

Of the lands purchased to the north of Auckland, 229,559 acres have been handed over to the province to be dealt with under the existing land laws.

I will take next in order—the Coromandel and Thames District. Many circumstances have, during the past year, tended to retard the completion of these purchases. Several of the blocks have been before the Native Land Court, and the Native owners ascertained, and are in a fair way of being finally acquired, the conveyances to the Crown only requiring one or two signatures to complete the purchases. One of these blocks is the Waikawau and Moehau, containing 118,802 acres, upon which payments have been made amounting to £15,930 6s. 9d. Several of the purchases in this district are encumbered with timber leases, having currency for periods varying from 21 to 99 years. The above lands are of little value for agricultural purposes, but the Superintendent of Auckland, whom the Government, under “The Immigration and Public Works Act, 1870,” were bound to consult, urged upon the Colonial Government the desirability of acquiring the fee-simple in the belief that the lands were auriferous. It must also be borne in mind that these purchases were recommended with the full knowledge that these leases existed. So strongly was the then Superintendent, Mr. Gillies, impressed with the importance that the purchases should be made without delay, that he represented to the Government the desirability of keeping the Land Purchase Agent supplied with money, and even made advances out of his own means to accomplish this object. I will quote his own words:—

“Being personally aware that a very large sum might be saved to the colony and the province on this purchase (Waikawau and Cape Colville Blocks) by dealing with the Natives at a tangi at Ohinemuri, I felt myself justified in advancing to Mr. Mackay the sum of two thousand pounds for that purpose. I proceeded with Mr. Mackay to Ohinemuri, and was present when he was negotiating with the Natives there assembled, and I feel convinced that a large saving, both in time and money, was effected by his being placed in funds promptly to conduct these negotiations. I trust that you will approve of my action in this matter, and that the amount advanced will be at once repaid. Permit me further to suggest that provision should be made in future for providing funds by which advantage can be taken promptly of such circumstances as the above, which occasionally arise.”

There are certain blocks of land on the Upper Thames, Waitoa, and Piako Rivers, amounting to an estimated area of 200,000 acres, the purchase of a principal part of which it is believed will soon be completed. A considerable portion of these lands are looked upon as suitable for settlement. Mr. Mackay has for some time been endeavouring to arrange the differences of the Native owners in respect to boundaries, and has succeeded in getting several blocks surveyed, so that I hope at no distant period these lands will be thrown open for sale and occupation.

The purchases in the Thames district that have been completed amount to 145,441 acres, at a cost (inclusive of expenses) of £23,231 17s. 1d., or 3s. 3d. per acre.

Owing to difficulties interposed by one or two sections of the Arawa tribe, it has been deemed prudent to discontinue for the present all land purchases in the Bay of Plenty District. The nature of those obstructions will be seen by reference to the reports of the Land Purchase Agents, already laid on the Table of the House. The agents have consequently been withdrawn.

At Taupo the like difficulties were not encountered, and larger areas have been acquired, either by purchase or lease. The survey of 62,787 acres have already been completed, and further surveys are in progress over lands estimated to contain 261,000 acres.

In these districts, 99,974 acres have been purchased at a cost of £14,258 11s. 6d., or about 2s. 10d. per acre.

I will now refer to the East Coast and Wairoa Districts. In the former very little has been completed, although large areas are under negotiation. Land purchase arrangements in this district being now the subject of inquiry, need not at present be further alluded to.