

CATTLE.

The cattle purchased during the past year numbered some 550, consisting of steers, cows, and heifers. The first two lots were brought by a scow, but the last herd was driven overland to the ground, the animals arriving in better condition than those sent *via* the sea.

The stockmen, since taking charge of the cattle, from October last, have been assiduous in their duties, and no losses have been reported. I anticipate a substantial profit at the clearance sale of stock to be held on the 19th May next. The presence of the cattle has been of great benefit to the land, having consolidated it greatly in many ways. Even if the Department only realised the cost of stock, the experiment would have proved successful, not only for the above reason, but also on account of the advertisement the property has obtained through the public seeing the excellent condition the cattle are now in. A more suitable object-lesson could not be found as to the ultimate value of the lands.

SURVEYS.

Three survey parties have been at work during the past year, and their energies have been fully taxed. Before any subdivisional scheme could be drawn out, some 140 miles of existing drains and stop-banks had to be traversed. I am pleased to say that very little of the existing drains was wasted.

Up to the 31st March, 1910, some 16,881 acres has been subdivided into 106 rural sections, 45 township sections, 30 suburban sections, and 19 reserves for various purposes.

The plans are almost complete, and a tracing for photo-lithographic purposes has also been made.

In addition to the above, many of the Crown awards were also cut out, and some ten miles of road on the eastern side of the Piako River was also laid out to give access to Turua, Paeroa, &c. Some of these roads were taken under warrant, and others under the Public Works Act.

LAND NOW READY FOR SELECTION.

An area of 16,398 acres is to be offered about the middle of May next, and the valuation of same totals £75,660.

This is very satisfactory, and is a fair value in every instance. I am very sanguine of a record number of applications being received for all sections, especially as the land is to be opened under the optional system.

As you are aware, all the works are not complete, but will be so by the spring. The fact of the Department maintaining and improving all drains, &c., for two years on the area to be opened should prove very satisfactory to the fortunate selectors. The country has also been greatly improved by the stock running on the same.

The financial aspect proves that your early expressed opinion has been fully justified, and that the Dominion has a very valuable asset in the Hauraki Plains.

LAND PROPOSED TO BE OPENED.

Regarding land that can be made available during the current financial year, I estimate the area at, say, 12,000 acres, which will come in the following order: 4,300 acres on eastern side of Piako River; 2,000 acres in the locality of Waikaka; and 5,700 acres at extreme southern end of Hauraki Plains. Preparations are in progress for the suitable draining of these areas, and a great deal of the work is now in hand. These areas are all good land, and should command keen competition. The first-mentioned area will be ready by late spring, and the others by early autumn. Of course, everything depends upon a good season being experienced for the drainage operations.

MAIN ARTERIAL ROADS.

The roads shown on the plan do not cover all those necessary in this direction, but I consider it better that such proposals should be shown from year to year, as many circumstances have to be taken into consideration in laying them off.

CARRIAGE OF STORES AND TIMBER.

During the past year the Department purchased the s.s. "Hauraki," and this vessel has been steadily engaged carrying timber and all stores to the various works on the Hauraki Plains, from both Thames and Auckland.

Three oil-launches are also engaged on the various works, and are in active commission every day on the rivers and streams.

PRINCIPAL WORKS PROPOSED.

The principal works to be carried out during the current financial year are as follows:—

1. The completion of stop-banks, flood-gates, culverts, bridges, wharves, and roads immediately connected with the area to be opened next May.
2. The continuance of dredging operations on Maukoro-Waitakaruru Canal, this work being the key to the whole scheme.
3. The construction of overflow on Puhanga Canal, which work affects the ultimate success of drainage-works.
4. The formation of roads between Kerepeehi and Turua to open up further Crown lands.
5. The construction of outfalls through Crown lands to enable the Waitoa Drainage Board to carry out their drainage proposals. This work will also open up our own country for settlement.
6. The further construction of stop-banks along the Piako River, together with necessary wharves, &c.