

CIRCULAR NO. 507, PRESERVATION OF NATIVE FORESTS, ETC.

WITH reference to the above-mentioned circular, I have the honour to furnish the following report and suggestions :—

During the early period of the history of Otago comparatively little was done to conserve the many naturally beautiful spots to be found in several parts of the province. Scenery of strikingly natural beauty existed round Dunedin and on many parts of the east coast, and our pioneer settlers still delight to describe the loveliness of the evergreen native bush to be seen in the early days rising gently from the sea-coast to the horizon; and, though every one regrets that so little has been done to retain these lovely scenes, very few seem to have interested themselves further in the matter. Many magnificent forest scenes are yet to be found in the Catlin's, Glenomaru, and other bush districts towards the south; while the far-famed Lakes District retains much of its original beauty and grandeur. Some of the bush rivers and streams of Otago still present to the tourist, the sketcher, and the photographer many scenes of beauty, while they offer abundant sport to the angler or other sportsman. The Maclellennan, the Tautuku, and the Tahakopa Rivers, with their banks clad in native bush, which on a clear day is so strikingly reflected in the water, have been said by visitors to even rival the celebrated Wanganui River.

Of late years steps have been taken to conserve some of the beauty-spots of Otago, but comparatively little has been effected in this respect. Attached hereto are schedules showing (a) what has already been reserved to insure a maintenance of water-supplies, an even rainfall, and an even climate, and to protect the native flora and fauna; (b) what has already been reserved to conserve scenic effect, shelter, and places of natural beauty; (c) what Crown land might be further reserved on behalf of (a) and (b); (d) what private land might be resumed to further the objects under (a) and (b).

The Amenities Society of Dunedin has effected good work towards retaining the natural beauties of the scenery in and around Dunedin, and a proposal was brought forward lately to have several hill-tops in the neighbourhood reserved.

The bed of Nicholls' Creek, a tributary of the Water of Leith, contains some splendid views, and the Water of Leith itself also offers some attraction to the tourist. The Taieri Gorge, throughout that portion traversed by the Otago Central Railway, and the left bank of the Taieri River towards its mouth are well worthy of attention, as is also that portion of the Waipori River Gorge in Blocks VIII. and X., Waipori Survey District.

There is a large area of birch bush near the top of the Blue Mountains, behind Tapanui, in the Rangleburn District, which is becoming well stocked with deer. It contains some good sawmilling timber, but even after the sawmilling timber has been taken there will be sufficient bush left as a good reserve for the native flora and fauna. Though so much of Otago's loveliest scenery has been ruthlessly destroyed in the past, it is not too late yet to protect what remains. Many of the areas of bush that have been robbed of their largest trees still contain large numbers of young trees, and if these areas are reserved now much protection will be given to native trees and shrubs.

A number of the reserves shown in Schedule A have been set aside for the Dunedin Corporation waterworks, and some of the bush reserves shown in the same schedule contain good sawmilling timber which might be removed without lessening their effect towards the preservation of native flora. In Schedules A, B, and C all lands not already permanently reserved might be gazetted reserves forthwith under the jurisdiction of the Land Board, who, in the case of bush reserves, could decide whether or not it would be advisable to remove the sawmilling timber. The suggested reserve (Schedule C) in Mount Hyde district is a wild rocky gorge traversed for some distance by the Otago Central Railway. The land is steep and somewhat poor and is of little value for grazing purposes. The scenic effect might be made much more striking by the addition of forest trees and shrubs. The suggested reserve in Hummockside District (Schedule C) is a wild rugged gorge on the Waikouaiti River, which affords splendid trout-fishing. Schedule D contains several areas that have been disposed of either by sale or by having been set apart as Native reserves. Mount Cargill was formerly covered with bush, which has now nearly all disappeared, and the same might be said of Signal Hill. These two hills, however, if resumed, might be planted with trees by the Forest Department. Flagstaff has also been made freehold, and if it were open to the public much use would be made of it by residents of Dunedin and suburbs. The hill commands a splendid view of the surrounding country. In Dunedin and East Taieri District Saddle Hill was once covered with native bush, but it has been sold and nearly stripped. A little bush, however, yet remains, and if resumed and made a reserve many young native trees would still flourish. Nicoll's Creek bed, which was formerly dense bush, and which contains a number of splendid waterfalls, is gradually being stripped of its timber. This is a very popular resort of picnic parties, sketchers, photographers, &c. That part of the Taieri Native Reserve suggested to be resumed lies between Henley and the Taieri mouth. It is now more or less covered with stunted bush and manuka scrub, and is resorted to by camping and picnic parties. Mount Puketapu lies near Palmerston, and commands a magnificent view of the surrounding country. There is no bush of any value left on it. Carey's Creek, near Waitati, contains some very pretty bush scenes, and is much resorted to by picnic parties and parties camping out. The part of Purakanui Native Reserve suggested to be resumed is on the west side of the Dunedin and Christchurch Railway, on that part known as the Purakanui Cliffs. It is nearly all under native bush, which has, however, been denuded of its larger trees. The Tautuku Peninsula is part of that area in the Tautuku Bush that has been set aside for landless Natives. The peninsula itself is nearly all clear land, but all the surrounding country is in virgin forest. The coast scenery here is rugged and beautiful, and fishing is carried on to some extent on both sides of the peninsula.

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