

MINERALS OTHER THAN GOLD AND SILVER.

The market price for scheelite was too low to permit the scheelite-mines to be operated during the year.

The blast furnace at Onakaka was in operation for about a month, and 630 tons of pig iron were produced. Work was stopped pending the construction of a better means of transport between the wharf and the blast furnace.

The search for petroleum in the Taranaki District is again being prosecuted. A well is being drilled at Tarata, and another at Moturoa, and expert oil geologists are searching for a favourable structure or structures in the vicinity of those localities. Similar field-work is being carried out in the Gisborne-East Cape district.

COAL-MINING.

The output of several classes of coal mined in each inspection district is summarized as follows :—

Class of Coal.	Output of Coal during 1924.				Total Output to the End of 1924.
	Northern District (North Island).	West Coast District (South Island).	Southern District (South Island).	Total.	
Bituminous and sub-bituminous	Tons. 129,927	Tons. 955,077	Tons. ...	Tons. 1,085,004	Tons. 36,938,671
Brown	507,598	35,173	296,246	839,017	18,990,027
Lignite	...	362	158,824	159,186	3,675,650
Totals for 1924 ...	637,525	990,612	455,070	2,083,207	59,604,348
Totals for 1923 ...	633,865	849,029	486,940	1,969,834	57,521,141

There were 2,083,207 tons of coal produced during 1924, as against 1,969,834 tons during the previous year, an increase of 113,373 tons. This increase was wholly of high-class bituminous coals, of which the output was 149,307 tons greater than in 1923. There were small decreases, 21,343 tons and 14,591 tons, in the outputs of brown and lignite coals. During the year the coal-mines in the Dominion have been free from any serious industrial trouble, and ample supplies of coal have been available for all the requirements of the country. Many of the mines are finding difficulty in marketing their outputs; on this account, and as 674,483 tons of coal were imported from abroad, mostly from Australia, a Board has been appointed to investigate and report as to how far imported coals can be replaced by New Zealand coals on the Government railways.

My attention has from time to time been called by my staff to serious losses of coal as the result of the bad methods which were followed years ago when the mines were being opened out. The number of fires which have occurred in coal-mines has been rather alarming, and steps were taken last year to obtain parliamentary authority to require the owners of coal-mines to take suitable steps in future so as to more effectively control fires which may arise from time to time. There is still, however, a necessity for strengthening the existing law so as to enable more effective means to be taken to ensure that coal-mines shall be worked by such methods as to enable a very much larger quantity of coal to be extracted in future than has been the case in some of the mines in the past. Suitable provisions will be drafted, and I hope to be able to introduce same during this session of Parliament, in order that they may be considered during the recess and passed into law next session.

INVESTIGATIONS, NEW ZEALAND COALS.

With a view to the utilization of much of the slack from our collieries, for which at present there is no profitable market, an experimental briquetting-press was purchased from Yeadon and Son, Leeds, and installed at the Dominion Laboratory early in 1924. A series of preliminary tests showed that New Zealand brown coals cannot be briquetted without a binder, but that the lignites and possibly some of the bituminous coals can be so briquetted. A large amount of work has been carried out on the brown coals to determine the most suitable binder