

*Climatic Conditions.*

The weather throughout the whole season has been indescribably bad and this has very seriously interfered with the progress of the operations.

At the commencement of the season proper (in October) serious floods were encountered—pack-tracks were washed away, parties were isolated, and conditions for shooting were hopelessly bad. All rivers have been in flood at frequent intervals, rain has fallen almost incessantly on the western side and along the main divide, snow has fallen every few weeks right throughout the summer, and when rain or snow was not actually falling the mountain “tops” (the main shooting-ground) have been enveloped in fog.

The parties operating in the Hokitika watershed encountered only twenty-three fine days in the whole seven months.

This bad weather not only prevented the men from operating effectively, but it kept deer to the bush, thus making shooting difficult and materially reducing the results.

In many localities hundreds of skins, which under normal conditions could have been recovered had to be abandoned owing to the impossibility of getting them dry, and unsuccessful attempts to dry skins eventually resulted in the men becoming discouraged and merely taking the tails.

*Sphere of Operations and Tactics employed.*

The “season” opened with what were really the closing stages of last season’s campaign by a small party continuing to operate in certain portions of the Makarora and Hunter Valleys, at the heads of Lakes Wanaka and Hawea respectively, which lent themselves to winter operations. This resulted in a further seven hundred deer being killed in the area worked during the preceding season and effectively “cleaned up” these special “winter quarters” of the deer.

The main portion of the season’s deer campaign was launched from about twenty different points on both sides of the main divide throughout the area from the heads of the Rangitata Valley on the east and the Whitcombe Valley on the west, to the line of the Blenheim–Murchison highway at such times between the beginning of September and the beginning of December as necessary to conform with the general tactical plan.

The system of commencing the operations in the foothills open valleys, and other “front country” and then pushing forward towards the main divide and forcing surviving deer on ahead, progressively increasing the personnel of the organization and culminating in a concerted “kill” in the very head basins of the divide in the autumn having been found, by years of experience, to be the most successful, it was pursued this season with marked success as the topography of the country lent itself to such tactics.

It might be thought that the numerical results obtained by the parties operating on the western side were so low as to scarcely justify the undertaking in those localities. This idea, if it should exist, is, however, entirely erroneous, as the value of such operations cannot be judged solely by the numbers killed by the parties actually operating there.

There is abundant evidence to show that the presence of the parties on the western side resulted in a far greater number of deer being killed on the eastern side than would otherwise have been the case.

In the cases of the Waiau, Hurunui, Poulter, and Rakaia Valleys, a stage was reached at the conclusion of the first working of these areas when there were exceedingly few deer left, and weekly results fell to very low figures.

The parties then went back to the starting-points to go over again while those on the contiguous Westland country were pressing forward, and by the time the eastern parties reached their back country again there were more deer there than during the first working, and big “kills” resulted.

In the case of the Rakaia in particular was this noted, as at one stage the results fell so low that it was feared that it would be necessary to withdraw the parties, and as there is very little bush cover it was obvious that the deer were not there.

At that stage, however, deer commenced to appear in increasing numbers, obviously coming over from Westland, and good results were maintained until the end of the season.

With a view to dispelling an erroneous idea that still appears to remain in the minds of some uninformed people who refer to, and even criticize, this Department’s operations in the press and elsewhere, it should be stated that to departmental parties there is no inaccessible “away back” country to which deer may escape and find sanctuary, as the parties operating from each side constantly crossed the divide at numberless points besides traversing along it, and literally met on the top regularly. It can be definitely stated that in the whole zone of operations not even the smallest piece of country on which deer could possibly be found was not covered by our men.

As an integral part of the campaign of the season under review, though the work will not be done until after the period covered by this report, winter operations will be conducted in the valleys of the Awatere River and all the tributaries of the Wairau on the southern side.

This area of country lies to the sun (the north) and is the natural winter quarters of many of the deer which in summer inhabit the high Molesworth–Tarndale Plateau. Operations were, of course, conducted in this “summer country” during the past season, and now that surviving deer have moved into the “winter country” referred to and the passes become snow-bound, the final stage of the campaign in that sector is the winter operations mentioned above.

*General Progress and Results.*

(a) *Thar and Chamois.*—Dealing firstly with thar, it can be stated at once that it is exceedingly fortunate that it was decided to operate against these animals this season.

Two of their dominant characteristics are their gregarious habits and the tendency to remain on the country where they were born. The result has been that, although they have increased tremendously, they have not yet spread far from the Mount Cook reserves.

Their great fecundity and absence of natural enemies, however, had resulted in an entire absence of a natural balance with food-supplies being arrived at, with the result that the country occupied by them had become denuded of vegetation to an almost indescribable extent.