

Figure 1. Location of San Juan structural basin, Colorado Plateau, and study area.

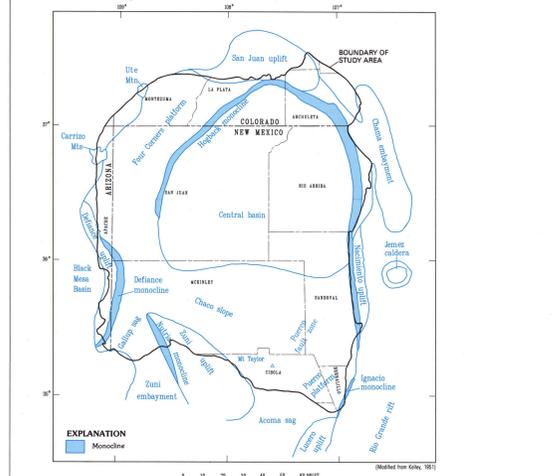


Figure 2. Structural elements of the San Juan structural basin and adjacent areas.

INTRODUCTION

This report is one in a series resulting from the U.S. Geological Survey's Regional Aquifer-System Analysis (RAISA) study of the San Juan structural basin that began in October 1984. Previous reports in the series describe the hydrogeology of the Dakota Sandstone (Craig and others, 1989), Point Lookout Sandstone (Craig and others, in press), Morrison Formation (Dane and others, 1990), Gallup Sandstone (Dane and others, 1989), and Cliff House Sandstone (Thorn and others, in press), in the San Juan structural basin. The purposes of the RAISA (Wilder, 1986) are to: (1) Define and evaluate the aquifer systems; (2) assess the effects of past, present, and potential ground-water use on aquifers and streams; and (3) determine the availability and quality of ground water. This report summarizes information on the geology and occurrence and quality of water in the Menefee Formation, one of the primary water-bearing units in the regional aquifer system. Data used in this report were collected during the study or were derived from existing records in the U.S. Geological Survey's completed National Water Information System (NWIS) data base, the Petroleum Information Corporation's data base, and the Dwight's ENERGYDATA file. BRIN data base. Although all data available for the Menefee Formation were considered in formulating the discussion in this report, not all of them could be plotted as in the illustrations.

The San Juan structural basin is in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah, and has an area of about 21,600 square miles (fig. 1). The structural basin is about 140 miles wide and about 200 miles long. The study area is that part of the structural basin that contains rocks of Triassic or younger age and, therefore, the study area is less extensive than the structural basin. Triassic through Tertiary sedimentary rocks are emphasized in this study because the major aquifers in the basin are present in these rocks. The study area is about 140 miles wide, 180 miles long, and has an area of about 19,400 square miles.

Altitudes in the study area range from about 4,200 feet in San Juan County, Utah, to about 11,000 feet in Cibola County, New Mexico. Annual precipitation in the high mountainous areas along the north and east margins of the basin is as much as 65 inches, whereas annual precipitation in the lower altitude, Central basin is generally less than 8 inches. Mean annual precipitation in the study area is about 12 inches.

Data obtained from documents published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 and 1985, were used to estimate the population of the study area. The population of the study area in 1970 was estimated to be about 138,000. The population rose to about 194,000 in 1980, 212,000 in 1982, 221,000 in 1984, and then fell to about 210,000 in 1985. The economy of the basin is supported by agriculture and development of petroleum, natural gas, coal, and uranium resources; urban enterprise; farming and ranching; tourism, and recreation. The rise and fall in population were related to changes in the economic strength of the mining, petroleum, and natural-gas industries. Uranium mining and milling activities grew rapidly until the late 1970s when most uranium-mining activity ended in the study area. Lignite and the gas industry prospered until about 1983 and then declined rapidly, also affecting many jobs in support industries.

