

1908.
NEW ZEALAND.

HOROWHENUA LAKE

(REPORT ON), TO DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST AND HEALTH RESORTS, BY MR. JAMES COWAN.

Return to an Order of the House of Representatives dated the 7th August, 1908.

Ordered, "That there be laid before this House the report on Horowhenua Lake prepared by Mr. James Cowan."—
(MR. FIELD.)

MR. JAMES COWAN to the SUPERINTENDENT, Department of Tourist and Health Resorts.

Wellington, 1st September, 1903.

SIR,—

Lake Horowhenua.

In accordance with your instructions, I visited Lake Horowhenua and adjacent localities of scenic interest last week.

The main road from Levin gives access to the Native Reserve (inalienable) surrounding Lake Horowhenua, but the public can only cross this reserve or use the lake on the sufferance of the Maoris. The local rowing club pays a small rent for the site of a boatshed on the shores of the lake, but has been unable to obtain a legal lease. For several years there has been more or less friction between the residents and the Natives over the question of the right of access to the lake, and, as this sheet of water is likely to become a favourite pleasure resort for Wellington people and other visitors, it is desirable that the present unsatisfactory state of affairs should be terminated.

Lake Horowhenua is two miles and a quarter in length by one mile greatest width. It is shallow: the greatest depth is not much over 20 ft. A series of soundings taken some time ago gave the average depth of the lake as about 7 ft. In the deepest part of the lake some large springs gush up and help to feed it. The outlet is by the Hokio Stream, which runs out to the sea (six miles), but which is much choked in places by flax and raupo. The circumference of Horowhenua is between nine and ten miles.

The most interesting features of the lake are the remarkable islets or defence mounds constructed about eighty years ago by the Muaupoko Tribe of Maoris as places of refuge from Te Rauparaha and his warriors of Ngatitooa and Ngatiraukawa. There are six of these islets—viz., Karapua, Namu-iti, Waikiekie, Roha-a-te-kawau, Waipata, and Puke-iti.

The largest island, Karapua, is separated from the mainland by a narrow winding channel, navigable only by canoes. The others lie at distances of from 50 to 100 yards from the shore, and are densely covered with vegetation—high flax, ti palms, koromiko, raupo, ngaio-trees, &c. The largest is perhaps a quarter of an acre in extent; the others are much smaller. One (Puke-iti), near the southern end of the lake, has almost disappeared, and is marked only by some high bushes of flax, &c. On these islands the Muaupoko tribespeople took up their residence when Rauparaha began to raid the district, but the lake-dwellings were all captured by the Ngatitooa musketeers with great slaughter—so great that, as the old Maoris describe it, the waters of the lake were red with blood, and the seagulls came in from the coast to feast on what the Ngatitooa left.

On Namu-iti isle, near the northern end of the lake, Rauparaha shut up a number of Muaupoko prisoners, killing some from day to day as required for food.

Some of these little islands are slowly decreasing in area, but the thick flax and other vegetation hold them together. The Maoris have been cutting the flax surrounding the lake, and if they are allowed to interfere with the islands the beauty of these interesting spots will be greatly marred, and the unprotected soil (which is only a foot or two above the level of the lake) will gradually wash away.

Another place of historic associations is the old Pipiriki Pa, on a grassy ridge on the mainland (western side of the lake). This pa was built about 1872 by the late Major Kemp and his Muaupoko for defence against the Ngatiraukawa Tribe in a quarrel over the ownership of the

land. The old Chief Te Rangimairehau, whom I took round the lake with me in the boat to point out and name the various localities, was in the pa in 1872–3 with a strong force of Muaupoko, who had about three hundred rifles. Two rows of totara palisading then encircled the pa, but all that remain now are the trenches and earthen parapets, on a hill about 50 ft. above the lake. This was for the protection of the women drawing water from the lake for the garrison. If this fortification were fenced in, so as to keep out cattle, it would be kept as it is for a long time to come, an interesting relic of the last intertribal dissensions in this district.

Most of the native forest surrounding the lake has been destroyed, but a good deal of light bush remains here and there, more particularly on the eastern side (that nearest Levin Township) and the south-eastern end. The bush is chiefly kahikatea, pukatea, tawa, some rimu, karaka, &c. High flax grows thickly along the margin of the lake. This bush is all within the Native reserve, but the Maoris have been selling the timber for some years past to a firm of sawmillers (Rowe and Bartholomew), of Weraroa, at a royalty on the trees used.

Near the southern end of the lake there is a fair-sized clump of milling-timber (the Poriro-a-te-Wera bush) still standing. Some of the biggest trees have been felled, but there is still time to save the rest of the bush, which forms a fine background to that end of the lake. The western or seaward face of the mainland is clear of bush except in some places close to the lake-waters: this vegetation should be carefully preserved.

There are several Maori settlements, belonging to the Muaupoko and Ngatiapa Tribes, on the shores of the lake, and a number of canoes are in use. One canoe, at the northern end of the lake, is a large one, an old war-canoe, capable of carrying fifty or sixty men. The Native life, the canoeing, &c., should enhance the interest of the lake in the eyes of visitors, and if care is taken to guarantee the Maoris their rights of fishing, &c., they could, no doubt, be induced to co-operate with the Europeans in preserving the attractive features of the place for all time.

The Maoris derive a considerable portion of their food-supplies—eels, kakahi, shellfish, ducks, &c.—from the lake, and have large eel-weirs in the Hokio Stream. Flounders come up the Hokio from the sea, and are caught near the outlet of the lake.

Recommendations.

I would suggest that steps be taken to reserve the native vegetation on all the eastern and southern foreshore of the lake for a distance of about four miles, from the vicinity of the Kaweu Bush, near the north end, down to the Hokio Stream, and including the Poriro-a-te-Wera Bush, at the southern end.

This is all included within the Native reserve, which has a width on this side varying from 15 to 20 chains. The islands and the Pipiriki Pa site should also be reserved.

The land could, no doubt, be taken under the proposed new Act dealing with scenic reserves.

The Maoris should, at the same time, be guaranteed their present rights of fishing for eels, dredging with their rou-kakahi for the shellfish which abound on the bottom of the lake, and of snaring and shooting wild ducks, &c.

I understand that Te Rangimairehau, the chief of the Ngatihine Hapu of Muaupoko, is agreeable to some such arrangement being come to. He tells me that he thinks the bush, &c., should be preserved for future generations, and he laments the disappearance of the native birds through the destruction of the forest on the lake-shores. Tui and several other native birds are still heard around the lake, but their numbers are thinning with the felling of the bush.

It is worth while recalling the fact that in 1886 the late Major Kemp (Kepa te Rangihwinui), who on his father's side was chief of Muaupoko, proposed, in connection with the sale to the Government of the site of the present Township of Levin, that 100 acres of the Native land fronting the lake should be set apart as a public garden and recreation-ground. This suggestion, unfortunately, was never given effect to, and the public are at any time liable to be denied the privilege even of access to the Levin people's boat-shed on the lake-side.

The Ngatiapa Tribe, of whom Wilson Hunia is the principal man, also live on the shores of the lake. I did not see Wilson Hunia, but I was told that he was sure to disagree with whatever Muaupoko did, and that it is not much use arguing with two factions: the best plan is to set the reserve apart, and explain to the Maoris afterwards that their ancestral rights will not be interfered with beyond forbidding them to destroy the bush or other vegetation.

J. COWAN.

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