

1887.

NEW ZEALAND.

OPENING OF THE SOUTH-WESTERN LAKES AND SOUNDS

(MEMORANDUM ON THE), BY THE HON. J. C. RICHMOND.

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Sir R. Stout, with the Leave of the House.

No. 1.

The Hon. Mr. RICHMOND to the Hon. Sir R. STOUT.

Memorandum on the Opening of the South-western Lakes and Sounds.

SIR,—

Wellington, 5th May, 1887.

During the months of March and April last, in company with the well-known landscape-painter, Mr. J. Gully, I visited the Lakes Anau and Manapouri for the purpose of making studies of the scenery. The impression we both of us received of the singular beauty of the district makes it my duty to recall attention to its importance and the importance of the neighbouring ocean-sounds as a field for the tourist.

At present the lakes are practically closed to the public at large, and can only be enjoyed by the aid of the Hon. Matthew Holmes and the managers of his stations at Castle Rock and at Takitimo (Manapouri). By the hospitality of Mr. Holmes, Mr. Barnhill, and Mr. Mitchell, we were supplied with food, conveyance, attendance, and boats, and enabled to appreciate the beauties of the two principal lakes; but the western sounds, though within ten miles of the lakes at several points, are almost inaccessible for the present from the landward side even to robust and enterprising explorers.

The village of Mossburn, on the Mararoa branch of the Invercargill–Kingston line, is the nearest point on our railway-system to these lakes. Mossburn is about twelve miles northwestwards from the Lumsden (or Elbow) Station on the main line. It is near the Oreti River, and distant about thirty-five miles by the present dray-tracks from each of the two lakes at the points where the River Waiau flows out.

The distance as the crow flies from the South-west Arm, Middle Fiord of Te Anau, to the head of George Sound (probably the most accessible from inland of the ocean-sounds), is under ten miles; and the western arm of North Manapouri is about the same distance from the head of Bradshaw Sound. The watershed at neither of these points is likely to exceed an elevation of 3,500ft. above the sea. Arthur's Pass, on the projected Canterbury and West Coast Railway, is about 3,200ft., and Mount Rolleston, which overhangs the Otira Gorge, is about 6,000ft. The mountains at the heads of the ocean-sounds and lake-fiords above named do not reach 6,000ft.; therefore the estimate above for the passes between lakes and sounds (which is Mr. McKerrow's) is ample, making due allowance for the specially precipitous character of the crystalline rocks which form the dividing-range. The pass-roads of the Alps are from one and a half times to twice this height, and are crossed by splendid coach-roads, and in some cases by railroads. The Swiss pass-roads have been generally formed by the little cantons without incurring any debt.

It will be seen by what has been thus stated that a very compact and interesting district may be rendered accessible from the sea and landward sides at no extravagant cost. With the aid of a good steam-launch on each lake and a larger seaworthy vessel stationed on George or Bradshaw Sound, all the unique scenery of the south-west coast, the lakes Anau and Manapouri, several minor lakes, and the already-frequented Wakatipu, would be brought within the limits of one moderate summer tour.

Of the two lakes which have drawn my attention to this matter each has its own special attractions. The Anau, the largest lake in the colony, offers a delightful field for aquatics. Its outline is familiar to all on the map. The body of the lake lies along the eastern shore, and is bounded on that side by comparatively low eminences and extensive flats. It is a noble and cheerful expanse of water. On the west wooded mountains of about 4,000ft. elevation hem it in; their continuity being broken by three great fiords adorned with islands and fine promontories, sometimes rising from the water in bold precipices. The fiords branch out in several places. The heads are overhung by the higher mountains, the highest being at the northernmost extremity of the lake. There is considerable variety in the geological character and pictorial appearance of the higher mountains; but the general effect of the fiords is grave and even solemn. Among the islands and at some promontories and beaches shelter for boats exists, but not in sufficient abundance. The deficiency may be easily supplied, especially on the eastern shore.

To the majority of visitors Manapouri will be the more attractive lake, by its labyrinthine arms, fantastic islets and promontories, the surprises which its coves and bays afford, its variety of peaks and the noble range of the Cathedral Peaks, its transparent waters and white beaches, and by the copious outflow of the noble Waiau River, which, short as is its course, pours a large and constant tribute to the sea which few of our rivers surpass.

Both lakes must necessarily be explored by water; the multitude and length of the arms, the

occasional precipices on the shores, the forest which clothes all the feet of the mountains, would render all possible tracks on shore circuitous and laborious.