REGIONAL GEOLOGIC SETTING OF THE SAN JUAN STRUCTURAL BASIN

The San Juan structural basin is a northwest-trending asymmetrical structural depression formed during the Laramide orogeny (Late Cretaceous-early Tertiary) at the eastern edge of the Colorado Plateau (fig. 1). Structural boundaries are well defined in many places, whereas, in other areas, the basin margins gradually into adjacent depressions or uplifts (Hollister, 1963, p. 120). The structural boundaries typically consist of large, elongate, small uplifts, low, marginal platforms, and abrupt monoclines as shown in figure 2 and as defined by Kelley (1951, p. 124-127). Faulting is common, especially in the southeastern part of the basin. Maximum structural relief in the basin is about 10,000 feet (Kelley, 1951, p. 126). The present structural elements of the basin had developed by middle Tertiary time (Kelley, 1951, p. 130).

The San Juan structural basin contains a thick sequence of sedimentary rocks ranging in age from Cambrian through Tertiary, but principally from Pennsylvanian through Tertiary (fig. 3). The maximum thickness of the sequence of rocks is about 14,000 feet (Fassett and Hinds, 1971, p. 4). These sedimentary rocks dip basinward from the basin margins toward the troughlike structural center of the basin. Older sedimentary rocks crop out around the basin margins and are successively overlain by younger rocks toward the center of the structural basin. Volcanic rocks of Tertiary age and various deposits of Quaternary age also are present in the basin.

GEOLOGY OF THE MENEFEE FORMATION

The Menefee Formation is of Late Cretaceous age (fig. 3) and crops out beyond the margins of the Central basin. Erosion-resistant sandstones in the Menefee commonly cap isolated buttes and hillsides, whereas softer shale units form slopes and broad valleys or flats. Topography formed on the Menefee typically is rolling to rough, broken and steep, and generally has a badlands appearance. The upper part of the Menefee Formation commonly forms steep slopes below mesa or butte capped by the erosion-resistant Cliff House Sandstone.

The Menefee Formation, named by Collins (1919) for exposures on Menefee Mountain near Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado, is the middle unit of the classic three-part Mesaverde Group of the San Juan Basin (Point Lookout Sandstone, Menefee Formation, and Cliff House Sandstone). The Menefee Formation conformably or disconformably overlies the Point Lookout Sandstone and is conformably or disconformably overlain by the Cliff House Sandstone, intertonguing locally about its contacts (Tabel and Frost, 1979; Craig, 1980). Some authors have reported the Menefee to be conformably overlain by the Lewis Shale in the southeastern part of the basin (Dane, 1936; Beaumont and others, 1950). South of the pinch-out of the Point Lookout Sandstone in the vicinity of Gallup, New Mexico, the Menefee conformably overlies the Crevasse Canyon Formation (fig. 3).

In general, the Menefee Formation consists of interbedded and repetitive sequences of differing thicknesses of sandstone, siltstone, shale, and claystone, carbonaceous shale, and coal beds of differing thicknesses (Collins, 1919; Sears and others, 1936; Manshardt, 1976; Tabel and Frost, 1979; Craig, 1980). Typically the sandstones are lenticular, light brown to gray, thick to very thick bedded, and fine to medium grained, with clay matrix and various types of cement. The siltstones commonly are shaly, gray, and thin to thick bedded (Manshardt, 1976; Tabel and Frost, 1979; Craig, 1980). Claystones typically are light-brownish gray and thick to very thick bedded (Manshardt, 1976; Tabel and Frost, 1979; Craig, 1980).

Thickness of the Menefee Formation increases from north to south. Thickness ranges from zero where the unit pinches out between the Point Lookout and Cliff House Sandstones in Colorado to about 2,000 feet along its southern outcrop area (Molenaar, 1977b, p. 164; Tabel and Frost, 1979).

Data used to compile the depth to and the altitude of the top of the Menefee Formation were obtained primarily from oil- or gas-test holes in the Petroleum Information Corporation's data base with supplemental information from NWIS and from outcrop altitudes. The locations of the test holes and wells are shown in figure 4. Depth to the Menefee ranges from zero in areas of outcrop to about 4,000 feet in the northeastern part of the study area (fig. 5).

