

and Napier respectively. The Government will lose no opportunity which may present itself for obtaining such information with regard to the intervening country, as will enable the best mode of completing this main arterial line to be determined.

Picton-Hurunui.—Crossing the Strait, we enter the Picton-Blenheim section, on which the only work completed during the year is the extension to the town of Blenheim, a distance of one mile and a quarter, including the Opawa Bridge and Blenheim Station.

Nelson-Roundell.—The works on this section are the formation of three miles extension from the inland terminus, Foxhill, to Belgrove, a forest country, from which a timber traffic may be calculated on, with very small increase to the working expenses. The permanent way is finished, and the station works are so far advanced as to admit of the line being opened immediately.

Hurunui-Bluff.—The main line, the longest continuous trunk in the colony, measuring from the Hurunui River, the old Provincial boundary of Nelson and Canterbury, to the Bluff, four hundred and forty-three miles (exclusive of branches), has, during the year, been completed from Amberley to Waipara, an extension of seven miles at the northern extremity, leaving nineteen miles to complete the whole distance to the Hurunui. The extension from Waipara to Waikari, a distance of nine miles, will, I hope, be completed in time for the ensuing grain and wool season; but the section from thence to the Hurunui awaits further survey.

Branches.—During the year, a portion of the Tinwald Branch to Mount Somers, ten miles sixty chains, has been opened for occasional traffic.

An agreement has been made with the Rakaia Forks Company, under which the Government work this company's line, twenty-two miles seven chains in length.

On the Waipahi-Heriotburn Branch, fifteen miles forty-three chains have been fully opened.

Arrangements have been made for interchange of traffic with the Waimea Plains Company (thirty-seven miles), under which the business is now carried on with through booking.

Otago Central.—Works have been prosecuted on the Hindon section of this line by "unemployed" labour. All hands, except a few who have small contracts, are now discharged. On the Wingatui contract, the formation is practically finished, excepting the small tunnels at the sixth and seventh miles. The working survey is finished to Hyde, and from Roughridge to near Lake Hawea. This important work is in an exceptionally favourable position for being prosecuted by a Company, aided by grants of land on the principle I have already referred to. I trust that by this means the work will be gone on with.

Riverton-Orepuki.—The works on the Riverton contract, six miles, which include ballasting and permanent way, are now finished.

Otautau-Nightcaps.—The Opio and a portion of the Waicola contracts are ready for the laying of the permanent way. The whole line to the Nightcaps Coal Field may be finished without difficulty during the present financial year.

Total Increase of Working Lines in the Colony.—Summing up the additions made to the working lines in both Islands during the year, we have a total of one hundred and six miles. This gives a length of twelve hundred and eighty-seven miles of trunk railways and branches now in work. To complete the main trunk lines in both Islands, the following additions will be required:—In the North Island, from Wellington to Foxton, seventy miles; from Waverley to Hawera, twenty-five miles; and from Waitara to Awamutu, one hundred and twenty miles; being a total of two hundred and fifteen miles, besides the gap of eighty miles on the Wellington-Napier line. In the Middle Island, a length of about one hundred and forty miles, between Blenheim and Waikari, will complete the trunk line from Picton to the Bluff.

WORKING RAILWAYS.

I now come to the review of the year's experience of the working railways. Important changes have been effected in the administration of this department.