

WAIKATO-MANIAPOTO MAORI LAND DISTRICT.

A glance at the detailed reports of the development schemes of the Department reveals the extent of the progress which this feature of the rehabilitation of the Maori is making in this district. Extending from Auckland in the north to the borders of the Tuwharetoa and Taranaki country in the south, the district embraces the ancestral domains of the Waikato tribes, the Maniapoto of the King-country, and the Ngatimaru of Hauraki.

Left landless and hostile after the Waikato wars with their resulting confiscations, the Waikato tribes for many years remained aloof and apathetic, living to a great extent spiritually on the memories of the glorious past, the remnant of their former numbers refraining from taking advantage of the enlightening influences which were aiding the tribes elsewhere. That all this is now changing is greatly to the credit of the far-seeing leaders which Waikato possesses in no small degree. Their kinsmen of Maniapoto were not unaffected by similar influences, but, being by no means landless, although slow to realize the advantages of development, they are now eager to participate. The Ngatimaru have been affected least of all by developmental activities, but due to various reasons not of their own making, a commencement has now been made in this district and progress is assured.

In olden days the Waikato-Maniapoto tribes were in the van of Maori agriculture. Dr. Hochstetter has described the view from Kakepuku which he climbed in 1859, and the richly cultivated country which met his view—these were the lands of Kopua, Pirongia, and Rangiawhia, largely cultivated by the Maoris. The crops were not confined to kumara and similar edible roots, wheat was grown, and grown well, by those early Maori farmers. In those days the Waikato, the Waipa, and the Waihou were busy waterways, the banks resounding to the merry shouts of the “Ngatangata hoe” as the canoes sped on their way to market with the produce of their lands. However, the war changed all that, and the fair promise of those earlier years was not fulfilled.

The initiation of the Native land development schemes bids fair to show that, what was denied by circumstances to an earlier generation, is being revived to the benefit of the present, and one may imagine the leaders of old—Te Wherowhero, Te Waharoa, and Rewi Maniapoto, could they return from the spiritland beyond Reinga—counselling their followers to-day to emulate the pakeha in modern methods of agriculture.

The population of this district is 14,845, and it was approximately 12,500 at the census of 1926, ten years before. The estimated extent of the Native lands is 750,000 acres, of which area 31,295 acres are gazetted, and approximately 13,000 acres are developed under the provision of the Native Land Act. The extent of the Maori population shows the problem, and the tendency is for it to become more serious as the number increases. Land development will, it is thought, prove to be an important factor in dealing with the situation, assuming, of course, that capital funds are available and that suitable education on farming methods is provided.

Development of land in this area falls into two classes—the large development scheme, of which Mahoenui and Waimiha are examples, and the unit scheme exemplified by such undertakings as Waipipi and Pio Pio. The larger schemes are proving very useful, apart from the development aspect, in absorbing available unemployed. On the whole, they prove easier to handle and to supervise than the unit schemes where financial assistance is extended to individual farmers. The ragwort menace in the King-country demands stocking with sheep, and close supervision is necessary. There is abundant evidence that the average Maori farmer responds in a most satisfactory manner to intelligent supervision and sympathetic, but firm, treatment. It may well be said that the success of land development will be in exact proportion to the ability of the Department to supervise the activities which it is promoting.

Here, as in other districts, assistance from unemployment funds is available where necessary. As far as possible the funds are spent on properties in which the Department is financially interested, but where private Native farmers require subsidized assistance, and supervision is available, an effort is made to meet the needs of the applicants. The amounts of the grants for the past year were £7,746 on scheme lands and £8,197 on non-unit properties.

The extent of the work being undertaken in this district may be appreciated from the following record of the year's general farming activities on both scheme and other lands, the latter being shown in parentheses: Bushfelling and clearing, 1,821 (1,525) acres; stumping and logging (110 acres); new fencing, 1,346 (1,284) chains, and repairs to fences, 500 chains; digging new drains, 939 chains, and cleaning old drains, 291 chains; grassing, 743 acres; roading, 166 chains; ploughing and cultivating, 788 acres; splitting posts, 4,350 (10,025), battens, 37,680 (58,350), strainers, 207 (343); the erection of 12 cottages, 8 cow-sheds, 2 wool-sheds, 7 implement and manure sheds, and 6 workmen's huts.

The live-stock tallies as at 31st March, 1937, for scheme and unit lands were 8,739 sheep, 1,954 cows in milk, 598 other dairy stock, 1,337 run cattle, 215 horses, 99 bulls, 304 pigs, and 550 goats.

The units or settlers established number 82, the additional labourers on schemes 175, the wives and children 639, thus giving a total of 896 persons.

In summing up the work in progress the district may be divided into three parts—the Waikato proper, where, although Native land is not plentiful, dairying is in progress on small holdings with satisfactory results; the Hauraki area, where movement is commencing which will result in the development of small holdings; and finally, and probably the most important, the Maniapoto district, with no shortage of land and further possibilities for large block development, and where mixed farming by units is pursued, and where, if the control of ragwort is assured, then good dairying country is available.