A structure-contour map differs from a depth-to-top map in that a structure-contour map represents some particular geologic horizon whereas a depth-to-top map, thus, the effects of topography are removed. In the configuration of the top surface of the Menefee Formation, the datum used is sea level.

The configuration of the top of the Menefee Formation is shown on the structure-contour map (fig. 6). The overall structure of the basin also is shown in figure 6. For example, the deepest part of the structural basin in the northeast, the Hogback monocline surrounding the Central basin, Chaco sag, Four Corners platform, and the structural sag areas in the south, as delineated in figure 2, all appear in figure 6. The top of the Menefee

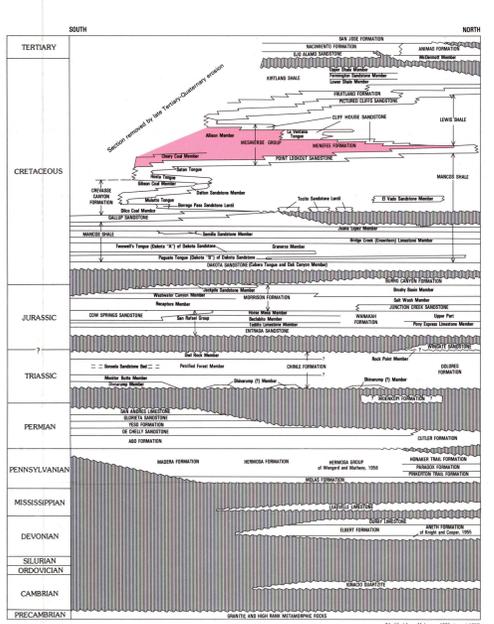


Figure 3. Time- and rock-stratigraphic framework and nomenclature.

CONVERSION FACTORS

Multiply inch-pound unit	By	To obtain metric unit
foot	0.3048	meter
foot squared	0.0929	square meter
foot per day	0.0000457	meter per day
gallon per minute	0.06309	liter per second
gallon per acre-foot	0.0000123	cubic meter per second
mile	1.609	kilometer
square foot	0.0929	square meter
square mile	2.590	square kilometer

Temperature in degrees Celsius (°C) can be converted to temperature in degrees Fahrenheit (°F) by using the following equation:

$$T^{\circ}F = 1.8 \times T^{\circ}C + 32$$

Sea level. In this report "sea level" refers to the National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD of 1929)—a geoidic datum derived from a general adjustment of the first-order level nets in both the United States and Canada, formerly called "Sea Level Datum of 1929."

Formation decreases from a maximum altitude of about 8,500 feet above sea level along the north-central basin margin to about 1,000 feet above sea level in the northeastern part of the study area.

WATER IN THE MENEFEE FORMATION

The Menefee Formation is a source of water for domestic and livestock use in areas where drilling depths and pumping levels are economically feasible and where water quality is acceptable. These water wells generally are on or near the outcrop areas. Minor amounts of oil are being produced from channel sandstones in the Menefee in the southern part of the basin (Molenaar, 1977b, p. 166). Some of the oil-production wells also produce water, but the quality usually is not acceptable for domestic and livestock use.

The altitude of the potentiometric surface of the Menefee Formation at selected water wells, springs, and oil- or gas-test holes is shown in figure 7. The altitude of the potentiometric surface in the water wells was determined from measured or reported depths to water or was calculated from pressure-gauge readings on flowmeter installations. The altitude of the potentiometric surface in oil- or gas-test holes was calculated by analyzing shut-in pressures from drill-stem tests conducted from 1954 to 1985; the data were obtained from Petroleum Information Corporation. Drill-stem tests were selected for analysis if the length of time allowed for the shut-in pressure to stabilize was greater than 1 hour.

