

It has been disappointing that no production can be recorded from the Garvey Creek area, near Reefton, where the Mines Department have proved up a new and promising deposit of good-grade bituminous coal. Owing to the abnormally wet spring and early summer and the difficult country it was not possible to complete the access road till the end of the year, and the erection of mine buildings and screens could not be undertaken till the road was completed. However, construction work has now been completed and production commenced on a small scale, which it is hoped to expand so that a real contribution can be made to our bituminous-coal supplies.

As the result of an intensive drilling programme in the vicinity of the Liverpool Mine, at Rewanui, it has been proved that some 1,500,000 tons of recoverable coal are contained in four seams, and plans are now being prepared to open up this area so that it can replace Liverpool when that mine becomes exhausted. As the Westport Coal Co. has been opening up a new colliery on Cook's Lease and increased production can be expected from Stockton opencast when the aerial ropeway is installed, it will be seen that ample provision is being made from the long-range viewpoint, though the short-range viewpoint presents greater difficulties. It is generally difficult to increase output materially without considerable preparatory development work, and under New Zealand conditions, where access is difficult and the vagaries of the coal-deposits are notorious, it is impossible. The recent acquisition by the State of the mines of the Westport Coal Co. practically vests control of all the bituminous-coal deposits of New Zealand with the State, and henceforth coalfields can be developed as a unit and the resources of bituminous coal conserved to the utmost.

The opening-up of sub-bituminous coal deposits in order to provide replacements for mines approaching exhaustion is also receiving attention, and a drilling programme at the Morley Block, in the Ohai Coalfield, was completed during the year which justifies the opening-up of a large-scale colliery capable of producing 1,000 tons of coal per day. With the purchase by the State of the adjoining Star Mine, the way is cleared to lay out the new colliery to the best advantage, and to this purpose drilling has been commenced upon the Star area, and a commencement of development work only awaits the completion of the drilling programme.

At the present time the Kaitangata Co. is drilling an area adjoining its mine, one borehole having already proved the existence of a coal-seam comparable to that at present being worked, while the Mines Department has just commenced drilling operations at Wangaloa to determine the existence or otherwise of coal-seams in the underlying Kaitangata series. In addition, the Mines Department is boring an area adjacent to the Wilton State Coal-mine in order to prove additional reserves of coal to provide for continuity of operations at that mine.

Generally, while it is appreciated that the development of hydro-electric schemes and the use of alternative fuels such as oil for railway locomotives may lessen somewhat the demand for coal, every precaution is being taken to maintain coal production at a level in keeping with the needs of the country.

OPENCAST MINING

Opencast mining continues to be responsible for an increasing proportion of the total coal production, and in 1946, 528,700 tons of coal were produced by this method of mining, almost 20 per cent. of the total, and thus comparable with the proportion achieved by this form of mining in America, where it has been most fully developed.

The recent development of opencast mining did not commence till October, 1943, with the opening-up of the Glen Afton opencast mine, but since that date until the end of April, 1947, the aggregate production of these opencast mines which had not commenced operations in October, 1943, amounted to 1,059,223 tons.