

JOHN PAUSINA, a Gum-buyer who had lived at Waiharera for eight years or so.

To Mr. Greville.] He knew the swamp between Rio and Stony Creek, and thought it might contain a little gum, but was useless for any digging until drained. This, he was of opinion, it was the duty of the Government to do, and the land could then be safely opened for farming purposes. In its present state the swamp was useless to digger and farmer. He could not say if it contained much timber, but thought it would be expensive to drain.

To Mr. Stafford.] In regard to fires on swamps, in some cases digging could not be done until they had been fired. On the whole, the Opoe field was a fairly good one, and the principal seat of the gum industry for Waiharera. He did not consider it practicable to dig on the face.

PONI KOISOVICH, a single man, and a Digger with six years' experience at Waiharera.

To Mr. Greville.] He knew the Opoe field well, and agreed with former witness that the swamp between Rio and Stony Creek should be opened up for farming purposes, as in its present state it was useless to any one. He knew the sand was encroaching very fast, and could show one place where it had travelled over 200 yards since he came into the field.

To Mr. Stafford.] In regard to the firing of the swamps, he thought nothing should be done in that direction between December and March, as there is always the danger in very dry weather of the fire going right down to the cement bottom and burning every piece of gum. He knew very serious damage was being done in that manner.

WAIHARERA, SATURDAY, 4TH APRIL, 1914.

JAMES STEED, Gum-digger, of Waiharera, and a married man.

To Mr. Greville.] From his experience of twenty-two years he knew the nature and extent of the Opoe Gum Reserve, and was of opinion that it was not all gum-bearing, there being portions in areas of from 50 to 100 acres in different parts that were free of gum and fit for settlement. He knew the swamp between Rio and Stony Creek Crossing, about four miles long, and of considerable area, and thought it might be set aside for farming purposes. It was called the Motutangi Swamp, and should be drained by the Government and then thrown open for digging on a royalty charge. It would be a valuable field after drainage, but it was work no private person could undertake. If opened in that manner no fires should be allowed, but he did not think it would pay the diggers to fill up the potholes if paying a royalty. He did not think it a feasible plan at all. He knew the "Big Flat," about 800 acres, south of Bunkall's, and it was gum-bearing. Selwyn's Flat was also gum-bearing, though he had not done much digging there himself. Another flat to the north of that, known locally as Stony Crossing Flat, was also gum-bearing, and should be retained for the diggers. He knew of men who had made big wages there during the past month. The land about Kaimarama Lake was gum-bearing, and he knew that thousands of pounds' worth of gum had been taken out of it in the past. The stretch of country towards Waipapakauri was gum-bearing generally, though small areas in different parts could be found non-gum-bearing and fit for cultivation. There were many such small areas from Parengarenga right down to Waipapakauri non-gum-bearing, but hardly in sufficient quantity or extent to be made payable for agricultural purposes.

To Mr. Stewart.] The sand-encroachment was becoming serious. He could show members of the Commission some small lakes that he had shot around a few years ago now lost in the sand, and other localities where the sand had encroached two miles.

To Mr. Greville.] If the Motutangi Swamp was drained and cut up into lots of from 5 to 10 acres he did not think the diggers would compete for them. From the Motutangi Swamp up to the hills there were rush basins containing gum, and he had at different times done spearing there himself.

FREDERICK JAMES HAGGER, Gum-buyer, of Kaimaumu, where he had lived for twelve years.

To Mr. Greville.] He had known the country for thirty-five years, and was probably the oldest gum-buyer in New Zealand. The past year, and so far this year, had been record years in the gum business, because the poor earthy gum that had formerly been rejected was now of marketable value, and consequently the gum-digging industry was more profitable all round. He knew the lower part of the Motutangi Swamp to be a profitable one in summer, and had bought very large quantities of gum from that locality. Every basin of the swamp was gum-bearing, but the upper part of the swamp was barren of gum.

To Mr. Stafford.] In his opinion the firing of the peat swamps was regrettable, involving the destruction of the gum-dust, which may eventually prove to be of even greater value than the gum itself. He had sent samples of peaty earth to San Francisco for analysis, and was certain it contained essential oils of great commercial value. If the mode of treatment was satisfactory any peat swamp might be taken in the face and the soil treated, and he was quite certain there was great economic value in it. Only fifteen years ago the purest gum-dust was rejected, now even the peat soil was valuable. Personally, he had great faith in this new development, but apparently our knowledge of it had to advance before anything very practical would be the outcome. Unless something of the sort came about the gumfields would ultimately become a breeding-place for noxious weeds. He hardly considered that the cutting-up and balloting for the lands fit for cultivation would altogether meet the case.

To Mr. Stewart.] The sand-drift, at its present rate of progress, must in course of time wipe out the whole peninsula.