

(b) ORAKA.

(c) KAWHAKAPUTAPUTA.

These two schemes, although dealt with as separate schemes under section 23 of the Act of 1929, apply to groups of blocks in the same locality and owned by the one community. They have in practice been regarded as one scheme, and the accounts which relate to them have been grouped together. Oraka is on the east side of Kawhakaputu Bay, and Kawhakaputaputa on the west.

The Oraka Block is well situated, being within easy distance of Colac Bay Railway-station and school. A cheese-factory is situated four miles distant, and the roading is fairly convenient for transport of farm commodities. The highest point on the block is 300 ft. above sea-level, and the country slopes gradually towards Colac Bay on the east, where the land is sheltered, and towards Kawhakaputu Bay on the west. The land sloping west is exposed to the south wind, which is cold and severe. The land was reported to be suitable for dairying if proper methods were adopted with careful subdivision, provision of forage crops, and systematic top-dressing.

At the commencement of the scheme there were 150 acres in pasture, mostly brown-top. The balance of the block, about 1,130 acres, was in bush and underscrub, of which it was estimated that more than half, if properly cleared and sown in suitable grasses, would be brought to profit.

Kawhakaputaputa Block of 1,267 acres is land of similar quality to Oraka. A few of the owners were in occupation of sections of open land, attempting to milk on about 210 acres of poor pasture, portions of which were badly infested with ragwort. Portions of the land were in scrub, but the largest area was in standing bush.

It was reported that these two blocks were badly infested with ragwort, which would be prejudicial to successful dairying until the weed could be controlled. Rabbits were also a nuisance in the locality.

The problems of the combined areas were complicated enough at the beginning, and required that a Supervisor with knowledge of farming in the district should be appointed. Mr. T. M. Timpany was appointed Supervisor, and assumed direction of the schemes in October, 1930. It took him some time to appreciate the various elements involved, how to assist units in occupation of partly improved land, how to organize the human element to carry out the various operations in connection with development, and how to co-ordinate the wishes of owners with proper farm practice under the administration of a Government Department. He was too far away from headquarters for consultation, and there were questions of Native title and of unemployment relief on which it was difficult to obtain a lead from Wellington.

Up to the end of March, 1931, for a period of four months since active development began, the expenditure on the two schemes amounted to £1,880. Mr. Dudson, of the Wellington office, was sent in that month to report on the progress of the scheme. The following comments are extracted from his report: "The natives are a good stamp of men and should develop into good settlers, but with the exception of two or three men they have no practical experience of farming. They had been accustomed to depend mainly on fishing and mutton-birds. A sustenance allowance of 7s. a day was allowed to the men employed on the scheme, work being done by day labour. They appeared to be keen to improve the areas allotted to them. In regard to ploughing and cultivation, farm implements and horses were regarded as belonging to the settlement. The work was in the nature of unemployment relief, except that the men were made to realize that they were eventually to pay for the assistance given to them."

There were eleven units in occupation, half of whom had cottages. A few were dairying, and had cow-sheds and small herds. The largest herd was owned by Joe Beaton, who also had the largest area of improved land. Six casual men were employed in addition to the settlers. Housing appeared to be an acute problem. The area of open land in fair to poor pasture was estimated at 640 acres. A little ploughing for crops for winter feed had been done. Fencing was the first job taken in hand, for such fencing as was found on the land was in bad order, and boundaries against lands leased to Europeans were not fenced. Fencing cost in material and labour over £400. Scrub-cutting and clearing, draining and road-making accounted for about £250. Dairy cattle were purchased to enlarge some of the herds, also 450 sheep to control ragwort and for meat for the men. Eight working horses were bought at a cost of £211. It was gathered from the reports and recommendations of the Supervisor that he was influenced greatly by the distress among the people, and disposed to magnify the service of the development scheme as a relief measure.

Towards the end of the financial year there were differences between some of the men on the scheme and the Supervisor. Some of the men were in occupation of sections. The ill-feeling was apparent in correspondence and reports for a considerable time, and indicated dissatisfaction and unrest not only among those who were employed on the scheme, but among owners residing at a distance.

During the financial year 1931-32 the chief undertaking on the scheme was felling 1,336 acres of bush by contract or day labour. Contracts were let for 525 acres of bush on Oraka at a total cost of £753 9s., carrying a subsidy from unemployment funds of one-third, and providing work for thirty-eight men. This was completed in October. The area involved on Kawhakaputaputa was 686 acres, and the estimated cost £1,218 5s., subject also to a subsidy of one-third, and providing work for forty-six men. The price per acre ranged from 30s. to 40s. an acre. Actually the area of bush felled in the season was 1,336 acres, and ninety-three men altogether found employment. While it was thought in the Head Office that the price was high compared with the cost of similar work done in various parts of the North Island at the same time, the men on the Southland schemes complained that the price was too low, and they were only kept to their contracts by the lack of other employment.