



Part B:
Site Evaluation



B:1 TENURE AND AREA

The area referred to as the Upper Waikato River Valley includes the Lake Taupo outlet to Ngaawapurua Rapids and the adjacent reserves and Wairakei Tourist Park.

The Tuwharetoa Maori Trust Board owns the bed of Lake Taupo which includes the portion of the Waikato River Bed from Lake Taupo to the Huka Falls. Environment Waikato and the Department of Internal Affairs have a regulatory role with respect to use of the water.

Areas of Recreation, Scenic and Local Purpose Reserves managed by Taupo District Council are Nukuhau Boat Ramp Reserve, Tongariro Domain, Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve, Spa Thermal Park and Reids Farm Recreation Reserve.

The Department of Conservation manages the Aratiatia Rapids (below the dam) and the Conservation Areas of Lake Rotokawa; Aratiatia (above the dam); Waikato River (between the river and the Taupo Field Centre); and Waipuwera Stream. Huka Falls; Craters of the Moon and Alum Lakes are administered by the Department of Conservation in conjunction with Commissioner of Crown Lands as Crown Land, with the intention that they will become reserve lands administered by the Department at some time in the future.

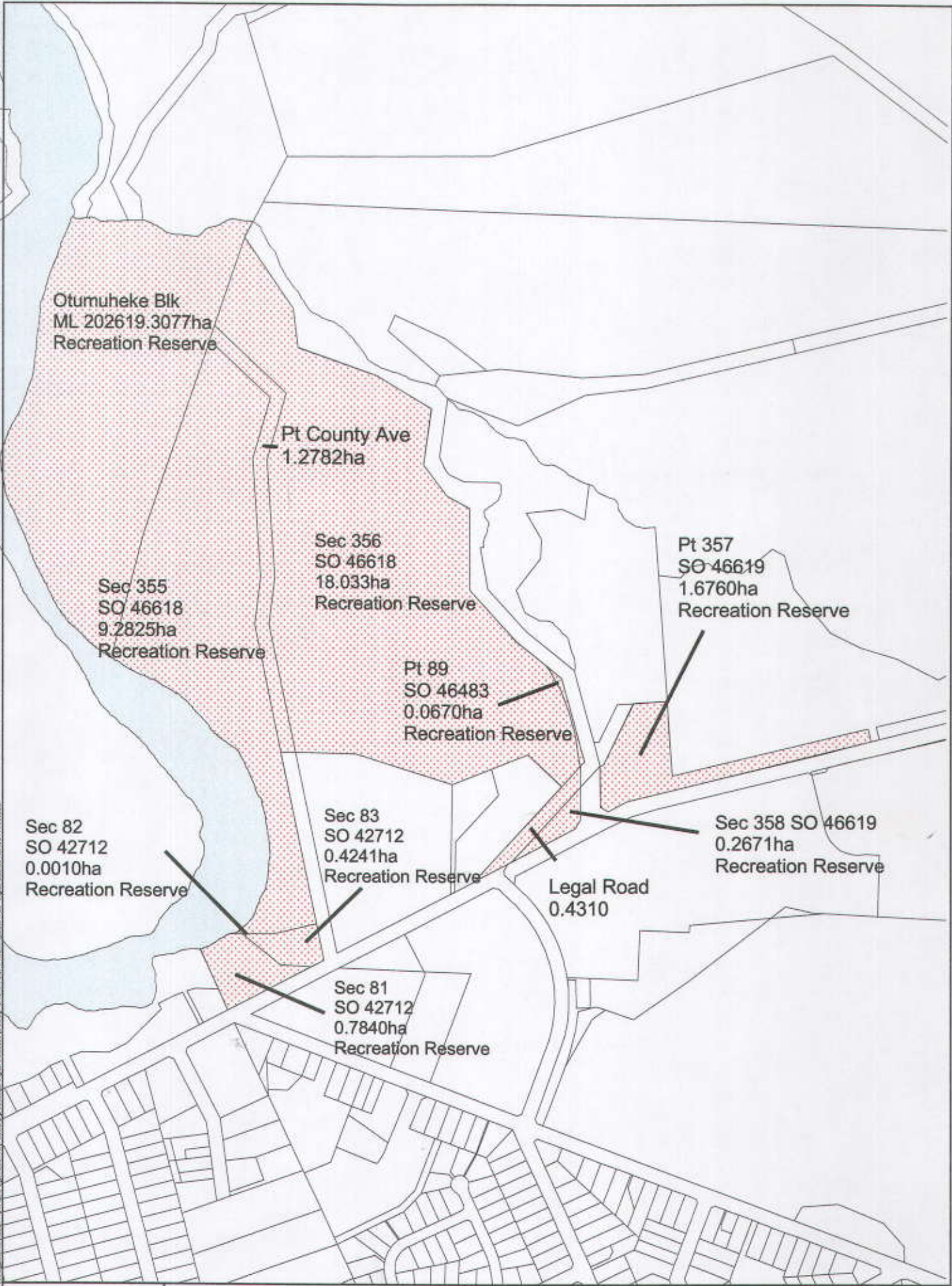
Features in the Wairakei Tourist Park include farmland, forestry, golf courses, concessions, hotel developments and industry. A Park Management Board oversees activities within the Park.

