

COAL-SUPPLIES.

The average consumption of coal per week during the year was 8,032 tons, an increase of 621 tons over the previous year, due to some extent to the more extensive use of Waikato coal.

For the past three years only New Zealand coals have been purchased. During the year, 181,409 tons of hard coal and 240,925 tons of soft coal were purchased.

TIMBER AREAS AND SUPPLIES.

After a careful review of the Department's prospective timber requirements, in conjunction with the conditions of the timber trade generally as at present existing and likely to exist in the future, the Board decided during the year to consolidate its interests in the several timber areas over which the cutting-rights had been reserved by the Government for the Department or for which the Department had already paid royalty. Consideration of the matter also raised the question as to the desirability or otherwise of continuing sawmilling operations at the Department's mill at Mamaku, and the Board, after a most careful review of all the relevant factors, concluded that the balance of advantage to the Department lay in ceasing milling operations at Mamaku in the meantime, and retaining its timber interests there against future requirements. This decision enabled the Board to take advantage by tender of the favourable state of the timber market and at the same time still leave the bulk of the North Island timber requirements to be met by supplies from the Rotorua District.

The areas reviewed by the Board included the Pukete forest in the Hokianga district, of approximately 16,476 acres, chiefly kauri, and the Oruanui-Pakuri forest, near Taupo, of approximately 980 acres, chiefly totara, over which the cutting-rights only were reserved and which the Board has decided to relinquish.

As already announced by public advertisement, the Board is offering for sale by tender the timber in its Pokaka forest area between Ohakune and National Park. This area comprises approximately 4,377 acres and consists chiefly of rimu timber.

Although the Board has decided to relinquish the areas mentioned, the future requirements of the Department will be fully provided for by the retention of the Maroa-Kirihono freehold area, near Taupo, of 1,552 acres, containing approximately 55,000,000 ft. of rimu and matai timber, and 10,000,000 ft. of totara, plus its interests in the area at Mamaku containing approximately 15,000,000 ft. of rimu.

Following on the Board's policy to utilize to the best advantage such of the Department's waste lands as may be suitable for afforestation purposes, both from a general utility and æsthetic point of view, a survey has been made of all such lands by an expert officer seconded from the Forestry Department for this purpose. Consequent upon the services of this officer being made available to the Board, many of the Department's existing plantations have been inspected and improved, whilst the timber from others has been utilized to advantage in connection with the general building operations of the Department.

During consideration of the problem confronting the Department in regard to its future supplies of hardwood timber, the Board availed itself of the opportunity of inspecting an area of Crown land near Katikati which the Hon. the Minister of Lands has since agreed to reserve for railway-afforestation purposes in accordance with sections 359 and 360 of the Land Act, 1934.

The area comprises approximately 3,460 acres in close proximity to the railway-line, and is particularly suitable for tree-planting purposes. Arrangements have been made accordingly by the Board to have this area planted in a variety of eucalypts, the timber of which will be most suitable for the future requirements of the Department.

WAY AND WORKS BRANCH.

The following are the principal features connected with the operations of the Way and Works Branch during the year :—

Permanent-way.—The relaying carried out during the year was as follows :—

Main line and branches 53 lb., 55 lb., 56 lb., and 70 lb. rails relaid with new	M.	Ch.
70 lb. rails	36	00
Main line and branches relaid with second-hand 53 lb., 55 lb., 56 lb., and		
70 lb. rails	6	10
Total	42	10

Tunnels and Cuttings.—Heavy repairs and strengthening have been carried out in tunnels Nos. 6, 7, 10, and 11 on North Auckland line and in Poro-o-tarao Tunnel on North Island Main Trunk Line, while two special gangs were employed for several weeks on the North Island Main Trunk line in removing dangerous boulders from the sides of the cutting.

A start has been made on deviating the main south line at the tunnel at Puketeraki.

Sleepers and Ballast.—During the year 210,089 sleepers and 179,620 cubic yards of ballast was laid.

Bridges and Culverts.—Bridges and culverts have been repaired as required, and the Mangaweka Viaduct was cleaned and painted. A large number of bridges have been renewed and strengthened, the principal works in hand as at 31st March, 1935, were Whakatu, Ashburton, and Rangitata Bridges, at each of which the foundations are being erected by contractors.

General.—The surface-type of cattle-stop were installed in several localities and the site of the old station at Auckland was fenced. A number of level-crossings and station-approach roads were tar-sealed.

During the year new sheep and cattle yards were erected at Ahura, Kaiwaka, Te Kauwhata, Hinuera, Taneatua, Kopu, Rukuhia, Mauriceville, and Lumsden.