

The Selwyn Group, of 3 runs, containing a gross area of 36,800 acres, of which 13,000 acres consist of barren and worthless country.

The Waipara and Amuri Group, of 2 runs, containing together a gross area of 235,500 acres, of which 133,000 acres consist of birch forest and barren country.

The following brief general description of the country contained in each of the above-mentioned groups will convey a sufficiently reliable impression of its character :—

THE MACKENZIE GROUP.

The area included in what is known as the "Mackenzie country" is nearly the whole of the basin of the Waitaki River north of its confluence with the Ahuriri River, at the back of which are mountain-ranges rising to 10,000 ft. Within this country is an area of 835,000 acres, now held for pastoral purposes, the leases of which will expire in February, 1912; but in this area are included mountain-tops and absolutely bare country amounting to at least 242,000 acres. The major portion of the run-country lies over 3,000 ft. in altitude. The approximate area under 3,000 ft. which will be available for lease is about 300,000 acres. As the Ahuriri River joins the Waitaki River at an altitude of 1,168 ft., and this point lies south of the Mackenzie country, it is evident that no part of the Mackenzie Plains is under 1,200 ft.

From the physical configuration of the country, it is inevitable that it should vary in character: hence the rolling downs, high table-lands, and stony plains, with steep gorges running into the heart of the Alps. The soil is generally poor and light, and, except in a few places, incapable of sustained cultivation. The snowfalls vary from 2 ft. to 6 ft. in depth. As regards shelter, the comparatively low downs and plains are worse off than the higher broken country. The country which consists of many steep spurs with northerly aspect is far safer than the plains and downs that offer little obstruction to the snow-laden winds; for on the former may be found facings comparatively free from snow, while the plains and downs lie under a uniform mantle of snow for weeks occasionally. In this respect country such as that included in the Glentanner Run—steep, gorgy, easterly-running spurs of Ben Ohau Range—is ideal. The rolling Balmoral country, with its easy slopes—which appear an attraction to the summer visitor—and the country wholly on the flat, are death-traps in bad winters. Low-lying country in the Mackenzie Basin is therefore no criterion of safety; nor, considering the quantity of barren land included in the runs, is the area included in a run any criterion of its carrying-capacity.

It is not too much to allege that more has been written and spoken during the last few months concerning the Mackenzie country than probably of any other pastoral area in the Dominion. Local evidence as to the real character of the country is unreliable, for it is contradictory. There are the pessimists and the optimists, the interested and the disinterested, both equally dogmatic in the expression of their views. As a matter of fact, the Mackenzie country is not nearly so dangerous a place, nor nearly so good, as it is represented to be. It is a deceptive country; the snow losses for which it is responsible prove that. The snowstorm which occurred in 1895 was responsible for the loss of 179,000 sheep. This loss was abnormally heavy, owing in a large measure to carelessness. But, again, in 1903, when the runs were worked under more modern methods, several thousands of sheep succumbed to snow. Again, in 1908, further slight losses from snow occurred. All of which goes to prove that the Mackenzie country is essentially pastoral country; unreliable as regards climate; in no sense adapted for subdivision in small areas by men having no capital. Subdivided into small areas, capable of carrying moderate-sized flocks—say, from 5,000 to 9,000 sheep—not only would the percentage of lambs be greater, but the losses would be much reduced, and the country increased in carrying-capacity.