

**The Crown Lands Ranger reports:—**

*“ Ordinary Crown Lands.*—The occupiers of ordinary Crown lands have made steady progress during the past year, notwithstanding the fact that many adverse circumstances operated against them. In parts of Central Otago the winter was most severe, owing to the very heavy snowfall over such a large area of pastoral and small-grazing-run lands. The loss of stock, however, proved not nearly so heavy as was at one time anticipated, and this is in a very large measure due to the energy and self-sacrifice of the run lessees and their employees, who worked so hard and so fearlessly in ploughing tracks through the snow and in carrying artificial feed to the starving stock. Following the disappearance of the snow, the weather was very dry till well on in December, with the result that feed became scarce, causing a somewhat poorer yield of wool, and operating in a measure against large lambing percentages. During the months of December and January good rains fell, and from that time onward feed has been plentiful, and there is every appearance of plentiful root crops and winter feed. Wool prices, though somewhat better than last year in certain lines, are still on the low side. The principal sufferers on this account, however, are the smaller holders who go in for mixed farming, but their losses in this direction may be more than counterbalanced by good grain and root crops.

“The southern and coastal parts of Otago have had a fairly dry season, but, on the whole, the crops, both grain and root, may be described as very good. Sheep have not been commanding as high prices as usual, and the fat-lamb trade has not been marked by such briskness as in previous years. The success of this trade is a very large factor in the success of a big majority of Otago farmers, and any prolonged depression in prices would be a very serious matter for them. It is to be hoped, however, that low prices will soon give way to substantially increased ones. The dairy-farmers have had a good year. Prices have been maintained, and feed has been plentiful. Fruit-farmers have been very successful, and when the returns for the fruit-growing districts are totalled it will probably be found that the past has been a record year.

“Generally speaking, steady progress has been made all round, and the settlers have not any serious grievances. Notwithstanding the fluctuation in prices of certain lines of produce—and these fluctuations must be expected from time to time—the prospects of the Otago farmer are good.”

**ARREARS OF RENT.**

Compared with last year, the arrears at end of this year are greater by £674 1s. 9d. It must be remembered, however, that the previous year was an exceptionally prosperous one, and, when you take into account the fact of the increase of annual payments on holdings and the undoubted tightness of the money-market, the result must be regarded as fairly satisfactory.

**FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.**

A reference to the various tenure tables gives full details of dealings under this heading, and it may be observed that the number of forfeitures is comparatively small, and bears very favourable comparison with the transactions of former years.

**TRANSFERS.**

The following list shows clearly the dealings under this head. It might be remarked that there is a falling-off of transactions, but this is mainly to be accounted for by the high prices asked for by the vendors and the reluctance of the financial institutions to advance money to intending purchasers at the present time:—

Tenure.	Number.	Area. Acres.
Lease in perpetuity ... ..	44	6,715
Occupation with right of purchase ... ..	17	2,026
Land for settlement ... ..	49	13,069
Small grazing-run ... ..	17	35,282
Perpetual lease ... ..	10	980
Occupation lease ... ..	11	422
Pastoral license ... ..	20	257,192
Miscellaneous ... ..	30	3,769
Total ... ..	198	319,455

**SCENIC RESERVES.**

Little has been done this year in the way of acquiring further areas for scenery preservation, but some useful work has been done in connection with some of the large reserves near Dunedin. At Mount Cargill, tracks have been cut and direction-boards set up for the guidance of visitors, and at West Harbour, or Signal Hill, most of the scenic area has been fenced, so as to prevent the incursions of cattle. The administration of this reserve has been placed in the hands of a local Scenic Board, and it is the Board's intention to undertake the work of replanting some of the vacant spaces at an early date. Most of the reserves, naturally, have been made for the purpose of conserving the native forest, and every endeavour is being made to prevent its destruction by fire or timber-cutting.

**DEPARTMENTAL.**

The period under review has been a year of strenuous work for the whole staff; a greater volume of work had to be taken in hand and put through than has been the case for many years. All, both field and office, have done good work, and to them I am much indebted for the successful results of the multifarious duties required in connection with land for settlements, run-classification, sales, and general working of the district under my control.

D. BARRON,

Commissioner of Crown Lands.