

NATIVE-LAND PURCHASE.

During the year 121,176 acres were purchased, and 107 blocks, comprising 75,119 acres, proclaimed Crown lands. The total area of Native lands purchased by the Crown for settlement since 1909 is 1,076,570 acres, and the total amount of purchase-money paid £2,505,473. There being less land available for purchase, the purchases will naturally be less in the future than in the past.

Urewera Reserve.—29,996 acres were purchased during the year, bringing the total area purchased at the 31st March, 1920, to 320,578 acres. The total area of the blocks (forty-four) which are under purchase is 518,329 acres. The following figures will give some idea of the difficulties attending the purchase: The total number of original owners in the blocks under purchase (not including successors) was 14,367; the total number of signatures to be obtained to cover all interests (estimated), 17,939; the total number of signatures obtained, 10,451; the number still to be obtained (which will be increased when further succession orders are made), 7,488. The owners are scattered over a large district and difficult to reach. A large number are non-sellers or unwilling to sell. Nearly two thousand applications for succession had to be lodged and dealt with by the Native Land Court before the purchases could be completed in many cases. It is not surprising, therefore, that progress should have been apparently slow, and the Purchase Officers rather deserve credit in that they have been able to acquire so large an area at all.

With regard to this district it has been stated in a previous report that those familiar with it know that the bulk of it is very rough, and suitable only for pastoral purposes in large areas requiring the expenditure of much capital, while a considerable area should be permanently reserved for scenic purposes and the preservation of the lakes and forests. This is the position notwithstanding all that has been written and said on the subject.

Conversion of West Coast Settlement Leases.—A considerable number (forty-three) of transactions have been completed during the year and the land proclaimed Crown land, which will enable the lessees to obtain the freehold title. In nineteen other cases the purchase of owners' interests have been completed but the necessary partitions have to be made by the Native Land Court before area purchased can be proclaimed. In forty-seven cases purchase is in progress, and in eighty-six cases valuations are being awaited.

The total area purchased during the year was 10,001 acres 3 roods 2 perches, and the total amount of purchase-money paid was £107,138 8s. 9d. This will be recouped in cash by the purchasing lessees when the transactions are completed.

It should be noted that the Native Land Purchase Board is only concerned with the purchase of the interests of the Native owners who are willing to sell, and the land then passes to the Crown Lands Department, which completes the transaction so far as the lessee is concerned.

LAND STILL HELD BY MAORI OWNERS IN THE NORTH ISLAND.

The following figures show the position of Native lands as at the 31st March, 1920, as compared with the position at the 31st March, 1911:—

	Acres.	Acres.
Estimated area held by Maoris at 31st March, 1911	7,137,205
Disposed of since 31st March, 1911—		
Purchased by Crown	1,009,949	
Alienated by sale through Maori Land Boards	1,339,570	
		<u>2,349,519</u>
Area (approximate) owned by Maoris at 31st March, 1920		4,787,686

Of the land owned by Maoris the following areas are estimated to be profitably occupied:—

	Acres.
Leased through Maori Land Boards	2,810,637
Leased and farmed by East Coast Trust Commissioner	158,432
Leased by Public Trustee	151,801
Leased under special enactments	9,538
Occupied by Maori owners (estimated)	380,000
	<u>3,510,408</u>

Area of land unoccupied at 31st March, 1920	1,277,278
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The unoccupied lands are estimated to comprise:—

Papatupu lands	15,340
Vested in Maori Land Boards and undisposed of	210,648
Vested in East Coast Commissioner	100,117
Urewera District (unpurchased)	316,400
Other lands	634,773
Total	<u>1,277,278</u>

If to this area of unoccupied land is added the 380,000 acres estimated to be occupied by Maori owners, you have a total area of 1,657,278 acres available for the use of the Maoris. But of this it is estimated that about 550,000 acres are within the pumice area, and to this probably another 200,000 acres, which includes mountain-tops, springs, sand-dunes, &c., and land unfit for settlement, should be added. This leaves an area of 907,278 acres that may be considered suitable for settlement. This cannot be regarded as an excessive area for the use of the 47,000 Maoris comprising the population of the North Island and their descendants. It is roughly 19 acres per head. Instead, therefore, of there