

been conducted on a small scale on the pumice lands of the Hot Lakes District in order to test their suitability for a number of varieties of trees. According to official reports* from Messrs. G. Mueller, then Commissioner of Crown Lands for Auckland Province, and R. H. Reaney, Road Surveyor, the above experiments were successful and pointed to the suitability of the vast pumice-area for afforestation. Although up to the year 1896 there had been abundant planting, both public and private, and though there were several enthusiastic tree-planters well versed in the requirements of their own districts, there was no one who could claim a thorough knowledge of the colony as a whole, with its manifold soil conditions and climates. Nor had the planting referred to above been carried on according to the requirements of modern European forestry. The Government, therefore, had a difficult problem to face, nor could it be solved forthwith without a good deal of experimental work. Even in those countries where forestry has been prosecuted on a most extensive scale for a long period there is still ample room for experiment.

Notwithstanding the above, a great deal of knowledge was self-evident from the plantations. It should not have been a hard matter to have learnt what trees were almost certain to thrive in any district, what species would ensure a short rotation, or what it would be risky to plant. Knowledge derived from European or American books and practice was of little moment, and suggestive only compared with the lessons to be learned from the existing plantations. Had these plantations been sufficiently studied the mistakes cited below would have been avoided and the State plantations to-day have been far more valuable.

In 1896 the late Mr. H. J. Matthews was appointed Chief Forester, under the Surveyor-General, who was head of the branch and responsible for its management. Yet, as pointed out in the Report on State Afforestation for 1910–11, the actual inauguration of the scheme was due to Mr. Matthews, who “had the sole technical control of the tree-planting operations” until his unexpected death in 1909. But not only had Mr. Matthews to busy himself with nursery and tree-planting operations, but he had to design the necessary buildings, lay out the various grounds, make roads, and carry on farming operations with the accompanying selection of stock. In short, he had to plan and direct the most extensive operations, involving the expenditure of large sums and the employment and management of many men. Obviously, much of his earlier work was of an experimental nature, and there were failures as well as successes. One part of Mr. Matthews’s work, however, stands out conspicuously, and deserves unqualified praise. We refer to the nurseries and their management, which are a striking testimony to his ability and skill. Further, he early chose young men of promise as his assistants, who entered into their work with enthusiasm, so that by degrees there developed a capable staff trained in the technique of nursery and plantation work.

Among the first work was the establishment of nurseries at Tapanui and Eweburn, in the South Island, and at Whakarewarewa, in the North Island. Later on, other nurseries were formed at Hanmer, Kurow, and Starborough, in the South Island; and at Ruatangata, near Whangarei, in the North Island. In the neighbourhood of these nurseries, Kurow excepted, the various plantations have been established, now amounting in all to 18,870 acres containing about 44,000,000 trees. The above nurseries are all in operation excepting Starborough, Kurow, and Ruatangata, all of which were closed and planting operations stopped owing to the alleged unsuitability of the localities in question for afforestation.

The unfortunate death of Mr. Matthews in 1909 led to changes in management. The office of Chief Forester was allowed to lapse, and, instead, a separate officer was appointed to control the forestry operations of each Island respectively, under the title of Superintending Nurseryman, Mr. H. A. Goudie being appointed to the North and Mr. R. G. Robinson to the South Island.

* Report of the Department of Lands for 1896–97, pp. 110–11.