

HOROWHENUA STATE FARM.

MR. WINTERBURN, the overseer in charge, reports:—

On the 24th January I proceeded to the site of the State Farm with a few men, and pitched camp.

At first the men were paid day-wages, but it was considered advisable to substitute contract work, which was partially brought into force on the 13th February, and has so far worked satisfactorily. All the work that can be let by contract is so done, but certain classes of work must be done by day-wages, this being unavoidable.

About 25 acres of manuka near edge of bush was cut, burned, and heaped, and the space sown with grass-seed, which is thriving well. The division line between the farm and village settlement has been underscrubbed and felled 2 chains wide, and the western boundary has also been completed a chain wide all through. The whole of the frontage to the Horowhenua Road is now fenced with wire and battens; also the open at eastern end up to the skirt of the bush, to be continued as division fence between the settlement and farm.

The road from front gate is completed a mile into the bush, and when extended to boundary will divide the farm in halves, east and west.

A nursery, containing about 2 acres of land, has been fenced with paling, and the stones and roots cleaned out; this work is not quite finished yet, but will in all probability be ready in a few days to receive the 2,500 fruit-trees required. Holes have been dug along the fences, and at each side of road running through the farm, for the purpose of planting 600 ornamental and shelter trees in. I am now running a fence along the skirt of the bush to form a paddock for horses, and intend to plough some of it for cropping. The boulder belt extends about 20 chains into the bush, but the land behind it is capable of growing anything, being a rich loam.

I am leaving a forest reserve, 10 chains wide, along the southern boundary and down to the Waiwiri Lake; this reserve will act as a breakwind and shelter to the farm, as well as being a good piece of natural bush.

Mr. Bartholomew is now putting in a tram-line to get at the timber in the heart of the block, and at the south-west end. It will take about twelve months or more to get the timber out. The royalty paid up to the present amounts to £94 19s. 9d., at the rate of 6d. for matai, 3d. for white-pine, and 4d. for rimu.

There are now thirty-three men employed on the place; the population, including children, numbers eighty-three. Nine men have left of their own accord, either to go to other employment or through discontent; only one man has been dismissed, and that was through repeatedly disregarding instructions, and threatening to inflict bodily harm on several of the men. At first the men, through inexperience, made small returns at contract, for instance—at underscrubbing some of them only made 2s. 5d. a day; but they kept at it, and the same men are now making between 5s. and 6s. a day at the same work: this applies all round to contract work. It seems hard at first, but it tests the men, and I may say that, with few exceptions, they have profited by the experience gained, and now make a moderate wage. It takes time, and is a difficult matter to find out what each man is best suited for, and that can only be arrived at by actual test. A man may do well at underscrubbing, and yet be lost at road-work or bushfelling; so I have just to use my own discretion and try to mete out justice to all.

Since the start, three men have been lost and spent the night in the bush; but on each occasion they were either found by search parties or got out themselves at sunrise, apparently none the worse for their night's outing. There has been very little sickness in the camp, and none of a serious nature; but two men have injured themselves slightly—one cut his foot with a slasher, and was away for a fortnight through it; the other man cut his hand with a slasher some weeks ago, and is still in camp. He has a large family to support, so the men held a meeting and unanimously decided to give a half-day's work on the unfinished road section where he met with the accident, so that when they have all had their turn at it, it will, in all probability, be completed, and he will then receive the amount earned for the contract. This will tide him over his misfortune, and speaks well for the men who came forward to assist him: they who worked not have promised cash in lieu thereof.

The Government buildings at present consist of two structures 10ft. by 14ft., built on skids, one in use as an office, and the other for living in; also a shed for keeping the carts and horse-feed in. There are five private dwellings built of wood, and six composite—calico and timber—the tents built up and floored for sleeping in, and the living-room of wood; the rest are still in tents, but most of them have ordered timber to supersede the calico.

The nucleus of a library is already here, and when the hall promised is erected I intend to obtain as many papers and books as possible, for there is a considerable amount of reading indulged in by a goodly number.

When the nursery is planted, the intention is, for a time, to utilise the space between the trees as a vegetable garden, and for the supply of plants to the people on the Farm.

I expect to be able to get about 600 acres of the bush down in time for the next year's burn, and 50 acres will then be logged up, stumped, and cleared, ready for an orchard.

The road through the Farm will, in all likelihood, be completed in two months.

I should much like to see a trade opened up in firewood and posts. If this were done the Farm would pay almost half the expense of management and working until the bush is down. A pork trade and butter-factory are things to be considered later on. It is also proposed to experiment in silk-culture, for which purpose some white mulberry-trees will be planted in the nursery at once.

There are 2 chains felled between the village settlement and farm, and one chain between Maori land and farm; and it will be necessary to have an extra chain in width felled on adjoining blocks to enable me to have the fences erected. Will your department kindly see to this?