The object of a drill-stem test to determine the potential for gas production, not to determine the potentiometric surface. Therefore, the best water-producing zones commonly are bypassed, with the result that the hydrologic data are from less permeable zones. However, the data generally are all that are available for aquifers in the deeper parts of the basin.

The final shut-in pressure was converted to equivalent freshwater hydraulic head according to the procedure outlined by Miller (1976, p. 17). The following equation was used:

$$h = (FSP \times X) + PRD + L \quad (1)$$

where
 h is the altitude of the potentiometric surface, in feet above sea level;
 FSP is the final, bottom-hole shut-in pressure, in pounds per square inch, measured by the pressure-recording device;
 X is a factor to convert FSP to equivalent freshwater hydraulic head, in feet;
 PRD is the depth to the pressure-recording device, in feet below land surface; and
 L is the altitude of the land surface, in feet above sea level.

A factor of 2.307 feet of water per pressure increment of 1 pound per square inch was used for X. This value assumes the water is at a temperature of 4 degrees Celsius with a density of 1.0 gram per cubic centimeter.

Water in the Menefee Formation occurs under both water-table and artesian conditions. Water table conditions occur where sandstones crop out and artesian conditions occur in isolated channel sands enclosed in shale. Recharge to the water-bearing sands commonly is from vertical leakage of water through confining beds but some recharge is from infiltration of precipitation on outcrops and from infiltration of streamflow.

No areas of stress from ground-water development are known to exist. The water levels shown in figure 7 are the most recent data available. These data do not represent a specific time interval; they have not been contoured. General ground-water gradients may be determined for localized areas if sufficient data exist.

The transmissivity of the Menefee Formation depends on the thickness of sandstone lenses penetrated. The range of values reported for nine tests (Sears and others, 1936) is 0.07 to 112 feet squared per day with a median value of 10 feet squared per day. Hydraulic conductivity calculated from oil and gas wells in deeper parts of the basin averages 0.17 foot per day (Renner and Harris, 1957).

The reported or measured discharge from 81 water wells and seven springs completed in the Menefee Formation ranges from 1 to 55 gallons per minute and the median is 13 gallons per minute. The specific capacity of 17 of these wells ranges from 0.02 to 0.57 gallons per minute per foot of drawdown and the median is 0.11 gallon per minute per foot of drawdown. The distribution of these data is shown in figure 8.

The location of two tests that derive water only from the Menefee Formation and have four or more water-level measurements is shown in figure 9. Reference numbers in figure 9 correlate well locations with identifications (SITE ID) used to identify each well in the NWIS data base. The official site identification for both wells are completed in the area where the well is located. The data presented on these wells are in sand lenses where ground water occurs under artesian conditions. Water levels in these lenses may change rapidly depending on changes in ground-water withdrawal. The hydrographs for well 2 shows such a change. It is not possible to determine if these hydrographs show any long-term changes in ground-water levels because ground-water levels may change rapidly and there are too few water-level measurements to define an envelope for the short-term changes.

QUALITY OF WATER FROM THE MENEFEE FORMATION

Water-quality data discussed in the following section are from the NWIS, Petroleum Information Corporation, and Dwight's ENERGYDATA file. BRIN data base collected during 1948-84. Distribution of data from water wells reflects their location near the outcrop where the drilling depth is economically feasible. Well records were checked to assure, to the extent possible, that a particular sample represents water only from the Menefee Formation and not a mixture of water from other formations. Data presented on the illustrations do not represent the total amount of available data for the Menefee Formation.

More than one analysis exists for a single well, the most recent analysis is shown on the illustration. Selected water-quality properties and constituents are presented in table 1. The minimum, maximum, and median values were calculated for the most recent analysis for those wells that have multiple analyses.

Temperature of water from the Menefee Formation is displayed in figure 10 and presented in table 1. Most of the temperature data are from water wells drilled where the Menefee Formation crops out within the basin. A bottom-hole temperature was obtained during a drill-stem test in oil- or gas-test hole in the central part of the basin in show also.

