

General.

One important matter in connection with the preservation of our scenic reserves that requires attention is fencing. At present, whilst there are such tremendously urgent calls on the public purse, this matter cannot be considered, but as soon as funds permit the most important small reserves should be fenced; for if they are going to be a free grazing-ground for stock their eventual destruction is certain, and their reservation has been in vain. Though stock should be excluded from the large reserves as well, the damage they receive is not nearly so serious as in the case of the small reserves.

The appointment of local Inspectors for those reserves in the more populous districts is an innovation that should prove very satisfactory, as would-be offenders are far less likely to commit offences if they know there is some one in the locality who may at any time come upon them. A man always on the spot has also opportunities for getting local residents to take an interest and delight in these reserves which are set apart for the enjoyment of the public.

The Forest and Bird Protection Society is proving a valuable aid in looking after our various reserves. The *School Journal* is also a valuable auxiliary, as in it are often to be found short articles on and references to the beauties and the value of our forests; and there is no doubt that child readers, acquiring from its pages an appreciation and understanding of the forest, will soon exercise an influence for its protection that probably their parents at present do not.

E. PHILLIPS TURNER,
Inspector of Scenic Reserves.

REPORT ON SCENIC RESERVES, QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND.

During the greater part of the year just past matters in connection with the above reserves have been of a normal character, though, owing to the exceptionally dry season—the driest this locality has ever experienced—much anxiety has been felt owing to the danger of fires being started in or spreading into the reserves. On two occasions the latter, unfortunately, occurred, and had it not been for a providential fall of rain a few hours after the starting of the fires the damage done must have been infinitely greater than was the case. I cannot too highly commend the care and thoughtfulness shown by the majority of campers and visitors in their carefulness in thoroughly extinguishing their camp fires previous to leaving, and in otherwise showing their appreciation of these beautiful spots. Neither can I condemn too strongly the action of some of the adjoining occupiers in their practice of starting fires adjacent to the reserves, taking no precautions as to spread of same, and altogether showing a total disregard as to the welfare of the reserves.

The number of visitors to the reserves during the past year was above the average, Ship Cove and Kumutoto Bay being the favourite resorts, the others being practically neglected, due chiefly, I believe, to unsuitable landings or lack of fresh water.

Several of the reserves suffered to quite a noticeable extent from the effects of the severe drought that existed for such an extended period, manuka, rangiora, and large birch trees dying from lack of rain. It is a matter of great congratulation that we have come through such a season with as little damage from fire as has occurred. Once a fire has secured a firm hold on this class of country it is practically impossible to deal with it, owing to the dense and tangled nature of the undergrowth. The amount of dead timber on the ground, and the manner in which the fire burns in under the roots of the standing timber, taken in conjunction with the prevailing steep nature of the country and absence of water, renders fire-fighting an impossibility.

Kaipupu and Kumutoto Reserves were both damaged by fire spreading into them from adjoining lands during the period of drought. In the former case the fire originated on Crown lands some distance from the boundary of the reserve, crossed the dividing-ridge, and crept down hill, destroying some 20 acres of bush; in the latter it started on private property immediately adjoining the boundary, drove across and down country, burning about 6 acres. Had it not been for a timely fall of rain a few hours after the commencement of the fires the two reserves must have suffered considerable damage.

Native birds appear to be holding their own in fair numbers. I have noticed quite a number of pigeons fairly distributed through the whole of the reserves, being particularly numerous in Ship Cove. Ducks are occasionally to be seen along the foreshores, while an odd ground-robin is sometimes to be met with. Blumine Island is the only locality where these friendly little birds are to be seen in any numbers. This I believe is due to the fact that the stoat and weasel have not yet reached there. On one occasion last winter I saw four of the latter on the beach of Kumutoto Bay engaged in a desperate encounter.

During the course of the year I have had to warn several parties against landing on the reserves with firearms. On one occasion while anchored in Ship Cove a party well armed, and accompanied by dogs, put in an appearance. Immediately upon sighting my launch they took a hasty departure. On another occasion I found a party already landed with dogs, and firearms in their possession. These were duly warned off, and the matter reported to the District Office.

On the 25th December a unique and interesting ceremony was held at Ship Cove, being a religious service in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the first sermon preached in New Zealand by the Rev. Samuel Marsden. Unfortunately the elements were not propitious in the earlier part of the day; consequently the attendance was limited, though appreciative.

During the course of the past year I visited the scenic reserves on 142 different occasions, varying the time of visit from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., making many excursions to the tops of the ranges, and often anchoring by them for the night. I believe my efforts meet with a fair measure of success, though occasionally I have reason to believe a few irresponsibles do secure an advantage over me. Previous to my taking charge it was the common practice for any one requiring rough timber or firewood to procure it from the reserves; I am pleased to be able to report that this stopped in the first few months of my taking charge.

H. TURNER,
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