

IKAROA AND SOUTH ISLAND MAORI LAND DISTRICTS.

From the Capital City—the Whanganui-a-Tara of early Maoridom, so named after Tara, the eponymous ancestor of the Ngai-Tara tribe that formerly owned Port Nicholson—the Ikaroa district extends up the west coast to the mouth of the Rangitikei River, thence the boundary follows approximately a north-easterly direction touching the Ruahines and crossing the Ahimanawa Range, whence the line turns east and follows the Mohaka River to the sea. Thus the district comprises Manawatu, the greater part of Hawke's Bay, and the Wairarapa, the ancient domains of the Ngati-Apa, Rangitane, Muaupoko, and Kahungunu tribes, afterwards dispossessed of much of their land by the invading Ngati-Toa and their allies led by Te Rauparaha, and now well settled farming localities with very little Native lands available for development.

The whole of the South Island is included in the one Maori Land District, which, although larger in area than the North Island, contains the small Native population of 3,262 persons, according to the last census returns, together with a certain number possessing some degree of Maori blood who have interests in Native lands and grants to landless Natives. From the shadowy legends which have been handed down there is sufficient evidence to show that the Island of Wai-Pounamu was once a thickly populated country. Tradition tells that the Waitaha, one of the earliest tribes, once "covered the land like ants," until they were destroyed or absorbed by the Ngatimamoe, who in turn were subdued and finally exterminated by the more warlike Ngai-Tahu. These people to-day occupy a greater part of the remaining lands with the exception of the Nelson and Marlborough districts, where Ngati-Toa, Ngati-Koata, Ngati-Rarua, Ngati-Tama, and Te Ati-Awa have predominated since the internecine wars of a century ago.

During the year under review development work, under the control of the Ikaroa and South Island Maori Land Boards, has proceeded satisfactorily, and the majority of the farmers have made reasonable progress with their holdings.

The two schemes in the Ikaroa district are concerned only with the provision of assistance to individual Maori settlers with the exception of the Matakara block at Foxton, which for developmental purposes is included in the Manawatu scheme. This block, which is being developed from the flax swamp and can be made into a highly productive farm, is at present being farmed by two share-milkers. Unfortunately the further development of this area has been hampered by the dearth of Maori labour in the locality.

All the settlers assisted under both schemes have reduced their indebtedness considerably during the year and are reaching the stage when no further financial assistance should be necessary.

In the South Island there are three schemes, two of which are separate by almost the entire length of the Island—the Wairau scheme at Blenheim and the Oraka and Kawhakuputaputa schemes at Colac Bay, near Invercargill. With the headquarters of this Maori Land Board district situated at Wellington the difficulty of adequate supervision presented itself, but was overcome by utilizing the services of Lands Department officers at Blenheim and Invercargill. The Kaiwhare scheme, which is situated in the vicinity of Kaikoura, is being supervised by an enthusiastic and altruistic nearby farmer in an honorary capacity, who, with the assistance of a Maori foreman, is doing good work in preparing this land for settlement.

The problem of finding work for unemployed Maoris is becoming more difficult of solution by reason of the fact that in the Ikaroa district there is practically no undeveloped accessible land, and the only work offering is on lands leased to Europeans. This difficulty is particularly acute in the vicinity of Hastings, where there are a considerable number of Natives unemployed and where all the land is highly developed. The work undertaken with assistance from the Employment Promotion Fund is carried out under the contract system and represents good value for money expended.

The difficulty experienced in supervising unemployment contracts in the South Island is considerable, as Native interests are scattered over the whole of the Island, and while developmental work can be found on the schemes it is almost impossible to provide it elsewhere.

As a result of representations by the Natives living on Rangitoto (D'Urville Island) and in the vicinity of the French Pass it was ascertained that in some cases they had been reduced to living on primitive foods, and it became imperative to provide for them by means of unemployment contracts. This was arranged with the aid of a local resident acting in an honorary capacity.

The total number of unemployed Maoris in both districts assisted by the Department during the year was 441; the amount expended being £16,684, of which £12,085 was spent on contracts on private Native lands, while the balance was expended on the schemes.

The extent of the work on the five schemes, each with individual characteristics and separate problems, comprises 985 acres of bushfelling and clearing; 988 chains of new fencing, with 756 chains of fencing repairs; 342 chains of new drains, with 1,341 chains of drain cleaning; 122 acres of grassing; 215 chains of roading; and the erection of three cottages. On the 31st March, 1937, the live-stock tallies included 741 cows, 162 other dairy stock, 90 run cattle, 452 sheep, and 39 horses. The settlers established number 40, the additional labourers on schemes 38, the wives, children, and other dependants 245, thus giving a total of 323 persons.