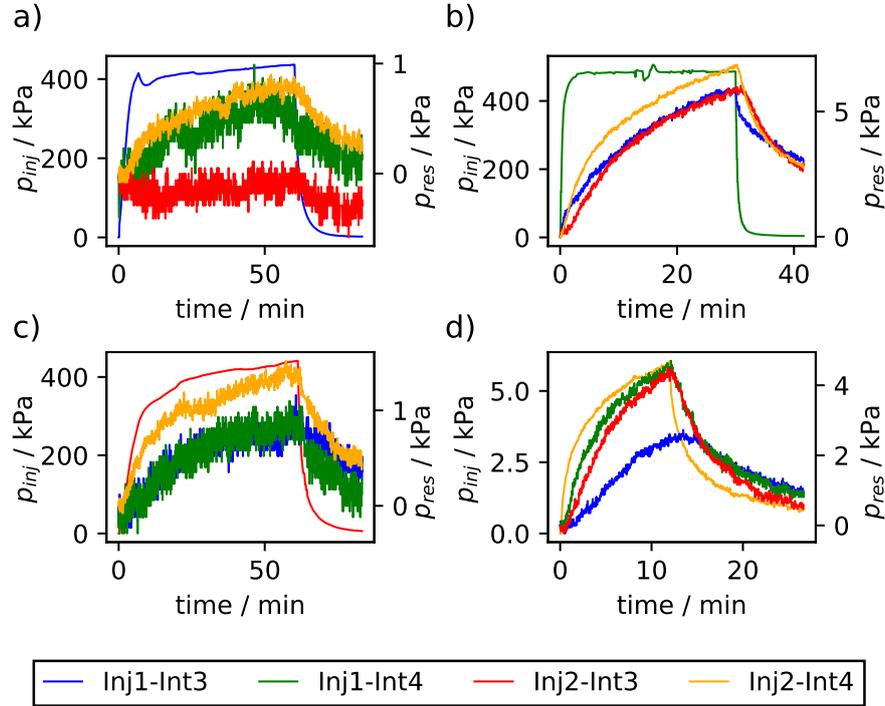
Figure 2. Pressure response in the different intervals provoked by a constant rate injection applied sequentially to the intervals Inj1-Int3 (a), Inj1-Int4 (b), Inj2-Int3 (c), and Inj2-Int4 (d) according to Table 1. The pressure measured in the respective injection interval belongs to the left vertical axes and the pressure signals measured in the observation intervals to the right vertical axes.

3   Implementation of the inversion

3.1   Forward modeling

Fractures are modeled as 2D objects with constant properties normal to the fracture midplane in a 3D rock matrix that is assumed impermeable. The pressure diffusion in a single fracture is described by

$$a\rho S \frac{\partial p}{\partial t} - \nabla_T \cdot \left(a\rho \frac{k_f}{\mu} \nabla_T p \right) = aq \tag{1}$$

with the hydraulic aperture a [m], the density of the fluid ρ [$\mathrm{kg\,m^{-3}}$], the specific storage S [$\mathrm{Pa^{-1}}$], the permeability k_f [$\mathrm{m^2}$], the dynamic viscosity μ [$\mathrm{Pa\,s}$], and a source/sink term q [$\mathrm{kg\,m^{-3}\,s^{-1}}$]. The pressure p [Pa] consists of the static pressure and the piezometric pressure. The permeability is related to the aperture by

