

Early in the year a small rush took place to the valley of the Howard River, a tributary of the Buller River, near Tophouse, regarding which Mr. T. O. Bishop, Inspector of Mines, reported during May as follows:—

“There has been some little excitement of late by the discovery of coarse gold in the Howard Valley, and the locality has been the scene of a small rush. On this visit I found about sixty men engaged in digging in the bed of the Louis Creek, a tributary of the Howard. This creek is being worked from end to end. The wash is very shallow, and consists of large stones resting on a soft granite bottom and filled in with fine gravel. The gold, which is all coarse, is found lying on the granite and stuck in small crevices, and in most of the claims the men save it not in a sluice-box, but by picking it up with a pocket-knife (fossicking) after moving the stones and washing the bottom. There is a considerable extent of alluvial terrace in this locality, and this has not yet been tried. No doubt in the coming spring and summer there will be a lot of prospecting done, and if the terraces prove payable there will be plenty of room for extensive mining. There will, however, be a great difficulty in obtaining any large water-supply for sluicing purposes should that be required.”

During his last visit to the rush, in November, the Inspector found that there were about one hundred and fifty men employed, and all appeared satisfied with their earnings, of which, however, there is no record, as the greater number of miners are employed at ordinary claims, which make no returns to the Government. On the fourteen registered claims in operation twenty-one men were engaged, and gold to the value of £2,022 was produced therefrom. This, our latest alluvial discovery, may therefore only be regarded at present as a poor man's field.

For much of the following information regarding alluvial mining on the West Coast and in Otago and Southland, I am indebted to the reports of Inspectors of Mines, T. O. Bishop and A. Whitley respectively.

In the Maruia Valley there are still three parties making good wages by sluicing, and a newly formed company has commenced operations during the year at Taylor's Creek. It is reported that the wash is highly payable, but the water-supply is small and the ground which is exposed is rough and stony. The results of the next few months' work will prove the claim definitely.

The Carthage Gold-mining Company is still operating on the old beach lead at Fairdown. Six men are employed, and the returns should leave a fair margin of profit over working-expenses.

At Addison's Flat a few parties of working-men continue to make a living, but the English syndicate which spent considerable capital in opening up the old Shamrock lead got into financial difficulties and had to cease work. The ground was very stony, and the gold won was not sufficient to pay all expenses.

The Addison's Gold-mining Company, a newly established concern, undeterred by the fate which has attended so many other companies in this district, has taken over Carmody and party's claim, and is erecting a bucket elevator to handle the tailings and bringing in a water-race for power and sluicing purposes. The producing stage will not be reached for some time yet.

The few miners who remain at Charleston continue to make very good wages, and Messrs. Powell Bros., who are now treating black sand on a large scale, are doing very well.

The various tributary streams of the Grey River continue to support a few miners, and the returns from this source are about the same as for the past three years.

The Lake Hochstetter Company, which proposes to sluice the low-grade terraces near Riverview, Ahaura River, has not yet completed its water-race from Lake Hochstetter. Upon the result of this company's work the future of alluvial mining in Westland may largely depend. If it be proved that sluicing the higher terraces on a fairly large scale can be made to pay, then there may probably be several other similar ventures made.

Messrs McKay and party at Barrytown have had a year of steady and profitable work, but apart from this claim mining has practically ceased in the district.

From Maori Gully to Stafford there are about one hundred men engaged in sluicing operations on a small scale, and of these some are doing very well indeed, while others are making but small wages.

The Golden Terrace Company at Maori Gully has ten men employed, chiefly on water-race construction. From actual sluicing £542 worth of gold was won during the year, so that when the race is completed, if sluicing can be carried on full time with a good water-supply, the result should be payable.

The Hohonu Diamond Terrace Company has carried on sluicing at its claim with the old and limited supply of water, and has won £646 worth of gold during the year. The water-race construction has also been gone on with, and is almost completed for four miles and a half from the claim. The company is short of capital, and work will probably be suspended for some time pending new financial arrangements being made.

In the Hokitika district all work ceased during the year at the Montezuma Claim and the plant was removed to a new claim south of Ross. This also has proved a failure, and it is understood that the concern will now be wound up.

Golden Flat Claim, Kanieri: A very complete Kershaw pumping plant was installed on a pontoon on this claim and a paddock was opened out, but, after a run of a few weeks, work ceased, and the plant is now idle. The usual mistakes which are made in mining ventures were all repeated in this case—viz., insufficient capital, failure to ascertain by prospecting the value and nature of the ground to be worked, and a quite unsuitable plant for the claim. There can only be one result for all ventures which are conducted in this way.

The returns from the claims worked by small parties in the Rimu district show a slight falling-off, and there are fewer men employed than for the previous year. Those who remain are making good wages, and some a little better than that. Rimu Flat is again being prospected, this time on behalf of Sydney mining speculators.