

Two or three specific instances will illustrate these general observations, and may be taken as typical of the condition of every part of the district on which my work has to be completed. The Stony River Block, for instance, estimated to contain 18,000 acres, was practically returned to the Natives, after the war of 1865, free from confiscation; but no part of it was ever surveyed. The Natives, entitled to it have for some time past been exceedingly anxious to have it subdivided among their hapus and Crown-granted, in order that they may lease it to Europeans and otherwise utilize it. I contemplate dividing it among six or seven hapus, with a Crown grant to each. Before I can take even the initiatory steps, I must know what the area is. The block is bounded by the sea coast on the west side, and by rivers on its north and south sides, somewhat converging inland as they approach Mount Egmont. Looking at the existing maps of the Provincial District of Taranaki, on which these three boundaries are laid down after a fashion, I naturally expected that all that I should have to do would be the work of internal subdivision among the hapus. Now, I find that I not only have to do the latter, but all the former also. When it is remembered that traversing a very tortuous river through a broken bush country is good work for a survey party, even in fine weather, at the rate of a mile a week, it is evident that the two river boundaries in this case will require at least twenty-five weeks, independently of the sea boundary. This is an illustration of how the matter stands in a district quite in a state of nature, and not connected with any local surveys. The cases of the Opunake Block of 44,000 acres (less a small deduction of 1,400), and some others, are precisely analogous.

The Patua Ranges Reserve at the base of Mount Egmont, about 8,000 acres, is an instance of one which is surrounded on three sides by sections allotted, and many of them Crown-granted, to military settlers, and on the remaining side by a straight line. These boundaries are laid down with the greatest apparent precision and exactitude on the provincial maps. But I am informed that no part of the sectional survey is reliable, and the straight line has never been surveyed on the ground. The block is of a very broken and difficult character; and the survey of its external boundaries, with the subdivisions, will, according to Captain Skeet's estimate, require eight months to complete.

You will find attached to Captain Skeet's report a few tracings which illustrate what I have stated, and you will appreciate by the few red dottings (which represent the extent in each case of executed work which he can utilize) how very little there is that will be available for my purposes. In general terms it may be stated that, before I can recommend all the Crown grants required in fulfilment of the promises made by the Government to the Natives, I shall have to survey and resurvey a very large part of the Provincial District of Taranaki, including many portions already sold, occupied, and Crown-granted.

However there is nothing, fortunately, impracticable in the matter. It is only a question of time and money; but it must be done if the Government intends, as no doubt it does, to fulfil the promises to the Natives ascertained by the Commissioners of 1880 to require fulfilment. You will perceive from Captain Skeet's enclosed report—which has been made with great consideration, very extensive local knowledge, and after much consultation with Mr. Humphries, the chief surveyor of the provincial district—that he estimates that with my present survey staff of four parties in the field and the necessary establishment for office work it will take upwards of two years, at least, to finish the work that is before me and that the cost, extended over that period, will be (say) £9,500. Feeling the great importance of the work being finished as soon as possible, both with regard to the settlement of the Native question and the occupation of the country by European settlers which is certain to follow, it appears to me that it would be a great mistake to delay its completion a day longer than can be helped. By doubling the number of survey parties and expending the same amount in one year instead of two it seems easy to accomplish it. I have, as I am aware, full power under the terms of my commission to employ as many surveyors as I please; but, as it might take the Government by surprise if I made so great an increase in my survey force and in the current expenditure, I am anxious to have your concurrence before I do so. I presume it would also be necessary that the amount, say £10,000, should be placed upon the Estimates during the coming session of Parliament.

An additional reason for the foregoing suggestion is that the Natives at present are in an excellent humour, and very desirous to have the work done which is to define the limits of their ownership and to enable them to make their land productive by leasing it or otherwise. As far as concerns what I may term the judicial part of my work, that is, the ascertainment of the rights of ownership of the different hapus and individuals, I am, with the valuable assistance of Major Parris, making excellent progress; but even this is to a considerable extent impeded by the inability to fix the areas of the reserves and subdivisions till the surveys are completed.

In referring to the impediments arising from the condition of the local surveys, I think it right to state that I impute no blame whatever to Mr. Humphries, the Chief Surveyor of the district, from whom I have invariably received all the co-operation and assistance I could desire or it was possible for him to give. They are the result of a system which existed formerly, not only in this but many other parts of the colony, into which perhaps it was forced by the pressure of rapid settlement and other causes which no longer exist, though their consequences survive. It will be a good thing in this district if my work results in amending some of the defects attributable to the former system, which, under any circumstances, would some day have to be corrected.

I have, &c.,

WILLIAM FOX,
West Coast Commissioner.

The Hon. Minister of Lands, Wellington.

Enclosure.

Captain SKEET to Hon. Sir W. Fox.

West Coast Royal Commission,
Survey Office, 13th April, 1882.

SIR,—

In accordance with your instructions, I have the honor to report upon the surveys probably required to complete the work of the West Coast Royal Commission in the settlement of Native claims and awards in the district proclaimed in "The West Coast Settlement (North Island) Act, 1880."