

As we proceed southward through the Mangonui County from near Lake Ohia there is a marked change in the character of the gum-bearing lands. The extensive swampy areas have given place to the shallow clay gum lands, and this characteristic generally prevails as far south as the gum has been found. However, there are in various localities in some of the southern districts considerable areas of gum-bearing swamps; these are chiefly to be found in the Counties of Whangarei, Hobson, Otamatea, and Waitemata.

The shallow clay lands referred to are the winter fields of the gum-digger. On them the gum is found at depths ranging from a few inches to 4 ft. Thousands of acres of the shallow clay gumfields from the tops of the ridges to edges of the gullies have been turned over by the spade of the gum-digger, while in the gullies where the gum lies deeper, deep holes have been sunk of various shapes and sizes.

These shallow clay gum lands are of different classes. There is the white pipeclay land, with sometimes an underlying layer of cement. Such fields produce good white gum in the pipeclay and brown gum in and under the cement. Then there are the stiff red and yellow clay lands, which also carry the best-quality white gum. There is the grayish clay land, usually occupying the flat lands and the lower slopes of the hillsides. Again, there is the sandstone formation of the Kaipara and Northern Wairoa districts, which carries the gum generally under the sandstone slips. This class of country produces the best-quality white gum as well as some of the poorer grades of white.

THE ORIGIN OF THE KAURI-GUM RESERVES.

In the early days of settlement in New Zealand the kauri-gum industry was the mainstay of the pioneer settlers of the North of Auckland district. In those days of isolation the district possessed neither roads nor railways, and communication by sea was irregular and unreliable. Then there were no freezing-works nor dairy factories, and the cream-separator had not been thought of. Under such conditions the kauri-gum proved a good friend to the struggling farmer, and enabled him to support himself and his family until better times should arrive and his farm be able to support him.

Besides the small farmers there were a great many men who followed gum-digging as their regular occupation, and so it was that year after year the output of gum steadily increased until in the year 1891 it had reached 8,388 tons, representing the value of £437,056. Kauri-gum then ranked fifth in value of our total exports, and became recognized as one of the most important staple products of New Zealand.

The gum-digging in those days was carried on over the vast areas of unoccupied Crown and other lands, which were then of little value.

It was about thirty years ago that a small band of immigrants from south-eastern Europe, principally Dalmatians and Croats, arrived in New Zealand and found their way on to the northern gumfields. At first these immigrants were few in number, but, being men accustomed to long hours of labour and frugal habits of living, were soon able to make enough money to enable them to return to their native land comparatively rich men, and thus to spread the fame of the New Zealand gumfields.

Following these pioneers soon a steady stream of the young and vigorous sons of Austria began to flow towards New Zealand, and eventually on to the gumfields, and in the course of a few years it was estimated that there were fully five thousand of these men on the fields. This influx resulted in an over-production of kauri-gum, and a slump in the industry followed, which was very keenly felt by the small settlers and original gum-diggers.

In the year 1898, in order to protect the interests of the pioneer gum-diggers and to some extent to check this influx, the Kauri-gum Industry Act was made law. As a result of the Act an area of over a quarter million acres of Crown land was permanently set apart as kauri-gum reserves. The Act provided that all British subjects and naturalized British subjects should, by the payment of an annual license fee of 5s., be entitled to dig for gum on any kauri-gum reserve or on any unoccupied Crown land, while in the case of