

been proceeding under the officers of the Survey Department. It is proposed, however, if found practicable, to increase afterwards the channel to make it passable for light steamer traffic.

It is evident that the main highway afforded by the Wanganui River can only be made useful to its full extent by branch navigation such as this, where found practicable, and still more by road-lines opening on to the river where the nature of the country admits of this being done on either side of the river, as has already been done at Pipiriki.

The river service by the two steamers "Wairere" and "Manuwai" has been efficiently kept up with regularity and completeness, except in a short period of exceptionally low river, extending from the 26th December, 1896, to the 13th January, 1897, when for three Tuesday and two Friday trips the steamer did not run the full distance through to Pipiriki, going only part of the way up. The risk of damage to vessel, and the labour involved in taking up and down boats of the size and weight at present on the river, in such low state of river, when the channels are of limited width, being considerable, besides the consideration that no cargo could then be taken. Mails and passengers were forwarded on from where the steamer remained by canoe service to Pipiriki, and similarly from Pipiriki to the steamer. The River Steamer Company are procuring a boat of smaller dimensions and lighter draft, which it is expected will obviate the occurrence of those few partially incomplete trips.

It is satisfactory that, on this highway to the interior, hitherto we have not had to record any serious damage to the improvement works already done between Wanganui and Pipiriki, by the heavy floods occurring from time to time in the river; nor is it found that snags or timber have obstructed the cleared channels after floods (a few days work removing the small number lodged hitherto, on some occasions only), and this is remarkable considering the large number of snags that were removed out of the channels before they were practicable for steamer navigation at low river levels. This renders it hopeful that the river may continue a valuable means of communication, and one requiring moderate maintenance, not only for the distance now available, but for much further into the inland country.

The maps of the river survey done last season by Mr. Lewis, of the Government Survey Department, from Kanihinini to Kawana, near Ranana, have been prepared by him, but not yet handed over to the River Trust. It is desirable that this survey should in the meantime be completed as far as Pipiriki, a further distance of ten miles. This survey, made last season, shows not less than 2 ft. of water on any of the rapids or shallows at low summer level in the cleared channels.

No doubt the Wanganui River is capable of much further improvement, although the limited means at the disposal of the River Trust allows of improvement to a limited extent only; the means adopted being clearing the channels of snags and boulders, papa reefs and rocks, and confining and training the water over shallows to increase its depths in the channels at low river.

Viewing the probability of the steamer service being next year extended to the junction of the Tangarakau River, on the right bank of the Wanganui River about twenty-six miles above Pipiriki, and eighty-three miles from Wanganui by the river, it would be well now to consider the improvement of the river beyond this, past the junction of the Retaruke, on the left bank, to the junction of the river Ohura, on the right bank, about fifty-two miles above Pipiriki, and about 109 miles by river above Wanganui. From information gained during a visit in 1885 it was found that there are fifty-six rapids of more or less importance between the Tangarakau and Ohura junctions. In forty-six of these the work of clearing would be moderate, many of them requiring little or no work. In the remaining ten the clearing would be more difficult. Training-walls would also be required in places. Between the Tangarakau and Ohura there were noted at same time twenty-four good, clear, main reaches of river, of varying lengths, occurring between the rapids. There is little doubt but that the improvement of this portion for steamer navigation is practicable in the same manner as in the portions of river already dealt with, the banks generally being stable and well defined. But it might be advisable to make the next stage of clearing continue fourteen miles higher up the Wanganui River, above the River Ohura junction, or to about 123 miles by river above Wanganui. There are forty-one rapids of more or less importance in this further extension. There are also numerous quiet clear reaches of river, and the general character of this part is similar to the portion above referred to. This latter point is where the more decided gorgy character of the river begins and continues downwards. It is about four miles above Whenuatere, and the Natives said a line of road could be got from here to Taumaranui and also to the Ohura Valley. Above this, for the thirteen miles by river to Taumaranui, the river presents greater difficulties for improvement for steamer navigation, and this portion may be left until the portions indicated are cleared and improved.

Should the steamer navigation reach the point mentioned, about thirteen miles by river from Taumaranui (where the North Island Main Trunk Railway route abuts on the Wanganui River), communication might be continued by a road to Taumaranui, and thence by the road-line up the valley of the Ongarue River to the point south of the main tunnel, where the rails are laid to from Auckland. The Ongarue joins the Wanganui River at Taumaranui. The importance of penetrating with steamer service so far directly into the inland country, and the large extent of land which would be benefited on both sides of the river, need scarcely be more than referred to.

The accompanying map shows the different points mentioned.

P.S.—In the Public Works Statement of last year it was mentioned that it was intended to continue the construction on the line of railway from Auckland as far as the junction of the Stratford-Ongarue Road. This is a considerable way south of the tunnel, and about ten miles from Taumaranui, so that there would be about twenty-one miles of road communication to be used between the point proposed to be reached by steamer on the Wanganui River and the rails on the railway to Auckland. Of the portion of this distance lying between junction of Stratford-Ongarue Road and Taumaranui, the District Road Surveyor says in last year's report: "Beyond the junction, to Taumaranui, the road has been maintained only as a bridle-road, but last month I had it made good enough to allow of an ordinary vehicle to pass as far as Taumaranui. There are five