Spa Thermal Park

Spa Thermal Park is located in the north-eastern corner of the Taupo urban area and is accessed from Spa Road along County Avenue.

The Park covers an area approximately 41.5524 hectares, extending west from County Avenue to the Waikato River, and east of County Avenue to the boundary of Owen Delany Park. It is all classified as recreation reserve with the majority of the surrounding land zoned as rural. Spa Thermal Park lies within the geothermal resource zone of the Taupo District Plan.

A legal map follows and a legal description may be found in Appendix 1



Otumuheke Blk
ML 202619.3077ha
Recreation Reserve

Pt County Ave
1.2782ha

Sec 356
SO 46618
18.033ha
Recreation Reserve

Sec 355
SO 46618
9.2825ha
Recreation Reserve

Pt 89
SO 46483
0.0670ha
Recreation Reserve

Pt 357
SO 46619
1.6760ha
Recreation Reserve

Sec 82
SO 42712
0.0010ha
Recreation Reserve

Sec 83
SO 42712
0.4241ha
Recreation Reserve

Sec 358 SO 46619
0.2671ha
Recreation Reserve

Legal Road
0.4310

Sec 81
SO 42712
0.7840ha
Recreation Reserve



Spa Thermal Park Legal Descriptions



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Map created by Anna Eilers
Map graphic location:
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Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve

Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve is located in the northern portion of the Taupo urban area and incorporates reserve land on both banks of the Waikato River, within the urban area.

The land concerned is held in various classifications of reserve including:

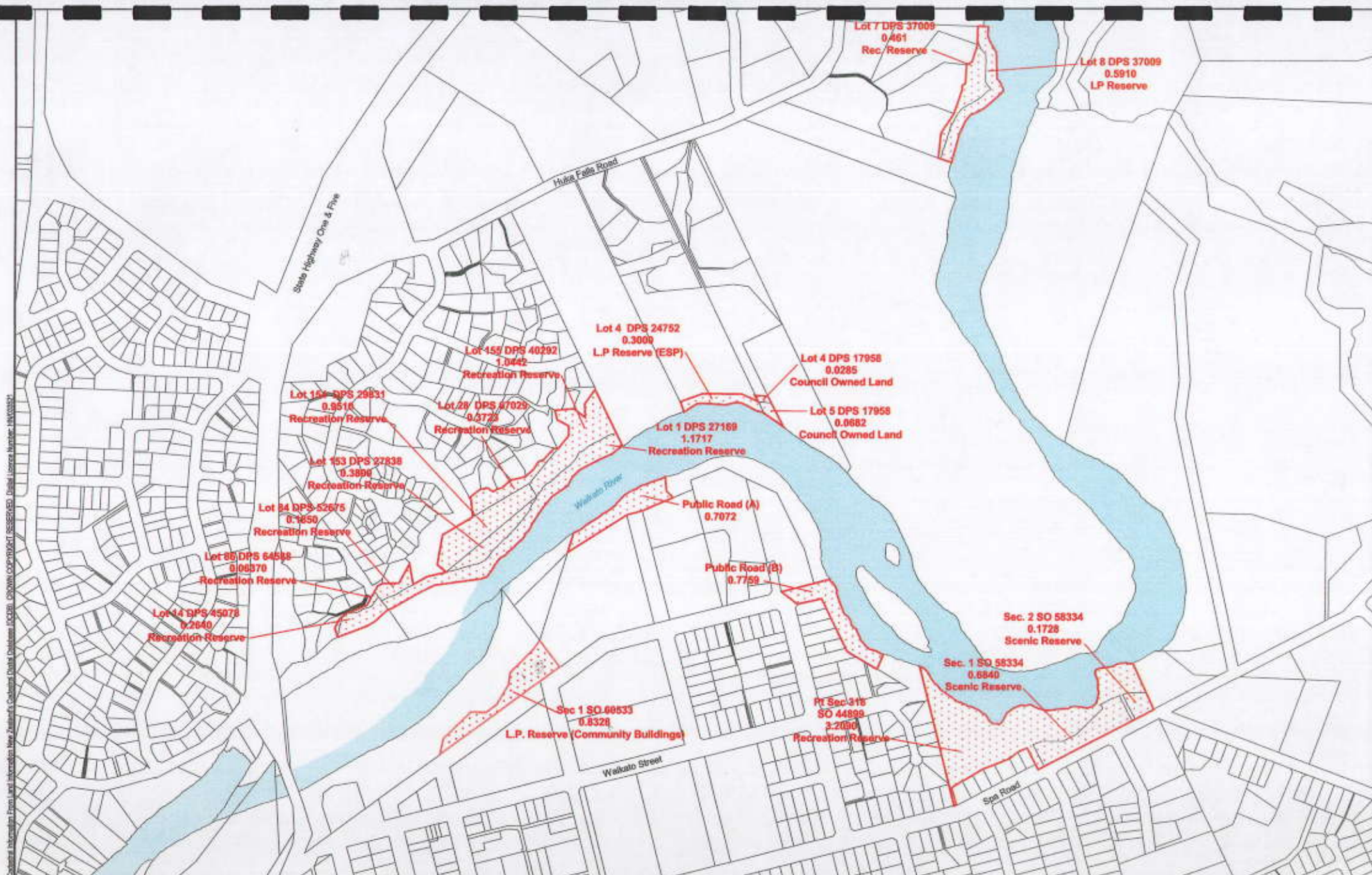
- scenic reserve;
- recreation reserve;
- local purpose (esplanade) reserve;
- The area containing the Taupo Community Playgroup and the emergency housing has been surveyed and transferred to Taupo District Council as Local Purpose Reserve (Community Buildings).
- road reserve.

