

No. 41.

Mr. J. GRINDELL to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 31st May, 1872.

In pursuance of your directions, I have the honor to forward you the following general report on land purchasing operations in the Province of Wellington, in which I have been engaged up to this date, 31st May.

In the first place, I have to state that at a sitting of the Native Land Court held at Masterton in September last, a block of land in the Seventy Mile Bush known as the Manawatu-Wairarapa block, No. 3, or Mangatainoka block, was awarded to the Rangitane people as a tribal right and by them withheld from sale. The soil of this block is most excellent; the land is perfectly level, heavily timbered, and never flooded; its area is estimated at 62,000 acres. The line of the proposed railway to Ruataniwha in the Ahuriri district runs through this block, and its acquisition by the Government is of the utmost importance. I interviewed the Rangitane at Manawatu in January last on the subject of the sale of this land, and again in March following. I found the majority of the tribe in favour of selling it to the Government, excepting a certain portion for their own occupation. The chiefs, however, strongly objected to parting with any portion whatever of it. The views of Hoani Meihana (the leading man of the tribe) on this subject have recently undergone a change, and he now believes that the enhanced value given to their reserves by roads and a European population in the vicinity would more than counterbalance the loss of the land sold. He said it was the last block of land of any extent which they had left;—their dead were buried there; it was endeared to the people by old associations, and it would require time to remove their prejudices against parting with it. The feeling amongst the people in favour of selling is increasing, and I have no doubt that ere long the Government will have acquired possession of it. I have paid the tribe an advance of £100 on account of it.

The next block I have to notice is Kaihinu West, adjoining the Ahu-o-Turanga block, and extending from Manawatu to the western boundary on the Tararua Range of the Seventy Mile Bush purchase. This block is estimated to contain 50,000 or 60,000 acres. It is heavily timbered, but there is an extensive swamp between the Manawatu and the hills. It is claimed conjointly by the Ngatiwhakare hapu of Ngatiraukawa and by the early tribes—Rangitane and others, who inhabited the country before its invasion by Te Rauparaha and his allies, Te Ngatiraukawa and others. Applications have been sent in to the Native Land Court for investigation of title of claimants. After this has been done the Natives will be prepared to enter into negotiations with the Government for its sale. Some small advances have been made on account of this block.

I have subsequently attended meetings of the Natives at all the settlements along the Coast from Manawatu to Waikanae, and have received from each hapu written applications to the Land Court to have their claims investigated in respect of the whole of the land on the West Coast, extending from Manawatu River and the Ahu-o-Turanga block on the north to the Crown land south of Waikanae, known as the Wainui and Waikanae block, and the Seventy Mile Bush on the east—comprising an area of 250,000 or 300,000 acres. Each hapu will then be in a position to sell to the Government without fear of the interference of others, and I have no doubt some valuable blocks will be acquired. It is quite apparent that they are generally desirous of selling their waste lands at the present time, but an immense amount of jealousy and suspicion exists amongst the various claimants and tribes in reference to each other's claims and boundaries. It has been with much difficulty that they have been induced to agree to let all disputes stand over to be decided by the Land Court and to allow the surveyors in the meantime to proceed quietly with the work of preparing a map for the use of the Court. I accompanied the surveyor (Mr. Thompson), sent by His Honor the Superintendent, and introduced him to all the hapus interested, and explained to him and them the nature of the work to be performed. It is not proposed to make an exact survey of the district, merely a good topographical map with all prominent points and names clearly marked will be sufficient. On a map of this nature the various claims can be marked off in Court with the help of the surveyor.

When I was last up the Coast I obtained a promise from Muaupoko that they would send me their applications for investigation of title and that they would allow the surveyor to proceed with his work without interruption. I have now received a letter from them purporting to be from the whole tribe with several signatures attached in the same handwriting, threatening to break the chain of the surveyor if he persists in surveying the land in dispute between them and the Ngatiraukawa. Another letter came by the same mail, containing the application promised with the names of the principal men of the tribe attached, so that there appears to be a division amongst them. As I am just about to start for the Coast to set to work two other surveyors who are being sent by His Honor the Superintendent for the purpose of expediting the survey, I shall have an opportunity of seeing these people and of endeavouring to arrange matters with them. In previous reports I have suggested that a sitting of the Land Court be held at Otaki when the surveys are completed, and another at Manawatu so as not to give the Natives any occasion to imagine that favour is shown to any party in particular.

The whole of the mountains are offered by the Natives for sale, also some portion of the flats. I have no doubt that a strip along the flats at the base of the hills can be acquired at once, stretching from point to point of the spurs and taking in many valuable valleys and gullies suitable for purposes of settlement. The slopes of the lower hills and many of the hills themselves are available for cultivation.

I have, &c.,

JAMES GRINDELL.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works, Wellington.