REPORT ON THE
RECONNAISSANCE RESISTIVITY SURVEY
IN THE
SURPRISE VALLEY AREA
MODOC AND LASSEN COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA
FOR
AMERICAN THERMAL RESOURCES INC.

McPHAR GEOPHYSICS

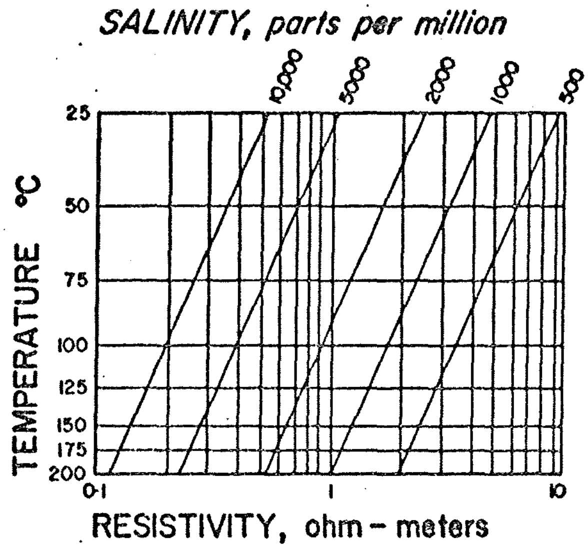
NOTES ON GEOTHERMAL EXPLORATION USING THE RESISTIVITY METHOD

Many geophysical methods have been tried in the exploration for geothermally "hot" areas in the upper regions of the earth's crust. The only method that has been consistently found to be successful has been the resistivity technique. In this geophysical method, the specific resistivity (or its reciprocal, the specific conductivity) of the earth's subsurface is measured during traverses over the surface.

The principle of the technique is based on the fact that the resistivity of solution-saturated rocks will decrease as the salinity of the solutions is increased and/or the temperature of the system is increased (see Figure 1). Therefore, volumes of the earth's crust that contain abnormally hot and saline solutions can often be detected as regions of low resistivity.

The resistivity measurements are usually made using grounded current and potential electrodes, but some useful data can sometimes be obtained using electromagnetic techniques. The field data shown on plan maps in Figure 2 are from the Broadlands Area in New Zealand; in this area there are substantial flows of hot water and steam at the surface.

The results show resistivity lows measured with a Wenner Configuration Resistivity Survey and a loop-loop electromagnetic survey. The anomalous pattern is much the same in both cases and the regions of low resistivity correlate well with the areas of increased rock temperature.

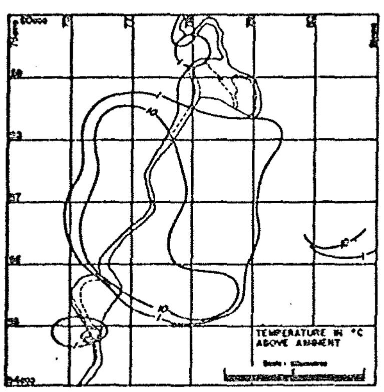


VARIATIONS OF SOLUTION RESISTIVITY
WITH TEMPERATURE AND SALINITY

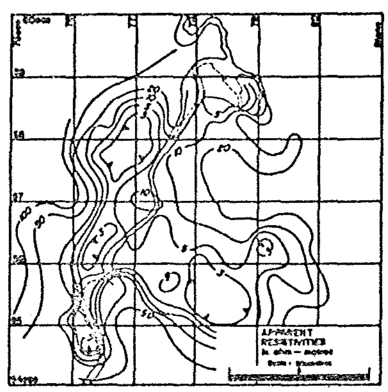
FIG. 1

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

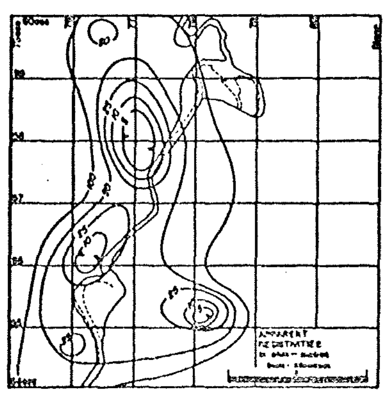
BROADLANDS AREA, NEW ZEALAND



A. TEMPERATURE AT 15m DEPTH



B. APPARENT RESISTIVITY SURVEY USING WENNER CONFIGURATION A = 180m.



C. APPARENT RESISTIVITY SURVEY USING LOOP TO LOOP ELECTROMAGNETIC METHOD
COIL SEPARATION = 60 meters FREQUENCY = 440 Hz

FIG. 2

If the rock volume saturated with hot solutions does not extend to the surface it will be necessary to use large electrode intervals to detect the resistivity lows. The resistivity data shown in "pseudo-section" form in Figure 3 is from Java. Along this line there are two deep regions of low resistivity detected for the larger electrode intervals used. Zone A is associated with surface manifestations of geothermal activity. The source of the resistivity low at Zone B is unknown.