Birch, or, more properly, beech, of several species, and rata, form the bulk of the forest. The shores in some parts are lined with manuka. No trout as yet show themselves in either lake, but they are seen in the River Waiau. At present eels, paradise ducks, gulls, grebes, shags, and a few black swans are the only tenants of the waters.

To conclude this short sketch I venture to say that those even who have revelled in the beauties of the lakes of Switzerland, Savoy, and Italy, with their peaks glittering with snow, and creeping glaciers, their shores adorned with white towns and towers, their histories, legends, and memories, will be dull people if they feel no new delight in these lonely waters, destitute of history and of remnants of the past, except the stone tools and weapons and the few bones and skulls of a considerable Maori population which within the present century lived on the level parts of their shores.

Of the Wakatipu and Milford Sound and the other ocean-sounds it is needless to speak, as they have already a reputation outside the colony.

It is an inauspicious time to propose any expenditure on the lakes-and-sounds district, nor is that my purpose; but I wish to put on record for future use what little I have learned of the probable cost of rendering the two lakes accessible from the landward. Mr. Mitchell, manager of Mr. Holmes's Manapouri Run, roughly estimates the cost of making a passable carriage-track from Mossburn to the two lakes at £1,500. The track exists, and an ordinary buggy can travel on it; but it is very rough in most places. There is no difficult ground to be traversed except the bed of the Mararoa River, which cannot be dealt with for some time to come. The £1,500 would be required for some short side-cuttings, the filling-up of crab-holes and small swampy watercourses, the rounding-up of a few parts where the ground is damp, and the removal of large stones from the track. My impression is that Mr. Mitchell's estimate is sufficient. It would be idle to pretend to guess what the cost of the suggested bridle-tracks to the sounds would be until the most encouraging lines have been examined.

The erection of a few rough huts at suitable points, and the organizing of a boating service on each lake, are among the earliest requirements. The Government possesses one good whale-boat on the Anau: another boat there and two on Manapouri would be ample for some time to come. I should think that trustworthy men may be found who would take the service on a scale of fixed charges and a small additional subsidy or retainer. On the Manapouri there is one small but good boat, the property of Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Barnhill, which, if my memory serves me, cost them £40 when delivered on the lake. Three boats of a larger size might be placed, two on Manapouri, one on Anau, for, say, £200. Half a dozen rough bush-huts, shingle-roofed, would cost, perhaps, £120.

But, should even the smallest expenditure here set down be held inopportune, I would still urge the expediency of making an extensive reserve, to cover the two lakes and their shores some distance back, and to include the West Coast sounds; the reserve to be dedicated to public use as a park or recreation-district. Little or no land has been alienated in this part of the country, and little, if any, exists worth cultivating, except as cottage-gardens.

It is needless to dwell long on the value of such an asset as now lies dormant in the districts referred to. It is enough to name the example of Switzerland, where for four months of the year the five great nations of Europe and the United States of America pour their contingents over the land, filling the railway-trains and hotels, and consuming on the spot all the surplus productions of the land; employing an army of labourers of all kinds. Though our land is less attractive, and its neighbours less populous, yet, on the other hand, New Zealand has a monopoly of attractions of this kind in the southern latitudes; and during the summer in Australia our moderate climate invites her population, at the season most favourable for enjoying our mountains and lakes.

Already, without any organized attempt by the Government to facilitate the tourist, frequent visits are made by the ships of the Union Steamship Company to one or another of the sounds. When it shall become possible to pass thence with moderate ease to the interior the attraction to such visitors will be vastly increased; and there need be no doubt the same enterprising company will do their part to cultivate the traffic, and will probably station one of their small boats, for visiting the sounds, at that one to which access from the interior has been effected.

The Hon. Sir R. Stout, M.H.R., K.C.M.G.

I have, &c.,

J. C. RICHMOND.

No. 2.

The Hon. Sir R. STOUT to the Hon. Mr. RICHMOND.

SIR,—

Premier's Office, Wellington, 7th May, 1887.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your very interesting memorandum on the opening-up of the south-western lakes and sounds. The matter has already received the attention of the Government, but I am afraid in the present state of our finances it will be impossible even to incur the small expenditure you have indicated. I propose, with your permission, to lay the memorandum on the table of the House of Representatives and move that it be printed, in order that so valuable a communication may be preserved for future reference.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. J. C. Richmond.

ROBERT STOUT.

[Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, nil; printing (1,275 copies), £1 5s.]

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1887.