$$k_f = \frac{a^2}{12} \tag{2}$$

and the gradient ∇_T is evaluated in the fracture plane (Zimmerman and Bodvarsson, 1996; Berre et al., 2019). In this study, flow in the shear zones is modeled with the same approach as flow in the DFN, i.e., the shear zones are represented as 2D
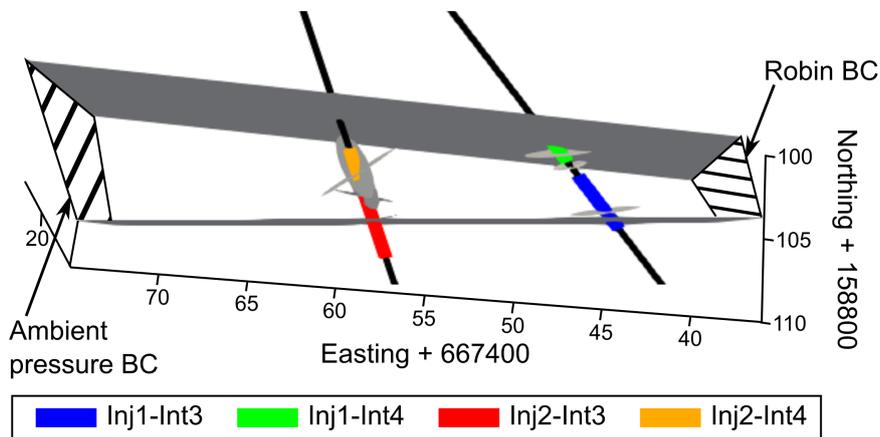
Figure 3. Overview of the volume considered in the forward model and the boundary conditions (BC). The geometry of the S3 faults is simplified to planes, the fractures intercepted by the injection intervals are illustrated as plane ellipses.

objects whereby the flow parameters are given by hydraulic aperture and specific storage (Eq. 1). The equations are solved numerically by the finite element method (FEM) with a conforming discretization at the intersections of different fractures. The generation of the geometry and the meshing of the fractures and shear zones are implemented using the open-source mesh generator *Gmsh* (Geuzaine and Remacle, 2009). The geometry of each structure is created separately by the built-in geometry

120 module of *Gmsh*. The fractures and the shear zones are connected for a conforming discretization at the intersections of different structures by the Boolean operations implemented in *Gmsh*.

The investigated volume is limited to the volume between the two S3 shear zones (Fig. 1). Since the properties of the shear zones are not the target of this study, the shape is simplified and the associated hydraulic parameters are fixed. The shape of

125 the shear zones is simplified to a plane rectangle, i.e., a linear interpolation between the shear zones' traces at the injection boreholes. A constant hydraulic aperture of $a_{SZ} = 1 \cdot 10^{-5}$ m is assigned. This small value is chosen based on preliminary tests and the knowledge, that the cores of the shear zones are impermeable at their tunnel intersection. A higher permeability of the shear zone cores at specific locations can be covered by placing fractures in the respective area which accounts also for the spatial variability of the permeability of the shear zone cores. The specific storage value is also fixed to $S_{SZ} = 1 \cdot 10^{-5}$ Pa^{-1}. The

130 high value is prescribed due to the centimeter-wide opening of the shear zone and considering the results from cross-borehole tests (Klepikova et al., 2020).

The implemented boundary conditions are shown in Fig. 3 together with the S3 faults, and the fractures intercepted by the injection boreholes obtained from optical televiewer logs (Krietsch et al., 2018). The boundary conditions are chosen under

135 consideration that only a small volume of the ISC experiments is investigated in this study. Therefore, the following boundary

conditions are applied: The AU tunnel is represented by a pressure boundary condition, in this case, ambient pressure. The way to the VE tunnel cannot be modeled explicitly. Therefore, we apply a Robin boundary condition to consider the flow and the extension of the shear zones towards the VE tunnel (Watanabe et al., 2017). A no-flow boundary condition is applied normal to the planes of the fractures and shear zones.

3.2 Inversion algorithm

The parameters of the DFN θ are treated as unknowns characterized by probability density functions. Based on the Bayesian equation, the posterior density function $p(\theta|\mathbf{d})$ of the parameters given the measured data $\mathbf{d}$ is proportional to the likelihood function

$$\log L\left(\mathbf{d}|\theta\right) \propto -\sum_{i=1}^{N_{\mathrm{data}}} \frac{\left(d_i - f\left(\theta\right)_i\right)^2}{2\sigma_i^2} \tag{3}$$

and the prior distributions $p(\theta)$ (Gelman et al., 2013). The term $f(\theta)$ refers to the forward simulation of the hydraulic tomography experiment for the DFN realization defined by the parameters θ. The posterior density function is evaluated by sampling from it according to Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods. This is an iterative procedure whereby new samples θ' are proposed by a proposal function and accepted $(\theta_i = \theta')$ with probability

$$\alpha = \min\left(1, \frac{p(\theta'|\mathbf{d})q(\theta_{i-1}|\theta')}{p(\theta_{i-1}|\mathbf{d})q(\theta'|\theta_{i-1})}|J|\right), \tag{4}$$

or rejected $(\theta_i = \theta_{i-1})$ (Brooks et al., 2011). The so-called reversible jump MCMC algorithm allows to change the number of parameters (Green, 1995). In this study, the number of parameters is adjusted by deleting or inserting a fracture within the prior bounds. The determinant of the Jacobian matrix $|J|$ has to be considered for transdimensional updates. It equals one for parameters sampled from the prior without linking its value to already existing parameters (Sambridge et al., 2006). The parameters of the inversion problem are adjusted by proposing a new value from a normal distribution whereby the mean of the normal distribution is given by the current value.