If the abnormally hot region occurs in a sedimentary basin, the general resistivity level can be quite low, due to the high porosity in normal sediments. This is the case in the Imperial Valley of California. The resistivities shown in Figure 4 are from an area near El Centro, California. The largest electrode separation used was 12,000 feet.

The results show a two-layer geometry with the upper layer having a thickness of approximately one-half electrode interval (i.e. 1,000 feet). The resistivity in the upper layer is 3.0 ohm-meters; the resistivity of the lower layer is 1.5 ohm-meters. Due to the small resistivity contrast, additional measurements would be necessary to determine the possible geothermal importance of the lower resistivity layer at depth.

The results shown in Figure 4 are from a dipole-dipole electrode configuration survey. Our dipole-dipole data is plotted as a "pseudo-section" for several values of n; the separation between the current electrodes and potential electrodes, as well as the location of the electrodes along the survey line, determine the position of the plotting point. The two-dimensional array of

APPARENT RESISTIVITY SURVEY, DIENG PLATEAU AREA, JAVA, INDONESIA

Pseudo Section Plotting Method Along Dieng–Batur Road

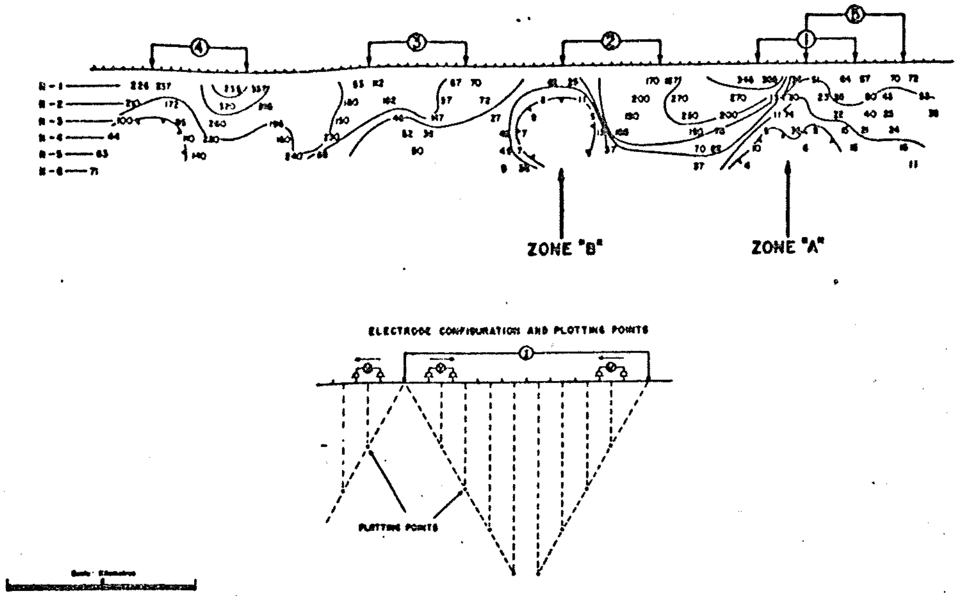


FIG. 3

RESISTIVITY SURVEY, IMPERIAL VALLEY–CALIFORNIA.

LINE-"O", FREQUENCY–0·125 Hz.