Additional areas of land are designated in the District Plan as proposed reserve and are intended to be included in the reserve at a later date. The policies in this plan will make reference to these areas in the event that some designated area may become reserve during the time frame covered by this plan.

The existing reserve area is approximately 16.1169 hectares.

A legal map follows and a legal description may be found in Appendix 2.

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Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve

Legal Descriptions



Original Scale 1:9000



Map created by: GIS - Tracey May
Map graphic location:
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B.2 PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

TOPOGRAPHY

The reserves consist of an area of predominantly gently rolling contours bordered in part, by steep cliffs and gullies. The topography varies in altitude from around 360 metres above mean sea level at the Waikato River to 400 metres at Spa Road. The portion of the Spa Thermal Park east of Spa Road rises from 400 metres at the road to 411 metres near the boundary with Owen Delany Park.

Spa Thermal Park has an overall north-westerly aspect, although there is local variation where the contour is broken and gullies exist.

Two main watercourses border the Spa Thermal Park, the Waikato River to the west and Otumuheke Stream to the north and east. Several springs occur on the western side of the Park, largely on the bank of the Waikato River. Many of these springs are warm with some being quite hot in temperature. Other hot springs occur along Otumuheke Stream, which is a warm spring fed stream comprising waters from the Kathleen (hot) and Tapapakua (cold) streams.

CLIMATE

Taupo enjoys a temperate climate with long periods of settled weather. The area experiences 2031 hours of sunshine during a year. The average annual rainfall is 1200 mm, from 148 days of rain throughout the year. Summers in Taupo are warm while winters are fairly cool. Mean temperatures vary from 6 degrees Celsius in the winter to 17 degrees Celsius in the summer.

The prevailing wind is from the southwest during the winter and spring seasons. Northwest and westerly winds prevail during the summer season.

Moderately heavy frosts are fairly common in Taupo in winter. However, they are accompanied by calm, clear weather. Fogs also occur during winter.

SOILS

The soil type in the Spa Thermal Park and Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve is Whenuaroa gravelly sands. This soil type is a yellow-brown pumiceous soil, formed on water-sorted volcanic alluvium. It is a coarsely textured soil of low fertility falling into land use capability Class Ivs4. [New Zealand Land Use Inventory Work Sheets ---MWD]

GEOLOGY

The geology of the Spa Thermal Park and Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve is linked with the volcanic history of the Taupo area and eruptions of Lake Taupo.

In a wider context Taupo lies within the Taupo Volcanic Zone, an area of volcanic activity extending 240km northeast from Ruapehu to White Island. It is at the southern end of the Tonga - Kermadec active plate margin. The recent geological history of this area has lent itself to its geomorphology, dominated by lakes, volcanoes, and geothermal features.

Lake Taupo is a caldera (collapsed volcanic crater) probably with multiple vents and eruption sites. In 186AD (a date determined by geological as well as historical inferences) Lake Taupo erupted in what has been described one of the largest explosions known to man. The eruption displaced between 60 and 100 cubic kilometres of tephra (ash, cinders, pumice etc), 60 times greater than Mt St Helens 1980 and 30 times greater than Vesuvius 79 AD eruption which obliterated Pompeii and Herculaneum.

