

NATIONAL SUICIDE DISASTROUS FOREST DESTRUCTION

(By E. T. Frost.)

I HAVE just completed a motor trip of about 1200 miles during which I visited a number of out-of-the-way places and took particular notice of the remnants of the once glorious forests that covered the North Auckland District.

Starting at Parenga, near Spirits Bay, I worked South as far as Tauranga, via the Puketi State Forest near Kaeo, thence across to the West Coast via the Waipoua Kauri Forest.

I hear that the kauri is to be worked out in the Puketi State Forest, near Okaihau. This will spell destruction to this fine area, which is the last remnant of kauri on the East Coast. Should this area of high country be denuded of its forest covering it will spell disaster to the settlements on the low lands at Kaeo and the surrounding district.

Already they are suffering for the mistakes of the past and disastrous floods have frequently occurred in recent years. The worked-over country, adjoining the Puketi Forest, is an eyefore and a striking example of the vandalism of civilized man. The country is rough and the rainfall heavy, and the denuded country is washing away with every heavy rain. Little use has been made of this worked-out area, and it is now a breeding ground for noxious weeds and is also a potential source of danger to the forest adjoining, as it is liable to carry fire during the dry seasons.

Foolish Fires in Kauri Forest.

I saw two lots of people lighting fires in prohibited areas in the Waipoua Forest. Damage running into millions could occur if a fire got out of hand here, but other damage could not be measured in terms of money if this National Reserve was destroyed.

I got into hot water with some people for interfering, especially when I had it published in the papers. It struck me that a patrol on the road through this area would be a safeguard, especially on holidays when traffic is heavy.

It may be that in the near future some check on those entering this Reserve will be necessary, so that every person entering it will have to be given a pass, together with instructions about fire-lighting. Certainly, from the way some of

the travelling public behave, more drastic steps will have to be taken in this direction.

We are having a dry season in North Auckland district. I could not help noticing how each year fires are eating way into remnants of bush here and there all over the country. It is only a matter of time when, if fires are not checked, there will be hardly any bush left on many of the higher slopes.

Penalties of Folly.

Some of the local bodies are now paying for the past folly of land settlement. The Hokianga County is about bankrupt, and cannot maintain its roads.

Over large areas the whole country seems to be moving now that the forest covering is gone. Roads disappear overnight. In one case I saw a whole row of piles driven alongside a road to prevent further slipping. Fences move every winter, and cow sheds and wool sheds have been endangered. In one instance the only road access to a settlement was wiped out, and the settlers were months without road access.

This will continue for years getting progressively worse. Yet they still are chopping down some of the last remnants of bush to get a few years of grass, while their earlier so-called improvements are vanishing. In a few years it will be all scrub and slips, and in many cases large areas will be abandoned.

A vigorous public and private policy of re-afforestation is needed immediately to check the drift to destruction. Already in this same country there can be seen tens of thousands of acres which have reverted to scrub, and as far as one can see very little stock is being carried on these areas.

In one instance I noticed the sides of a mountain, so steep that it could not be ridden over, had been cleared of heavy bush quite recently and the whole face seemed to be coming down. It appears that to save some surveying the settler had been given title right to the top of a mountain, rather than run a line across the face lower down. Consequently he chopped all the bush with the result that he will lose it all in a few years. Further, no regeneration of