

route. In normal times private cars pass in and out of the glacier country by the dozen. There are first-class accommodation-houses at both the Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers. Large freight trucks carry in stores and supplies and back load timber, sheep, &c. And so the settler, though his life may be somewhat more exacting than that of a South Canterbury farmer, has this in common with him—ready road access to commercial centres.

Going to town has not always been so easy. Until 1937 the road went as far as Weheka, and because of the war it has advanced only forty miles since then. Much of the land around and north of the Fox Glacier was broken in when only a pack-track led out to Ross and Hokitika. At Weheka itself the fertile flats were first settled only about fifty years ago when, after the gold rush at Gillespie's Beach, some of the diggers foresaw the possibilities of farming the deltas of the Fox, Cook, and Karangarua Rivers. The heavy virgin bush had to be cleared from the land and homes established under conditions of exceptional difficulty miles from any of the amenities even then regarded as essential to ordinary existence.

At first access was mainly by sea and very occasional because of conditions which still hamper shipping on the Coast. Because of this irregularity of supplies the settlers had to be almost self-supporting. Gradually the bush was pushed back until to-day almost the whole of this rich plain has been opened up for sheep-farming and cattle-raising.

The settlers were themselves of pioneering stock used to difficulties and isolation, but they were glad for more than economic reasons to see the road move slowly south. The fear of accident was always present, and the sick and wounded had to be carried out on a stretcher over pack-tracks for many miles before they could be transferred to a dray. Mothers carried their fortnight-old babies in from Hokitika on horseback. One pioneer mother with a family of twelve never bothered about the Hokitika nursing home. And all this was not back in 1850, but after the turn of the twentieth century.

To-day there is a prosperous happy community at Weheka. The cleared flats with their plentiful shelter-belts run out from the foothills to the sea, and at the foot of the glacier a compact settlement clusters round the hostel. There is a school, a church, a hall, a Public Works office and depot, a Railways Road Services garage, a store, a butcher's shop with a freezing-chamber, an electric-power plant which supplies all the settlement—all the amenities and conveniences of a small township.

For this remarkable transformation in a matter of fifty years those who had the courage and foresight to develop this isolated area must be given full credit. Behind their homes rise most of the 10,000 ft. peaks in the main divide, with Cook and Tasman standing supreme. The bush runs down literally to the back-door. Yet, though Miss Kavan pities them because of "all the hoary, enormous, spectral trees standing massed against them and getting them down" and though she hates to think of "the huge mass of nature bearing down upon them," it must be recorded that they seem strangely unafraid of the "ocean, the ice-cap, and the antique, forest," rather proud of them in fact, and undoubtedly happy in their work.

It is some fifty miles south of Weheka that the backblocks really begin. The road runs south to Bruce Bay and then on to the Paringa River, where it crosses a long white concrete bridge and comes to a halt in front of a wall of forest and a tangle of hills.

At Bruce Bay there is a settlement, a sawmill, a sheltered harbour, and facilities for loading timber. After the war the white-pine from this area may again be shipped north, but at the moment there is little for the locals to do except maintenance work at the mill, a little boat-building, and some black-sanding on the beach.

In the season Paringa is the headquarters of the white-baiters who net the fish in this and other handy rivers.