The variance σ^2 in the likelihood function (Eq. 3) accounts for different sources of uncertainties like measurement errors, modeling errors, and errors of the conceptual model. Therefore, the value of the variance is estimated separately for each pressure signal. This is implemented as part of the inversion algorithm after the update of the parameters of the DFN. The measured data is assumed to consist of a mean and a normally distributed error $\mathbf{d} = \overline{\mathbf{d}} + \mathcal{N}\left(0, \sigma^2\right)$. With this assumption, the variance can be estimated by sampling from an inverse gamma distribution

$$\sigma^2|\mathbf{d}, \theta \sim \mathcal{IG}\left(\frac{N_{\mathrm{data}}}{2}, \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N_{\mathrm{data}}}\left(d_i - f(\theta)_i\right)^2}{2}\right) \tag{5}$$

as introduced by Gelman (2006) and implemented by e.g., Haario et al. (2006) and Ringel et al. (2019). For this reason, the noisy measured data can be applied directly for the inversion without filtering or smoothing the signals.
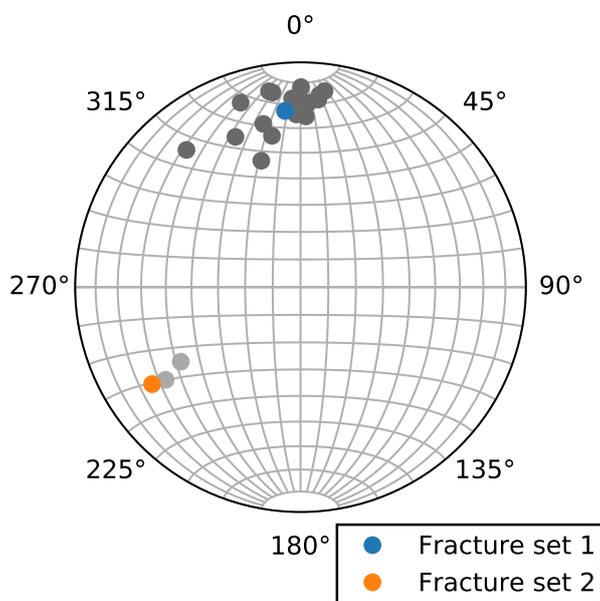
Figure 4. Orientations of the structures between the fault cores of the S3 shear zones in the injection boreholes observed from optical televiewer logs (Krietsch et al., 2018) together with the defined fracture sets applied for the conceptual model.

3.3 Inversion constraints

The overall inversion procedure relies on several simplifications and parameters with less importance for our research target. For instance, the parameters specifying the properties of the shear zones have to be fixed. In general, our aim is an optimal balance between the accuracy of the generated results and the computational costs of the inversion procedure.

The underlying conceptual model comprises simplifications of the properties of single fractures that serve as inversion constraints. We assume plane ellipses as the fracture shape and the length of the minor axis equals half of the length of the major axis, i.e., the length ratio is fixed. The hydraulic aperture is assumed constant over the fracture plane. Two fracture sets are defined with fixed orientations based on the orientations of the structures intercepted by the two injection boreholes. Thereby, the fracture set is chosen by the inversion algorithm for the fractures between the boreholes, however, the orientation assigned to the fracture sets are default. Figure 4 shows the orientation of the structures between the S3 shear zones intercepted by the two injection boreholes and the orientations defined for the two fracture sets. The appearance and distribution of the fractures dominate the flow. Accordingly, the surrounding rock matrix is assumed impermeable. Fractures of the fracture set 1 are approximately parallel to the S3 faults. Hence, a position close to an S3 fault also accounts for spatial changes in the permeability of the S3 faults.

Table 2. Uniform prior distributions defined by a minimum and maximum possible value.

