

The development of the Whareponga Blocks, nearly 7,000 acres in extent, between the beginning of June, 1931, and the end of April, 1932, to the point of clearing, fencing, and carrying over 8,000 sheep and a large number of cattle is a record for the Native-land-development schemes of the Dominion in scope, speed to production point, efficiency, and economy. This may be allowed even if the advantage in ready-made pasture is taken into account. The result reflects great credit on the local organization, which has its headquarters at Ruatoria and on the Registrar, Mr. Harvey, who assumed the duties of supervisor. Mr. Fenn, branch manager of the Waiapu Farmers' Co. and secretary of the Dairy Company, was in charge of the local branch administering the details of the Maori unemployment grant. He was assisted by Mr. H. Poananga, a temporary employee of the Native Department. The foreman of the Whareponga group of blocks was Hamuera Ngarimu, himself a large owner in these blocks and the son of the chief of the sub-tribe which owned the territory.

(d) MOHAKA.

This scheme was authorized on the 15th January, 1930, being the first in the Tairāwhiti Maori Land District under the legislation of 1929. The consolidation of the interests acquired by the Crown in the Mohaka blocks and the definition of awards of land to the Crown and to the Natives, who had not sold, were advanced sufficiently under the Mohaka consolidation scheme to enable the Department to provide assistance for improving the Native holdings. The area brought under the scheme was 10,006 acres of Mohaka and 1,200 acres of Waipapa. Subdivisions of Putere and Waihua were added in April, 1931, bringing the total up to 13,763 acres.

The Mohaka blocks presented many difficulties in development. They were many years ago leased to Europeans, who grazed sheep and cattle thereon. Whatever clearing and grassing had been done by such lessees had reverted to fern, manuka, and tauhinu, while blackberry had taken possession of the land on either side of the main road, more particularly the Waipapa Block, on which Mohaka Village is situated. Pumice predominated on the flats and terraces and easy hill lands, while papa outcrops were the order on all steep country. The hill country was riven in places by gullies, which were an obstacle to connected improvement and economical subdivision. The lands suitable for dairying were strung along the main road in such fashion as to create allotments of peculiar shapes and sizes.

The Mohaka Natives had commenced dairying in a small way before the scheme was launched, and were anxious to obtain assistance under the Act of 1929. The policy adopted in regard to the scheme was the same as in regard to Ruatoki, Opape, or Ranana, where the owners were already in occupation and farming and required further assistance to recondition pastures and fences, to extend their cultivations, and to improve their herds. In the case of Mohaka as in that of Ranana blackberry was an added obstacle, but ragwort had not yet become prominent. The unusual combination of pumice and papa soils on the scheme necessitated special treatment and methods. It was absolutely necessary to plough and cultivate intensively all low-lying lands, if not for the control of blackberry then for cropping preparatory to sowing in permanent pasture. The realization of the prevalence of pumice on the terraces and easy hills led to a great extension of ploughing and cultivation, and compelled the liberal use of manures and of heavy stock for consolidating the pastures. The plough and disk harrows became the chief implements in the development of the Mohaka lands.

The summary of items of expenditure for the first three months of the scheme is eloquent of the policy of rendering assistance in the form of material, seed, posts and battens and wire, manure, implements and stock, and as little as possible in the form of paid labour, which was demanded as a contribution from those whose lands were affected. In the total expenditure to the 31st March, 1931, £5,653, the wages paid were £370 for fencing, draining, and scrub-cutting. The ploughing with the after cultivation was done by contract let to a man who owned a tractor and tractor implements, as the Mohaka people had few implements and horses. Until unemployment measures for relief of distress caused by drought, by the Hawke's Bay earthquake, and the depression, were rendered necessary, the Maori settlers of Mohaka showed the same spirit of self-reliance as those of Ruatoki or of North Auckland. The combination of those three factors, however, pressed so heavily on them that relief had to be provided in the form of development contracts, subsidized from unemployment funds. The work included scrub-cutting and bushfelling, the area involved being estimated at 2,500 acres; splitting 3,000 posts and 29,000 battens and packing the same on to fencing boundaries; and the erection of 260 chains of fences. The estimated cost was £1,770, and the subsidy allotted £450, while the number of men employed was eighty-one. Other development-work has been subsidized from time to time.

At the 31st March, 1932, the total expenditure on this scheme reached £17,691, reduced to £17,178 by unemployment subsidies, £447, and miscellaneous credits and repayments by settlers, £66. The contents of this expenditure may be reviewed in detail to show the remarkable progress made in the two years since the scheme was undertaken:—

Fencing: £5,299 for material and labour. Material consisted of 12,820 posts, 179 strainers, 72,400 battens, 1,414 cwt. of plain wire, 255 cwt. of barbed wire, and 117½ cwt. of staples. Labour was paid for packing material and for erecting 1,061 chains of fencing. Battens were split on the scheme lands, but posts were obtained from outside the district at great expense.

Clearing, cultivation, cropping, and pasturing: Including clearing and scrub-cutting, draining, ploughing, and cultivation, preparation of land for crops (including potatoes), these items cost £3,800, not allowing for unemployment subsidies.