

WELLINGTON—RAROTONGA—TAHITI ROUTE.

No. 16.

The GENERAL MANAGER, Union Steam Ship Company (at Wellington), to the Hon. the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, Wellington.

Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand (Limited),

SIR,—

Wellington, 30th September, 1908.

For some time past there has been an agitation for a second steam service between Rarotonga and New Zealand. The Government on two occasions have had the matter in hand, and have advertised for tenders for a service proceeding direct to a southern port, but have not seen their way to accept the proposals made. The agitation in favour of a second steamer is still being continued, and my company has been urged to place another vessel in the service which would trade to Wellington.

We have given very careful consideration to this proposal, but are satisfied that the prospects of the trade would not warrant our running a supplementary steamer without a very large subsidy. The matter, however, has not been neglected, and at the present time there seems a chance of providing a service at a moderate cost by making a connection at Tahiti with the subsidised service that is run between that port and San Francisco.

The service I refer to is operated by Messrs. Spreckels and Co., whose steamer "Mariposa" makes ten trips per annum; and we are considering the advisability of running a steamer from Wellington to Rarotonga and Tahiti, connecting with the "Mariposa" at the latter port.

The advantages of this connection would be to provide additional facilities for the importation of Rarotonga fruit to New Zealand. Auckland is at present well provided for by the four-weekly service that runs thence, and the settlers in Rarotonga and the fruit-importers in New Zealand believe that a service to Wellington would give an impetus to fruit-production in the Cook Islands.

It would also provide a reliable connection between New Zealand and San Francisco for cargo, mails, and passengers. So far as we can gather, the prospects of the old San Francisco route by high-class passenger boats *via* Honolulu, Samoa, to Auckland and Sydney, being resuscitated are not bright.

The service provided by the cargo-steamers now operating between San Francisco and Sydney, touching at Auckland, is the only direct communication between America and New Zealand; while the proposal we now make would supplement this with a quicker service, which would be regular in both directions, and which should also tend to develop Rarotonga by bringing it into direct communication with America as well as New Zealand.

The mileage of the proposed route is as follows:—

	Miles.
Wellington to Rarotonga	1,800
Rarotonga to Tahiti	630
Tahiti to San Francisco	3,658
	6,088

Comparing this with the route *via* Honolulu, I find the distance—Auckland to San Francisco *via* Pago and Honolulu—is 6,260 miles [corrected in next letter to 5,946] to which has to be added the distance between Auckland and Wellington.

The prospects of the route are not sufficiently good to warrant a first-class service for a term of years, but we are prepared to test the possibilities of the trade in a modest way by running a steamer to average 11½ knots from Wellington to Tahiti, whence the ongoing steamer's contract speed is fully 13 knots; this, including a stop of a few hours at Rarotonga on the up journey and a day or so in Tahiti, would give a 23–24-days service from Wellington to San Francisco.

This could not be classed as a fast service, but for mail communication would be an improvement on the existing route; and with, say, five days to New York and six days and a half thence to London, it would furnish a 35-days service to London.

We are led to believe that the United States postal authorities would make full use of this connection as the principal postal route to New Zealand and Australia.

We are also led to believe that American tourists, who now come as far as Tahiti and who, to a small extent, make use of the service to Auckland, would come in larger numbers by the route to Wellington, and make the complete round tour of the Pacific. Our advices from America indicate that very considerable interest is being taken there in this part of the world, their attention being directed by the information circulated by the New Zealand Tourist Department.

We propose to use a steamer of the "Manapouri" or "Tarawera" type, of not less than 2,000 tons, at the initiation of the service.

As pointed out, the earnings of the proposed service, for the first year, at any rate, are quite problematical: for instance, the freight earnings to New Zealand would be small, consisting largely of fruit from Rarotonga, which, so far as we are concerned, would merely be a diversion from our Auckland steamer, and we would ask a subsidy of £10,000 per annum to cover payment for outward mails. I may mention that the subsidies earned by the "Mariposa" amount to some £15,500 per annum.

I have, &c.,

C. HOLDSWORTH,
General Manager.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward, Wellington.

[P.O. 08/3861.]