Selected secondary (nonmetallic) constituent levels are displayed in figure 11. Concentrations of sulfate differ greatly between adjacent wells and no apparent trend is evident. From a total of 223 samples analyzed for sulfate, 29 percent exceeded the primary drinking-water standard of 4 milligrams per liter (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1986). Of 85 samples analyzed for pH, 44.15 percent exceeded the secondary drinking-water standard of 8.5. From a total of 117 samples analyzed for chloride, 47 (40 percent) sulfate samples and 9 (7 percent) chloride samples exceeded the secondary drinking-water standard. The dispersion diagram is displayed in figure 11.

Concentrations of sulfate differ greatly between adjacent wells and no apparent trend is evident. From a total of 223 samples analyzed for sulfate, 29 percent exceeded the primary drinking-water standard of 4 milligrams per liter (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1986) and 45 percent exceeded the secondary drinking-water standard. Concentrations of chloride are shown in figure 12. The greatest number of samples exceeding both the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 40, Parts 100 to 149, revised as of July 1, 1986, p. 524-528, and the National Interim primary drinking-water regulation (U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 40, Parts 100 to 149, revised as of July 1, 1986, p. 524-528), are located in the south-central part of the San Juan Basin. Out of 104 samples for dissolved solids 89.6 percent exceeded the secondary drinking-water standard. Dissolved-solids concentrations of water from the Menefee Formation for water wells and oil- or gas-test holes are shown in figure 13 and listed in table 1. The dissolved-solids concentration of water from water wells was calculated from the major ion concentration of water from the wells. The dissolved-solids concentration of water obtained during drill-stem tests from oil- or gas-test holes was determined by weighing the residue remaining after evaporation, which is a different technique than the summation of major ions. The data from oil- or gas-test holes were obtained from Dwight's ENERGYDATA file. BRIN data base.

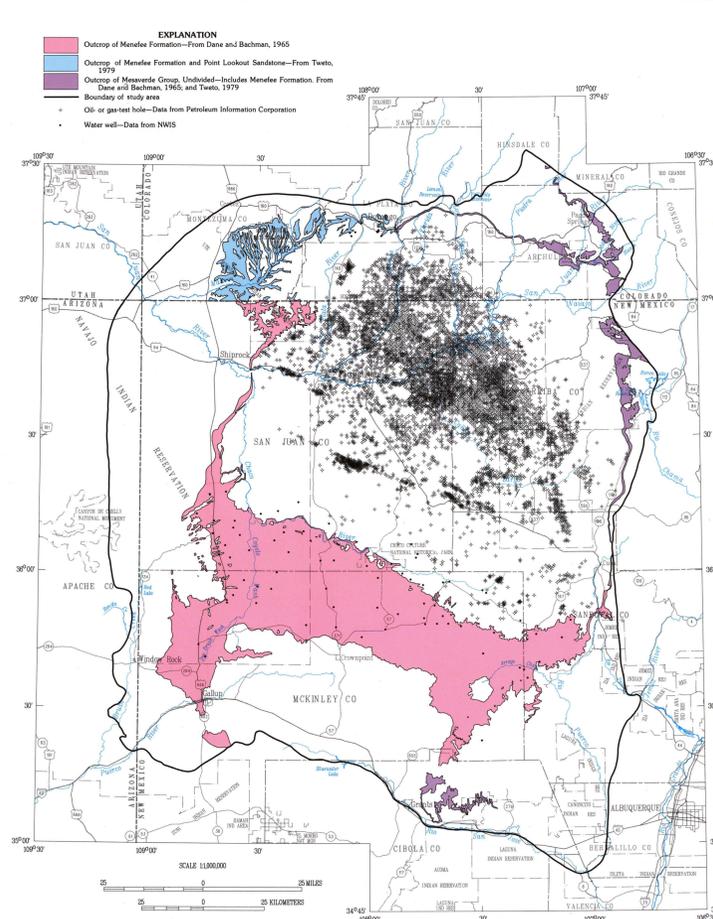


Figure 4. Location of oil- or gas-test holes and water wells used to compile depth to and altitude of the top of the Menefee Formation.

