

*William Thomas Sarah* : I have been a storekeeper and gum-buyer for about nine years, but have been in the district all my life. The supply of gum furnished by each individual digger is smaller than in previous years, but the presence of a larger number of diggers makes it to be even larger than formerly. It is nearly all poor gum, and of inferior quality, and would not have brought half the price years ago. There are about 15 to 20 tons of gum a week sent away from here. Austrians are the principal sellers now. They are honest, straightforward, and industrious. I supply them with stores. I have no reason to complain of their conduct. I think they would make good settlers, but I do not think they would settle down on the land here. They work from ten to twelve hours a day. I think the average of money saved is 15s. to £1 per week. The very best Austrian digger would realise from £2 to £2 5s. clear of tucker. They all live fairly well, stores costing them about 8s. to 10s. a week, not including tobacco. I am satisfied with the treatment I receive from the Auckland merchants, and I believe the fluctuations in the market are fair trade movements, and are not owing to any ring combination. The prices of stores here are : Flour, 50lb. bag, 7s. 6d ; No. 2 sugar, in large quantities 3d., in small quantities 4d. ; tea, 2s. to 2s. 3d. per pound ; candles, 6d. and 10d. ; tinned meat, 1s. 2d. the 2lb. tin. I supply fresh meat at 4d. per pound all round ; lard, 1s. 6d. the 2lb. tin. There is another store here in competition with me, consequently a good price is given for gum. We send our gum in sacks, and we know there must be a loss in weight, because of the handling. If we keep the gum we have now from the swamps it gets considerably lighter on account of the moisture it contains evaporating after it is brought to us, but full weight is paid for, as no allowance is made for leakage. This field will not last very long if the same amount of gum is taken out of it, at the rate it is going on. I should think there are about two hundred Austrians on the field, but I may be a good deal out. The Austrians have only been here about two years ; in fact, last summer was the first time they were in any considerable numbers. I recognise that the British digger has a grievance against the Austrians for exploiting the gum, but cannot suggest any means by which it can be remedied. When the gum is exhausted I do not know what is to become of the settlers, as many of them are dependent upon the digging of gum for a partial livelihood. I know that some of the Austrians work together in small co-operative parties, one man obtaining the money for them all. Probably these are parties of relatives. The Austrians send money Home, probably for the purpose of bringing others out. I have been told this by Austrians themselves. The Inspector of Weights and Measures was through this district about three or four years ago, but I have never heard of any grumbling from Britishers or Austrians as regards weights given by storekeepers. I leased a field (an old field) from the Kauri Timber Company, for which I paid them £40 for four months, and I charged the diggers £1 each for the right to dig, and they were free to deal where they liked. My father was here before me in the same business. Gum-digging has been going on for the last thirty or forty years on this field.

*John Thomas Somerville* : I have 30 acres freehold, and have been thirty-three years in this district. I have dug gum sometimes ; it has been a considerable help to me when I had time to do it. I know of other settlers who have done the same. There is hardly one in the district who has not had to get help from the gum-digging. I think myself that it will be a great calamity if the settlers who have been relying upon this source of support are thrust aside by the Austrians coming in such numbers and removing the gum as they are doing. In a year or two more there will be no chance for the small people settled about here to live. The Austrians showed up here about two years ago. I believe there are over three hundred now in this neighbourhood. The Austrians dig gum on the face ; they clear the ground entirely of gum, and it is no use anybody following them. I have heard many complaints about Austrians digging on private property. It is not only the Crown lands that are being despoiled, but the land of absentees is absolutely being deprived of value, so that when a man is paying taxes on land which is worth £10 or £12 an acre he will return to find it worth nothing. There was land in this district worth from £100 an acre, and now there are great shafts sunk 9ft., and the land so turned up and broken that the settlers are afraid to run their cattle on it. If the Austrians are allowed to remain here for another twelve months the Government will have a heavy responsibility in regard to the people who are left here settled for years. A residential qualification should have been the basis of the right to dig gum years and years ago. Government property should not have been allowed to be taken away by any wanderer who chooses to come and take it away. The wandering diggers will continue to dig gum so long as they are able to, but the settlers of the district do not get a pennyworth for the damage they do by cutting up the roads, for the supply of their stores and taking away the gum.

*Robert Henry Moir* : I am district constable, stationed at Mangawhai. I have been here forty years, and five years as constable. I am well acquainted with the gum industry. I have had great complaints from all the settlers in the district about the coming of the Austrians. The settlers in the district have been in the habit of relying upon the gumfields to provide a certain portion of their income. They fear that this source of supply will now be speedily exhausted, as the Austrians are clearing the gumfields wherever they go. I should certainly say that if the Austrians remain here for two years more it will be impossible for the settlers to help themselves as they previously did, by getting gum in the Mangawhai district. The Austrians generally are men of good character, and industrious. The great objection that is made to them is their wandering habits, and the thorough way in which they remove the gum from the soil. There have also been complaints about their not respecting the rights of private property, and following gum off the Crown lands on to freehold. I have a good deal of trouble in warning them off private property without attempting to summons them. I have not heard of any complaints about Britishers trespassing on private gumfields. I have not heard any complaints about Austrians assaulting females ; they are always most respectful. I have not heard any suggestions made by settlers as to how the difficulty should be met. I recognise the evil, without seeing the way out. I remember, about thirty years ago and over, when the gum was collected off the surface by the Maoris only, who then obtained