

LAKE WANAKA AND UPPER WAIMAKARIRI

Consist of 128,000 acres.* The lower end almost joins the west end of the Oxford Forest, and extends for miles on either side of the Waimakariri River. As there are no roads near this block, and there being snow on the ground when I visited it, I only saw the lower portion; but I ascertained that the trees were similar to those in Oxford, and that, with the exception of the requirements of the settlers in the neighbourhood, who freely use the timber for fencing and firewood, the forest remains entire. Perhaps the best mode of treating this block would be to claim it as forest land, lease it to runholders at the ordinary run rental, and put a stop to all unauthorized cutting, the probability being that the value of the wood will be greatly augmented by the certain increase of population in this district when the supplies from other quarters are exhausted.

BANKS PENINSULA.

All round Pigeon Bay, Akaroa, Robinson's Bay, Goff's Bay, and Le Bon's Bay, the land is entirely freehold, excepting a few Educational, Harbour, and Military Reserves from which the timber has been sold. In these districts 30,000 or 40,000 acres of timber were destroyed by fire several years ago. There are four saw-mills at work, but they are now merely gleaning what they can from the neighbouring freeholders. There is a block of timber at a place between Goff's and Le Bon's Bays, which is at present in its natural state, but I understand that the proprietor of the saw-mill at the last-mentioned place has purchased 500 acres, which will comprise all that is valuable as timber land. All along the tops of the ranges from this point to Little River there are several thousands of acres of bush still in the hands of Government, but I was unable to form a probable estimate of the acreage. In the valley of Little River there are patches of timber still pertaining to Government, but the best parts have been bought up, and the remainder, being scattered through the bush, is not worth while retaining as timber land. A very large saw-mill at this place is doing a good trade, the owner of which has bought up almost all the timber in the surrounding country, but the cost of transportation to the coast, necessitating, as it does, a considerable amount of boat and tramway conveyance, materially affects the value.

Upon the whole, the timber trade on Banks Peninsula is nearly at an end, the main object of the landowners being to get the ground cleared of timber and bush, and converted into pasture as rapidly as possible. Their mode of clearing here is to engage men at about 50s. an acre to cut the bush, which is afterwards allowed to dry on the ground prior to being burnt, and, should any large trees interrupt the progress of clearing, the expense of cutting is avoided by building the dried bush round them and setting fire to the pile. The fire has the effect of killing the trees, and many thousands of them remain standing in a scorched and blackened condition. Immediately on the bush being cleared, grass seed is sown above the *débris* of the fire, and it grows most luxuriantly from the first season.

The bush land remaining in the Government hands on Banks Peninsula is so broken up with small freeholds that it would be very difficult to get it leased, and in my opinion the most profitable plan would be to claim it as forest land and sell it.

In taking leave of Banks Peninsula, I consider that the clearing of the timber would not materially affect the rainfall of the district, as the land is so indented with bays, and as there will always be a sufficiency of bush to exercise the necessary and beneficial climatic influences.

With regard to the forests of Oxford, Alford, Peel, and Waimate, I am of opinion that the destruction of these would not alter the rainfall, they being closely tucked under and extended up the slopes of the snowy ranges, although their removal might lessen the flow of water (by the absence of shade) to the brooks and rivulets near them.

UNAUTHORIZED CUTTING.

I do not think that unauthorized cutting prevails in any of the forests but those of Alford and Oxford, where, I believe, it is carried on to a great extent.

The absence of Rangers in the Canterbury Province would make it difficult to prove a case against trespassers, and a stranger would hardly be able to detect the line of march between the Government and freehold land, as the surveyors' pegs and narrow lines are in many instances covered with undergrowth and fallen trees; but, if the suggestion I previously offered relative to clearing a hundred yards as a dividing line be favourably considered, I feel confident it would prevent further interference in Oxford at least.

WASTE OF TIMBER.

I am astonished at the reckless and improvident manner in which the timber lands of Canterbury have been managed; and it is no wonder that the Forest Department has derived no benefit from the sales effected, as it would appear that the timber—the growth of ages—had been considered and treated as an incumbrance on the land rather than a source of wealth, and invariably sold along with the ground, apparently without a thought being given to the value of the crop or the future necessities of the province, at the nominal rate of £2 per acre. Perhaps this is the reason that there exists so much senseless waste in its removal; and, if the present system of wholesale decimation is persisted in, the existing generation will see all the available timber in Canterbury cleared out.

If the Oxford and Alford Forests, where the principal crop is black and white birch—trees which grow freely from seed with little or no preparation—had been properly managed by clearing the ground of the original crop in a regular manner, and the inroads of cattle and sheep prohibited, I have no doubt but that by the time the present growth got exhausted a fresh supply of young timber would be getting up to be useful.

* Note by Conservator:—There is some confusion here—the two are perfectly distinct and far apart, but were shown together in report on area available.