	Minimum	Maximum
x (Easting + 667400) / m	45	70
y (Northing + 158800) / m	102	108
z (Elevation + 1700) / m	14	19
Fracture length / m	0.4	7
Hydraulic aperture / m	$1 \cdot 10^{-3}$	$1 \cdot 10^{-5}$
Specific storage / Pa^{-1}	$5 \cdot 10^{-10}$	$1 \cdot 10^{-6}$

All spatial values refer to the position of the midpoint of the ellipse.

3.4 Prior distributions

The parameters to be inferred are the number of fractures, the position of the fractures, the fracture lengths, the hydraulic aperture separately for each fracture, and the specific storage coefficient that applies to the whole DFN. The specific storage S (Eq. 1) is given by the compressibility of water in theory (Freeze and Cherry, 1979). However, some fractures are only partially open and due to the roughness of the surface, the specific storage can be increased compared to the theoretical value (Jalali et al., 2018). Moreover, the hydraulic aperture is in general smaller than the actual aperture (Berre et al., 2019). The specific storage is assumed to be valid for the whole DFN since two variable hydraulic parameters for each fracture are not feasible for the inversion algorithm. Accordingly, five different update types are implemented to be applied sequentially: the transdimensional update changes the number of parameters by either inserting a new fracture or deleting a fracture. The other update types keep the number of parameters constant but adjust position, length, hydraulic aperture, or the specific storage. For the update of the position, length, and hydraulic aperture, one fracture is chosen randomly and a new value is proposed by a random perturbation of the current value.

Uniform prior distributions are applied, i.e., a parameter is specified by a constant probability between minimum and maximum possible values that are given in Table 2. The spatial priors are derived in general from the position of fractures intersecting the injection boreholes. The maximum value in the x direction corresponds to the distance to the AU tunnel to apply the boundary condition. The prior for the north direction is given such that the fractures are located between the cores of the S3 shear zones. The elevation of fractures is expected to have a minor influence on the flow between the two boreholes, and a broader possible range for the elevation would be less resolved. The minimum value for the fracture length is given by the borehole diameter, and the maximum possible value corresponds with the distance between the shear zones. Fractures proposed during iterative inversion which intersect with the fault cores of the shear zones are reduced to the part of the fracture within the

investigated volume (Fig. 1b and Fig. 3).

The prior range for the aperture is approximated from the results of single- and cross-borehole tests (Jalali et al., 2018; Brixel et al., 2020b, a). The minimum specific storage value is given by the compressibility of water (Freeze and Cherry,
205 1979), whereas the maximum value is based on cross-borehole injection tests (Klepikova et al., 2020). Both prior distributions for the hydraulic parameters cause the flow preferentially in the DFN rather than in the shear zones, due to a smaller specific storage and a larger hydraulic aperture of the fractures.

4 Results

4.1 Processing of the results

210 Overall, 27,000 DFN realizations are considered as posterior DFN realizations since they minimize the error and fulfill the prior conditions. DFN realizations from the initial iterations are discarded as so-called burn-in iterations due to a higher error. The posterior realizations are approximately equally likely. They reflect the uncertainty of the inversion results in contrast to a unique solution that would be obtained by a deterministic approach. To reduce the autocorrelation of the results, we keep every 100th realization for further processing, which is called thinning (Brooks et al., 2011). By the stochastic approach applied
215 here, the fit between the measured and simulated pressure signals of the hydraulic tomography experiment is evaluated by the posterior and prediction uncertainty. The posterior limits are calculated based on the simulated pressure signals of the posterior DFN realizations which corresponds with the uncertainty of the inversion method. The uncertainty for predicting new observations is a measure for the overall error, as well as conceptual simplifications, since it also considers the estimated variance (Eq. 5). The DFN realizations are evaluated by a fracture probability map (FPM) over the investigated volume. For
220 this, the inspected rock volume is divided into raster elements. Each element records if the element is part of a fracture. By taking the mean element-wise over all the posterior DFN realizations, the probability of each raster element for being part of a fracture is derived. The hydraulic aperture is evaluated on the same raster elements. If a raster element is part of a DFN realization, the respective aperture is taken from the DFN. Thereby, the mean hydraulic aperture can be evaluated for each element.

