

Some small works are still in hand, and deviations outside the block on the leading roads are being made with the assistance of the Road Board.

Kaitangiwhenua No. 2.—Rawhitiroa Road: As explained in last year's report, this is an inland connecting road between Waitotara River (about thirty-eight miles above Waitotara Township) and Eltham. During the year 220 chains of dray-road formation, 770 chains of felling, stumping, &c., 690 chains of bridle-road formation, 2,173 lineal feet of culverts has been made, leaving only about three miles and a half to be felled and formed to complete the through connection. The settlers in Matemateonga Block contributed £600 (raised by special loan) towards the cost of above work. From Eltham to Waitotara River the distance is about 44½ miles, of which about thirteen is of dray-road width.

Toro Block.—The vote for this road represents a special loading put on Section 23, Block IV., Huira, for forming Toro Road, but as part of the road requires deviating, and no offer has yet been made for the land to which it leads, no action has been taken towards doing the work.

Opaku-Kapara Block.—These works include Mataimoana, Weraweraonga, and Ridge Roads, and during the year 1,242 chains of felling, stumping, &c., 1,190 chains of bridle-road formation, and 380 lineal feet of culverts has been done. Access has been given to all the lands disposed of, and to portions still remaining Crown lands.

Rawhitiroa Block.—This block, though surveyed, has not yet been disposed of, and until this is done it would not be prudent to fell and form the roads, as without traffic they would soon grow up with scrub, and become impassable through slips.

Moeawatea Block.—Rawhitiroa Road has been formed, felled, &c., along part of the town side of this block, but no service-roads have been made through the block, as, though surveyed and allotted, none of the special settlers have yet attempted to occupy it.

Maraeowhai.—The expenditure under this heading was for road-work to Mangaere Saddle, sawing timber for bridges, and for maintenance of part of Ohura Road.

Whenuakura Block.—Rawhitiroa Road has been felled, formed, &c., through the middle of this block, but the side-roads have not been made for the reasons given in Moeawatea Block.

Stratford-Ongarue.—Ohura Road: Very little work beyond maintenance and necessary repairs was done on this road during the past year until January, 1897, since when a strong party has been at work on the heavy siding going down from Pohokura-Mangare ridge towards Whangamomona, forming the road of dray-road width. Three miles of this work—now in hand—is exceptionally heavy, and the most costly of any part of Ohura Road between Stratford and Ohura River, but afterwards the work will be of a lighter description. Two hundred chains of dray-road formation has been done during the year, bringing the effective coach-road to a point over thirty-nine miles from Stratford. Three miles and a quarter felling and clearing for dray-road, two miles and a quarter of similar work for bridle-road, 758 lineal feet of culverts, and one bridge 66 ft. long are also among the works done during the year. As some parts of the road for the last two winters were very muddy—impassable for dray-traffic—and metal was scarce and costly to obtain, an experiment was tried by placing a coat of 12 in. of a dry yellow sand (found in some of the cuttings) on the lower or wet parts of the road. It has answered very well, and will assist in keeping the road open for light-dray traffic. It binds well in wet weather, and throws off the water that otherwise would lodge. Its cost is only one-third of that of a light coat of metal. During the past summer four miles and a quarter of this sanding has been done between Makuri Bridge and Pohokura Bridge, in sections, as urgently required, and the road is much improved in consequence. Ohura Road, being the main channel for the traffic from lands lying for miles on each side of it, is quite unable, on the unmetalled parts, to sustain the heavy strain thrown upon it, and each year the difficulty of supplying the various settlements during the winter months becomes greater. Unless the worst parts between the end of the present metal (nine miles and a half from Stratford) and Pohokura are metalled, settlement of the outside lands cannot progress satisfactorily. The worst portion is to Douglas Road, about two miles, and a further two or three miles in sections at Makuri and Mangaotuku would suffice for a year or so; but if possible the work should be done in a continuous length. The shell-rock metalling completed last year has made a splendid road, and has shown its suitability, when laid under proper circumstances, for carrying the heaviest traffic.

GENERAL.

The total number of contracts let during the year was 613, in addition to the fifty-seven in operation on the 1st April, 1896, making a total of 670. Of these, 632 have been completed, leaving thirty-eight in progress. Of the 670 contracts, 667 were co-operative and three only by ordinary tender.

The following works are proposed for the coming year: Continuation of Ohura Road formation-works, and metalling; completion of Mimi roadworks; formation of Mokau Road; commencement of Moki Road; completion of Rawhitiroa Road; and the opening-up of roads through the various improved-farm settlements and special settlements.

G. F. ROBINSON, Road Surveyor.

WANGANUI.

Pipiriki-Waiouru Road.—A large amount of work preparatory to metalling has been done during the year, but owing to an unusually wet summer a comparatively small amount of metal has been placed on the road. Four contracts, covering a length of 297 chains, are in progress, and three of them are nearly completed, though none of the work done on them has been entered on this year's returns. 1,751 cubic yards of shell-rock have been broken at three faces; this involved 5,494 cubic yards stripping, and 36 chains of service roads, 12 ft. wide. Nine chains of metalling were done at Huikumu. Shell-rock breaking is still proceeding at two faces. With the exception of Kaukore and Waipuna sidelings, which do not cut up badly in winter, the road will (when the metal now being broken is spread) be metalled in all the worst places from Pipiriki to Toanui, a distance of 21½ miles. This is about thirteen miles of actual metalling. The road has been main-