The geology of the Spa Thermal Park and Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve is a result of this violent activity. The Taupo Pumice event, which this period of activity is known as, was within a series of small eruptions. These small explosions were followed by several large explosions that formed towering columns of ash many kilometres high. There was time for the lake to refill before the final violent explosion produced the bulk of the Taupo Pumice followed by a brief outburst of gas and ash that spread across the lake. (Thornton 1985).

The Taupo Pumice Alluvium, the product of this activity, forms the geology of the Spa Thermal Park and Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve is a result of these eruptions and subsequent effects of the Waikato River.



The Taupo Pumice Alluvium comprises of pumice alluvium and pyroclastics from these periods of eruption.

Geothermal activity is prevalent in Spa Thermal Park. Underground hot water areas occur throughout with hot water streams surfacing in places. Steaming ground occurs west of County Avenue and in a band across the centre of the Park between the Waikato River and the Spa Hotel complex. The steaming ground by the County Depot is a recent hydrothermal crater.

Other instances of geothermal activity include hot water streams, tomos, steaming ground and blowholes.

The Spa Thermal Park also has three minor but active faults.

The geographic features of the whole area have been shaped by the rate and pattern of wear by water on the underlying geology. This interaction of water and geology results in the River's width, flow rate, sound and level changing over the entire length of the upper valley. The pinkish, hydrothermally altered pumice cliffs at the Taupo end, and the alluvial pumice terraces at 'Hells Gate' (corner of County Avenue and Spa Road), the hard ignimbrite restrictions of the Huka Falls and Aratiatia rapids and the lower rock strewn terraces all reflect back on the interplay between water and geology.

See Appendix 4: Geological Data for additional material.

LANDSCAPE

The Waikato River is the dominant and unifying feature of the surrounding landscape. The river valley is surrounded by dramatic cliffs which have unique thermal features that characterise the area and provides a haven for birdlife. Water is a dominant theme and its varying nature contributes a great deal to the various landscape characters in the area. Such features may be identified in a Significant Natural Values Study

The landscape of the Upper Waikato River Valley offers outstanding views with the River as the obvious focal point. Foreground and mid-ground features enhance the perspective and natural composition of these views. (DOC, 1989)

The reserves have a tranquil atmosphere about them which is dominated by the Waikato River and its features. They are attractive 'natural' areas adjacent to an urban area providing a contrast to the bigger vistas of the lake and mountains.

VEGETATION

The majority of Spa Thermal Park has been grassed and the fringes contain mixed native and exotic trees. Tree planting and landscaping have been undertaken, consisting of oak, *Quercus spp.*, silver birch, *Betula spp.*, gum, *Eucalyptus spp.*, willow, *Salix spp.* and other exotic tree varieties on the open areas, with patches of native vegetation comprising ake ake, *Dodonaea*, cabbage tree, *Cordyline australis*, flax, *Phormium spp.*, toetoe *Cortaderia toetoe*, kowhai, *Sophora spp.*, *Pittosporum spp.*, Rimu, *Dacrydium cupressinum*, *Hebe spp.*, kauri, *Agathis australis*, five finger *Pseudopanax laetus*, *Coprosma spp.* and various other species. There are also small patches of bush and scrub. These areas consist of broom, bracken, lupins, seedling pines, blackberry, Himalayan Honeysuckle, grasses, manuka and various weed species.

Bordering the Waikato River is an area of regenerating native vegetation. This area has been highly modified in the past with *Pinus pinaster* being planted; the older ones would now be around 50 years old. The area is now predominantly regenerating native vegetation with seedling pines and various weed species being well represented. The most common species in the area include: manuka, prostrate kanuka, mingimingi, rimu, *Coprosma*, wineberry *Aristorelia serrata*, kamahi, hebe, red matipo, five finger, kohuhu, tree ferns, ground ferns, filmy ferns, flax, heaths, *Dracophyllum spp.*, *Brachyglottis*, dense forest sedge, blackberry, mosses, lichen, acacia, peach tree, *Pinus pinaster*, bracken, broom, ragwort, himalayan honeysuckle, fox glove, wild mint, bind weed and grasses.

A patch of rare ferns occurs in the centre of the area of vegetation. The ferns are *Nephrolepis cordifolia*, *Asplenium falcatum*, *Asplenium fabellifolium*, and *Lycopodium cernuum*.