4.2 Evaluation of the data

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In the first step, the measured and simulated pressure signals are compared to assess the quality of the posterior realizations. Figure 5 shows the median fit and the 95% limits of the forward simulation of the posterior DFN realizations and the 95% limits of the prediction uncertainty together with the observed data. Figure 5 demonstrates that the general shape and trend of the measured signals are reproduced by the simulated pressure curves checking the median fit and the 95% posterior limits. This is
230 the case especially for the response in the intervals 4 of both boreholes. The weaker fit of some signals in the intervals 3 indicates effects not covered by the inversion approach or forward simulations, such as deviations from the assumed fracture shape or
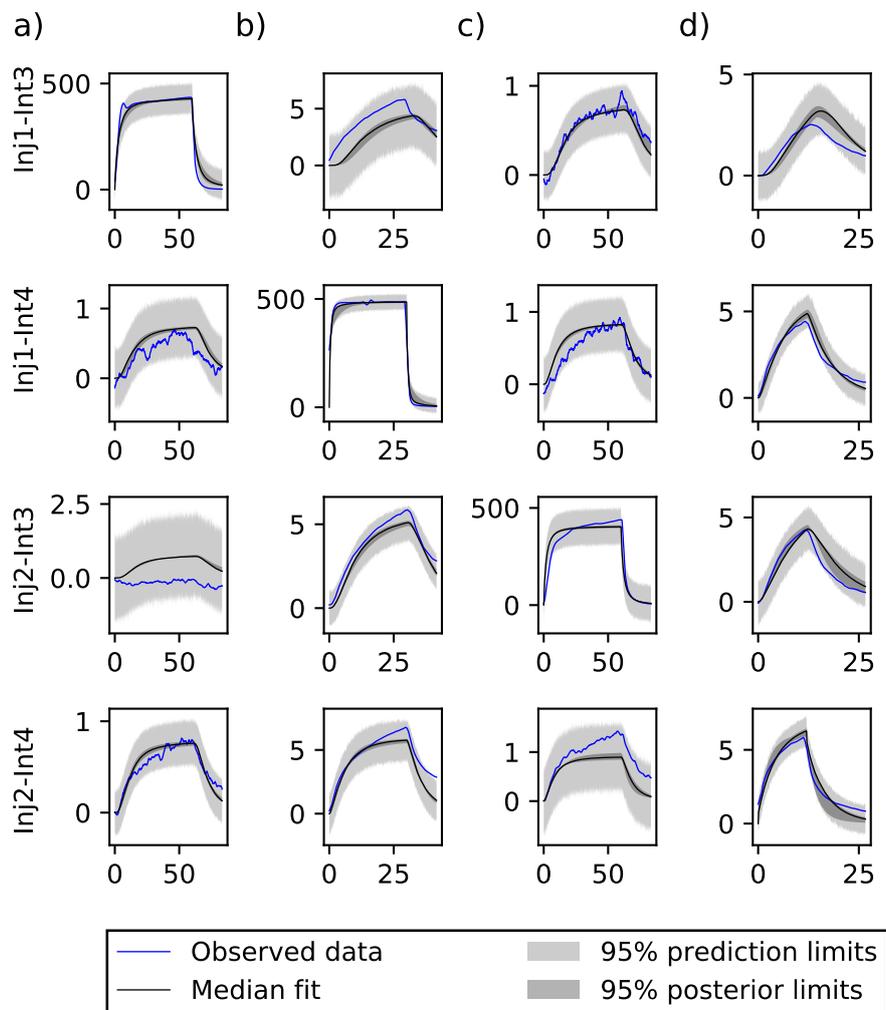
Figure 5. Comparison of the observed pressure response with the simulation of the hydraulic tomography experiment for the posterior DFN realizations for the injection in the intervals Inj1-Int3 (a), Inj1-Int4 (b), Inj2-Int3 (c), and Inj2-Int4 (d) according to Table 1. The vertical axes give the pressure response measured in each interval in kPa and the horizontal axes give the time in minutes. For the clarity of the visualization, the observed pressure signals are smoothed.

