

Grahamstown-Hikutaia Section.—Hikutaia contract, formation only, commencing at end of Kauaeranga section, 4½ miles, and terminating at 12 miles 65 chains, was let by contract on the 28th July, 1885, and should be finished on the 28th January, 1887. The work is progressing fairly well, and is about one-half done.

Surveys.—The survey of the remaining portion of this line—from Hikutaia to Te Aroha—was begun in February last, and has progressed as far as 22 miles 26 chains. It was slightly obstructed at times by the Natives, but their opposition appears to have been withdrawn.

Hamilton-Cambridge Branch Railway.—In connection with this the Victoria Road has been formed and metalled from Hautapu Railway-station to Cambridge town boundary. Some requisite fencing has also been erected.

MAIN TRUNK RAILWAY: NORTH END.

Puniu Contract.—Formation and permanent-way, 15 miles 2 chains, reaching from Te Awamutu southward. This contract was let on the 13th April, 1885, and the contract-time will expire on the 13th April, 1886. The works will not be completed by that time, but the contractor is making steady progress. The Puniu bridge has been completed, and the rails have been laid for 3½ miles. A portion of the formation of this contract, viz., from the 6th to the 12th mile, was reserved for Maori piecework, which was begun in April, 1885, with eight parties of Natives. In all thirty sections were let, and twenty-five of these have been satisfactorily completed. Three will be finished in a few weeks, and the rest in about three months. The latter comprises the long embankment across the Kawa swamp, 7 miles 45 chains to 8 miles 25 chains. In connection with the Kawa Railway-station a branch road to connect with the main road leading south from the Puniu, let on piecework in nine sections to parties of Natives, was satisfactorily completed in May last. The length of this road is 3 miles 70 chains.

Te Kuiti Contract, including formation and permanent-way, 10 miles 58 chains long, was advertised in August last, but was withdrawn from tender in September. This contract joins the Puniu contract, and the formation on the first five miles was reserved for piecework by the Natives living near.

Puro-o-tarao Tunnel Contract.—This is about forty-eight miles south of Te Awamutu, and was let on the 11th August last, the date for completion being the 11th August, 1887; its length is 1 mile 34 chains. The principal work done has been in connection with getting the materials to the ground. This was accomplished by the use of punts on the Waipa River from Alexandra to Te Kuiti, from whence to the tunnel the contractors formed a rough road suitable for bullock-teams. Other preliminary work has been done, such as bush-felling and clearing, and the cutting of timber for bridgework.

Road-works in Connection with the Main Trunk Railway.—The Puniu River cart-bridge was one of the works found to be absolutely necessary to give safe and convenient access to the railway works and to the Native lands south of the Puniu River (confiscated lands boundary), and a contract for the work was let the 17th July, and was finished the 19th December of same year—1885. The bridge consists of three spans of 40ft. each and six spans of 20ft. each—total, 240ft. It was also deemed necessary to form a road alongside the Ongaruhe River above the point to which it is navigable for canoes—viz., Te Koura, and leading northwards towards the Puro-o-tarao tunnel. This work has been done for about fourteen miles. It was offered to the Natives in July last, but they refused to take it, except at prices which were much too high. It was then offered to Europeans, who took it at fair rates in four sections, on which sixty men were set to work, and who finished it satisfactorily. Another portion of this road—Waimiha to Te Koura, five miles—was advertised for public tender on the 11th August, but all the tenders were declined, being too high.

Proposed railway connection between New Plymouth and Auckland.—This question has been under consideration, and, judging from the amount of information in possession of the department, there is little doubt that a fairly workable line at a not immoderate cost could be obtained. It would start from Waitara, along the coast to the Mimi River; thence up one of the branches of that river, crossing the range into the Tangarakau, and onwards towards the Ohura, up which valley a fair route could be found, joining the Main Trunk line at a point about 60 miles south of Te Awamutu. The length of this line would be about 75 miles.

Cottages have been built for the accommodation of the engineering staff at 11 miles 61 chains and at 14 miles 14 chains, both four-roomed; also at 17 miles 38 chains, three-roomed; at 19 miles 77 chains, two-roomed; at 25 miles 68 chains, six-roomed; at 48 miles 25 chains, six-roomed. The latter is near the tunnel described above.

Sleepers.—Contracts for sleepers have been let to the extent of 66,000, and 18,000 have been taken over from the Working Railways Department.

Surveys.—Southwards of the Te Kuiti contract comes the Waiteti contract, 8 miles 52 chains long. The contract survey of this was completed and plans and sections made in January last. The Mokau section follows next, of which a trial survey four miles in length, extending to the saddle between the Mokau and Paretikoura Rivers, has been completed. At this point the survey was stopped, along with other works, to reduce expenditure. Southwards of the Puro-o-tarao tunnel for 4½ miles a survey of the railway-line was also finished, but was stopped at the same time and for the same reason as the one described.

Revision and Correction of the first preliminary Survey made by Mr. Rochfort.—During the year Mr. Rochfort has been surveying, locating, and grading the line between Turangare to Waimarino, 14½ miles; all in bush. He also explored for a suitable cart-road from Ohakune to the Wanganui River, and, as before described, the one starting from Pipiriki was found to be the best and shortest. Other lines were explored, viz.—from Ranana and Hiruharama respectively—but were found to be too rough, as was also another line explored down the Manganui-a-te-ao River. Pack-tracks have been made by Mr. Rochfort's party to the extent of 35 miles in all, viz., from Ohakune towards