

At present the swamps were being reduced quite 2 ft. by fires, and digging was hindered thereby in the summer. He did not think firing ought to be stopped altogether, as that would be injurious to the industry. He did not think there was any likelihood of the Taipa Reserve being selected if cut up and thrown open, and not one digger in ten would make a success on a 25-acre section on the field.

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KAEO, WEDNESDAY, 15TH APRIL, 1914.

SAMUEL SANDFORD BRAMLEY, Settler of Kaeo for fifty-five years, also Gum Ranger and Ranger for the Kauri Timber Company (Limited).

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had been over the Totara Reserve and knew the country, which had been dug over for forty years. About five years ago there was a good deal of digging done, mostly by Europeans and settlers of Totara, and there were still a few diggers there. The reserve was land of poor quality, but could be grassed if treated with basic slag. The land was certainly not uniform in quality, and the swamp part was the best. The greater portion was ploughable, but it was hardly likely much gum could be obtained in that way, as the land had been stripped so often for so many years. He would favour it being cut up into, say, 100-acre sections, with a right to the gum by the selector, provided he improved the land and put a certain area into grass each year. Personal residence should also be a condition of the lease. He knew the Puketotara Reserve (Bay of Islands County). There was no one living on it, and he regarded it as played out for gum-diggers. There was some passable land on it which could be brought into cultivation by manuring, even more so than the Totara Reserve.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] What gum there was left in the Totara Reserve was in the swamps and was deep. It was generally black gum. He could give no idea of the average quantity dug out per week. The only gum got on the hilly parts was nuts, as the ground had been dug over so long and so often.

ERNEST EDWARD CARR, Storekeeper and Gum-buyer, of Kaeo, for twenty-five years.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He knew the Totara Reserve well, and shared the former witnesses' opinion as to its present state. The reserve was virtually dug out, but enabled some of the Kaeo settlers to get a picking at times. He believed settlers and diggers would jump at the chance of getting a section there if the reservation was lifted and the land cut up into areas of, say, 200 or 300 acres. If dug over consistently he did not think that it would yield £3 worth of gum to the acre. The land would carry grass if manured, and it was far ahead of gum lands of the north generally. He had bought no gum from the Totara Reserve last year.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] If the reserve were first ploughed and then dug he did not think the result would pay for the time and labour. As a payable field it was absolutely exhausted.

ALBERT HAYWARD NESBIT, Farmer, and resident in the district for forty years.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He knew every inch of the Totara Reserve, and regarded it as an exhausted field. The land as a whole was very sour, and it appeared to him if a man had the capital to tackle it he would prefer to take up land elsewhere, as the cost of improving the gum land was too great.

*To Mr. Stewart.*] He had never specially considered the question of breaking in poor lands.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] It would be a splendid scheme to reforest the reserve, say, with larch, gums, pines, and wattles. The reserve had been dug over for fifty years to almost any depth, and he knew one good digger (Sullivan) who could hardly get 20 lb. of gum in the week. At one time the reserve was full of Austrian diggers, who left the field several years ago, and as a rule when they moved away it was safe to conclude there was not much if any gum left in the ground.

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LAKE OHIA, TUESDAY, 14TH APRIL, 1914.

GEORGE SCHEIGIS, Gum-dealer, of Kohanga, Kaimaumau North, a resident for fourteen years and Gum-buyer for eleven years.

*To Mr. Greville.*] His purchases last year amounted to £3,574, and were the highest he had made. For 1912 his purchases were £1,197 16s. 7d., and the previous year's buying averaged from £600 to £800 worth of gum. At Lake Ohia there were probably fifteen hundred men digging last year, and, say, a hundred men in the winter months. It was mainly a summer field. He was acquainted with all the gum reserves in the locality, and knew them to be generally poor lands and gum-bearing, which might eventually be suitable for grazing stock. He had dug as deep as 11 ft., and considered the fields still good for digging purposes for many years to come. Generally speaking, all diggers made good money, more particularly so during the past two years. He considered it advisable to stop the firing of all swamps, as it destroyed both gum and soil; but firing could not be stopped altogether on gum reserves.

WILLIAM WILKINSON, Gum-buyer at Lake Ohia for three years, and previously farming at Oruru.

*To Mr. Greville.*] Last year he bought gum to the value of from £4,000 to £5,000. On the Puheke fields and about Lake Ohia there were six gum-stores—Urlich (two stores), Sherman, Scheigis, Phelan, Saintsbury, and his own—all established about the same time. On the summer fields the population (men, women, and children) would be from five hundred to eight hundred souls, in the winter probably three hundred. He knew Puheke Reserve fairly well. It was all