

(l.) Lack of formed access.

Bad access in the past, and in some cases at present, contributes to the settler's difficulties, increasing costs of development and expenses of running the farm.

(m.) Lack of capital.

It was almost universally said in statements made by settlers that lack of capital was responsible for the greater part of their trouble. Cheap money was said to be the crying need of the country. They realized now that more fencing had to be erected, that more cattle had to be kept, that more seed had to be sown, and that manure, where possible, had to be applied. The question of raising money for the purchase of these was the great stumbling-block, for in many instances the land was already heavily loaded and lending institutions had tightened up considerably. A good deal of money must yet be spent on the country, and in the case of badly deteriorated areas there is little inducement given for the investment of private money. Undoubtedly the tightening-up of the money-market to these settlers has deterred much good work from being accomplished.

SIZE OF HOLDINGS.

(Part A, Order of Reference.)

(a.) In the case of the unploughable hilly land we consider that many of the holdings are too small to enable the settlers to make a reasonable living, and that the same class of land can be improved and worked more economically in larger holdings, the capital expenditure in the matter of fencing, building, &c., being considerably less per acre on larger holdings. We are of opinion that in the case of the land above described the minimum area generally should be large enough to winter about one thousand mixed sheep and one cattle-beast to 5 acres. We recommend that provision be made for the reclassification of these lands, and also of the freehold lands of similar description held under title subject to Part XIII of the Land Act, 1908, with a view to allowing an increase in the area of holdings where desirable. In the case of the ploughable lands, either bush or other country, we consider the present areas are sufficient. It would, however, be a great benefit to the settler who has at present only steep, unploughable land if he could secure in addition a piece of ploughable land. This would enable him to carry stock through the winter which he requires in the spring to keep his country in order.

In regard to areas of holdings which by reason of their poor quality and extreme steepness cannot at present be profitably improved, it would not be advisable in most instances to sever such portions, which are usually steep, high country at the back of the holding, and if severed would have no access. They would also be liable to become a breeding-ground for pigs and noxious weeds. The settler would control them as far as pigs and noxious weeds were concerned, and derive benefit from them as a source of supply of fencing-material and firewood.

The planting of these portions by the settler might be worth consideration.

We think, therefore, the best policy would be not to sever steep and unprofitable portions from the holding, but to reduce the rental of the unprofitable portion to a nominal figure and allow the settler to retain them.

There are instances where these rough and poor portions adjoin Crown reserves, and where good fencing boundaries on severance would be obtainable. Provision might be made for severance in such instances.

ACCESS AND COST OF ROADING.

(Part B, Order of Reference.)

(b.) Part of the lessees' difficulty has been, and is still, due to bad roads, or none at all, and the distance of the holdings from railway-stations or distributing-centres. This adds to the cost of everything that goes on the place; and, where top-dressing is found to be profitable, good roads will lessen the cost of and encourage the use of manures. They would also in many parts enable fat lambs to be sent to market without waste, by motor-lorry, and thus enable the farmer to secure larger returns. It is considered that increased road subsidies to certain counties should be made. Some witnesses suggested that the payment of "thirds" should be continued for longer periods, and this would help to some extent.

The road-access question has always been somewhat of a stumbling-block. In an earlier period it was considered advisable to delay roadmaking to enable the settlers on the land to earn money; but in this class of country, where larger holdings should predominate, it is probable that a better policy would have been to do most of the roading before selection, as the settler usually has enough to do on his farm. Prior to 1913 it was not customary to load for roading at a greater rate than 5s. per acre, but in rough country this sum is quite inadequate. Provision has since been made for increasing the loading.

The area of occupied holdings, taking in both improved and unimproved land, in ten of these counties is approximately 2,792,000 acres, and an approximate estimate of the cost, including bridges but excluding metalling of completed roads, is £3,020,000—much of them done more cheaply than at present. To complete unformed portions £1,740,000 would be required: this gives an average of £1 14s. per acre of occupied land. Some of this high cost is due to having to carry the roads through private and Native land as well as Crown land to reach the occupied Crown land. Prior to the war, roading-costs, without metalling, ran from £150 on the easiest country to £1,200 per mile on the roughest. These costs may now be safely doubled.