EXPLANATION

- Outcrop of Menefee Formation—From Dane and Bachman, 1965
- Outcrop of Menefee Formation and Point Lookout Sandstone—From Twest, 1979
- Outcrop of Mesaverde Group, Undivided—Includes Menefee Formation, From Dane and Bachman, 1965, and Twest, 1979
- Boundary of study area
- Oil- or gas-test hole—Data from Petroleum Information Corporation
- Water well—Data from NWIS

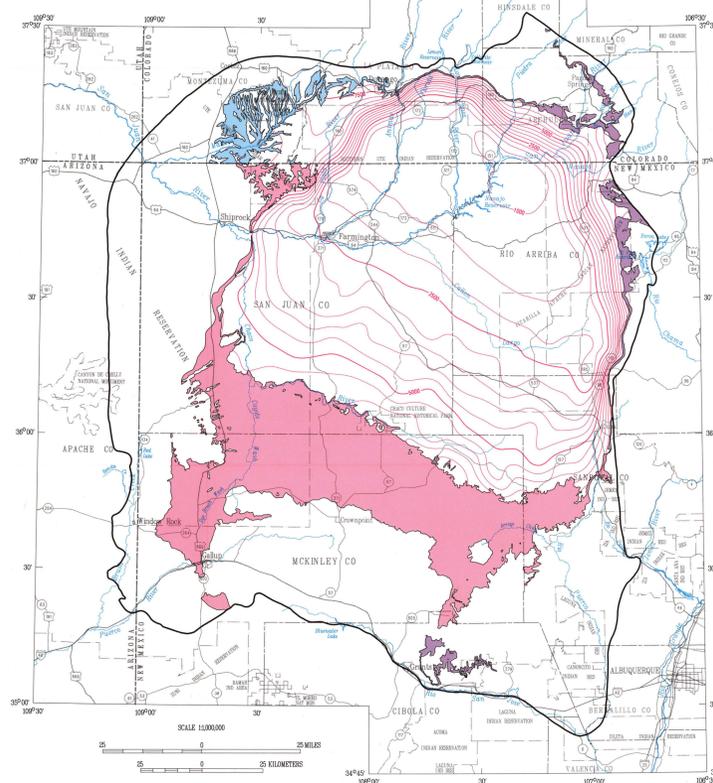


Figure 6. Approximate altitude and configuration of the top of the Menefee Formation.

