

A Visit to Port Craig.

The Marlborough Timber Company's big new mill at Port Craig, Mussel Beach, Southland, was officially opened last month, and through the courtesy of the State Forest Service (the Director and Special Timber Officer of which were present at the opening), we have been given a description of the mill and workings, and of the journey to Port Craig:—

On arrival at Tuatapere, the most south-western terminus of the Government railway, the party were conveyed by motor-car for seven miles down the fertile valley of the Waiau to the ocean beach. On either side prosperous looking farms were to be seen, with a sawmill here and there producing rimu, matai and totara.

This being the end of the metalled road, motors were abandoned for the modest horse vehicles in the shape of spring drays, which travelled along the open ocean beach for some 14 miles, to a point marked on the map as Track Burn. This stage of the journey was so rough that it had to be negotiated on foot except for portions where the beach was flat and hard and the passengers could ride in any sort of comfort on the 8in. board which constituted the seat. At Track Burn the Marlborough Timber Company had erected a cantilever landing stage, and it was a rather nervy party that watched the dingy push off from the oil launch, which was anchored in the offing, and take aboard the luggage, which was lowered into it by ropes and tackle. This operation took some time, as there was a fair sea running, and when the time came for passengers to get aboard a gangway was lowered. Considerable agility had to be displayed to get from the end of the suspended gangway to the boat, as it rose and fell in the surf. At last all were aboard the launch which, it may be mentioned here, was the craft that brought back the escaped fugitive Von Lucknow to Auckland, and is now the property of the Marlborough Timber Company.

Seven miles by open sea and then the landing at the Port Craig wharf, where a sloping skidway is provided for the sea to land the flat-bottomed dingy: another exciting performance.

Arriving at 5 p.m. after a very hard and tiring day—having left Tuatapere at 6 a.m.—we were ushered to the residence of the Manager, Mr. Peter Daley, to partake of a very welcome meal, having been without food for just on 12 hours; needless to say justice was done.

Next day the object of our visit, the new American outfit sawmill was inspected. The bush hauling outfit, a Lidgerwood Skyline hauler and yarder, was working, and it was demonstrated that a much greater speed of travel can be gained by this method than by the ground snigging method. The bush being worked at present, and for at least five miles along the proposed main line towards Sand Hill Point, is of a very sparse and wizened

nature. The country is very rough and rugged, being very close to the sea coast, and rock cuttings have to be blasted out to make a tramway route possible. The logs are loaded on bogie trucks of the ordinary bush character by the Lidgerwood yarder, which is a composite part of the machine.

The logs are grappled by hooks at both ends, and hoisted bodily in the air, and landed in proper position for transport on the trucks to the mill skids. A geared locomotive of local manufacture then hauls the loads along a very well laid steel tramway with 56lb. rails, about 40 chains long at present, to be dumped on sloping skids which lead to the fiddling bench.

The first operation of fiddling (cross-cutting) the logs to the required length is performed by a steam-driven crank crosscut saw of large dimensions. This saw makes short work of the job, and then the live rolls are set in motion and the severed log moves into line with the Pacific breakdown. When its turn comes a steam nigger rises up from below, and with mighty power thrusts the log upward and forward on to the bench brackets. In the hands of the skilful sawyer imported from America to teach the natives, the steam nigger is almost human in the manner it can, gently or roughly as the operator wishes, handle the log.

Once on the Pacific a dogger-on who rides on the carriage works levers which firmly but quietly force in the holding dogs, and the setter, riding too, adjusts the position, having regard for taper, shake, etc., and before the adjustment is completed the sawyer who manipulates the travelling levers takes a slab off in half the usual time, and the log is back again to be kicked over by the nigger until the whole operation of flitching is completed—each slab or flitch falls from the saw and is conveyed by live rolls forward, and by conveyor chains sideways, to the next bench. What is called a Pony Pacific takes the place of the local breast bench. This bench is of the same construction as the Breaker Down Pacific, but is travelled by what is termed a steam shot-gun feed.

The shot-gun feed is composed of a long steam cylinder, the length of the travel required, containing a piston and rod, one end of the rod being fastened to the bench. Steam pressure is introduced at either end of the cylinder at will by the movement of a lever by the sawyer and a very sensitive and fast feed is the result. Another bench which is comparatively uncommon in this country is the edger, which deals mostly with flitches and boards with bark on both edges. The edger is a feed roller machine having four or more saws on a slotted spindle. These saws can be set to any distance apart in a moment, by the movement of a lever in conjunction with pointers on a scale graduated in inches and parts of an inch. So far the scheme of operation is characteristically American, except that circular saws are used instead of band saws.