

a complete crushing plant capable of dealing with the requirements of the district. At the present time the plant is crushing a fine sample, which is delivered on the trucks at Ward at £1 5s. per ton in 6-ton lots.

Mining.—Two gold-mines are operating in the district—namely, the Deep Creek, and the lately opened Queen of Sheba Mine at Mahakipawa. Also, there are still a certain number of small ventures going on in the Wakamarina Valley, and a few in the Wairau Valley.

Land Board.—The Board held twelve ordinary and one special meeting during the year, 440 items being dealt with, 109 of which were soldiers' cases, 81 ordinary transfers, and 250 miscellaneous cases. During the year the term of Messrs. A. McCallum and James Boyd's appointment as members of the Land Board expired by effluxion of time, and both were reappointed for another term.

Revenue.—The gross revenue received during the year amounted to £80,843, an increase of £1,883 on that of the preceding year. This includes £23,692 received under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account. Rebates granted for prompt payment amounted to £3,122. Arrears of rent amount to £21,166, and postponements of rent in force at the end of the year amount to £3,502.

Land for Closer Settlement.—The Clarence Valley is about the only area of Crown leasehold that would lend itself for closer settlement. I recently made a trip through this country, and was greatly impressed with the large area of really fine land it contains, both agricultural and pastoral. The land has been overrun with rabbits, and they have eaten out everything. At one time they have been so numerous that vast areas have been absolutely denuded of all vegetation, and they took complete possession, runholders apparently abandoning their holdings. In the end the rabbits apparently starved themselves out. They are still to be seen here and there in limited numbers only, and will have to be carefully dealt with as the land gradually comes back into pasture. At the present time the land takes the seed well, and responds in a remarkable way to grass, clover, and lucerne treatment. In my opinion the potentiality of the land in this valley is very great. It would not be a very costly undertaking to construct a road from Kekerangu up the Clarence to tap this country, and eventually continue it right through comparatively easy country to connect with the present Hanmer Springs Road in the upper reaches of the river. It would open up an immense area of fine pastoral country which at the present time is practically isolated for want of access. If this road is constructed the land is capable of being subdivided into suitable areas that would settle quite a number of families.

There are a few freehold properties that might be acquired for closer settlement in Marlborough; but to purchase at the prices asked by the owners, as disclosed to the Land Purchase Board for Soldier Settlement, would not make successful settlements.

In conclusion, I have to thank a very keen and efficient staff for the attention they have given their duties during the year.

WESTLAND.

(W. T. MORPETH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—Weather conditions in Westland for the year ending 31st March, 1924, have been exceptionally good, and very favourable to farming operations. The rainfall for the year was 93.59 in. for Hokitika, which is about 26 in. below the average. There were 2,095 hours of sunshine—one of the best records in the Dominion. Turnip crops have been very good. Potato crops suffered somewhat from blight, and owing to unfavourable weather conditions at the time not so much hay was saved this year as usual. The farming community in this district should realize the value and importance of producing ensilage for winter feed.

An indication of the gradual expansion of the dairying industry in Westland is the establishment of the new Central Dairy Factory in Hokitika. This factory is an up-to-date building with every modern convenience and appliance, including an elaborate cold-storage plant. The range of suppliers extends as far north as the Taramakau Settlement, and south as far as Waitaha. I understand that the Matainui Dairy Factory at Wataroa, and the Inter-Wanganui Factory at Herepo, are contemplating a change of policy—the new proposal being to drop the production of cheese altogether and concentrate on butter.

Compared with last year, prices for stock have gone back a little, but there is a notable advance in wool. Summer prices for ox beef were 26s. to 31s. 6d., heifer beef 20s. to 27s. 6d., and cow beef 18s. to 24s. a hundredweight. Winter prices were respectively 28s. to 38s., 28s. to 33s. 6d., and 20s. to 27s. 6d. per hundredweight. Wether mutton summer prices were 5½d. to 6½d. per pound, winter prices 6d. to 7½d. Ewe mutton, 5d. to 6d. and 5½d. to 6½d., summer and winter prices respectively, and lamb 6d. to 7½d. per pound. Butterfat fetched 1s. 7d. per pound. Crossbred wool, 13d. to 19d., and three-quarter-bred 13d. to 22d. per pound. Store sheep ran from 14s. to 25s. 6d. a head, and store cattle from £2 to £8 10s. for steers, and £1 10s. to £6 for heifers.

Lime-works.—The lime-works at Ross and Kokatahi are in active operation. The importance of these industries can hardly be overrated, particularly in Westland. In the renewal of worn-out pastures ploughing is usually considered to be an essential operation. In many parts of Westland, however, experience has proved that better results are obtained by liming and top-dressing only, and that owing to local soil conditions ploughing does more harm than good. This view, of course, seems quite contrary to precedent, but it is nevertheless strongly held by many experienced dairy-farmers in this district. There is no doubt whatever that exhausted pastures have temporarily crippled many soldier settlers, and that the maintenance of the feed in healthy condition is of vital importance. The difference between exhausted and healthy pastures is, in fact, the difference between failure and success.