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HYDROGEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE  
PALMERSTON NORTH REGION

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## ABSTRACT

The Lower Manawatu River Valley and its major tributary the Pohangina River Valley are incised within the marine strata of the South Wanganui Basin. Lining each valley are a flight of both aggradational and degradational terraces. Three aggradational terraces are identified and correlated with the Ohakea, Rata, and Porewa terraces of the Rangitikei River Valley which aggraded during stadial periods of the Last (Otiran) Glaciation. The distribution of these terraces in the Lower Manawatu River Valley is discussed and their cover beds described. Previous river channels of the Manawatu River are identified by means of bore-log information.

The nature and history of the Manawatu River has resulted in a sequence of clay, silt, sand, and gravel deposits which is exceedingly complex in detail. Cross-sections are presented which show this complexity. This has been the main factor influencing the distribution and nature of the aquifers in the region. Water is normally extracted from the coarsest deposits with 75% of the bores in the region obtaining water from gravel layers, 15% from sand layers, and 10% from sand/gravel mixtures. The aquifer system is considered to be "leaky" due to the complex arrangement of lithologies allowing water to flow both vertically and horizontally without much impedance. Depth ranges of 0-60 m, 60-120 m, and >120 m below the ground surface are considered to be the closest resemblance to separate aquifers. Piezometric contour maps are presented which show an overall groundwater flow direction for all the depth ranges from east to west along the Manawatu River Valley with additional water influx from the Pohangina and Oroua River catchments. Transmissivities of the aquifer system ranges between 150-2000 m<sup>2</sup>/day and storativity between  $1.1 \times 10^{-4}$  and  $3.2 \times 10^{-4}$ . Static water levels and discharge rates increase with depth and decrease from east to west. Nearly all the bores in the area are naturally flowing artesian, making the entire area a discharge zone. Recharge of the aquifer system is from two sources. Firstly, direct percolation of atmospheric precipitation, the main source areas being the Tararua Range, the Ruahine Range, and both the eastern and western flanks of the Pohangina Anticline, and secondly, river recharge.

There is a significant loss (6,500 l/s) of water as the Manawatu River flows through the Manawatu Gorge which is identified as occurring in the vicinity of White Horse Rapids. This water loss is attributed to groundwater river recharge of shallow aquifers. Groundwater accounts for nearly 90% of total water use within this area and the estimated water extraction from the aquifer system is 120,000 m<sup>3</sup>/day (43 x 10<sup>6</sup> m<sup>3</sup>/year.)

The hydrochemistry of the area is presented by way of isoconcentration contour maps. Total alkalinity, calcium, magnesium, chloride, electrical conductivity, potassium, manganese, sodium, and total dissolved solids increase from east to west within the research area. Free carbon dioxide, fluorine, and iron show no trend but have local "highs". Only sulphate shows an increase from west to east. The average concentrations for the various chemical parameters are: total alkalinity - 157 ppm, Ca - 104 ppm, Cl - 36 ppm, free CO<sub>2</sub> - 11 ppm, conductivity - 43 mS/m, F - 0.16 ppm, Fe-2.1 ppm, Mg - 55 ppm, Mn - 0.38 ppm, nitrate - 0.02 ppm, Na - 23 ppm, SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> - 10 ppm, and total dissolved solids - 256 ppm. Concentrations increase with depth for all the chemical parameters. Conductivity diagrams are presented which show extremely good linear relationships when plotted against all the major cations and anions. These diagrams have practical significance because conductivity is easy to measure in the field.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title Page.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	xi
<b>Chapter One - Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Description of Study Area.....	1
1.1.1 Location.....	1
1.1.2 Selection of Study Area.....	1
1.1.3 Climate.....	3
1.2 Objectives.....	5
<b>Chapter Two - Geology.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.0 Introduction.....	6
2.1 The Geology of the Study Area.....	6
2.1.1 The Axial Ranges.....	6
2.1.2 Wanganui Basin Sediments.....	8
2.1.3 Previous Work-Terraces of the Lower Manawatu Valley.....	12
2.2 Present Work - Terraces of the Lower Manawatu Valley.....	15
2.2.1 Introduction.....	15
2.2.2 Field Methods.....	15
2.2.3 Discussion.....	16
2.3 Dating of Stratigraphy.....	23
2.4 Previous River Channels of the Manawatu River.....	25
<b>Chapter Three - The Aquifer System.....</b>	<b>29</b>
3.0 Introduction.....	29
3.0.1 Bore Reference Explanation.....	29

3.1 Aquifer Data.....	30
3.1.1 Bore-logs.....	30
3.1.2 Piezometric Data.....	32
3.1.3 Well Level Data.....	35
3.1.4 Pump Test Data.....	36
3.1.5 River Gauging Data .....	37
3.2 The Aquifers.....	39
3.2.1 Introduction.....	39
3.2.2 The Three Aquifers.....	40
3.2.3 Piezometric Maps.....	40
3.3 Recharge Zones.....	48
3.3.1 Introduction.....	48
3.3.2 Possible Recharge Zones .....	48
3.3.3 White Horse Rapids, a Recharge Example.....	49
3.4 Groundwater Uses .....	51
 Chapter Four - Hydrochemistry.....	 55
4.1 Introduction.....	55
4.1.1 Discussion of Chemical Parameters.....	56
4.1.2 Methods of Chemical Analyses.....	65
4.2 Isoconcentration Maps .....	66
4.2.1 Methods .....	66
4.2.2 Hydrochemical Districts .....	67
4.2.3 Discussion .....	69
4.2.4 Interpretation.....	94
4.3 Chemical Changes With Respect To Depth.....	95
4.4 Conductivity Diagrams .....	99
 Chapter Five - Conclusions .....	 106
 References .....	 110
Appendix A - Profile Descriptions.....	A 1
Appendix B - Static Water Levels.....	B 1
Appendix C - Chemical Data .....	C 1

