

No. 11.

Mr. Warden FITZGERALD to the UNDER SECRETARY for GOLD FIELDS.

SIR,—

Warden's Office, Ross, Westland, 28th April, 1873.

I have the honor to make the following report on the present state of the Totara District. Having only taken charge of the district since the 1st of the present month, I am not as yet in a position to give such a full report as further acquaintance will enable me to furnish. The district at present seems in a languishing state, which is mainly due to the stoppage of all the steam and other deep-sinking claims on Jones' Flat, the principal centre of operations in the district. All of those claims were on payable gold at the time of the stoppage, many of them with known payable bottoms unworked. The great difficulty to be contended with was the large quantity of water found in the underground workings, which increased as the ground was opened up. To obviate this, a drainage engine of 90 horse-power was erected, and maintained by rates levied on all claims within an area defined under "The Gold Mining Claims Drainage Act, 1868." The rates levied on the several claims were very high, owing to the expensive manner of working the engine, which was found after a time unequal to the labour of draining the ground sufficiently. More than half time the claims were flooded out, and yet obliged to continue paying the rates as when working. This led to the abandonment of a great many of the claims, which threw the burden of maintaining the engine on a few, who were also soon obliged to cease operations. Efforts have since been made several times to reorganize the Drainage Company or form a new one, but without avail, although the shareholders are sanguine of being well repaid for their outlay if the ground could be worked economically. Under the above circumstances the district is at present depending, with a few exceptions, on the sluicing claims, which are scattered in patches over all the known gold-bearing parts.

Owing to the great number thrown out of employment through the stoppage of the Drainage engine, ground which was considered worked out years ago is again being turned over, while in some instances this want of employment has led to prospecting, and the opening up of new ground. There are no claims in the district which can be termed rich, the best paying little more than wages, while the majority are barely supporting. The great drawback in every instance is the high price charged for water, the quantity available being totally inadequate to the demand. This leaves much ground unworked which would yield fair wages with a plentiful and cheap water supply. This want has been most severely felt this summer, the rainfall being less than in any other summer known on the coast. The only water race company in the district—the Totara and Jones' Creek—are at present enlarging their upper race, with the view of taking a larger supply to the west side of Jones' Creek, where there is an increasing demand.

A company called "The Greenland Water Race Company" have taken out a water right for twelve heads of water, and commenced to cut a race, the supply for which they expect to get from Greenland Hill, and small creeks along the course, which at present empty themselves into the Mikonui River. The race in length will be about seven miles, terminating at Ross, and will take over twelve months to complete. This race will no doubt give considerable employment, as its course is known to command many auriferous terraces.

The Upper Totara diggings are on the increase, and support a population of about 80 miners. The workings consist principally in ground sluicing the beds of creeks and adjacent terraces as far as the present elevation of water will command; but had they a good supply of water at a high elevation, the population would rapidly increase, as the ground is known to be very remunerative. The weekly earnings in that locality are from £3 10s. to £4 a week. There has been a small rush in the vicinity of Lake Mahinapua, and also near Aylmer Lead, but neither of these has turned out to be of any importance. At Donnelly's and Jones' Creek there are about 100 miners, and when water is plentiful the majority make fair wages. At German, Sailor's, Blockade, Clear Water, Robinson's, and Donohue's, deep sinking is carried on with varying success. The claims at Redman's are working at a depth of from 50 to 65 feet. The quantity of water to be contended with is very great, and the machinery erected for pumping is of an expensive nature, being driven by water, the scarcity of which latterly has told severely on that part of the district. A party have lately taken up an extended claim of three acres on Jones' Flat, and intend to sluice the ground by the aid of a turbine wheel. Should this prove a success, there is little doubt that these wheels will come into repute, as the expense of erecting them does not exceed £50.

From causes assigned in the beginning of this report, there has been a considerable exodus of the mining population. On the part of the remaining population there is an increased disposition to settle down. The total acreage of rural and suburban sections disposed of is 1,261 acres; out of that, however, 740 acres have been given over as part payment on public works.

The amount of gold forwarded from Ross to Hokitika during the year has been 22,889 oz. 5 dwts. 21 grs.; value, £87,265 8s. 7d.; thus showing a falling off in the value of £44,829 7s. 5d., as compared with last year.

Gold Fields Revenue	£3,129 10 10
Warden's Court, fees and fines	59 15 0
Export duty on gold	2,861 0 0
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						£6,050 5 10

This total shows a falling off in the revenue for the year of £1,610 13s.

Wages.—Managers, £6 per week; underground captains, £3 10s.; carpenters, £3 10s.; blacksmiths, £4; miners, £3.

Timber.—Caps, 9 feet, £7 10s. per 100; round props, 7 feet, £6 per 100; split props, 1 and 7 feet, £4 10s. per 100; laths, 5 feet, £1 10s. per 100; firewood, £1 per cord; sawn timber, 12s. per 100 feet.

Freight.—From Hokitika to Ross, beach road sixteen miles, inland road twenty miles, 150 tons per month, at a cost of £2 10s. per ton.

The population may be estimated as follows:—Male, 1,460; female, 540; total, 2,000.