

TARANAKI.

I have little to add to last year's report. We have had no friction with the men during the year. Most of them are improved-farm settlers, or other settlers, who have worked intermittently with us for years (when not on their farms or employed by neighbours holding large areas). They understand the work, and can make fair wages at prices which compare favourably with outside work.

Earthwork on sidings (all our work is in heavy bush country) costs from 5d. to 8d. per cubic yard, according to amounts or proportion of stumps and roots and length of throw. In breast cuttings from 8d. to 1s. per cubic yard, according to depth of face and length of run. For papa-rock we add 4d. per cubic yard to above prices. Quantities are taken out in New Plymouth office from plans, if for dray-road or 8 ft. wide bridle-road work, and from tables of quantities for various vertical angles if for 5 ft. wide bridle-road work. These quantities and tables are supplied to the various Inspectors. The men therefore get the full amount due to them: there is no guesswork.

Culverts, heartwood of the best timber obtainable, and usually sawn, are paid for as follows: 12 in. by 12 in., 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. per lineal foot; 2 ft. by 2 ft., 5s. to 6s. 6d.; 3 ft. by 3 ft., 6s. to 8s. 6d., measurements clear inside. I quote the lowest and highest prices we have given, and the work includes supply (by the contractor) of all timber, nails, work, &c., in fixing and making, also in preparing bed for culvert, but should the latter be of heavy nature, such as deep trench or excavations in rock, the contractor (that is, the party) receives extra at per cubic yard. The prices vary according to locality, difficulty of obtaining timber, extra haulage, &c.

Bridge-work (we provide all material, but no plant) is paid for at from 4s. per 100 superficial feet for plain stringer bridges to 8s. 6d. per 100 superficial feet (I have again quoted extreme prices) for large and heavy trusses, requiring strong scaffolding; pile-driving at 2s. 6d. per lineal foot, contractor supplying his own plant.

No especially high or low wages have been made during the year. Bridge-builders and carpenters make from 8s. to 10s. per day; the best of labourers from 7s. to 8s. 6d. per day; indifferent ones and old men as low as from 4s. to 5s. 6d. The good men drift into parties as usual, and the indifferent ones have to work together, the latter being usually put on by-roads. One advantage of the co-operative system is that it enables men whom a contractor would not employ, and who could not otherwise get work, to earn an honest living, though it may be a poor one, and keeps them off charitable aid. We have discontinued supplying tents or tools to men, and are now trying to leave off supplying explosives, trusting to competition amongst storekeepers to keep down prices. The only plant we now supply is barrows, hand-carts, earth-wagons, and jacks (these the men could not supply themselves), and the annual loss on these is very trifling, certainly under 1d. in the pound on our annual expenditure. The work generally is well finished. Some of it is exceptionally well done.

The total number of contracts completed during the year was 313. Average wage earned per man per working-day of eight hours was 6s. 11d.

Greatest number of men employed, 386 in August, 1899; least number in February, 1900, 113: average number, 267.

G. F. ROBINSON, Road Surveyor.

WANGANUI.

The number of men employed has ranged from 174 men in February to 250 men in October last, the average per month being 211·7.

Except in localities where there were no settlers available or desiring work, the men employed on contracts are now practically all settlers, those occupying sections on improved-farm settlements especially having been given a large proportionate share of the work. As dairy factories are now being started in the neighbourhood of most of these settlements, it is anticipated that the settlers will gradually become independent of the necessity of so much co-operative contract-work.

The number of contracts completed, including those for haulage, has been 311.

The average wage per day of eight hours on ordinary co-operative contracts for the whole district has been 7s. 4d. The highest wages, 11s. 5½d., were earned by a party of experienced settlers on bridle-track formation through light bush. They were greatly aided by fires having run through the bush and burnt up much of the higher scrub. The lowest wages, 2s. 5½d., were made by a family party of inexperienced settlers on bridle-track formation through heavy burnt bush.

With the exception of one contract by open tender on the Pipiriki-Waiouru Road, all the metalling operations throughout the district have this year been carried out at cartage rates of so much per cubic yard per mile of lead. By this system the delay and expense of calling for tenders are avoided, besides which the character and cost of the work compare favourably with that done under the tender system.

The prices per cubic yard per mile of lead ranged from 2s. on a downhill lead to 3s. 6d. on a long uphill lead. The average earnings per working-day of eight hours of a three-horse team has varied from £1 3s. 11d. on the Ohingaiti-Tokaanu Road to £1 15s. 9d. on the Raetihi-Ohura Road.

Owing to the difficulty of obtaining sufficient horse-teams on the Raetihi-Ohura Road metalling, four bullock-teams of six or eight bullocks each were employed. These drays carried from 1½ to 2½ cubic yards per trip, and earned large wages. In districts where horse-feed is expensive and the roads are mostly unmetalled the employment of bullock-teams is very satisfactory. They realise much larger earnings for their employers than do the horse-teams, and consequently should be able to perform work more economically.

On the whole the operations under the co-operative system have proceeded very smoothly throughout the year. The number of applications for employment has been unusually small.

G. T. MURRAY, Road Surveyor.