

APPENDIX B.

ANNUAL REPORT ON ROADS BY ASSISTANT ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF.

The ASSISTANT ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

SIR,—

Public Works Office, Wellington, 30th June, 1874.

I have the honor to forward my annual report on road work executed in New Zealand, under the Immigration and Public Works Acts, up to 31st May.

The majority of the roads now reported on having been described in former reports as to their locality and character, I have in this report limited myself generally to a statement of the works executed on each, either in the way of extension, or of improvements and additions which have been found necessary from time to time, particulars of which have been supplied by the Engineers in charge.

The advancement will, I think, be found generally satisfactory, but there are two important works which call for special mention.

I refer first, to the lately-completed road through the northern section of the Seventy-Mile Bush, whereby easy communication is now established between the East and West Coasts, and by which coaches now run regularly between Napier and Foxton: this I consider one of the most important and satisfactory works yet executed under the Public Works Act. The other work referred to is the cutting of a main line of road through the forest at the back of Mount Egmont, which, although now only completed to the extent of felling the bush, and clearing a wide track throughout, must yet be regarded as a great step in advance, when we consider that the work has been carried on in thoroughly Native districts, and executed to a great extent by the Natives themselves. It will doubtless, in the future, form one of the most important links in the road and railway systems of New Zealand, and will, besides, open up for settlement one of the finest tracts of bush land in the country.

The road works north of Auckland are being steadily if slowly proceeded with, and great benefit already results from the works thus far completed. There are, however, many gaps yet to be filled up on the different lines of road, and until these are completed the full benefit of the works in hand will not be felt.

In Waikato probably less road work has been done than would have been the case had it not been determined to press on the construction of the railway through the Waikato, in extension of the line from Auckland to Mercer. This work, however, has been begun, and several contracts have been let in connection with it, as will be found described in the report on railways by the Engineer-in-Chief. In reference to future road work, I may be allowed to repeat the hope expressed in last year's report, that fresh surveys of better lines of road than those now existing may be made, with a view to the permanent improvement of the road system in the Waikato, and as a means of lessening to a great extent the cost of maintaining and of improving (as will certainly be found necessary) the old lines of road as now laid out.

As regards the Bay of Plenty district, the report will, I think, speak for itself. A gradual and steady progress has been made in the construction of new roads and the extension and improvement of those already begun, so that there are large areas of the district which may now be travelled over with comparative ease and safety; and it is to be hoped that before another year has been passed over that free communication will be established between this district and that of the Waikato at Cambridge, as well as with that of the Thames by way of Kati Kati.

The same may be said of the Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay districts, although necessarily to a less extent; and in reference to the Coast road northwards to the East Cape, the work has been of a very isolated and patchy character, owing to the rugged and broken character of the coast line and the purely local requirements. It is, however, to be hoped that our expectations of finding a good inland line of road from Poverty Bay to the East Cape may be realized, on receipt of the special report shortly to be sent by the engineer in charge.

In remarking, as I have done above, on the great importance of the road recently opened through the northern end of the Seventy-Mile Bush, I should not omit to allude to that now being made through the southern extremity of the same bush, as being of equal importance, opening as it will do a communication between the Wairarapa and Napier, and westward through the Manawatu Gorge with the Manawatu and districts beyond. About one-third of its length (thirteen miles) has already been formed and bridged from Opaki at the southern end, and foot and horse traffic have for some time been carried on throughout. As before described, this line of road follows either exactly or very closely the line formerly laid out for a railway between Masterton and the Gorge, and consequently is generally of a very level and easy character for traffic, passing through large tracts of fine bush land.

In the Manawatu district, it will be seen that the work has consisted to a great extent of improvements on the roads already made, and the completion and extension of the tramway, together with the necessary station ground and buildings, and the erection of a wharf in connection with the tramway.

It will be seen that the road north of Wanganui to Carlyle is fast approaching completion as a first-class road, well formed, metalled, and substantially bridged throughout; whilst with that north of Carlyle to New Plymouth great progress in real improvements has been made, excepting in those parts where it has not yet been thought advisable to attempt works of any kind.

It is scarcely necessary to remark on the very great improvements which have been effected under the Public Works Act in Westland and the Nelson South-West Gold Fields, where the most substantial, well-built dray and coach roads have taken the place of rough and narrow horse and foot tracks, and where now in consequence there is real facility offered for travelling with comfort between all the more important places on the West Coast. In another year or two, under a similar wise expenditure, other places at great distances will be embraced in the road system proposed, and become