

GERALDINE

Is twenty-four miles from Timaru and three from the Orari Railway Station, and originally consisted of about 400 acres of black and white pine and totara. Upwards of 300 acres are freehold, and have been almost cleared, and there are seven acres in the township of Geraldine divided into quarter-acre sections, which are exposed for sale every three months, and generally realize £45 per section.*

In addition to this there is a Government reserve of sixty acres occupying a fine position on a rising ground immediately above the township,† the timber of which would be worth £24 per acre, and the land a similar sum per acre; but, as it is situated in such a picturesque position and forms a beautiful relief to the township and adjoining country, I would beg to suggest that it be retained. The trees are grown up, and the block could be let for pasture land at a small rental.

PEEL,

Sixteen miles north-west of the Orari Railway Station, stands on a flat close to the foot of Mount Peel—a snowy range. The original extent, 1,400 acres, has been reduced to 800, and the timber consists of black, white, and red pine and totara, with a few patches of manuka up the face of the range. The timber on the flat is of fine quality, and would be worth at least £30 to £35 an acre. This block is entirely freehold, with the exception of the manuka portion, which could only be used for fencing purposes, and is not worth the trouble of looking after as timber land.

ALFORD

Is situated irregularly along the flat at the foot and up the face of Mount Somers, distant about thirty miles from the Ashburton Railway Station, which is the nearest point of communication. It is about ten miles in length by one and a half in breadth, and the timber consists of black and white birch, with a few white and black pines near the south end. The whole of the timber land is freehold, with the exception of a strip about half a mile in breadth along the upper edge, the wood of which is of less value, owing to its smaller growth, the difficulty of access, and the top portion being little better than bush. The very expensive land carriage prevents the timber from being wrought so extensively as it would be if the transportation of the same was more easily effected, but a couple of saw-mills are at work, and a brisk trade is carried on in rail-splitting.

It would, considering all the circumstances, be difficult to say whether the portion in the hands of Government be worth conserving, or if it should be sold at the upset price, although I would be inclined to favour the latter course. Some years ago a large portion of this forest was destroyed by fire, the origin of which is said to have been accidental.

OXFORD OR HAREWOOD.

Harewood, or, as it is more generally known, Oxford Forest, extends along the slope of Oxford Hill, forty to fifty miles from Christchurch. The original acreage, 56,000, has been considerably reduced, and a large portion at the east end entirely worked out. The wood consists principally of black and white birch, with a slight mixture of black, white, and red pine and totara. All the lower portion from one end to the other, and extending more than two-thirds up the hill, is freehold, and only about 7,000 acres now remain in the Government's hands. The timber on 3,000 acres of this would be worth, taking everything into consideration, from £8 to £10 per acre, and the remainder, being further up the hill, of considerably less value. If a stop could be put to any further sale I would recommend that the 7,000 acres be conserved.

As it would be difficult to prevent freeholders from clearing their lands of rubbish by means of fire, and as a precaution against the spread of the same to the Government lands, I would further recommend that a stripe of a hundred yards in breadth be cut and cleared between the freehold and Government lands. The expense of clearing would be amply defrayed by the price obtained for the timber thus removed.

I find there is an opinion generally prevalent that as soon as the Provincial Governments are abolished a different system of management will be exercised in the disposal of the timber lands, and the result of this is that an extraordinary run is being made on the same by speculators, and it is possible that the better part of this forest also may be bought up prior to the Abolition Bill taking effect.

There are eleven saw-mills in or near the forest, nine of which turn out from 20,000 to 30,000 feet per month, while the other two are devoted to the manufacture of firewood. The system adopted by the mill-owners in cutting down the timber is to let the same to log-men, who get so much for every 100 feet of output of the mills, and these men fell the trees in a rough and ready manner, which they deem the most profitable for sawing purposes, leaving the smaller, the crooked, and the decayed trees standing on the ground. The owners then let the remainder of the crop to fence-makers, who convert to their purposes all they consider suitable. The residue of the timber that remains, after the fencers have finished, being only fit for firewood, the ground is leased to men who prepare and remove it.

The work of cutting down, however, has been progressing at such an enormous rate that there are many thousands of tons of limbs, tops, and dead trees lying on the ground rotting, which would be very liable to catch fire at any time. Some few months ago a fire originated on the freehold portion of this forest which destroyed two saw-mills and several dwelling-houses. Inquiry failed to trace how the ignition happened.

Besides the mill-owners, there are numbers of others who have bought timber land on speculation, and who are holding their portions intact pending a rise in prices.

The means of transport are exceedingly convenient, the terminus of the Christchurch and Oxford Railway being at the very edge of the forest.

* Note by Mr. Rolleston:—They are not now being offered for sale, and I think should not be.

† Note by Mr. Rolleston:—This is a recreation ground.