Rare ferns are also present along the lower section of the Otumuheke Stream. These include *Nephrolepis cordifolia*, *Christella dentata*, *Cyclosorus interruptus*. Further upstream by the Spa Hotel, *Hypolepis punctata* and *Histiopteria incisa* are present (D R Given). These ferns are scarce and difficult to find. They occur close to the stream in amongst the blackberry, lupins, broom, bracken, pines and grasses that border the stream.

The thermal area in the south of the park has a vegetation type of its own. The vegetation consists primarily of *Pinus pinaster* and *P. Patula*, prostrate kanuka with blackberry, broom, pampas, sedges, and gum occurring to lesser extents.



The vegetation in the Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve varies too with the gullies and cliff faces generally covered in regenerating native species and 'scrub'. The flatter and more gently rolling portions of the reserve are largely grassed and kept mown.

WILDLIFE

In its present state the reserves provide a variety of habitats for birds and other wildlife.

The birds that may be found in the area include:

tui, fantail, sparrow, blackbird, starling, thrush, mynah, chaffinch, greenfinch, bellbird, greywarbler, pipit, welcome swallow, yellowhammer, quail, mallard duck, shag, kingfisher, silvereve, rock pigeons, shining cuckoo and gulls

Other wildlife that may be found in the area includes:

cicadas, moths, butterflies, bees, dragonflies, manuka beetles, other insects, rabbits, opossums and trout.

There are no species of wildlife unique to the area. A natural heritage study may identify other species.



B.3 HISTORY

Pre 1869

Records are limited therefore we would appreciate some input from local iwi to this section.

Post 1869

The arrival of the Armed Constabulary Unit in the 1860's signalled the beginnings of European history in the area. Their role was to capture the Maori prophet Te Kooti, who was endeavouring to make his way from the Urewera mountain range to the sanctuary of the King Country. The unit established the AC Baths on the other side of the present day Spa Road.

Edward Lofley previously of the Armed Constabulary Unit started up the Spa Hotel on the property bordering the eastern side of what is now Spa Thermal Park. The Spa Hotel is the oldest hotel in the district and was established to sell liquor to the troops.

(Taupo Centennial Times Supplement, December 18th, 1969)

The Spa Hotel was sold in the 1870's to a Joseph Joshua who negotiated a lease on the land with the Crown. The lease was approved in 1887 and was much the same as it is today. The Otumuheke Block, which now makes up part of Spa Thermal Park, was also acquired by Joshua but as freehold land. Prior to this the whole area of the Park had been proclaimed "Waste Lands of the Crown".

Joshua ran a coach service between Taupo and Rotorua from the Spa Hotel. The coaches left the hotel via the Otumuheke Block and County Avenue, passing through the present day Spa Thermal Park and onto Rotorua, via Broadlands and Reporoa.

Tourism has been an integral part of the area since 1881 when the Geyser House Hotel was constructed at Wairakei. Rapturous reviews in tourism guide books of the late 19th and early 20th centuries testified to the significant value of the area's attractions. (Tonkin & Taylor, 1995).

Around the turn of the century Joshua developed a thermal river walk from the Spa Hotel along the Waikato River on the "Unnamed Domain". This included the sites of Satan's Glory Blowhole, Hell's Gate, the Eunice and Crow's Nest Geysers, Witches Cauldron and the other geothermal attractions on what is now Spa Thermal Park.

In 1888 the area of Spa Thermal Park, excluding the Otumuheke Block, gazetted (NZ Gaz. 1888 P. 1051) as Unnamed Public Domain at Taupo. The status of the land was Crown Land.

The 1930's and 1940's saw the commencement of using the Waikato River for electric hydro generation. The Control Gates were constructed in 1941.

The area known as Unnamed Domain remained under the control of the Department of Lands and Survey until the early 1970's. In 1971 negotiations began between the Department of Lands and Survey and the Taupo Borough Council to change the purpose of the area to reserve for recreation purposes vested in the Taupo Borough Council.

In June 1972, the Otumuheke Block was purchased by the Taupo Borough Council from J W Birnie for \$21 000, as land for recreation reserve.

In 1973 Sections 355, 356, 358 and part Section 357 Block II Tauhara Survey District, which make up the majority of Spa Thermal Park was gazetted (NZ Gaz.1973 p.793) as recreation reserve and vested in the Taupo Borough Council.

The name "Spa Thermal Park" was adopted for the area in 1972 by the Taupo Borough Council.

In October 1975 work started on ground development at the Park. The opening of the Park and the Skateboard Bowl was on 25th June 1977. The Skateboard Bowl had been a joint venture between Jaycees and the Lions Club.

Extensive tree and shrub planting was carried out during May and June 1978. Steps and platforms were constructed along the Waikato River banks and through part of the thermal area to form a walking track.