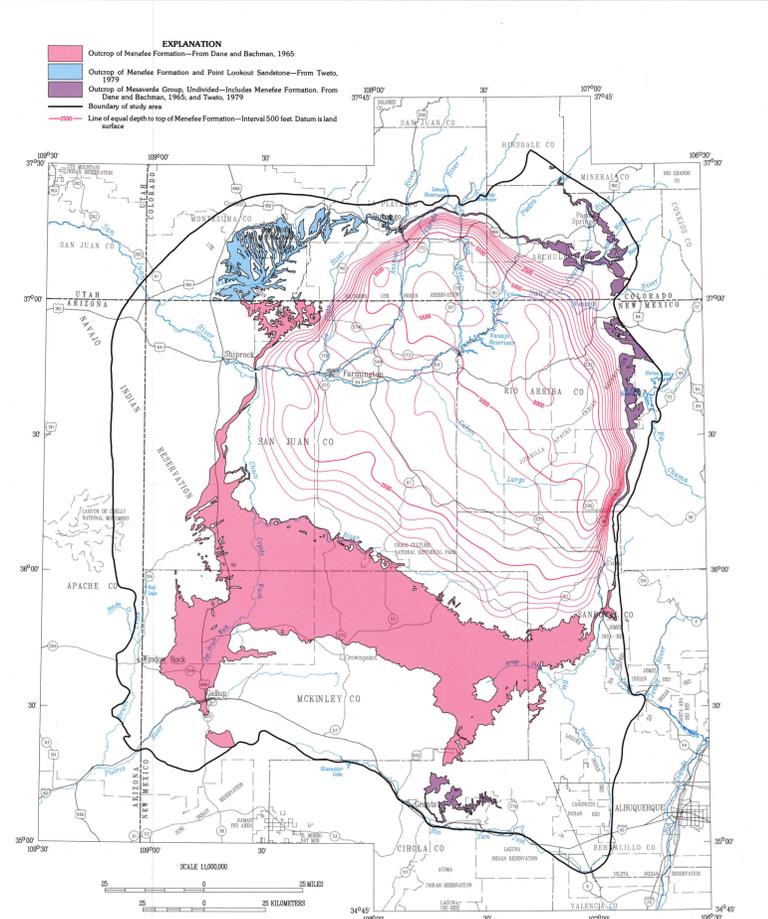


Figure 5. Approximate depth to the top of the Menefee Formation.

EXPLANATION

- Outcrop of Menefee Formation—From Dane and Bachman, 1965
- Outcrop of Menefee Formation and Point Lookout Sandstone—From Twest, 1979
- Outcrop of Mesaverde Group, Undivided—Includes Menefee Formation, From Dane and Bachman, 1965, and Twest, 1979
- Boundary of study area
- Water well—Upper number is altitude of potentiometric surface, in feet above sea level. Lower number is year water level was measured or reported
- Spring—Upper number is altitude of land surface at spring, in feet above sea level. Lower number is year spring was visited
- Oil- or gas-test hole—Upper number is altitude of potentiometric surface, in feet above sea level, calculated from drill-stem test. Lower number is year drill-stem test was conducted

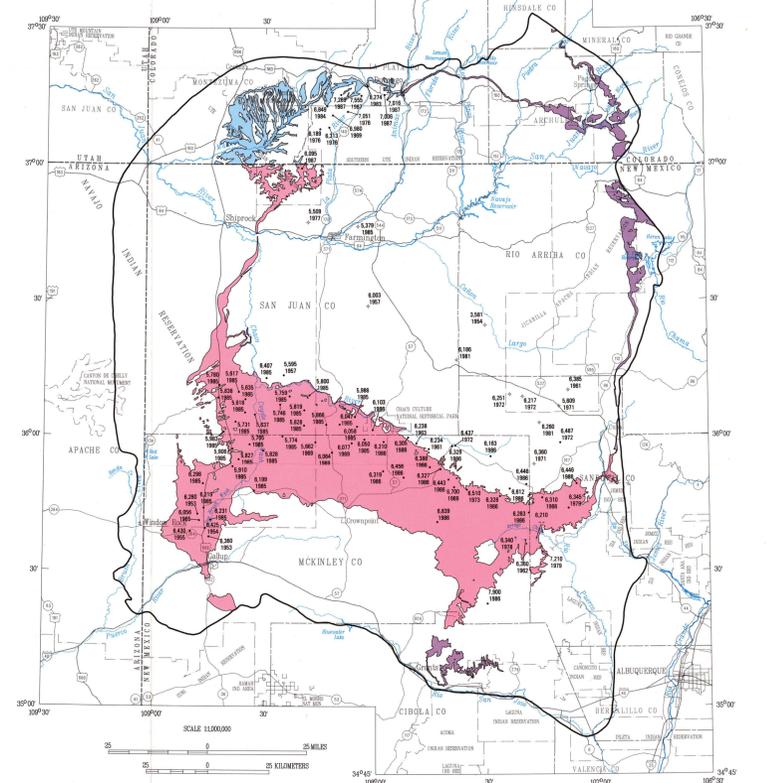


Figure 7. Altitude of potentiometric surface of the Menefee Formation at selected water wells, springs, or oil or gas test holes.

HYDROGEOLOGY OF THE MENEFEE FORMATION IN THE SAN JUAN STRUCTURAL BASIN, NEW MEXICO, COLORADO, ARIZONA, AND UTAH

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