

from Roxburgh to Lawrence

A KOREO REPORT



EVERY SEAT in the bus running from Alexandra to Roxburgh was occupied. The low roof made standing uncomfortable, and I was glad when the driver, forgiving us for the wetting he received when he had to clamber to the roof of his bus in the pouring rain, unstrap the tarpaulin, and secure our two heavy, oily, army bicycles, suggested I could sit, on a box of blackberries, on the step below his seat. The narrow road (metalled with the fine gravel, first class for roadmaking, of which there are large deposits in the district) had the contortions, the precipitous rise and fall of a scenic railway. Down we would roar like a skier gathering speed for a jump; then the bottom—would we get round the turn? Yes. Breathe relief—up the next slope we would crawl, roaring louder, the driver changing even lower. Engine temperature was high, the water nearly boiling.

The bus, we were told, was one of those which had been built in the United States especially for the Burma Road. When the order was ready to be filled, the Japanese had erected a "Road Closed" notice, and some of the vehicles were brought to New Zealand, to Otago Central. They had not a bus, but a truck chassis. We jumped and bumped about in our seats and on our blackberry-boxes. It was about as comfortable as a journey on a truck along the Burma Road.

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This place is a paradise for small boys, some one said to us across the table. He was talking of Roxburgh and its chief

means of support, its orchards. He should have known: he was a small boy.

Otago Central is important to New Zealand for its fruit; and of the fruit-growing districts Roxburgh is the most extensive. There are in the neighbourhood of that small, clean, progressive town between seventy and eighty registered orchards, covering about 4,000 acres, and varying in size from 1 acre to 45 acres. To offset possible crop failure, which these days is caused mainly by unseasonable weather, many of the orchards are combined with sheep-runs: nearly thirty of the Roxburgh orchards have sheep country running from behind the blocks of trees into the hills. About 3,000 tons of fruit is produced each year. One jam-canning factory operates outside the town.

Gold-miners were the first to plant fruit-trees. As soon as the rushes of the early days had steadied, the diggers, realizing their fortunes were not to be made in a day or a week, either returned to the trades and professions they had forsaken earlier with wild abandon or settled down to hard work, not giving up hope of a rich strike, but, until it came, content to make a living. From the hills they quarried stone to build houses, and round these dwellings they laid down gardens to provide food for thin times and work for the summer months when the rivers, swollen with melted snow, were often too high for panning. In some of the gardens fruit-trees were planted. They flourished. More seedlings were obtained; and as