

in a small area they were beyond counting; if you were not accustomed to Otago Central, they were beyond believing. They were there thicker almost than rice in a pudding, thicker than stars in the sky; beyond counting, but there could be no doubt of their millions; whole hillsides of rabbits. Cheekily, knowing no fear, they sat on their tails and flicked their ears as we rattled past. Once when the driver, amused at our wonder, pulled on the whistle violently as we turned a bend, the hillside flashed; a second later it looked like a table from which a coloured rug had been quickly jerked. "They're so cheeky; that's what gets me," said the fireman, and he threw a lump of coal at two large eyes between two large ears; the buck hardly shifted position.

But it's not possible; what do they eat? Each other? How do they live? we asked. A few miles on we stopped at a siding for a faster fruit train from Alexandra to pass; we climbed over the fence and up the side of a hill to find it not as completely bare as it looked. It wasn't grass, but it wasn't exactly not grass; it was like a thin, shabby, loose hair, a bit here, a bit there. The hills there support about one timorous sheep and one million fearless rabbits to each 10 acres.

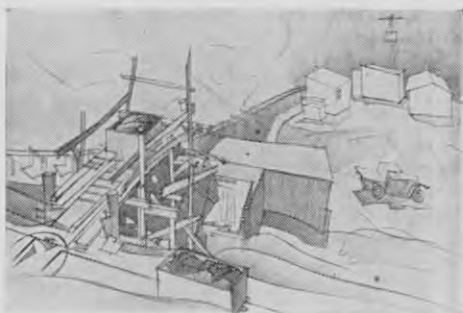
This is a strange part of New Zealand, we thought, feeling the way of Robinson Crusoe after he had seen a footprint on the beach one Friday morning.

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Early colonization of New Zealand was first to the North Island in spite of fewer Maoris in the South and treeless country already clear for ploughing; it was not until after the trouble caused by Busby's lack of power, the confusion rising from the arrival of Wakefield's first settlers in Wellington and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, the Wairau massacre, the weak governorship of Fitzroy, and the First Maori War that the South was thought of seriously. Colonists landed at Port Chalmers in 1848, at Lyttelton a year later. However, several years passed before exploration was carried far inland from the coast; until 1856 when a survey party journeyed fifty miles from the edge of the then-settled country nothing was

known of the interior except from stories by Maoris of wide stretches of open country and lakes at the head of the Molyneux River. Settlement began soon after the information gained was made known, and after regulations, legalized at that time, allowed land outside the original Otago Block to be bought for grazing-runs at a low cost. (Runholders were allowed 80 acres for the homestead block with 10 acres for each out-station.) Pasture (before the introduction of rabbits—they were first liberated to provide sport and distraction from hard work) was good; by 1861 the greater part of Otago Central had been sliced into huge blocks for sheep-runs. Slowly pastoral runs improved; the building of homesteads increased. For a time runholders enjoyed prosperity.

After 1856 efforts to attract colonists to Otago were made; and to encourage emigrants to the south of the "Middle Island" rather than to the north or the North Island pamphlets were printed and made available throughout the British Isles. With some of them the information was obscure and the wording quaint. How much was known of the interior of the province where settlers were asked to voyage across the sea to make their homes is obvious. "Lakes (one of the pamphlets says)—there are three lakes in the interior, but their existence, and position on the map, rest solely on Native testimony. Indeed, there is but one Native who has actually seen them . . . (their) proportions, and the surrounding country, are at present shrouded in mystery." "About the



The mine-head at Bannockburn.