

RATE OF WAGES PAID ON FACE WORKS, ETC.

Before leaving the subject of face digging it should be mentioned that the wages paid to the men engaged on face-work are 1s. an hour, with the maximum number of fifty hours per week. In addition to the wages the men are paid a bonus of 2s. a hundredweight on the amount of gum recovered. A few boys and old men who are employed collecting, drying, and assisting in the sorting of the gum are paid 8d. an hour.

The question of increasing the bonus on the amount of gum recovered is now under consideration.

At each of the face-digging works a gun-shed had to be erected. The necessary buildings were constructed mainly of corrugated iron. The shed at Mangawai is 24 ft. by 16 ft.; at Waihopo and Waiharara the size of the shed is 30 ft. by 20 ft. Since the close of the year it has been found necessary to make considerable additions to the Mangawai and Waihopo buildings in order to provide adequate storage accommodation for the gum recovered by the digging operations.

It is pleasing to be able to record that with very few exceptions the men engaged upon the face-digging works have loyally co-operated to make the undertakings a success.

PURCHASE OF KAURI-GUM.

The authority for the purchase of kauri-gum is contained in section 2 of the Kauri-gum Industry Amendment Act of 1914, which reads as follows:—

2. (1.) Subject to the provisions of this Act, it shall be lawful for the Minister of Lands to enter into and enforce contracts—

- (a.) For the working of any Crown lands situated within a kauri-gum district;
- (b.) For the drainage and general improvement of any such lands;
- (c.) For the purchase and sale of kauri-gum;
- (d.) For the insurance of any kauri-gum the property of the Crown;
- (e.) For the lease or purchase of any buildings required for the storage of kauri-gum;
- (f.) For the appointment of buyers, agents, and workmen; and
- (g.) For such other matters as may be necessary for the purposes of this Act.

(2.) On the purchase of any kauri-gum under this Act the Minister may pay to the vendor an amount not exceeding one-half of the estimated value of the gum. Forthwith on the sale of the gum by the Minister there shall be deducted from the selling-price—

- (a.) The amount paid to the vendor on the purchase, as hereinbefore provided;
- (b.) The amount expended by the Minister in respect of storage, insurance, and freight;
- (c.) All other charges incurred by the Minister in respect of the gum; and
- (d.) Such other amount as may be prescribed in respect of the expenses of the administration of this Act;

and the balance shall be paid to the vendor in full satisfaction of all claims in respect of the sale of the said gum to the Minister.

(3.) In estimating the value of any gum for the purposes of this section the Minister may adopt the prices for gum of the same quality current in New Zealand on the first day of July, nineteen hundred and fourteen.

The Act passed Parliament on the 6th November, and the first purchases of gum were made a few days later.

Before commencing the buying of gum it was decided, after careful consideration, that the best course to pursue was to draw up a schedule of grades into which all gum purchased by the Government should be classified by the vendor before it was purchased. To give effect to this idea a schedule was drawn up, and issued by me in circular form, on the 29th October, to all the gum-producing centres. At first there was considerable opposition in some districts to the grading. The practice in vogue in the trade of late years was that the digger sold his gum, either to the local storekeeper or buyer, just as he dug it. It was then taken by the purchaser to his place of business and cleaned and graded, and subsequently sent by him to the gum-broker or gum-merchant in Auckland. In other cases the digger sorted his gum out in his own particular way and sent it in to the brokers or merchants in Auckland for sale. The consequence was that there had arisen a system under which there were almost as many grades of gum sent to Auckland as there were individual diggers. In cases where the gum was bought on the ground it was just bought on a basis of value depending on the general "get up" of the gum and its state of dryness. The gum that was sent direct to Auckland was weighed and valued there, and the vendor had to take generally whatever price the sale produced, unless, of course, he had placed a reserve on it. So in considering the question of making advances on the gum I had to adopt either a system of having the gum roughly classified in grades by the gum-digger on the ground, and inspected by our buyer before purchase, or a system of allowing the gum to be sent direct to the depot in Auckland in whatever condition the vendor deemed fit to send it. If the latter system had been adopted it would have necessitated the employment of a staff of gum-sorters always on duty at the main depot. As soon as it became recognized by the gum-diggers that the schedule was not being arbitrarily interpreted, and that the scheme was being administered in a reasonable spirit, the opposition gradually became less and the diggers freely availed themselves of the advances. Since the end of the year the schedule of grades has been modified, and is now giving general satisfaction.