

I. INTRODUCTION

The coastline of Sri Lanka extends over approximately 1500 km. Beaches are found along most of the coastline and these are of great aesthetic value, providing a pleasant environment for the benefit of the people. In the west, southwest and south, the beaches are fairly narrow and they experience periodical erosion and accretion depending on prevailing climatic and hydrological conditions. Elsewhere the beaches are wider, favoured by sand deposition during certain periods of the year which outweighs erosion losses at other times. In the southwest and northeast of the Island, a series of rocky headlands, bays, lagoons and lakes, constitute the main geomorphological features. Between the headlands are bays which generally have stable shores. The southwest coast has undergone much erosion over the last few centuries and the intensity has increased many fold during the last two to three decades. The rocky islets seen in places just off shore, are reminders of a coastline which existed in the not too distant past. On the eastcoast, sand deposits have helped to form many lagoons, lakes and swamps and these are evidence of a growing coastline (Cooray, 1967).

Sand dunes are not generally associated with tropical climates (Ranwell, 1972). However, well developed dunes are a conspicuous feature over about 22% of the coast (Swan, 1979). These are found in the northwest, northeast and southeast. At certain places on the southwest coast and elsewhere, less well developed dune formations called berms are found (Appendix I). These berms perform a very useful function in protecting low - lying areas inland. Some of these land forms are found at Akurala in the southwest, at Koggala in the south and along the westcoast from Hendala to Negombo.