fracture orientations. For a given DFN realization, the actual measured pressure signals are predicted. Due to measurement noise and simplifications concerning the DFN model, the 95% limits of the prediction uncertainty are wider than for the posterior uncertainty.
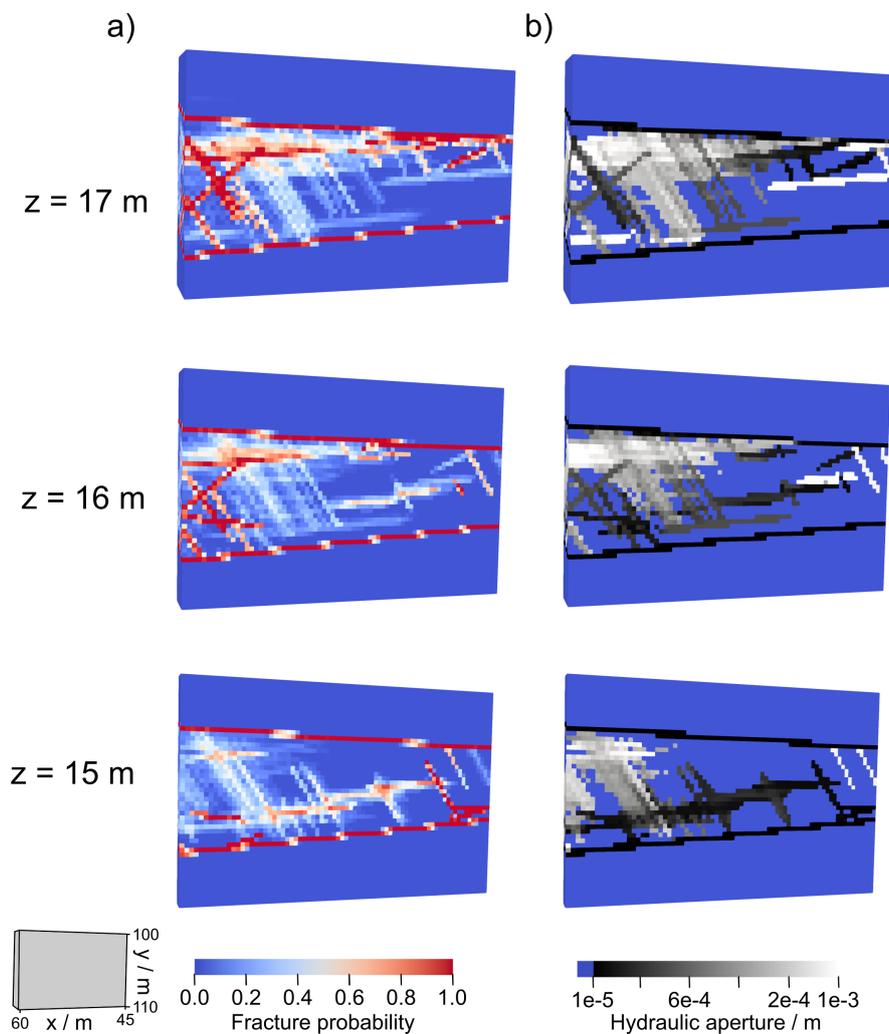
Figure 6. Evaluation of the results by the fracture probability map (a) and the mean hydraulic aperture (b) for different cross sections z. The boundaries of the investigated volume are indicated by the cuboid in the lower left.

4.3 Evaluation of the DFN realizations

The FPM and the mean hydraulic aperture are shown for different cross sections z in Fig. 6. The fractures intercepted by the injection intervals and the shear zones are fixed, and therefore, they appear with a probability of 100%. Overall, two different connections with different levels of permeability are present. A flow path dominated by fractures with a large hydraulic aperture exists between the injection intervals 4 of both boreholes (Inj1-Int4 and Inj2-Int4). The fractures providing this connection are visible with a high probability in the cross sections $z = 16\,\text{m}$ and mainly $z = 17\,\text{m}$. In general, a good respectively permeable connection between two intervals is possible by a large hydraulic aperture of the fractures, long fractures, by a long intersection

length between different fractures, or by a correlation of these factors. In contrast, a connection with fractures with smaller hydraulic apertures appears between both intervals 3 (Inj1-Int3 and Inj2-Int3) and Inj2-Int4. This flow path is present with an average probability of approximately 50% primarily in the cross section $z = 15\,\mathrm{m}$. Fractures linking both flow paths appear

