

APPENDIX A.

MR. BOYD BENNIE, Inspector of Mines, Thames, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Mines Department, Wellington.

SIR,—

Inspector of Mines' Office, Thames, 28th February, 1908.

In compliance with section 75 of "The Coal-mines Act, 1905," I have the honour to report on the coal-mines in the Northern District for the year ended 31st December, 1907.

Kawakawa (Samuel Neill, manager).—The manager's attention has chiefly been directed to prospecting and extracting pillars of coal near the surface. As may be expected, the atmospheric influences on the coal won from the pillars have reduced it to a poor quality, but being originally a superior class of coal it is found to be excellent for steaming purposes. The owners have done very little work in the mine, but they intend prospecting in a systematic manner, with a view to opening up a section of the coalfield when the railway connection between Hikurangi and Kawakawa is completed. The mine was inspected several times during the year, and on each occasion operations were being conducted in a careful and efficient manner. 559 tons of coal was extracted, and an average of four men employed.

Hikurangi Coal Company (Limited) (T. P. Moody, manager).—The company has confined its attention principally to extracting pillars on the western side of the Government railway. The cover over the coal in this part being thin and of a swampy nature, the work was consequently attended with some risk of flooding the mine. In the early part of the year a consistent fall of rain, lasting a few weeks, placed the company in a precarious position, as mining operations were hampered by floods, and the demands of customers could not be adequately met. The company showed itself alive to the situation by installing an additional pumping plant, and after a loss of some time this section was worked out. The company also sustains a heavy loss in not being able to extract more than 80 per cent. of the coal without running the risk of flooding the mine. This precaution is imperatively necessary, as the removal of a greater quantity of coal would result in the overhanging strata caving in and allowing the drainage from the swamp to enter. The coal under the railway is practically left intact, with the exception that drives for haulage and ventilation are cut through. On the eastern side of the railway there is still a large quantity of coal, which can be extracted without any danger or loss through flooding. This mine has been continuously worked for the past fifteen years, during which time coal to the extent of over half a million tons has been won from the earth. This enormous output has left the mine well nigh exhausted, and already the end is in view. But the company has obtained an extension of life by securing a valuable section adjoining the Phoenix and West Bryan properties. It is confidently anticipated that the development of this property will be a most remunerative undertaking. On my visits of inspection to the mine I have found the ventilation good and every care exercised to insure the safety of the workmen. The output for the year—a record one for the company—was 56,809 tons, an increase of 4,100 tons over the previous year. Eighty-two men were employed, and dividends to the extent of £1,875 paid for the year.

Northern Coal Company (Limited) (W. R. Dunn, manager).—As previously reported, improvements were being made in the main haulage road, which, on completion, would materially increase the output and effect a great saving in the cost of haulage. So far very little headway is manifested, but all possible skill is utilised in whatever progress is made. At different times throughout the year the ventilation was not all that could be desired, and during my visit on the 18th November, 1907, it was found defective. I immediately drew the manager's attention to the matter. He intimated his intention to me of remedying the defect by installing a fan at an early date. During one of my visits to the pillar district, where some men were at work extracting pillars, I found, after a fall of overlying cover, that there was a heating (the beginning of a gob fire). The manager was warned of the great danger and directed to take precautions to close off the affected area. However, on my last visit I found that matters had improved to such an extent as to dispel any apprehension of danger. The development work, &c., were carried out efficiently, and, in compliance with the Act, a plentiful supply of timber and mining requisites are always on hand. The seam still maintains its uniform size and quality, which makes the property a very valuable one indeed. The output for the year reached 48,498 tons, enabling the company to declare a dividend at the rate of 10 per cent. Seventy-five men were employed.

Kiripaka Colliery (E. W. Tattley, manager).—Since the Northern Coal Company has held this property extensive development works have been carried out. Attention was directed to opening up an area of coal of an excellent quality and so hard a nature as to necessitate the use of coal-cutting machinery. The seam in places averages a thickness of 16 ft., and, judging from the bores put down, there appears to be an immense coal-area lying mostly to the dip of the Ngunguru section, where the seam was very thin and faulty. Boring results show that this seam is the outcrop of the main coalfield. The main dip was extended a further distance of 300 ft., making 900 ft. in all. The ventilation-fan recently installed has not given entire satisfaction. It was thought at first that considerable improvement would be manifested in this line, but it is ascertained from results that the amount of ventilation is at times inadequate. A steam-boiler and an additional pump have been installed, with the object of extending the main dip and developing the mine in a general way. I regret to state that a fatal accident happened in this mine through a train of empty trucks descending the main dip incline and crushing a workman named William