The second service club project at the Park was the children's play complex established by the Round Table. This project was completed and opened on 25th November 1978.

In June 1979 a "Fun and Fitness Trail" was constructed by the Jaycees. The Jaycees' wives provided a shelter and seat.



Everything done to make a stay enjoyable for
those touring the district.



'THE SPA'



TAUPO

J. GALLAGHER

PROPRIETOR

THIS popular Tourist Resort is now open for the season, and the numerous wonderful sights round about make it one of the most delightful places to stay at, the baths especially being the finest in the whole Thermal District; the new Sulphur Bath being the bath *par excellence* for those suffering from Rheumatism, etc.

Magnificent Grounds and Gardens
Beautiful Carved Dining Room
Grand Geysers, Springs, etc., on
the Grounds.

SPLENDID TROUT FISHING IN THE WAIKATO RIVER.

"Lake Taupo and the Volcanoes"
James Cowan 1901



Edward Lofley
Ref No. F44655-1/2

Courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of NZ
Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa, WELLINGTON



Since this time further landscaping, tree planting and maintenance works have been undertaken and the Harriers' tracks have been marked out.

The Wairakei Geothermal Power Station was constructed in the 1950's and the 1960's saw the decline of the geothermal activity and geysers in the Wairakei geothermal field. The Taupo Sewerage Treatment Plant was constructed in the 1970's discharging into the upper Waikato River. The new Taupo Land Treatment Project was completed in 1995 eliminating all discharge into the river.

In 1991 Taupo Bungy began its operation along the riverbank and has proven to be a successful tourism venture for Taupo, whilst providing a new dimension for the reserve.

In 1997 the Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve and Taupo Cemetery Memorial Walkway was completed. The work included clearing blackberry and scrub, creating walkways, constructing wooden retaining walls and steps along with planting native trees and shrubs. This work was completed with the assistance of Employment NZ and a community employment initiative scheme.

B.4 TOURISM

There have been various tourism studies undertaken. Most are fairly general and relate to the Taupo District as a whole.

These reports have included:

The Needs and Perceptions of Tourism Intermediaries and their Clients.
Heylan Research Centre, 1988.

A Tourism Overview for the Great Lake District. Harding, 1995

A Sport, Recreation and Leisure Strategy. APR, 1995

A Taupo Visitor Industry Study. McDermott Fairgray, 1996

The APR report was prepared for the Taupo/Kaingaroa Ward area. It indicated that the overall population of Taupo District is projected to increase by 10.5% between 1991 and 2006. The Strategy observes that the "changing nature of the demographic composition of Taupo, and national trends in recreation and leisure, are likely to lead to the following leisure projections:-" (those relevant to this area are listed)

- an increase in the number of triathletes;
- an increased participation in walking,
- an increased interest in parks and gardens (which compliment public walks) and is combined with a trend toward greater interest in our environment;
- an increase in the demand for leisure facilities which cater for an ageing population

A Visitor Industry Policy was adopted by the Taupo District Council in November 1997.



The relevant aspect of this policy, as far as the Spa Thermal Park and Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve are concerned is that access to recreational opportunities remains or improves on 1997 levels, as a target for the year 2005.

B.5 PRESENT USE

Both reserves are used for a variety of informal recreational pursuits. Spa Thermal Park is very popular for people walking their dogs as well as those just walking either over the grassed areas or through the vegetated areas beside the river. The Spa Thermal Park - Huka Falls Walkway starts on the edge of the park and since its recent upgrade is receiving considerable use, some 45-50 000 people per year.

The harrier track also receives popular use.

Other activities in Spa Thermal Park include:

jogging, fishing, skateboarding, biking, swimming (in the hot stream), harriers, picnicking, confidence course training, playing on adventure play equipment, informal soccer, cricket and other ball sports.

The area is mainly used by people from the local community but there is an increase in the number of tourists visiting the area too.

Riverbank Recreational and Scenic Reserve is also used for informal activities such as walking and abseiling. Another major activity on the reserve is the Taupo Bungy operation. This attraction has increased steadily in popularity since it opened in 1991 and now receives at least 12,000 clients per year. They have landscaped the area immediately adjacent to their base and the casual use of that area has consequently increased.