245 more likely the closer the location is to injection borehole 2, i.e., further east. The described behavior is also reflected in the measured data. All responses provoked by the injection in both intervals 4 are more distinct than for the injection in the intervals 3. The specific storage coefficient converges to a mean value of $S = 7.4 \cdot 10^{-7}\,\mathrm{Pa}^{-1}$. Only a few updates were possible that occurred mainly during the burn-in iterations. Therefore, this value is interpreted as the result of an optimization, i.e., as the averaged specific storage to be applied for the whole DFN. The estimated specific storage is greater than the theoretical

250 value that functioned as the minimum value of the prior distribution of the specific storage (Tab. 2). This considers a delay in the response that is not related exclusively to the compressibility of water (Freeze and Cherry, 1979) but also to e.g., the surface roughness or fractures that are only partially open. Multiplied with the maximum possible aperture (Tab. 2), the inferred value is well within the storativity range calculated from cross-borehole injection tests (Klepikova et al., 2020).

255 Although the volume east from injection borehole 2 towards the AU tunnel is part of the inversion, i.e., fractures can be inserted or moved in this volume, the resolution of the results is low since various DFN realizations, i.e., fracture positions, are possible. Only the volume between the two injection boreholes can be evaluated with a sufficient resolution.

4.4 Comparison with other studies

The inferred flow paths consist of fractures with a high or rather low permeability which accords with the results from Klepikova

260 et al. (2020). We also compare our results with the structures intersected by other boreholes drilled after conducting the experiments evaluated in this study. While this inversion approach is capable of identifying fractures that are hydraulically relevant, geophysical methods, such as optical televiewer logs report all structures intercepted by boreholes independent of their permeability. The boreholes PRP1 and FBS1 are partially located within the prior range defined for this study. The interval at a depth of $23\,\mathrm{m}$ to $25\,\mathrm{m}$ of PRP1 has been identified as the interval with the highest transmissivity by Kittilä et al. (2019)

265 and Brixel et al. (2020a). In 95% of the posterior DFN realizations, at least one fracture is present in this interval. Fractures that intersect with the interval between the S3 faults of the FBS1 borehole are present in about 45% of the posterior DFN realizations. This supports that crucial hydraulic features of the DFN can be identified by the presented inversion approach. Still, even if such successful local validation is possible, there are no other independent measurements available to confirm the validity of the inverted complete DFN structure and its probability. Geophysical measurements such as seismic data (Doetsch

270 et al., 2020) or ground-penetrating radar (Giertzuch et al., 2021a) were able to characterize the ISC volume on a decameter-scale and identify the persistent structures and the highly fractured zone, however, they could not delineate or specify the properties of single flow paths.

5 Conclusions

In this study, we characterized the highly fractured zone at the GTS based on transient pressure signals from hydraulic to-
mography experiments with a new stochastic inversion method. A stochastic approach was applied to assess the uncertainty
of the measured data and the non-uniqueness of the results. The fractured rock is represented directly as a DFN model in the
forward simulations. Several posterior DFN realizations that are approximately equally likely are evaluated, and two prefer-
ential flow paths dominated by a large or small hydraulic aperture are successfully identified. The presented method relies on
some investigations to be applied prior to the inversion, such as the mapping of structures intercepted by boreholes, as well
as it benefits from single- and cross-hole permeability tests for the definition of a range of the hydraulic aperture. In case it is
possible to further narrow down the prior range of the hydraulic parameters, the specific storage can be inferred separately for
each fracture instead of computing only a mean value for the whole DFN.

Future research is necessary on the generally most suitable definition of prior and proposal distributions, which are ele-
mentary for robust inversion and for deriving meaningful results. The efficiency of the MCMC sampling can be improved
significantly by implementing more elaborate prior or proposal distributions, for example, relying on soft information and site-
specific expertise. A further option is utilizing continuous inversion results, such as continuous transmissivity distributions, or
geophysical measurements for highlighting a priori regions with a higher probability for the insertion of fractures.

The introduced inversion framework can be applied in a highly flexible way for the characterization of different fractured
sites by adapting the site-dependent parameters, mainly the boundary conditions of the forward model and the prior distribu-
tions, to meet the conditions of the tomography experiment at each site. Moreover, different types and sources of measured
data can be processed for the inversion, such as tracer or stress data, provided that a forward model is available that allows for
the flexible update of DFN parameters.

Data availability. The geological data set used for the setup of the conceptual model is available from Krietsch et al. (2018). The measured
pressure curves are available from Jalali et al. (2022).

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