

Kaingaroa." If so, Kaingaroa must be very poor country; its characteristics, a very light soil with a surface like frosted mortar, and a subsoil of pumice-gravel; the soil is mostly coated with moss, and carries a thin growth of tussock, stunted fern, and in amongst these a small proportion of fine sweet grasses, on which doubtless sheep would thrive if they had run enough. That country, however, from its elevation must be very cold.

The Whirinaki branch of the Rangitaiki flows chiefly through forest; but there is a large patch of open country above Ahikereru, where a succession of thinly-grassed terraces skirting the right bank of the river for eight or ten miles, might afford feed for a few thousand sheep.

The country between the two branches consists of high, steep hills, covered with fern or forest. I observed a good deal of fine timber, but not of the largest size; chiefly rimu, matai, and totara, with a little kahikatea.

The character of soil in this district is chiefly a thin coat of very light loam, generally coated with moss, and sprinkled with pumice-sand and small pumice-gravel, and underlaid by pumice-gravel. On the left bank of the Rangitaiki the top soil is almost dust, and off the track a horse sinks fetlock deep; so porous is this soil and subsoil, that even at the bottoms of large gullies no sign of the action of running water will be perceived, and the bottom is perfectly dry. In the bush on the hills the soil becomes a brown loam of much more promising character, but in the bush the ground is generally too steep and broken for agricultural purposes. Indeed, except for the sake of two or three runs of decidedly inferior character, the Upper Rangitaiki is not adapted for the occupation of English settlers.

The present track into the Whirinaki valley crosses some severe hills; a pack-horse ought not to carry more than half-a-load (100 lbs.) on such a track. The Natives report "cliffs and bad places," and I might add, heavy forest, as reasons for not having made the track follow the course of the stream. I observed no facilities for a good road to Ahikereru.

2. The Valley of the Whakatane. I entered this valley at Oputao by crossing the block of very high forest-covered hills, some fifteen miles in breadth, which divide the Whirinaki at Ahikereru, from the Whakatane at Oputao. These hills are of the most severe description and the track very badly cleared, so that it is impossible to ride, although Maoris do sometimes drag horses through. The descent into the Whakatane valley is down an almost precipitous hill-side, falling, I should think, 1500 feet to the little river, here about 20 yards broad and barely knee-deep. The timber on these hills is of moderate size, chiefly taua and rimu.

From Oputao down to Tunanui, a distance of 35 miles according to the Bishop of New Zealand's pedometer, the valley of the Whakatane preserves the general character of a mere mountain gorge; a deep, narrow, forest valley, in which the river for the most part flows out of sight in a deep trench or cleft. It receives two or three tributaries of similar character, of which the principal is the Waikare.

From the head of the river down to the confluence of the Waikare, the country is called by the Natives Ruatahuna. Sometimes strips of terrace intervene between the edge of the river cleft and the great hills; these are mostly covered with a growth of very fine koromiko, marking old clearings, but for the most part the valley is entirely choked up with immense steep, wooded hills. In the forest taua and rimu prevail, and at considerable heights black birch. The prevailing character of soil is a brown loam of fair quality; no pumice.

From Tunanui to Ruatoki, about 12 miles by the Bishop of New Zealand's pedometer, the valley changes in character from a mountain-gorge to a hill-gorge, and the river-bed expands from a mere cleft into a wide shingle-bed, nearly filling the bottom of the valley. The hills are covered with wood. At Tunanui canoe navigation is supposed to begin, but from the frequent shallowness and extreme rapidity of the current, it must be very ticklish work. The canoes can only be poled up.

At Ruatoki, the river emerges into a pleasant vale several miles in breadth, and of fair average quality of soil; growth, fern mixed with grass. The river then enters a short gorge between hills of moderate height, still preserving its broad shingle-bed; and then for several miles, before entering the sea, skirts on the left bank the vast swamps extending from Whakatane to Matata, on the right bank a narrow alluvial flat extending to the foot of the hills.

Five or six miles below Ruatoki, the Whakatane receives its principal tributary the Waimana, a small stream which a little above the confluence traverses a pretty little open vale, two or three miles broad and five or six miles long, and of fair average quality of soil. The country of the Urewera extends no lower down the Whakatane than the mouth of the Waimana.

This little valley and the valley of the Whakatane up to Ruatoki, would be valuable acquisitions for English settlers; farther up the valley would be almost useless, except to lumberers.

Another district belonging to the Urewera, is that of Waikare-moana. This lake lies at the S. E. side of the high, rugged, forest-covered range, which closes in the valley of the Whakatane above Oputao. I did not visit it, as the S. E. wind prevailing at the time of my journey rendered it impossible to cross the lake to the inhabited shore; and the Maoris say that the cliffs and bush, the depth of the bays, and the absence of all track, make it impossible to walk round the lake. According to the account of the Maoris, the central sheet of this lake is not large; but large, long bays diverge from it, and penetrate deep into the mountains. The track over the mountain from Oputao is of the most severe description, even for men on foot, and brings the traveller down to a deserted kainga on the shore of the lake. He must have with him a "tangata-whenua" (native of the district), who scrambles along over a bluff or two till he reaches a point whence a signal-fire is visible to the Natives at a kainga on the opposite shore. If there are Natives at this kainga, and they see the fire, and think that the lake is not too rough, they bring over a canoe to the travellers.