

MASTERTON AND MANAWATU GORGE.

(A. MUNRO in charge.)

THE railway line cut through the Forty-Mile Bush between these places by Mr. Rochfort has been, with a few modifications, adopted in the first instance as a road line, and as such is now being felled and cleared, the felling one chain, and the clearing half a chain wide.

For convenience, and for the purpose of accommodating and affording work to several classes of workers, the line has been divided into sections, as follows, namely:—

- No. 1.—About ten miles, has been allotted to the Scandinavian immigrants lately arrived.
- No. 2.—To the Wairarapa Natives.
- No. 3.—Divided into short contracts for public tender.
- No. 4.—To other Natives.
- No. 5.—Divided as No. 3.
- No. 6.—To other Natives; and
- No. 7.—Divided as Nos. 3 and 5.

A considerable amount of work has been done on No. 1 section by the immigrants, who show an aptitude for this particular kind of work.

Two sets of contracts have been advertised for public tender, 520 chains and 840 chains respectively. A part of the first set only has been accepted; the rest are still open for tender, with the second set, till 6th August.

The road line is being rapidly pegged off for future contracts, in sections, as above described; and it is proposed that, as the work proceeds, the several creeks and soft places, shall be roughly bridged, so as to make the road line immediately useful as a horse track. This will materially affect the price of future tenders, by giving a greater facility for getting up supplies of all kinds.

MANAWATU DISTRICT.

(J. T. STEWART in charge.)

Main Road.—Foxton to eastern part of the Manawatu Gorge, about thirty-eight miles. The work on this had progressed so far as to allow of the passage of drays in March last, the formations, cuttings, bridges, and culverts being then complete, as well as a considerable amount of metalling, the progress of which latter work was stopped by the bad weather, and the unmetalled parts have become unfit, or nearly unfit, for dray traffic.

Between Foxton and the Oroua, thirteen and a quarter miles, the road is made through sandy country, which is rather heavy for traffic, and does not readily admit of being gravelled. Over this portion the driest ground has been selected, and the swampy parts, where unavoidable, have been drained. From the Oroua to the western end of the Gorge, twenty and three-quarter miles, the road lies through a dense bush country, broken at two places by open flats, one at Palmerston, one mile and a half, and one at Otangaki, half a mile wide. Eight and a half miles of this, between Ngawhakarau, the head of the river navigation, and Palmerston, were originally opened by the Provincial Government, about two-thirds of the work being executed. The lower portion of the road, viz., between the Oroua and Palmerston, about ten miles, is unmetalled, and unfit for traffic in winter; the district is low and flat, and destitute of gravel near the line. Along this the tramway is now being laid, confining the traffic to one side of the road, which is thus more cut up than it otherwise would have been.

The completion of the tramway will relieve the road of heavy traffic, but it will still be necessary to metal it for local purposes. I suppose this work will be executed by the Provincial authorities, and it may be conveniently done by means of the tramway, gravel being obtainable at or near Palmerston. It will be seen how the existence of the sandy country, followed by that of the clay country, destitute of gravel, led to the tramway being designed, as the best means of providing for the heavy traffic that may be expected when this valuable district becomes settled. Between Palmerston and the Gorge the country is higher and drier, and gravel is easily obtainable. This section, ten and a quarter miles, has been double ditched and formed 26 feet wide throughout, and seven miles of it have been gravelled. Some heavy cuttings occur on this part of the road through gravel terraces, respectively 18, 20, and 50 feet. The latter occurs on the descent to the Manawatu. This section may be regarded as a fair sample of road-making through a new country—tolerably level, and covered with dense bush. Its cost, including all expenses and six months' maintenance, averaged about £700 a mile.

An unusually wet season has delayed the completion of this road; December, January, February, and March being the only months really favourable for the prosecution of the work.

The formation of the road in the Gorge (three and three quarter miles of side cutting) is all completed, to a minimum width of 12 feet. The culverts and bridges are being erected, and the whole will soon be completed. This section is level throughout, except a length of 20 chains with a grade of 1 in 88; it is kept high above the reach of all floods.

The cutting is made through a great variety of materials—sandy clay and coarse gravel, loose rock and earth, soft rock capable of being worked by pick and crowbar, and in some parts very hard rock, requiring blasting.

As might have been expected, a number of slips have occurred along this piece of road, and a gang of men will be required, during the present winter at least, to keep the road open. Their spare time will be employed in widening the roadway where the curves are sharpest.

Ferries have been established at both the crossings of the Manawatu,—one in the Gorge on the site of the future bridge, and one below the Gorge, also on the road line. Correct sections of the river bed have been taken, and designs for both bridges will shortly be prepared.

A great length of outlet drains has been necessary on this road, particularly in the lower parts