

5 ft. The various works are securely timbered and well ventilated under the supervision of William Weblet.

Minerals (Limited) (R. R. Hunt, Secretary, Auckland).—The preliminary works of sinking a prospecting-shaft, extending the main drainage-tunnel, and the bush tramway, have been completed. The new works in hand include the erection of a paddock for saving the gold. The site of the main shaft will be determined after several small prospecting-shafts have been sunk, in order to decide the best place for the main shaft and the permanent works. The discovery of a new lead at the bottom of the prospecting-shaft just sunk gives the company two faces to work upon. The various works are securely timbered and well ventilated. There are fourteen men employed.

HOKITIKA.

Humphrey's Gully.—Since the extensive water scheme from the upper reaches of the Ahaura River and its tributaries has been completed, sluicing has been continuous night and day on Nos. 1 and 2 faces. Recently the property was let on tribute, and the efficiency of these important works, in their varied departments, is effectively maintained. Including those engaged in the maintenance of water-races, &c., there are twenty-two men permanently employed. Mr. Greenbank (manager) is the authorised representative of the company.

Craig's Freehold.—Mining on this property is continued by three responsible parties of tributers employing three, four, and five men respectively. The workings are securely timbered and well ventilated. There has been no fresh development of importance during the year.

Ross.

Mont d'Or.—No change of any importance has been effected during the year. Sluicing has been much retarded, owing to the exceptionally dry season, consequently returns show a proportionate decrease. Water-races, dams, and other working plant, are in good order.

Ross United.—The Mont d'Or Company recently acquired the right of this property, but so far operations continue on tribute as under the old company.

OKARITO.

Fox and Cook's Rivers.—Lowe and party (six men) are constructing a water-race from the Fox River, a distance of two and a half miles, with the object of effecting hydraulic sluicing on a large scale. Guided by the extensive practical experience which the resident party has acquired relative to the auriferous character of the locality, they are satisfied to spend two years in the construction of a permanent water-supply.

Oamarua.—Woodham and McCloud, having just completed a successful series of prospecting, intend to commence sluicing directly their water-race and dam are completed. The various works are substantially built and in a forward state of completion.

Watson and Siller's water-race is nearing completion. They anticipate that sluicing will be in full swing in about two months. Meanwhile the timber for development is carried by manual labour a distance of six miles.

The Westland Hydraulic and Elevating Company (James Park, attorney, Hokitika).—The No. 2 elevator located just above the junction of the Callery and Glacier streams is worked on day wage, but when visited they had not washed up. On the No. 1 elevator, the tributers threaten to relinquish their tribute unless the next washing shows decided improvement. Water-races, pipe-line connections, and all mechanical installations are well maintained and in splendid working-order.

McVicar and Pannington with four others had completed arrangements to cross the Buster on the head waters of the Callery. On previous visits, during heavy frosts when streams are in low water, operations were very successful. Should the season be favourable, the trip will extend three or four months.

Waiho River.—Woodham, Batson, and Irwin parties, including fourteen men in all, are bringing up tail-races to operate on the bed of the river.

Gammon, Graham, and party, under an unregistered mining privilege, were working in the bed of the Waiho River to the detriment of the foundations and approaches of the bridge. At the instance of the Assistant Inspector of Mines, in the Warden's Court (25th November, 1903), a renewal of the application was opposed and struck out.

DREDGING.

A review for the past year of the gold-dredging industry as affecting the West Coast, does not disclose developments of importance conducive to stimulate or encourage the anxious investor to freely subscribe capital to an industry heretofore prejudicially affected by reckless speculation. It is true, nevertheless, where dredges of suitable construction are judiciously employed, profitable returns prove more consistent, and the term "sound investment" is more evenly qualified. By comparison of the revenue earned by a dredge termed "payable" in the ratio of the capital invested therein, practical experience has proved conclusively, that only in the minority of cases does the yield afford a profitable return.

With reference to the cost of working, breakage of machinery as an item of expenditure has always been underestimated, and the attention which should be directed towards economy and success has also been insufficiently considered. In short, these ruinous breakdowns and stoppages are simply looked upon as a natural and unavoidable sequence peculiarly suited to meet mechanical-engineering requirements.

Referring to the profitable extraction from the auriferous black-sand deposits, so abundantly distributed on the West Coast beaches, it is singular that notwithstanding the liberal inducement set forth by the Hon. the Minister of Mines to encourage scientific research, the problem, so far as demonstrated, has reached no higher altitude in the path of progress than the ordinary plush tables.