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THE LOCATION AND ORIENTATION OF COASTAL PARABOLIC SAND DUNES IN NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Geography
at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

No previous research into either the spatial diversity of different coastal sand dune types, or the factors influencing the location and morphology of any particular dune type has been done in New Zealand. Vertical aerial photographs were used to locate Holocene dunefields around the New Zealand coastline. The locations of dunefields in general and the spatial diversity of dune types are able to be explained by identifying the conditions most suitable for sand dune development and examining the spatial variation in these conditions.

One particular dune type, parabolic, was examined in more detail in order to discover the relative importance of different variables to the development of that dune type. The relationship between wind climate and the location and morphology of coastal parabolic sand dunes was examined in detail. Wind data from coastal sites around New Zealand were used to compute sand transport vectors using two methods - one proposed by Landsberg (1956) and the other by Fryberger (1979) - and these were compared with dune orientations obtained from aerial photographs. Although Fryberger’s method has never previously been applied to coastal sand dunes, the two methods were found to produce very similar results.

Spatial variation of other aspects of dune morphology, such as the shape of parabolic dunes, were also compared to wind climate characteristics. Such comparisons were permitted by applying further calculations proposed by Fryberger which allow the directional variability of wind to be expressed in exact terms.

The results of these studies indicate that morphological characteristics of parabolic sand dunes, such as orientation, shape and size, are largely controlled by the strength and frequency of onshore winds and the directional variability of winds. Sand transport resultants computed using the Fryberger method were found to be closely aligned to dune orientations in most cases.

This study provides some insight into the processes and variables affecting spatial variation of coastal sand dune development in New Zealand but also highlights the need for more detailed geomorphic studies of coastal dunefields in New Zealand.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements: iii  
Table of Contents: iv  
List of Figures: vii  
List of Tables: viii

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

- Aims and Scope of Study: 1  
- Chapter Format: 1  
- Methods: 2  
  - Use of Aerial Photographs: 2  
  - Wind Data: 4  
- Literature Review: 5  
  - Dunes in General: 5  
  - Coastal Dunes: 5  
  - Orientation of Parabolic Sand Dunes: 6  
  - Other Methods of Wind Data Analysis: 7

## Chapter 2 - The Coastal Setting and Location of Coastal Dunefields in New Zealand

- Introduction: 8  
- Quaternary History: 9  
- Tectonics: 10  
- Location and Wave Climate: 11  
- Longshore Drift: 11  
- Nearshore Bathymetry: 13  
- Dune Areas of New Zealand: 14
# Chapter 1 - Aeolian Transport and Reposition: The Role of Wind and Vegetation

- Aeolian Transport of Sand: 18
- Mechanics of Aeolian Transport: 18
- Effects of Water: 19
- Effects of Salt Crust Formation: 20
- Threshold Wind Velocity: 20
- Rate of Sand Transport: 20
- Effects of Topography: 21
- Effects of Vegetation: 21
- Sand Dunes: 23
- Unvegetated Sand Dunes: 23
- Vegetation and Sand Dune Development: 24
- Parabolic Dunes: 25

# Chapter 4 - The New Zealand Wind Climate and Analysis of Wind Data

- New Zealand Wind Climate: 27
- Previous Methods of Comparing Wind Data to Dune Orientation: 30
- Analysis of New Zealand Wind Data: 32
  - Landsberg Method: 33
  - Fryberger Drift Potential Calculations: 35
  - Comparison of Landsberg and Fryberger Methods: 38

# Chapter 5 - Aeolian Sand Drift Potential around the New Zealand Coastline

- Introduction: 41
- Potential Sand Drift around the New Zealand Coastline: 41
  - West Coast North Island: 41
  - West Coast South Island: 43
  - South Coast South Island: 45
  - East Coast North Island and Bay of Plenty: 46
  - West Coast South Island: 48
- Onshore Drift Potential around the New Zealand Coastline: 49
Chapter 7 - Orientations and Dimensions of Parabolic Dunes in New Zealand

Introduction 51
Dune Orientation 52
   West coast North Island 52
   West coast South Island 53
   South coast South Island 55
   East coast North Island and Bay of Plenty 56
   East coast South Island 60
   Landsberg Wind Resultants 61
Dune Dimensions 61
   Dune Size 61
   Dune Shape 62

Chapter 7 - Summary and Conclusions 65

Appendices 67
Bibliography 70
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Main factors influencing the development of parabolic dunes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Principal ways in which tectonics affect dunes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Nearshore bathymetry - North Island</td>
<td>13 - 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Nearshore bathymetry - South Island</td>
<td>13 - 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Stylised diagram of a parabolic dune</td>
<td>25 - 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Development of linear ridges</td>
<td>25 - 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Diagram from Hicks (1975)</td>
<td>25 - 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Location of anemometers</td>
<td>35 - 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 - 4.17</td>
<td>Sand roses for New Zealand sites</td>
<td>35 - 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 - 6.31</td>
<td>Dune orientations and onshore drift resultants for New Zealand locations</td>
<td>51 - 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Relationship of three main dune forms to vegetation, sand supply and wind (Hack 1941)</td>
<td>65 - 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Relationship of four coastal dune forms to vegetation, sand supply and onshore wind</td>
<td>65 - 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Areas of coastal sand dunes in New Zealand</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Percentage frequency of controlling factors in New Zealand</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Anemometer stations vs stretch of coast</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Form of data used in this study</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Fryberger weighting factors</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Resultants for winds $&gt;10$ knots and $&gt;21$ knots</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Fryberger wind energy classification</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>DP values for New Zealand stations</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>New Zealand wind energy classification</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Directional variability classification</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Directional variability at New Zealand stations</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Landsberg vs Fryberger resultants</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Wind characteristics - west coast North Island</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Wind characteristics - west coast South Island</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Wind characteristics - south coast South Island</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Wind characteristics - east coast North Island and Bay of Plenty</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Wind characteristics - east coast South Island</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Comparison of dune orientations and drift resultants for New Zealand sites</td>
<td>51 - 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Onshore wind directions and onshore drift potential values for New Zealand sites</td>
<td>51 - 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Onshore drift potential and directional variability related to dune type</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Onshore drift potential and directional variability at New Zealand sites</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>