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1	Location of study area showing bore grids.....2
2.1	Distribution of terraces in the Lower Manawatu River Valley.....17
2.2	Contour map of the Ohakea terrace (Ashhurst Terrace).....19
2.3	Present gradients of the Ohakea terrace and Oroua River.....20
2.4	Use of river gradient to calculate lithologies in water bores.....26
2.5	Maps showing previous river channels of the Manawatu River.....27
2.5(a)	Lithologies located at -10 m below mean sea level.....27
2.5(b)	Lithologies located at mean sea level.....27
2.5(c)	Lithologies located at +10 m above mean sea level.....27
2.5(d)	Lithologies located at +20 m above mean sea level.....27
3.1	Example of bore information sheets (bore-logs) submitted to the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council by well-drillers.....31
3.2	Example of bore information sheets (bore-logs) submitted to the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council by well-drillers.....31
3.3	Variation in static water level over time for bore number 0336 001 - Milson Airport.....34
3.4	Cross-section using bore-logs from Ashhurst to Palmerston North City along the Manawatu River.....41
3.5	Cross-section using bore-logs from Bunnythorpe township to the confluence of the Manawatu and Oroua Rivers.....42
3.6	Piezometric contour map using all static water levels available for all depths.....43

Figure	Page
3.7	Piezometric contour map for bores between 0-60 m depth..... 45
3.8	Piezometric contour map for bores between 60-120 m depth..... 46
3.9	Piezometric contour map for bores >120 m depth..... 47
3.10	Discharge of the Manawatu River between the Ballance confluence and Palmerston North City..... 50
3.11	Groundwater uses within the study area as at 27/2/90 ..... 52
4.1	Hydrochemical regions within study area..... 68
4.2	Isoconcentration contour map for Total Alkalinity (ppm) ..... 70
4.3	Isoconcentration contour map for Calcium (ppm)..... 71
4.4	Isoconcentration contour map for Chloride (ppm): All Depths ..... 73
4.5	Isoconcentration contour map for Chloride (ppm): 0-60 m Depth..... 74
4.6	Isoconcentration contour map for Chloride (ppm): 60-120 m Depth..... 75
4.7	Isoconcentration contour map for Chloride (ppm): >120 m Depth..... 76
4.8	Isoconcentration contour map for Free Carbon Dioxide (ppm)..... 78
4.9	Isoconcentration contour map for Conductivity (mS/m)..... 79
4.10	Isoconcentration contour map for Fluorine (ppm)..... 80
4.11	Isoconcentration contour map for Iron (ppm)..... 82
4.12	Isoconcentration contour map for Potassium (ppm)..... 83
4.13	Isoconcentration contour map for Magnesium (ppm)..... 85
4.14	Isoconcentration contour map for Manganese (ppm)..... 86
4.15	Isoconcentration contour map for Sodium (ppm): All Depths ..... 88
4.16	Isoconcentration contour map for Sodium (ppm): 0- 60 m Depth ..... 89

Figure	Page	
4.17	Isoconcentration contour map for Sodium (ppm): 60-120 m Depth.....	90
4.18	Isoconcentration contour map for Sodium (ppm): >120 m Depth.....	91
4.19	Isoconcentration contour map for Sulphate (ppm) .....	92
4.20	Isoconcentration contour map for Total Dissolved Solids.....	93
4.21	Graphs of cations and anions versus depth for the Bunnythorpe area .....	96-98
4.21(a)	Calcium .....	96
4.21(b)	Magnesium .....	96
4.21(c)	Total Hardness.....	96
4.21(d)	Alkalinity.....	96
4.21(e)	Sodium.....	96
4.21(f)	Chloride.....	96
4.21(g)	Conductivity.....	97
4.21(h)	Total Dissolved Solids .....	97
4.21(i)	Potassium.....	97
4.21(j)	Manganese.....	97
4.21(k)	Iron.....	97
4.21(l)	Sulphate.....	97
4.21(m)	Fluorine .....	98
4.21(n)	Free Carbon Dioxide.....	98
4.22	Graph of conductivity versus measured total dissolved solids and summation total dissolved solids .....	102
4.23	Graphs of the major cations and anions versus conductivity .....	103-105
4.23(a)	Calcium .....	103
4.23(b)	Magnesium .....	103
4.23(c)	Alkalinity.....	104
4.23(d)	Potassium.....	104
4.23(e)	Sodium.....	105
4.23(f)	Chloride.....	105

Figure

Page

A.1	Profile #1 - Ohakea terrace section.....	A 4
A.2	Profile #2 - Tua Paka section.....	A 4
A.3	Profile #3 - Freyberg section.....	A 8
A.4	Profile #4 - Ashhurst section.....	A 8
A.5	Profile #5 - Forest Hill section.....	A 12
A.6	Profile #6 - Tokomaru Marine Bench section.....	A 12

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.1	Climatic Data for Palmerston North Region .....	4
3.1	Discharge rates for bores 0-60m, 60-120m, and >120m depth ranges .....	38
3.2	Water uses, daily extraction rates, and number of water rights for each water use for all groundwater rights in this study area.....	53
4.1	Comparison between measured total dissolved solids and summation total dissolved solids .....	100