B.6 FUTURE USE

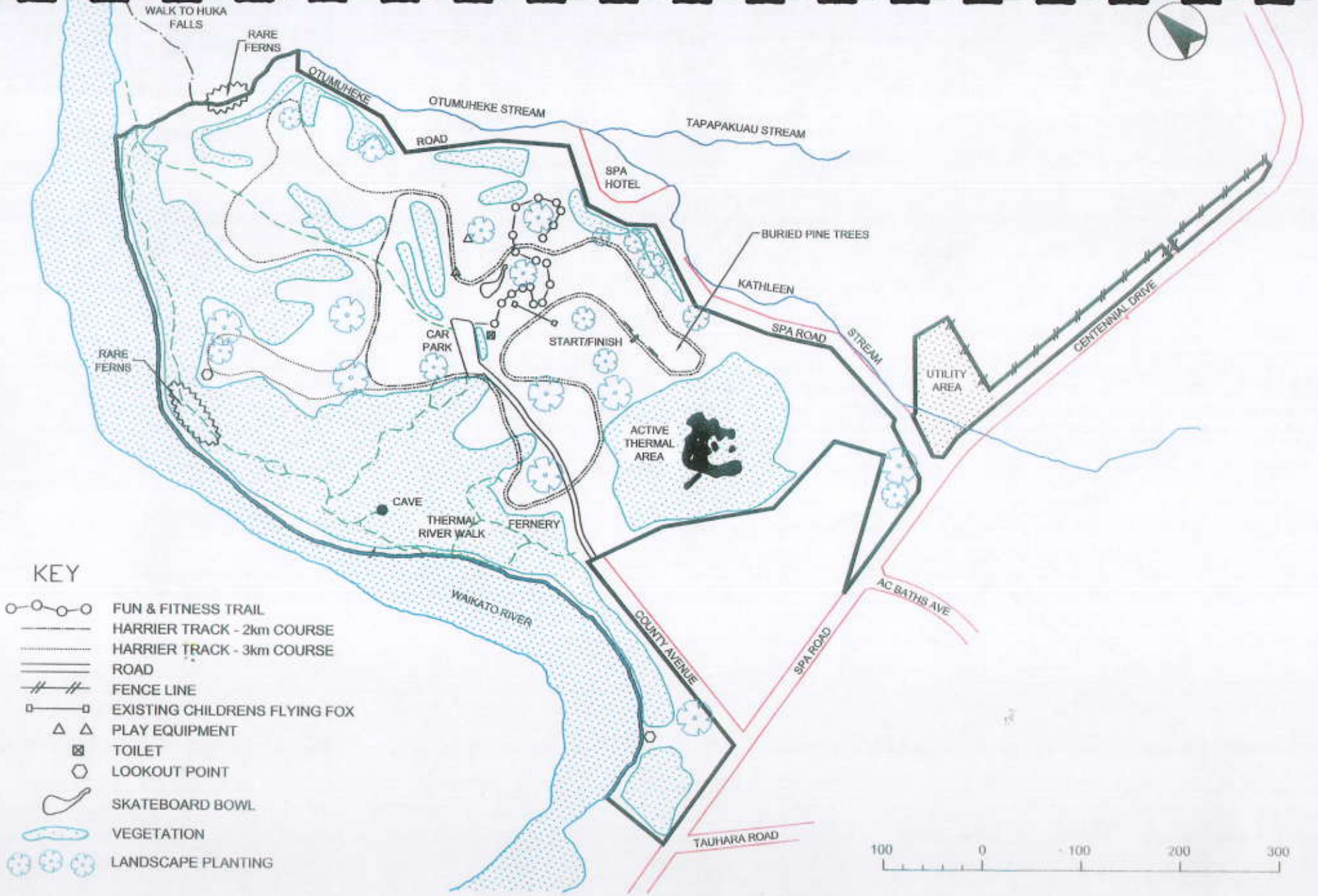
The possible future uses of the reserves are many and varied ranging from continued casual use through to intense commercial use. The submissions which were received prior to preparing this draft all supported retaining the open space and 'natural' nature of the reserves. There were however different opinions about how that space should then be used.

There is some demand (particularly by tourism operators) for the area to be available for activities such as abseiling, giant swing, confidence course, mountain biking, kayaking, climbing, festivals, events and adventure playgrounds. Some of these could be run on a commercial basis.

Alternatively others want to see the area remain relatively unchanged apart from the provision of picnicking facilities, walking tracks along both banks and the replacement of the blackberry and other weeds with native species.

As discussed elsewhere the area between the control gates and boundary of Spa Thermal Park provides the public with open space in a spectacular river setting immediately adjacent to the urban area. It is an area that can provide alternate experiences to those available on or adjacent to the lake.

The following maps show the existing facilities and Thermal and Topography of Spa Thermal Park.



