

No large forests are being bled for bush gum at present. The greater acreage of kauri forest now remaining forms part of the Government kauri reserves. These reserves are under the control of the State Forest Service, and that Department is carrying out extensive experiments with a view to determining the results bleeding or partial bleeding has on the trees. In the meantime no great increase in the production of bled bush gums can be expected.

ESTIMATED LIFE OF KAURI-GUM INDUSTRY.

There is very little statistical information available as to the tonnage of kauri-gum per acre in gum-bearing fields. The fields have been worked first for one class and then for another class, and so on. In probably not one single instance has the gum content of the soil been removed at one digging, or even by the same diggers. Estimates therefore vary, and the matter is made more difficult by the fact that gum is found mostly in patches and that some areas are richer than others.

The rubbing of gum lands has, however, given some data to work on. It has been found that it takes two men a year to rubble one acre of shallow ground. By taking the total number of diggers employed of late years, and the area available for rubbing, an estimate, near enough for all practical purposes, can be obtained.

For the year ended the 31st March, 1923, the gum-digging licenses issued to diggers amounted to only 1,716, this being a large increase on the number issued in the two previous years. Of course, many men dig without a license, and sell through others who have licenses; but, comparing the number of licenses issued with other information available, it can be safely taken that the number of diggers on the gumfields at any time during the past few years did not reach 3,000 in all.

Taking the total acreage of gum-bearing land, both private and Government, that could be profitably rubbled as 300,000 acres, which is a low estimate, it would take 600,000 men one year to rubble the whole of the 300,000 acres, on the basis of two men rubbing one acre in a year. Since the users under present conditions cannot absorb the output of 3,000 diggers, it would take that number of diggers 200 years to rubble the 300,000 acres. On a very conservative basis, and making due allowance for a considerable increase in demand in the future, it can be taken that the kauri-gum-bearing lands will provide medium- and low-grade gum to meet the overseas demand for well over a hundred years.

PRODUCTION OF KAURI-GUM.

The gum received at Auckland for the past four years is shown, month by month, in the following table. As stated in my report last year, there is a great wastage on the picking-out of foreign matter and the shrinkage of moisture on gum received before being shipped. Inward gum is also reckoned at twelve sacks to the ton, which is a little high. To compare weights received at Auckland with those exported, a reduction of at least 10 per cent. should be made on the inward weights.

Kauri-gum received in Auckland.

	1920-21.	1921-22.	1922-23.	1923-24.
	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.
April	612	191	543	480
May	532	331	514	613
June	370	358	654	459
July	434	404	548	352
August	376	368	689	522
September	577	508	781	450
October	447	420	610	490
November	371	482	601	612
December	339	285	667	576
January	289	331	590	506
February	301	466	658	475
March	359	608	700	537
	5,007	4,752	7,546	6,072

The gum received at Auckland during the last two years is probably the high-water mark unless another "boom" sets in. It included the balance of pretty well all the known accumulations other than chalk gradings, and the number of diggers on the gumfields was greater than for some years past. The winter weather set in very early in 1924, April having a rainfall of 11 in. against an average for April of 3.3 in., this constituting a record for April since measurements were first taken over half a century ago. The rainfall for May was also a record for that month, being 10.63 in. against an average for May of 4.48 in. The rainfall for June last, at time of writing, passed the average for the month. The deep swamps are therefore full of water, and production is almost at a standstill. The output for some time will be very small, and no large output from the deeper swamps can be expected before the end of 1924.

THE WAIPUNA KAURI-GUM COMPANY (LIMITED).

Rather an innovation in the trade is the formation of this English company, which has purchased an area of gum-bearing land, and proposes to dig and export kauri-gum on its own account. The area purchased is a valuable one, consisting of some 1,100 acres near Lake Ohia, in the Mongonui County. The project is understood to have been given most thorough investigation, both in New Zealand and abroad, by people well qualified to speak with authority. In addition to digging gum, the company will also probably purchase gum from diggers and others.