

The Crown Lands Rangers for the West Coast report as follows:—

The total number of sections inspected is 753, with a total area of 102,181 acres. Improvements to the value of £100,306 should have been made, and the value of improvements effected is £182,441, thus showing a surplus of £82,135 over and above the requirements of the Land Act. There were 193 defaulters, of whom seventy-nine are in default as to improvements and 114 as to residence. The cause of default as regards improvements is no doubt due to the somewhat heavy requirements of the Act at the end of the sixth year, and, as regards non-residence, to the fact that the selectors hold small areas of land in settled districts where they have comfortable homes and facilities for sending their children to schools, or because they are in good situations or employment which they are loth to leave. The want of road access and schools is no doubt also the cause of non-residence in many cases. The action of the Land Board in calling on defaulters to reside has had the result of bringing a good many on to their sections, and others again have sold out, good settlers having generally taken their places. We may here mention that we frequently experience great difficulty in deciding whether settlers are residing or not; they have built houses, and spent part of their time on the land and part of it away. Very often they happen to be absent when we call.

The settlers in the Waimarino district are fairly prosperous, though the severe winters in this locality retard their progress to a great extent. The dairying industry still flourishes here, and the settlers are about to take over the Waimarino Dairy Factory and Ohakune Creamery from the company that has been working them up to the present, and are going to work them on the co-operative principle, and they propose to establish additional creameries as inducement offers. There is still a good demand for land in this locality, and any sections offered for selection are readily taken up. In the Pohonui-a-tane (Huntermville Nos. 1, 2, and 3 Farm-homestead Associations) and Te Kapua (Palmerston North Knights of Labour and Sommerville Farm-homestead Associations) Blocks the settlers are making satisfactory progress. A dairy factory is now being built on the Turakina River, to be supplied by the Huntermville Nos. 1, 2, and 3 Farm-homestead Blocks. As there are few dray-roads in these blocks, each settler is to be provided with a hand separator, and the cream will be collected and packed to the factory until each section is given dray-road access. In the Palmerston Knights of Labour Block no dairying is done as yet, owing to the want of dray-roads. The settlers have, however, raised loans and formed all the branch roads into dray-roads, but the main road (Murray's Track) is still for the most part a bridle-track through the block. Some of the settlers in the Sommerville Farm-homestead Block are dairying in conjunction with the Taihape creamery, but the industry is far from being thoroughly established as yet.

In the Awarua Block the settlers seem to be doing well, and are improving their holdings in a satisfactory manner. Progress is, however, somewhat retarded by the want of dray-roads. They are raising loans for widening and metalling existing bridle-tracks, but comparatively slow progress has yet been made. The railway is now open as far as Mangaweka, which is a great boon to every one. The main road from Mangaweka to Taihape is now in good order, although almost impassable last winter. The settlement between Hautapu and Moawhango Rivers has been exceptionally successful, all the sections being resided upon, highly improved, and fully stocked. This is perhaps partly accounted for by the fact that dray-road access was given within two years of selection, which is a great inducement to successful settlement.

The Pohangina, Umutoi, Salisbury, Deleware, and Marton Nos. 1 and 2 Farm-homestead Blocks, which are situated between the Rangitikei and Pohangina Rivers, are now making good progress. Dairying is the chief industry, most of the holdings being too small for ordinary farming purposes. During the year two creameries have been established in central positions in the Salisbury and Umutoi Blocks; two more schools have also been erected. Altogether there is a marked increase in the general prosperity of these blocks, which is accounted for by the fact that most of the settlers have now got their holdings in good working-order, and also on account of the high prices they have received for their surplus stock during the year. Dray-road access is still badly wanted to some of the sections, especially on the east end of the Kawhatau Valley, Pourangaki, and Aputa Roads.

In the Malton and Palmerston Forest-reserve Farm-homestead Blocks there are still a number of non-residents, but the improvement conditions have been well complied with. In the Malton Block the holdings are only 100 acres each, which, on account of the high and exposed position of the settlement, is altogether too small an area to make a fair living from. They are now being allowed to increase their holdings by buying one another out, which is a step in the right direction. In the Palmerston Forest-reserve Block the default in residence is accounted for by the fact that most of the non-residents have small places nearer to the towns, but as the Land Board is now insisting on the settlers residing, or transferring to some one who will do so, it is only a matter of a few months until all the sections will be resided upon. The sections are of fair size, and when creameries have been established the settlers should do well. Nine settlers on the Ridge Road have at present only got horse-track access, and the widening of this road is urgently required.

Village Settlements.

The settlers in village settlements in our district are on the whole making good progress, and appear to do well and be contented.

In Raetihi satisfactory improvements have been made, and several substantial houses have been built. The sections are held by people engaged in business in the township, and used as homes, and also by persons working about in the district.

In Taihape satisfactory progress has also been made. Most of the settlers are working on the co-operative railway-works, and have taken up the sections for the purpose of making homes on them.