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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
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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 - <u>Introduction</u>	
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 - <u>The Coastal Setting and Location</u> <u>of Coastal Dunefields in New Zealand</u>	
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 3 - Sand Transport and Deposition -
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 3 - Sand Transport and Deposition -
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 6 - 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 - <u>Summary and Conclusions</u>	65
Appendices	67
Bibliography	70

LIST OF FIGURES

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

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
2.1 Areas of coastal sand dunes in New Zealand	15
4.1 Percentage frequency of controlling factors in New Zealand	28
4.2 Anemometer stations vs stretch of coast	29
4.3 Form of data used in this study	32
4.4 Fryberger weighting factors	35
4.5 Resultants for winds >10 knots and >21 knots	36
4.6 Fryberger wind energy classification	37
4.7 DP values for New Zealand stations	37
4.8 New Zealand wind energy classification	37
4.9 Directional variability classification	38
4.10 Directional variability at New Zealand stations	38
4.11 Landsberg vs Fryberger resultants	39
5.1 Wind characteristics - west coast North Island	41
5.2 Wind characteristics - west coast South Island	45
5.3 Wind characteristics - south coast South Island	45
5.4 Wind characteristics - east coast North Island and Bay of Plenty	46
5.5 Wind characteristics - east coast South Island	48
6.1 Comparison of dune orientations and drift resultants for New Zealand sites	51 - 52
6.2 Onshore wind directions and onshore drift potential values for New Zealand sites	51 - 52
6.3 Onshore drift potential and directional variability related to dune type	63
6.4 Onshore drift potential and directional variability at New Zealand sites	63