

No. 3.

Mr. ROBERT TENNENT, Inspector of Mines, Westport, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Mines Department.

SIR,—

Inspector of Mines' Office, Westport, 1st April, 1901.

I have the honour, in compliance with section 67 of "The Coal-mines Act, 1891," to report as follows on the West Coast Coal-mines for the year ended 31st December, 1900:—

Puponga Coal-mine, Collingwood.—Mr. Taylor has continued prospecting operations, and has driven headings in the thickest seam yet discovered. This has a gross thickness of about 9 ft., or about 7½ ft. of clean coal, after the partings and bands are deducted.

Puponga Prospecting Company.—This local company has acquired a leasehold section of 400 acres, adjoining and to the dip of Puponga Coal-mine. Several prospecting-shafts have been sunk on the flat country, varying in depth from 12 ft. to 66 ft., but the greatest depths attained have unearthed no new discoveries. Operations are suspended awaiting further consideration.

Pakawau Coal-mine (Caldwell Bros., owners).—A misunderstanding having arisen between the mine-owners and tramway contractors in relation to the completion of bridges and other works, suspension of mining operations was caused in the early part of the year until the end of April. Since that time developments consisted in driving the dip heading, the bottom and rise levels, north and south. Good hard coal was tapped in dip heading, but as the levels extended northward the coal became soft and faulty. Loading facilities at the wharf are much improved by the construction of two storage-bins, with respective capacities of 29 tons and 40 tons, but scarcity of sailing craft tended to restrict the output to 1,439 tons, which tonnage, according to the manager's statement, could have been easily doubled. Pier and bridge-fencing have received attention, and may now be considered fairly satisfactory. Mine-ventilation was good, and timber freely used. Ten miners and two truckers employed.

Motupipi Coal-mine, Takaka.—(17/8/1900): Mining on this property is at a standstill.

Enner Glynn Coal-mine, Nelson.—(2/2/1900): George Wise and William Bennet were stoping coal in upper level. The ground was well secured and ventilation good. (13/8/1900): Mine abandoned and all exposed places fenced off. Ropes and all movable plant removed.

Mokihinui Coal-mine (John Gibson, mine-manager).—This property was taken over from the State and reopened in June last by a party of twelve working-miners, who work the colliery under the title of the "Westport Co-operative Coal Company." Prior to this company taking possession the property was opened and worked by the late Mokihinui Coal Company from three separate mines—viz., the Hutt Seam, Big Face, and Upper Mines. The first two named mines command the best quality of coal, and in consequence were partially exhausted on the "first working," and standing on pillars. Resuming operations, mining was chiefly confined to the Big Face Mine, from which 10,092 tons were produced, the greatest percentage being won from the bottom section of the coal-seam, which was left underfoot by the old company. Hutt seam dip heading was reopened, and the pump placed at a lower level. Considerable prospecting has been done north and south from the main heading, but results so far are not encouraging. A new steam-boiler was provided for the Hutt seam haulage-engine, and the pump-driving water-wheel has been strengthened and much improved. Timber receives strict attention, and safety in every detail is strictly observed. Reports kept to date, and the provisions of the Act enforced.

Cardiff Colliery.—As noted in my report of last year, the Westport-Cardiff Coal Company suspended operations at the end of September, 1899, and on the 28th January, 1900, "gob-fire" was discovered in the old mine. On the 29th January Mr. Dixon, late mining-manager at Granity Creek, and the writer met at the mine and made strenuous efforts to reach the seat of fire, but, the ventilation being natural and unreliable, we considered exploration impracticable, and declined to incur undue risk to life. Deciding then to abandon all further explorations, we arranged to remove the ventilating-fan from the Bridge Mine and rebuild it at the main tunnel exit to Chasm Creek. (2/2/1900): Reliable air-current being obtained, Mr. Dixon led an exploring party into No. 1 incline heading, where fire was discovered in the return or back heading. Finding all practical efforts ineffective to cope with the fire under the conditions where discovered, the party returned to the mine-mouth and temporarily sealed down the mine. (5/2/1900): On my return to the mine the temporary stoppings were found intact, but before opening the stoppings I crossed over the terrace to the Chasm Creek outcrops, where active fire was burning through the outcrop fissures over the broken pillared ground on the extreme point of the terrace. Returning to the mine-entrance and opening the stopping, with a full air-current maintained, I led a party along the main haulage-road to the foot of old furnace-drive, where the tunnel was discovered in full blaze at the foot of No. 1 incline. At this point all effort to cope with the fire in the mine was practically impossible. I then ultimately decided to hermetically seal down the mine by means of substantial clay-puddled plank stoppings. These works were efficiently carried out; but, combustion being supported with oxygen from the open drives that pierced the outcrops, and the open surface fissures through the broken pillared ground overlying the existing fire, the ordinary system of dealing with underground fires by means of airtight dams were made practically ineffective. Flooding was then decided on, and permanent and effective dams are now built in both ends of the main tunnel. Mine-water is now raised to the highest possible point on the outcrops, and the smoking outcrops must burn back to the water-level. Predictions were made in respect to the probabilities of fire spreading into other sections of the coalfield, but this theory is confined to the authors; and I have no hesitation in saying that the fire is now confined within the limits of the present mine, without possible danger to adjoining coal areas. The lease was determined on behalf of the State on the 23rd day of May, 1900. All movable plant is removed, stacked, or securely housed, and under the charge of a reliable caretaker.

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