

Onakaka Ironworks.—These works started operations during the year, and a large quantity of pig iron was smelted. Further necessary works are now being carried out, including a tramway from the works to the wharf. The past operations may be considered very satisfactory as forming a basis for future developments.

Land Board.—During the year twelve ordinary meetings of the Land Board were held, occupying in all thirteen days, the total number of items dealt with numbering 796. Mr. R. Patterson was re-elected as Crown tenants' representative, and Mr. G. Macmahon was reappointed for a further term. As Chairman, I desire to thank all the members of the Land Board for their cordial co-operation during the time I have acted in this capacity.

Revenue Arrears.—The revenue received during the past year totalled £70,389; of this £23,943 was from ordinary Crown tenants, and £46,446 was on account of discharged soldiers settlement. These figures show a decrease of £13,000 on the previous year, but this is accounted for by the revenue from coal leases now being collected by the Receiver of Coal-mines Revenue. The amount of arrears by ordinary Crown tenants at the 31st March was £8,751, showing a decrease of approximately £2,000 on the previous year. Discharged-soldier settlers show an increase in arrears of £19,000, the total arrears being £50,206.

Roads.—The roading problem is a matter of great moment at the present time. Many settlers acquired holdings many years ago and still have not a reasonable road to their homesteads. The principal trouble in all these cases is that the land could not stand the loading of the high cost of roading, consequently only poor access could be provided. Now that the land is in a productive state it is only reasonable that the settler should agree to further loading if he desires better access, and this is suggested in most cases, and met by the existing legislation in adding on the amount to the capital value and charging 5 per cent. as additional rental.

Lands opened for Selection.—No large blocks have been opened up during the year, the sections opened up being principally isolated ones in different parts of the district. A total area of 14,243 acres was opened for selection, representing thirty-three holdings. A large number of sections are still available, and a total area of 56,215 acres, comprising 110 holdings, are shown in the Crown Lands Guide as open for selection.

Freeholds acquired.—During the year sixteen tenants acquired the freehold of their sections.

MARLBOROUGH.

(J. STEVENSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The progress of the settled Crown lands for the past year shows an improvement, and, although slow, is sound. The majority of Crown tenants have more than fulfilled the conditions of their leases.

During May of last year there occurred one of the worst floods that Marlborough has ever experienced. In the Wairau Valley it was very severe, and in consequence cropping operations were considerably hampered owing to farmers being unable to get on to and work the ground in order to get their crops sown in time. Further south the country also suffered severely, and a good deal of erosion took place in all the rivers. On the Clarence River half of the fine traffic-bridge was completely washed away. For quite a long time through traffic was completely suspended; then passengers were ferried across the river in a small boat, cars going as far as the river and other cars meeting them on the other side. Latterly a punt has been erected, capable of taking cars across, and through traffic has been resumed. Great damage was also done in the Hapuku Valley, and, although the traffic-bridge was not interfered with, the whole of the approaches on the south side were completely washed away. Through traffic is now maintained only by a duckboard arrangement from the new river-bed on to the end of the traffic-bridge. Going farther south, the Kowhai and Conway Rivers both suffered severely from the flood, and considerable erosion has taken place.

Following the flood a drought set in, starting in October and lasting right through the summer months, which gave the farmers a very anxious time, as, besides wanting rain for the crops, there was always constant danger from fires. In the Awatere Valley quite a number of grass-fires started, and it was only by the strenuous efforts and vigilance of the settlers that these were extinguished and they were able to save their homesteads. Round about Kaikoura the fires were most severe, and great damage was done to pasture and fencing, and several settlers suffered a severe loss in stock. In one or two instances the homesteads were burned down, and although the settlers had great difficulty in getting their families away from danger, I am glad to say that no lives were lost. Notwithstanding those setbacks from both flood and fire it is pleasing to note that the settlers are still quite cheerful.

It is noticeable that whilst the rabbits are being kept in check in north Marlborough, they are on the increase in the southern part of the district, not only on Crown land but on the freehold as well. I am of the opinion that it would pay the State to set up a division of expert officers to collaborate with the sheep-farmers to make a special study of the rabbit and his habits, with a view to his ultimate extinction. Undoubtedly, the increase of the rabbit accounts in a great measure for the shortage of sheep on the pastoral country, and I am satisfied from information supplied to me that the shearing averages have been reduced by more than 50 per cent. in our back country during the last twenty years.

Noxious weeds, and especially blackberry, show no sign of being on the decrease, especially on the wetter lands and poorer class of hill country in the district; on ploughable land it can be dealt with economically, but on the other lands it is becoming a bit of a problem.

Danthonia is gradually being established on the higher country. It is a persistent grower, and its value on the hill country is becoming more and more recognized; but more judicious burning and