KEY

- FUN & FITNESS TRAIL
- HARRIER TRACK - 2km COURSE
- HARRIER TRACK - 3km COURSE
- ROAD
- FENCE LINE
- EXISTING CHILDRENS FLYING FOX
- PLAY EQUIPMENT
- TOILET
- LOOKOUT POINT
- SKATEBOARD BOWL
- VEGETATION
- LANDSCAPE PLANTING



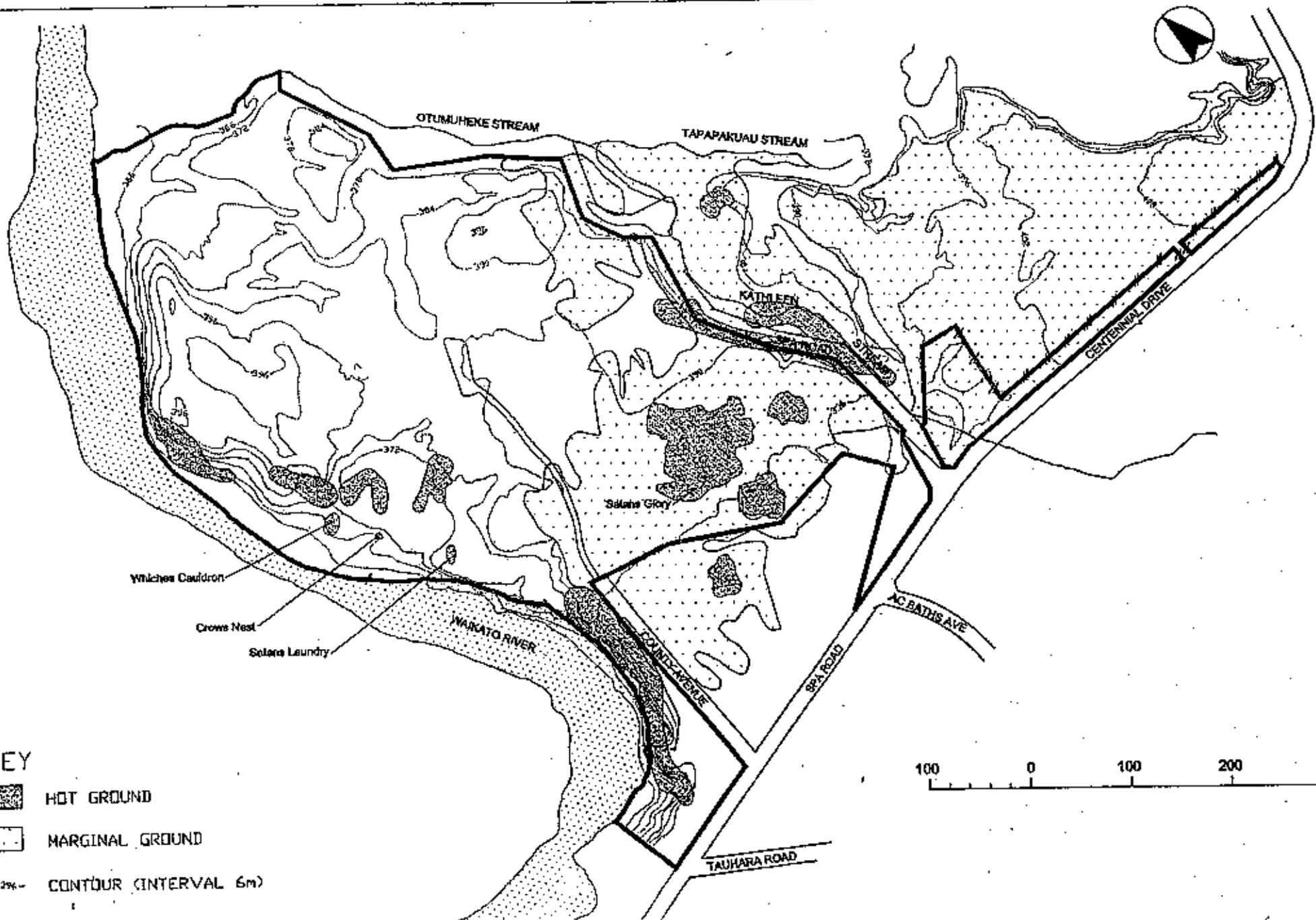
**SPA THERMAL PARK
EXISTING FACILITIES**

Scale 1:4000

TAUPO DISTRICT COUNCIL


Map created by J. Gale
Map graphic location: D:\drawing\parks\spa\spa_suzuki.p


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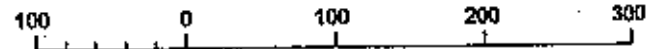


KEY

 HOT GROUND

 MARGINAL GROUND

 CONTOUR (INTERVAL 6m)



SPA THERMAL PARK

TAUPO DISTRICT COUNCIL

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