

AOTEA MAORI LAND DISTRICT.

The boundaries of Aotea commence in the north from White Cliffs, south of Mokau on the North Taranaki Bight, across country bordering on the thermal regions and beyond the volcanic peak of Ngauruhoe, through the inland sea of Taupo to Tarawera, and thence to the south and west by an uneven diagonal line following the Ruahine Range and the Rangitikei River to the sea. Thus practically the whole of Taranaki and a large slice of the Wellington Province lies within the district, the headquarters of which is Wanganui, and dotted about this compact area are the remaining ancestral lands of the Ngati-Hau people—the Tuwharetoa, whose paramount chief in 1887 gifted the sacred mountains which crown the Tongariro National Park; the Whanganui tribe, which under Te Kapa (Major Kemp) and other friendly leaders distinguished themselves against the frenzied Hau-Hau raids; the Ngarauru, Ngati-Ruanui, Taranaki, Ati-Awa, and Ngati-Tama, whose ancestors, according to tradition, sailed from Hawaiki in the Aotea canoe.

Described by Governor Hobson as "The Garden of New Zealand," the Taranaki Province is now well known for its fertility, particularly the Waimate Plains, once the scene of many battles and now the richest of dairying lands. Confiscations and sales have reduced considerably the holdings of the Natives, and what land still remains under its native title is either leased to pakeha farmers or is being farmed by the owners themselves. A considerable proportion of the mortgage investments of the Native Trustee has been made to Maori settlers in this district, and the need for assistance from Native land development funds is not so pressing as in other parts of the country. Presumably arising out of previous confiscations, the Natives of Taranaki have for the past seven years adopted an attitude of aloofness to the new policy of Government assistance in the development of their lands, both from Employment and other State funds, but a noticeable quickening of interest in this direction has of late been apparent. Although there is not the scope for the promotion of extensive development, it has been possible during the past year to commence operations on a small scale.

That portion of the Aotea district outside of the Taranaki Province is less closely settled, and for the most part the land remaining to the Natives is more suitable for sheep-farming than dairying. Embracing as it does the full length of three large rivers—Wanganui, Wangaehu, and Rangitikei—this district contains many areas, mostly river-flats, capable of development into first class dairy farms, and the prospects of further intensive settlement are encouraging. By an increase in the field staff it has been possible to investigate many new proposals, and it is pleasing to note the enthusiasm displayed by all concerned.

Development is in hand both on the lands bordering the beautiful Wanganui River and on those previously neglected pumice belts on the south shores of Lake Taupo and reaching to the foot of Ruapehu. Development on a large scale is possible only in the West Taupo area. A number of these blocks have been offered to the Department for settlement, and during the coming year it is anticipated that an area of 21,000 acres, to be known as the Manunui scheme, will be brought under the provisions of Part I of the Native Land Amendment Act, 1936, and will be the means of providing useful work for a large number of unemployed Maoris.

Ohinepuhiawe.

The scheme, comprising an area of 96 acres and supporting two units, is situated half a mile from Bulls Township and the local dairy factory. Both units are young and energetic, and are making rapid progress. The whole area is flat, and, when cleared of gorse, will make into very good holdings. The work undertaken during the 1936-37 season comprised 42 acres of gorse-grubbing, 132 chains of new fencing and 25 chains of repairs, 23 acres of grassing, and the erection of 1 cow-shed. The pastures are now in particularly good condition, and, with ordinary care and diligence, the returns should be greatly increased during the coming season.

In addition to the 2 units there are 10 unemployed workmen and 22 women and children dependent on the scheme.

The butterfat proceeds from 29 cows amounted to 4,093 lb., from the proceeds of which the Department retained £43. The carrying-capacity is 1 cow to 2 acres.

Ranana.

Comprising a total area of 4,516 acres, of which 2,991 acres are actually being farmed, this scheme is located forty-four miles up the Wanganui River, and surrounds the Native settlements of Hiruharama (Jerusalem) and Ranana, and is owned by the Ngati-Ruaka and Ngati-Hau hapus of the Whanganui tribe. The area, which for the most part consists of easy hills, was formerly portion of Morikau Station, but was revested in the beneficial owners in 1925. With assistance from two dairy companies, these Natives commenced dairying operations, but high costs, insufficient equipment, and lack of supervision handicapped them from the outset, with the result that by 1930, when the area was handed over to the Department for development, ragwort and other noxious weeds had obtained a firm hold and were spreading rapidly, while the dairy herds were of poor quality, and the people themselves were living in poverty in most unhealthy surroundings. In some cases, in addition, the debts due to the dairy companies had grown to such an extent that the suppliers' equity had almost, if not completely, disappeared.

In the early stages of development, therefore, expenditure was necessarily heavy, many of the liabilities to the dairy companies being taken over by the Department, while heavy purchases of dairy stock, building and fencing materials, manures, grass-seed, implements, and equipment of all descriptions were required.