

1889.

## NEW ZEALAND.

## THE WAITOMO CAVES, KING COUNTRY

(REPORT ON).

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

The CHIEF SURVEYOR, Auckland, to the SURVEYOR-GENERAL, Wellington.

SIR,—

Survey Office, Auckland, 24th June, 1889.

In accordance with your instructions to visit and report on the caves at Waitomo, I, in company with Mr. Allom, my assistant, Mr. Hanna, photographer, his assistant Mr. Bain, and Mr. James Stewart, C.E., left Auckland on the 31st May, arriving at Otorohanga the same evening. On the following morning we were joined by Major Mair, who had been good enough to arrange with the Natives for our visit; Mr. H. D. Johnston, Native Land Court Interpreter; and Mr. William Cussen, who kindly offered his camp equipage, and arranged the transit of camp and commissariat. I must express my great indebtedness to him for his obliging and gratuitous assistance throughout the exploration. After a ride of ten or eleven miles we reached the caves, of which I give a full description further on. Major Mair and Messrs. Stewart and Johnston returned to Otorohanga the same evening, but the remainder of the party camped close to the entrance of the caves for two nights, returning to Otorohanga on the evening of the 3rd June to catch the next morning's train to Auckland. We could profitably have spent a longer time, but there was no other train for a full week, the time-table having been altered. We had consequently to work very long hours. The first day, after having ridden from Otorohanga, we were at work inside until midnight, and on to 2 a.m. of the following morning. After a few hours sleep, and breakfast, we went in again until 11.30 p.m.: the last day from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m., when we left for Otorohanga. Nearly the whole of the time was taken up with the photographing, which was very tedious, as we were greatly impeded by the smoke from the magnesium burning, which hung about very much. The whole party suffered more or less for some days afterwards through inhaling its fumes so continuously. Mr. Hanna and myself took a large number of photographs, and I forward a selected twenty-two in triplicate with this report.

At the present time there is a fair Native horse-track from Otorohanga, which can be comfortably covered in an hour and three quarters.

The caves, if maintained in their present natural condition, will doubtless draw a constant stream of visitors, and every care should be taken to preserve them from being despoiled, or in any way injured. I fear that the Natives, of themselves, will not be able to prevent it. Already persons have written their names, selecting the most delicate portions—one in particular, "Foy Ngarato," who seems to have taken a delight in defacing them with indelible pencil. The aniline dye has sunk in, and all our attempts to erase it by rubbing and scraping failed. This person has even defaced the marble-like "White Terrace" in this manner, doubtless with a view of immortalising himself. He has succeeded, but in quite a different way to what he expected, for his name will be held up to execration by every person who sees his dastardly work. If this kind of thing were allowed to continue the natural unimpaired beauty would be irretrievably marred; so that, if possible, the Government should either purchase the site of the caves or in some way, with the consent of the Natives, assume the control and management of them.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CAVES.

On approaching the valley of the Waitomo the scenery is very fine, in marked contrast to the open plains of the Waipa below. The country is undulating, with clumps of light bush scattered about, and occasionally groves of mamaku tree-ferns. A quarter of a mile before the caves are reached, the Waitomo, a stream of about 20ft. in width, is to be found emerging from the side of a hill, under which it has meandered through limestone caverns of various sizes for about 20 chains, and along which a light canoe can be taken to within a few chains of its egress, where further progress is barred by the roof coming down to the water. Passing over a low saddle, which completely blocks the valley, the mouth of the cavern is reached, into which the stream disappears. This "rua" (hole), as it is called by the Maoris, has been known to them for generations, and the stream, which is 8ft. deep at the entrance, has been a noted place for eel-fishing. Tradition, however, gives no account of Natives ever having had the courage to enter this, to them, awe-inspiring darkness—the abode of taniwhas and other fabulous monsters. It was left for Mr. F. Mace to bring to light this domain of beauty, who, after constructing a slender raft of dry logs, courageously entered the forbidding darkness in company with a Native named Tane Tinorau, whom he had, after long persuasion, induced to share in his voyage of discovery.