

1881.  
NEW ZEALAND.

PASTORAL LANDS IN OTAGO.

(PROPOSALS OF THE GOVERNMENT AS TO DEALING WITH THESE LANDS: THE LEASES OF WHICH WILL EXPIRE IN 1883).

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

MEMORANDUM by the SECRETARY, CROWN LANDS, to the COMMISSIONER, CROWN LANDS, Dunedin.  
General Crown Lands Office, Wellington, 30th May, 1881.

IN view of the termination of the pastoral leases in Otago in the month of March, 1883, the Government has had under its consideration the course which should be adopted to promote the future occupation of the lands now included in these leases, in the manner most likely to induce a beneficial settlement of the country, and increase its productive power to the utmost.

In arriving at the conclusions which I have now the honor to communicate to you, and which the Hon. the Minister of Lands directs are to be submitted to the Land Board for its consideration, regard was necessarily had to the nature, extent, and accessibility of the country, and the present occupation by a population engaged in agricultural, mining, and pastoral pursuits.

Taking up these points and passing them in general review, we find the country under consideration is presently held in seventy-one runs, and comprises an area of 2,681,000 acres. This extensive area, with the exception of one or two runs near Waikawa, Southland County, is in one compact block, and stretches mainly from a point on the Taieri River, twenty miles from Dunedin, across the interior of Otago to Lakes Wanaka and Hawea, a distance of 150 miles by road. On this line lie Strath-Taieri, Maniototo (or Upper Taieri Plain), Ida, Manuherikia, and Upper Clutha Valleys. It is remarkable that, although the general character of the interior of Otago is mountainous, yet these valleys merge into each other so gradually that they really form one continuous valley or plain across the country, of an altitude above sea-level varying from 600 to 2,000 feet, the latter elevation being nearly attained for a few miles, where the coach road crosses the watershed between the Taieri and Clutha River systems, at the end of Rough Ridge, and across the Ida Valley to Hill's Creek.

The mountain ridges which enclose this low country rise from it as a base to summit-levels above the sea of from 3,000 to 6,600 feet.

Arranging the areas of the country according to the elevations of its surface above sea-level, we have approximately—

|                                     |     |     |     |     | Acres.    |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| Over 500 but under 1,000 feet       | ... | ... | ... | ... | 225,000*  |
| Over 1,000 but under 2,000 feet ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1,153,000 |
| Over 2,000 but under 3,000 feet ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 781,000   |
| Over 3,000 but under 6,600 feet ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 522,000   |
|                                     |     |     |     |     | 2,681,000 |

—from which it will appear that 1,288,000 acres, or nearly one-half the area of this interior Otago country, is under 2,000 feet. As garden fruits, wheat, oats, barley, and root-crops have been successfully grown up to or near this level in interior Otago for years past, and the winter snow-line varies from about 1,600 feet to 2,500 or 3,000 feet, according to the aspect of the country or severity of the season, we may assume that, so far as the climate is concerned, all land below 2,000 feet is safe for stock, and where the soil is good and the surface admits of cultivation, it may be classed as agricultural.

In apportioning the country for the purpose of settlement, it must be clearly understood that every acre of grass is to be utilized. To accomplish this it will be necessary to associate high with low country, so that when the summer country is under snow there may be winter country for stock. This determines that the holdings must run from the valley up the slopes of a mountain ridge to its crest or summit. Where the summit is only three or four miles back, as in the case of the runs east from Strath-Taieri, the country can be subdivided into much smaller areas than such high country as the Lindis or Morven Hill runs, where the back high country is eight or ten miles from the winter country. A good deal of the country is intermediate between these limits—that is, five and six miles in depth from the low-lying areas.

In any scheme of subdivision the question of boundaries arises. In the larger areas natural boundaries will usually be obtained, in part at least, but in the smaller, fencing will have to be resorted to. If the holdings were laid off in long, narrow sections, the cost of fencing would be out of proportion to the value of the land enclosed. If laid off in squares, the cost of boundary fencing would be

\* This includes 90,000 acres in Southland County.