

DISTRICT OF LYELL AND MURCHISON COURTS.

Dredging.

Lyell and Murchison districts have not escaped the rush for dredging properties, which has been so general both in Otago and the West Coast. Almost all the available ground in the two districts named has been taken up as special dredging claims and prospecting areas, but it is interesting to note that the majority of the applications coming before the Court of late have been for prospecting areas. These districts might be termed the pioneers of dredging on the West Coast, as it is now a number of years since the old spoon-dredge prospected a large number of beaches in the Buller River. The older type of dredge has also had its day, both on the Matakītaki and Buller, and is now being rapidly replaced by the most modern and up-to-date plants. That there are large areas of dredgeable ground in these two districts there is little doubt, and there is every prospect that a good proportion of the ventures will be made to pay.

The Buller Dredges (Limited) have for a number of years been at work near Fern Flat, in the Upper Buller. Altogether their operations have proved payable, their old dredge having won steady and profitable returns for some years, and their more recently constructed dredge has until recently been working on payable ground. It is now operating on a large beach near Toi Flat, and is in some distance from the river secure from all floods. This ground has unfortunately been good enough to pay working-expenses only, but there is every prospect of an increased return being obtained a little higher up the beach, in which direction the dredge is at present working. It is now about fifteen months since the building of the dredge was completed, and it is a good, strong, compact, and well-constructed plant.

The Consolidated dredge, formerly the "Cocksparrow," is the only other dredge at present at work on the Buller, and is operating near Three Channel Flat, about thirty miles from Westport. The sum of about £2,000 has been spent during the year in remodelling the dredge, and bringing her as near as possible up to date. The lifting-capacity has been considerably increased, and a saving made in the consumption of fuel. She has also been fitted with elevators, and all weak parts thoroughly strengthened. The dredge is now working steadily, and shareholders are expecting to obtain good returns as soon as the face is well opened up.

The Four River Plain Company has been actively employed during the year building a large dredge immediately above the Buller dredge's ground, and about three miles from Murchison. The pontoons have been launched, and the machinery is being delivered to the ground as quickly as possible. The company holds a special claim of 100 acres, and also has the right to work 100 acres of freehold land adjoining. The ground is well situated near the Matakītaki Junction, and is well spoken of by miners in the locality.

The Mokoia dredge has been floated, and now awaits the machinery to be placed in her. The plant will be a large one, and especially strong, to deal with some heavy, but good ground, which has been proved on the claim. The lease is situated ahead of the Consolidated Company's ground, and has been well prospected by the old "Cocksparrow" dredge.

The other dredges on the Buller in course of construction are the Old Diggings, the Rocklands, the Premier, and the Buller Junction, all situated between Berlin's and the Inangahua Junction. All the ventures are well spoken of.

The Matakītaki dredge has been laid up almost the whole year. The plant is very old and quite out of date. Trouble arising between the employers and the workmen, operations have been temporarily suspended. A new company with a strong capital is now being formed to take over the property with the view of thoroughly overhauling the dredge, and again starting work.

There are a large number of leases taken up in the Matakītaki, which are being prospected; but so far the actual building of the dredges has not started, although the successful flotation of one company to work an area near Murchison has been notified.

Quartz.

The only quartz-mine in active operation is the Alpine Extended Gold-mining Company's property, and the Lyell Township is mainly dependent upon the results from this mine. It is an old claim, having been working since 1874, and has a splendid record. The value of the total production of gold is over £275,000, and the shareholders have received more than £74,000 in dividends. During the past year a large amount of work has been done, fifty men having been employed almost the whole time. The company's twenty-head stamper battery has been kept constantly at work up till quite recently, but the stone treated has been of low grade. Stopping has been steadily progressing above the Nos. 10 and 11 levels on bodies of stone varying from 3 ft. to 20 ft. wide. The No. 11 level has been opened up north of the main shaft, and the No. 9 extended in the same direction for 90 ft. Two winzes have been sunk below No. 11, the lowest level, and proved the reef to be living down strong underfoot. The No. 7 level (400 ft. above) is being extended north on the line of reef, and the prospects met are very encouraging. Much interest is being taken in this work, as a favourable development in this portion of the mine would be of the greatest importance, giving as it would at once a fresh turn of prosperity to the old mine. Since last month operations have been carried on with a very few hands, causing rather a depression in Lyell business circles.

Alluvial.

The alluvial workings are generally confined to the efforts of individual miners, and the Matakītaki Valley will always support a large number of this class. The terraces along the Buller as well as its gold-bearing tributaries also provide a means of livelihood for a number of miners.

An excellent sluicing property near White's Point, belonging to Messrs. Neville and Perkins, has latterly been attracting the attention of outside investors. A scheme for bringing in a large supply of water from the Newton River to work this and the adjoining ground is now on the tapis.