

There are some people who think that this grub will gradually devastate the whole country. That is not my opinion, because, as soon as this barren country is left, and one comes into good land, the ravages of this grub cease; and I think the reason is that where the tussock is regularly burnt there is no protection for the grub against the winter frosts, and naturally it will be killed at this point. I saw one place where it had left the flats and gone for a short distance up the hill; but this was on a poor piece of land where the same conditions existed as on the flats. There is on some of the flats—the more moist ones—where the silver tussock is all dead, a fair sprinkling of blue tussock coming up.

I do not know if anything could be done to stop the ravages of this grub; but I think it would do a certain amount of good if runholders would do their best to have all the tussocks carefully burnt over a good width of country round the fringe of the ground that this grub is devastating.

I understand the Government is going to experiment on patches of this country, to find suitable grasses for regrassing it. I am afraid it will be very difficult to find grass that will strike on this cold dry country. I would suggest experimenting with scrub or bushes of some kind—anything that would give a slight shelter to the grasses till they got a start—or planting trees. Some of this barren country will grow fruit-trees, and the water for irrigation purposes is very convenient.

Plantation, &c., Reserves.

Through the most of the Mackenzie country runs that we have inspected there are a great many plantation and other reserves. These reserves when first made were let by tender to the highest tenderer. I think this is a great mistake. I would suggest that on whatever run there is a reserve the lessee should have the first refusal at a fair rental. My reason for saying that the present system is objectionable is that these reserves are selected on the most favoured places, generally good winter facings, and the fact of some of them being fenced in may seriously damage for winter grazing a very large tract of good winter country, through stopping the regular and natural movements of the sheep on a sunny facing. I know of one that is particularly damaging to the run it is on.

Stock-camps.

I would recommend that, before re-leasing these runs, stock-camps should be reserved at all necessary places. If the Mackenzie County Council, which knows the local conditions, were consulted in this matter, they would be able to give valuable information.

Roading.

I may add, in conclusion, in connection with the Mackenzie runs, that all homestead-sites on the different suggested subdivisions, as recommended, will be practically on present good roads. There will practically be no special money required for roading, and if the fourths or even fifths of these rents are returned to the public bodies, as at present, on a small-grazing-run system of tenure, all the tenants will be able to have carriage-drives to their homesteads by the time the money ceases.

Rabbits.

Fifteen years ago the rabbit had practically taken possession of the Mackenzie Basin, ruining many runholders, and permanently destroying some of the finest grasses on some of the runs. On our inspection of the country we saw very slight indications of the rabbit. He is now absolutely conquered. The runholder has now no dread of him. Systematic poisoning and the natural enemy have done the work. The present expense of keeping rabbits under is hardly worth mentioning.

THE ASHBURTON COUNTY.

Before proceeding to give my views on the runs in the Ashburton County, I might state that, with the exception of Mesopotamia, I have not previously been over any of these runs; and, although the general configuration of this country, and also the grasses thereon, are very similar to the Mackenzie country, yet there are always certain local conditions, such as certain belts of country subject to heavier falls of snow than other parts, and various other matters that the stranger may fail to note. These things can only be known correctly by the man who has lived in the district for some considerable time. Therefore I speak with more hesitation in connection with this country than when dealing with the Mackenzie-country runs, amongst which I have spent a lifetime. In fact, I think, in a work of this sort, it would at all times be a great advantage to have men on the Commission with local knowledge of the country inspected. It is difficult enough for the man who has a thorough practical knowledge of this class of country to conscientiously satisfy himself that he has made no mistake; but for any one without previous knowledge, practical or otherwise, of this class of country to presume to be a judge of it, in a quick and cursory inspection such as we have had to make is, in my opinion, absurd.

The most material difference I note between the Mackenzie country and the country we have inspected in the Ashburton County is that this country is more confined than the Mackenzie. The gorges are considerably narrower, and the sun has not the same power on this country, although the configuration is similar. Here, unfortunately, the facings in most parts that lie well to the sun are so much overshadowed by the higher ranges at the back that the supposed sunny facings do not get the amount of sun that, on first inspection, one would think they did. In short, generally speaking, this country is not so well favoured as the Mackenzie. These remarks do not apply to Double Hill Station.

The following are the details I wish to bring before you with regard to the runs in the Ashburton County:—

Runs 111A and 110B, known as Mesopotamia Station.

All the good frontage of these runs are College reserves, and it is quite impossible to deal with them separately. I would recommend that either the College or the State take over the whole, when the country could be dealt with to advantage in possibly three or four runs.