

1909.
NEW ZEALAND.

TARARUA RANGES

(REPORT BY MR. J. COWAN ON EXPEDITION TO THE SUMMIT OF THE).

Return to an Order of the House of Representatives dated the 22nd October, 1909.

Ordered, "That the report of Mr. J. Cowan, of the Tourist Department, on the expedition to the summit of the Tararua Ranges by way of the Otaki Gorge in March last, undertaken for the purpose of inspecting a route to Mount Hector, the second-highest peak of the Tararuas, be laid upon the table of the House."—(MR. FIELD.)

REPORT.

Tourist Department, 8th March, 1909.

Route from Otaki to Mount Hector, Tararua Ranges.

I BEG to report that, acting on your instructions, I went up to Otaki with Mr. W. H. Field, M.P., last Friday, and made the ascent of the Tararua Mountains from the north-western side, in order to examine the character of the proposed route from the Otaki Gorge to the summit of Mount Hector.

At Otaki Gorge we were joined by Mr. D. R. Mills and five other settlers, and on Friday evening arrived at the Forks, near the termination of the present horse-track, about fourteen miles from Otaki Township. The Forks is at the junction of the Otaki, Waitatapia, and Waiotauru Rivers, which descend rapidly from the mountains through deep and narrow gorges. Here our party pitched camp, and began the exploration of the route to the top of the range as soon as it was light enough to move on Saturday morning.

Mount Hector, 5,016 ft., is the second-highest peak in the Tararua Mountains. The Mitre, 5,154 ft., north of Mount Holdsworth, is the highest point of the range; Holdsworth is 4,835 ft. Hector can be reached from the south-eastern side (the nearest way is from the vicinity of Kaitoke Station), but only with great difficulty. The Otaki people are anxious to open up a track to the range-top from their side, and our party wished to get an idea of the character of the country for track-making not only on this side, but also on the other slope of the watershed, as far as a rapid survey would allow them.

The distance in a straight line from the Forks (which is a little under 900 ft. above sea-level) to Mount Hector is between six and seven miles; the route we traversed would be about ten miles to the dip in the range-top between Mounts Dennan and Hector. From the junction of the three streams at the Forks a long leading ridge trends up to Dennan and Hector. We followed this ridge all the way up to Dennan, passing through the bush, and emerging on the tussock slopes where snow lies in the winter; then our party went on to the high saddle between the two mountains.

The first mile or so of the route was an ascent through partly cleared and burnt bush, then we struck into the bush by a blazed track which kept to the summit of the narrow ridge. The upper Otaki River was on our left hand and the Waiotauru on our right. This ridge was in the form of a rough triangle with its apex at the Forks. The forest which covers it from the limit of the cleared land up to the alpine-vegetation line is exceedingly dense. There was no cleared path, but only a "blazed" track, in many places hard to find and difficult to follow because of the undergrowth and fallen trees. In some places there were very steep "pinches" to climb, but for the most part it was a gradual and regular ascent up to the snow-line, where the alpine grass began, and where the grade became sharper as the peaks were approached. We passed through about four miles of bush as we climbed from the junction of the rivers. First there was the usual North Island forest, with the nikau palms and very fine tree-ferns and other tropical-looking plants; then the lower mountain-forest growth of rata, rimu, miro, totara, tawai, &c.; then the trees diminished in size until we reached the dwarf totara belt and clumps of fagus trees of low wide-branched form, spreading so close to the ground that we had to stoop down to pass under their boughs (snow evidently lies on them heavily every winter); next thickets of wiry mountain-broom and koromiko and other alpine scrub growing very close and thick; then the snow-grass,