

MOTUEKA RIVER.

The Motueka River takes its rise in a mountain range which forms the boundary between the Land Districts of Nelson and Marlborough, and after leaving the mountains flows through small alluvial flats for a distance of about fifteen miles to its confluence with the Motupiko River. From its junction with the Motupiko River it flows for a distance of about nine miles through a strip of low-lying land, having an average width of about 40 chains to its confluence with the Whangapeka River; thence for a distance of about six miles and a half through a gorge, in which there are occasional small areas of low flats, to its confluence with the Baton River. From the Baton to the point where the river enters the plain near the Whakarewa Orphanage, its course, for a distance of seventeen miles, is through a valley, the low land of which has a width varying from 20 to 100 chains, and is an important fruit-growing locality. The hills on each side of this valley rise abruptly and are only suitable for grazing purposes.

The river after passing the Whakarewa Orphanage traverses a large plain, comprising an area of about 9,000 acres, all occupied in small holdings. The most of this land is highly cultivated, and a considerable portion of it is in hop- and raspberry-gardens and orchards. The river has in the past been continually altering its course and gradually cutting away the banks, until some of the settlers have now very little of the alluvial soil left on the land they originally purchased. It has in places cut through the sections, and in some instances left a portion on each side of the present channel.

The average fall in the river from the junction of the Rocky River to the ocean, a distance of eight miles, is about 9 ft. per mile, and from Rocky River to the junction of the Baton River, a distance of fourteen miles, it is over 15 ft. per mile, while above the junction of the Baton, the fall is considerably greater, the effect being that gravel and *débris* from the erosion of the banks in the upper part are carried down and deposited in the lower reaches where the fall is less. This has so raised the bed below the junction of the Rocky River, that in large floods the river overflows its banks and spreads in every direction over the plain where the Townships of Motueka and Riwaka are situated; indeed, there are now so many old channels and by-washes in this plain, that it is impossible to predict what course the river may take in the future.

Some landowners have protected portions of the banks at great expense, by the construction of groins, fascine-embankments, and willow-planting, but in several places, where no such work has been done, the river is rapidly cutting away its banks. At every flood some of the willows are washed out and deposited on the beaches and in the bed of the stream, where they ultimately take root and cause serious obstruction. As the river banks are low, and the ground falls away on both sides, unless some systematic protection-works are carried out, and the willows removed from the bed of the river, it is impossible to estimate the extent of damage to property by this river, whether a proclamation is issued or not.

Your Commissioners are strongly of opinion that a River Board should be formed for the purpose of carrying out a comprehensive system of protection, with the object of confining the course of the river and preventing the destruction of adjoining lands.

In regard to the auriferous character of the gravel-drift in the terraces adjacent to the Motueka River, your Commissioners could obtain no evidence to show that they contained gold. The only evidence tendered was to the effect that a number of miners about twenty years ago, were for a short period working on the various beaches of the river above its junction with the Rocky River, and that they could earn from 6s. to 10s. a day. Since then there have been a few miners occasionally at work.

Applications have lately been made for twelve prospecting licenses for dredging purposes in the bed of the river, but so far as your Commissioners could ascertain, no prospecting has as yet been done to prove whether or not gold could be found in payable quantities.

A considerable quantity of gold has been obtained from the watersheds of the Tadmor, Baton, and Pearce Rivers, which are tributaries of the Motueka, and evidence was tendered, showing that gold was obtained in the upper portion of the Motupiko River, and in the Rainy Creek, one of its tributaries; but, so far as could be ascertained, no gold has been found in either the terraces or the bed of the Motueka above its confluence with the Motupiko, and consequently your Commissioners did not make any examination of the land for which claims for compensation have been made above that point by Messrs. R. Ellis and G. Reay.

Your Commissioners have made careful examination of the land from the junction of the Motupiko to the ocean, in regard to which claims for compensation for prospective injury have been made.

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In view, however, of the liability of the river to change its course in its lower reaches, more especially the part near the coast, your Commissioners are of opinion that, if mining operations were carried on between the Graham River and the ocean, the destruction of a large extent of valuable agricultural land, together with the improvements thereon, would be greatly accelerated, while the value of the gold likely to be recovered would form no reasonable justification for the widespread destruction that would most probably follow.

Seeing that the Pearce, Baton, Whangapeka, Tadmor, and Motupiko Rivers, the outfalls of which are into the Motueka above the Graham, have in the past proved to be auriferous, to a greater or less degree, and that no injury by mining operations in that particular locality would be likely to be done to the lower parts of the country already referred to, your Commissioners recommend that the Motueka River, from its confluence with the Graham to a point 2 chains above its confluence with the Motupiko, with all the tributaries on that length of it, excepting those already gazetted under the Mining Act, be proclaimed watercourses into which tailings and waste water produced by or resulting from mining operations may be discharged.

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