

HAWKE'S BAY FLOODS.

The year has been marked by the large number of intense storms which have occurred in various parts of the Dominion.

The disastrous storm of 19th February has been referred to when discussing railway matters.

Another and, in some respects, more disastrous storm occurred in April.

Very intense rainfall in the Hawke's Bay and Gisborne districts over the week-end, amounting in some cases to nearly 40 in., culminated in a disastrous flood on Anzac Day, in which farms were obliterated by deposits of silt, roads blocked by slips and washouts in all directions, and bridges were carried away by the tremendous volume of water and debris carried by the abnormally swollen rivers and streams. In certain areas, such as the Esk Valley, the flood-heights were greater than anything known since the white man settled there.

Road access from Napier was cut off in all directions, except south to Hastings via Fernhill. Thousands of acres were under water and silt, and settlers were isolated on their farms with access indefinitely cut off.

The seriousness of the disaster was not realized at first either in the stricken area or outside it, but as soon as the true position became evident immediate steps were taken to cope with the situation.

An assurance of State assistance to the stricken area was given by the Government, and I immediately arranged for the transfer of plant from other districts to assist with the opening-up of the roads, and instructed that all the resources of the Department were to be used to restore communications as quickly as possible.

Two Government aeroplanes were despatched to Hastings to assist with the distribution of food to isolated settlers by air. This work had already been well organized by Judge Harvey and the East Coast Aero Club, and food was being dropped from aeroplanes where it was most urgently required. On arrival of the Government planes Squadron Leader Burrell took charge of the aerial distribution of food, and was ably assisted by the aero club and Judge Harvey, who was of great assistance in this connection on account of his local knowledge of the area.

The Post and Telegraph Department did splendid work, under very difficult conditions, restoring telephone and telegraphic communications as quickly as possible.

In the meantime further knowledge of the state of the roads and bridges had been obtained, both from aerial surveys and from inspections on foot, as well as telephone messages. Steps were immediately taken to organize gangs of men for clearing slips and getting machines on to the sections of the damaged roads where they could be used to best advantage. The construction of temporary bridges was also immediately taken in hand.

By concentrating men at suitable points and getting machinery on to various sections as quickly as possible the Napier-Taupo Road was opened for traffic on 8th May and the Napier-Wairoa Road on 4th June.

The opening-up of this road in a little over five weeks was a noteworthy feat best realized by those who have been over the road since it was opened.

The road that was opened was, of course, only a comparatively narrow track in places, and heavy rain since has at times caused trouble and occasionally blocked the road for a short time again.

The part played by machinery on the work of restoration has been remarkable. The Department now has five Diesel shovels, four tractors with bull-dozer attachment, and four tractors with scoops at work on roads and farms.

It is estimated that with the aid of machines it will take about four months more to clear up the damage to the highways. Without the help of machines it would probably take double that time.

The reconstruction of the bridges in permanent material will, of course, take much longer. It will probably be twelve to eighteen months before they are completed.

The staff and men in the Hawke's Bay and Gisborne districts have done great work in connection with the restoration of communications and the repair of flood damage, and I wish to express my appreciation of the manner in which they have carried out their duties.