

and the difficulty of obtaining sleepers, but I do not think this is sufficient to account for the whole of it. The contractors do not seem to have at first pushed on the work as vigorously as might have been done; they are, however, making a special effort now.

The only works contemplated on the Western Railways during the ensuing year are the completion of the Otautau and Orepuki lines.

ROLLING STOCK.

Considerable additions to the rolling stock of the Middle Island railways have been made during the past year, and further additions and orders to a large extent are being executed. It is calculated that these will meet the requirements of the traffic on the present lines for a long time.

ROADS.

CHRISTCHURCH TO HOKITIKA ROAD.

The Government maintains about 43 miles of this road on the eastern and 32 miles on the western side of the range, making a total of 75 miles. At present the Westland County Council maintains the road to the Rangiriri River, 22 miles from Hokitika, but a question has been raised as to whether they should maintain it farther than the Arahura, nine miles from Hokitika, which is practically the end of the settled district.

The ordinary maintenance of the road, keeping the surface in repair, is by no means heavy, the bottom being gravelly, and the drainage good: the difficulty lies in the gorges and river-beds, of which there are about 20 miles. In the gorges it is generally a mere bench cut out of the precipitous hill-side. There is no leaving the road with a vehicle, or even with a single horse: consequently a very small slip blocks up the whole traffic. In the river-beds the road is made impassable by the large boulders and other *débris* brought down in floods. Perhaps there is no place in the colony where the rainfall is so heavy and floods so frequent as in the district traversed by the West Coast Road; therefore a block frequently occurs from the causes just mentioned. Under these circumstances the maintenance must be constant, or the road must be closed altogether. Considering that this is the only line of communication for wheeled traffic between the East and West Coasts, and that the traffic is considerable and constant, I do not think it would be advisable to adopt the latter alternative. The maintenance, which amounts to about £8,000 per annum, could be considerably reduced, and the communication would be kept always open, by the diversion of the road at several places and the erection of bridges. To carry out these works in their entirety would cost £40,000 or £50,000, so they can scarcely be considered at present. If any expenditure on construction is contemplated, I would recommend the bridging of the Taipo (the most dangerous river on the road), the repair of the Hungerford Bridge over the Arahura should it come again into the hands of the Government, and certain diversions in the Otira and Bealey Valleys. These works can be carried out for about £10,000.

WEST COAST ROADS.

Karamea to Westport.—The only work executed during the year is the repairs to the Orowaiti Bridge, damaged by a flood.

Nelson to Buller.—A bridge has been erected over the Lyell.

Westport to Buller.—A contract is now in preparation for a bridge over the Ohika River.

Reefton to Greymouth.—Contracts were entered into last month for bridges over the Grey and Ahaura Rivers, and a commencement is being made with the works.

Greymouth to Okarito.—Contracts for bridges over the Teremakau and Hokitika Rivers are in exactly the same position as those above mentioned. The road from Bowen to Okarito is all contracted for; it is expected to be finished in November or December.

WATER-RACES.

The water-races on the West Coast directly in the hands of Government are now practically complete. The works have throughout been executed in a very satisfactory manner. Water has been sold regularly from each race so soon as it was finished, but the returns have hitherto been comparatively small. I enclose the annual report by Mr. O'Connor, District Engineer, which enters fully into the whole subject.

MISCELLANEOUS WORKS.

NELSON.

The Nelson Harbour works and the Motueka Bridge are the only works of importance that have been in progress during the year. They are both nearly finished.

CANTERBURY.

Waimakariri Gorge Bridge.—This bridge, a handsome and substantial structure of masonry and iron, was ready for traffic in September. The work has been carried out in a satisfactory manner.

South Waimakariri Bridge.—This bridge is on the main road from Christchurch to Kaiapoi, and replaces an old one that had become rotten. It consists of fifteen spans of 35 feet each, all of timber, the piles being ironbark. The new bridge was opened for traffic in January.