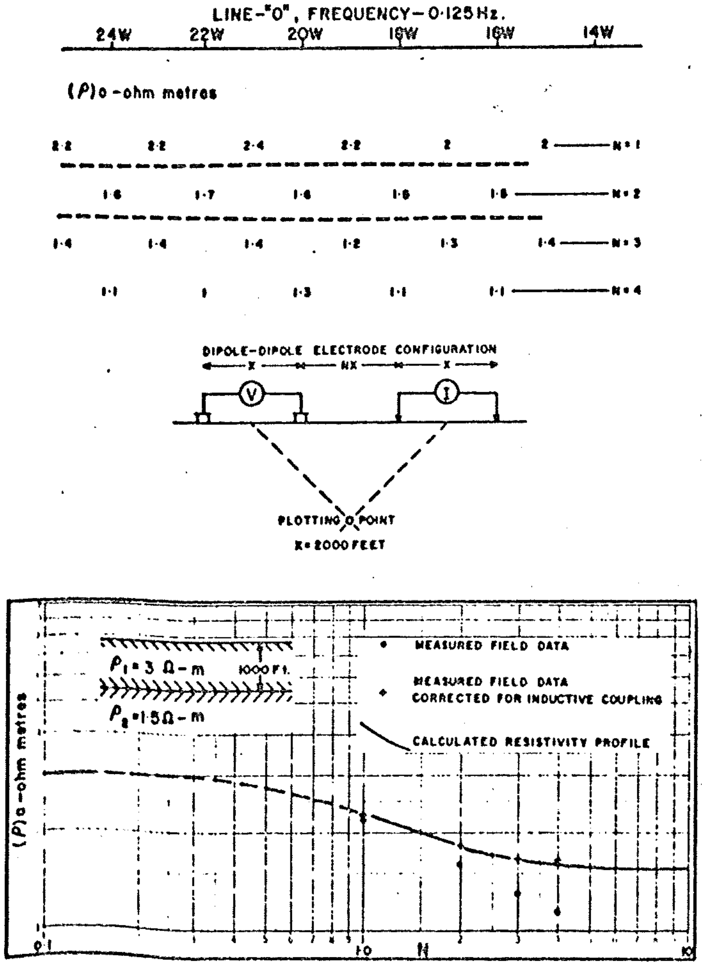
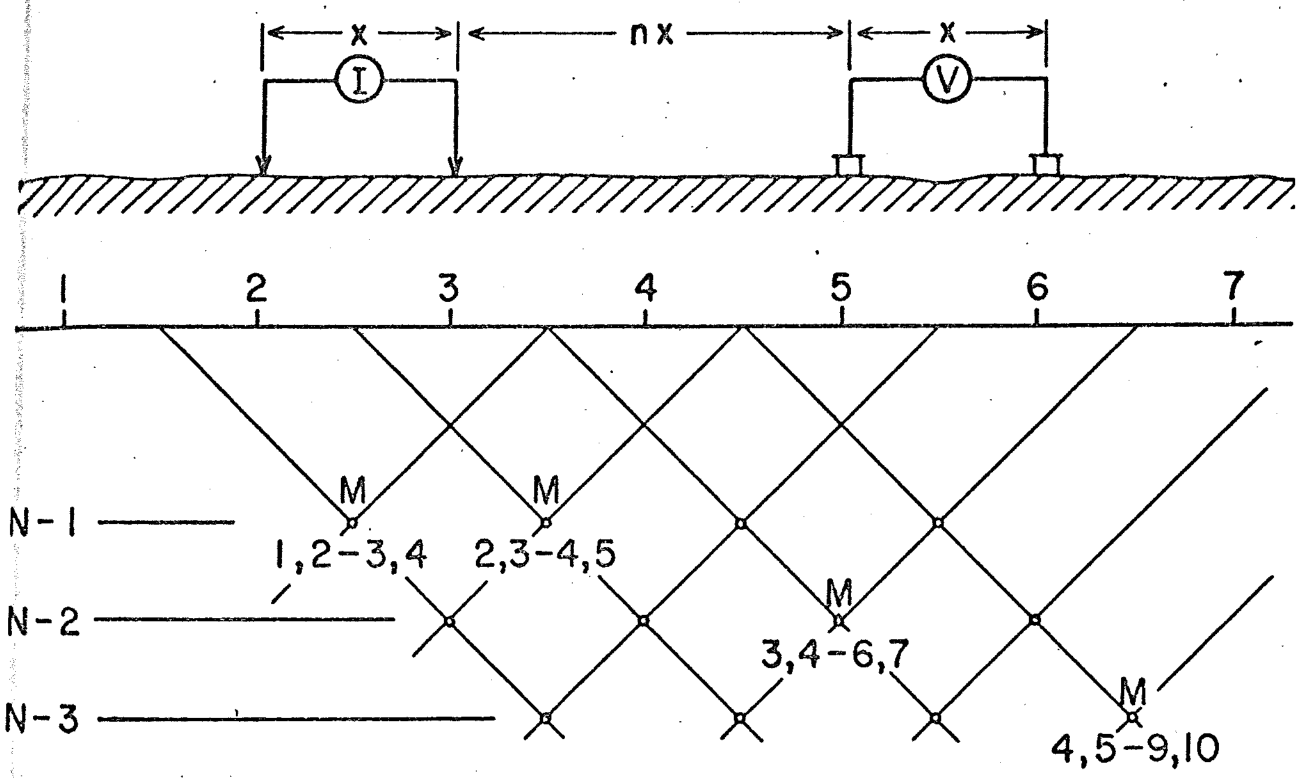


FIG. 4

data is then contoured (see below). The contour plots are not sections of the

DIPOLE-DIPOLE PLOTTING METHOD



electrical properties of the earth; they are convenient graphical representations of the measurements made. However, with experience the contour patterns can be interpreted to give some information about the source of the anomaly.

If the contour patterns indicate very simple geometries, more quantitative interpretations can often be made. For instance, if the contours are horizontal for a lateral distance of four to six electrode intervals, a horizontally layered geometry is indicated. In this situation, theoretical type-curves for dipole-dipole measurements in a layered geometry can be used in "curve fitting" techniques to give the true resistivities and depths for the earth.