

winter field, because of the hilly nature and hardness of the ground. There is gum in all the swamps about here, so the supply of gum is not worked out yet.

*Robert Howie*: I am a settler of eighteen years' standing, and buyer of kauri-gum for four years, at Hikurangi, and well acquainted with the kauri-gum industry. The gum is very much scarcer now than in former years, but it is of higher value, and the diggers are never satisfied, as many of them are very improvident. There are no Austrians on this field now, but last year there were about twenty at work here. I wish there were more here, as I have a very good opinion of them. I found them what I should like to say about Europeans. I have never lost a penny by them. I do not know of any drawback to their presence in the colony, but to the contrary. I think it would be a blessing to the country if Government were to set aside a block of land for them to settle upon. I know of some Austrians who have settled down, and they make steady good settlers. If the Government were to offer land to the average British gum-digger I do not think they would take advantage of it. I have given a few "starts," but as a rule they "leave their footprints." The value of a start is about £1 16s. We, as a rule, do not give "starts," as we generally get left; but this is never the case with the Austrians. I never heard that the Austrians were brought here under contract. I have every reason to respect the Austrians as neighbours. I consider that the gum-diggers have to pay towards the mischief that is done to the roads, in this way: If the roads are good it may cost, for instance, 10s. to deliver supplies at their camp—this they are charged; in winter time, when the roads are bad, it may cost £2 or £3 to deliver the same supplies, and this also they are charged with: so they have to pay higher for the mischief done to the roads; but, strictly speaking, they are only paying me for what it costs me to deliver those supplies, and contribute nothing towards road construction or maintenance. I am not aware that ever any gum-license fees are collected for digging on ordinary Crown land; the only license-fee I know of is the one charged for digging in the State forests. The collecting of license-fees, I think, is impracticable, because of the many facilities there are of evading payment. Last winter I purchased as much gum from diggers in one day as I got in two months recently, but this is accounted for partly because of the facility of obtaining good employment in connection with the timber industry and other work in the district, and there are not now nearly as many gum-diggers as there were a year ago. There are at present only about a dozen at work, whereas last year, inclusive of the settlers who got gum, there might have been a hundred at work. Settlers who have been at work gum-digging found it unprofitable, and therefore gave it up, and took to timber-working instead. They are not likely to go back to digging if they can help it. We also in this district have places where several layers of gum were found on the top of one another, but I believe that this has been owing to slips that have taken place.

*Thomas Shore*: I am a storeman and buyer of gum for Mr. Bennett, at Hikurangi. I have been connected with the gum industry for about ten years. Practically speaking, so far as this field is concerned, the gum is exhausted. There are not more than fifteen diggers now on this Hikurangi field. It is about nine miles in circumference. I think the field is too poor now for the Austrians. The average earnings on this field are 17s. or 18s. a week. The very best men, at this time of year, and the state the field is in, cannot average more than £1 15s. a week. I do not think the average yield for each man per week is more than 25 lb. to 28 lb. We pay on this field—For washed nuts, £1 10s. to £1 15s.; washed nuts included with other gum, £3 per cwt.; good ordinary, £3 8s. to £3 10s., according to quality and scraping; best ordinary, up to £3 12s.; re-scraped, £4 16s. to £5. Diggers are all free on this field. There are no private fields here; we have no hold over them; it is a free field. We very rarely give credit; we prefer cash business. The diggers on this field are those that have been here for a number of years. The field does not attract new hands. The gum is very shallow on the ranges, but I have known it to be found at 10 ft. and 16 ft. in the slips. The range gum is of superior quality, but it is of poor quality in the swamps. There has been no ploughing on Crown lands—not to my knowledge, but there has been ploughing on private lands for other purposes. As regards the Austrians, I know of nothing personally about them, having had no transactions with them. I have heard that they live very cheaply. I believe there are some diggers who would take advantage if suitable land for settlement was opened adjoining gum-lands. The life of a gum-digger is wretched, and one of the last a man would take to. I would reserve all gum-land from sale; in the majority of cases, when a man applies for gum-land to settle upon he is not to be believed, as he simply wants it to work the gum. I do not consider that it would be advisable to make any special reservation for settlers, but leave the whole of the gumfields free to everybody and anybody. My reason for saying this is that the settlers will always derive some benefit from the gum-diggers working near their holdings, in the sale of produce, and so on. I consider that the Austrians should be taxed in some way. I believe in the issuing of licenses for the right to dig gum, but I think that the Austrians should pay a higher fee than Britishers; but it wants a wiser head than mine to state how such license-fees are to be collected. I consider the diggers on this field are just as honest men as any ordinary British citizens. As far as my personal knowledge goes, they are an honest set of men on this field. We have not a gum-digger on our books, as we do not give credit. There are many settlers in this neighbourhood who would not be on their sections if it had not been for the assistance the gum had given them. The average earnings of a digger eight years ago was £1 7s. a week, but at that time provisions were higher. I consider this gumfield to-day is not a field for the ordinary digger to make a living on, but a good stand-by for the settlers round about.

*William Carter*: I am a settler at Hikurangi of twenty-seven years' standing, and am a member of the Whangarei County Council, and Chairman of the Charitable Aid Board. I have had considerable experience in the way in which the gum industry has been worked in this district. The gum industry has the effect of breaking up the roads, principally in winter time. For this we have received no recompense. While the price of gum remains as at present I do not think the