

AOTEA MAORI LAND DISTRICT.

The boundaries of Aotea commence in the north from White Cliffs (Parinihinihi), south of Mokau on the North Taranaki Bight, across country bordering on the thermal regions and beyond the volcanic peak of Ngauruhoe, through the inland sea of Taupo to Tarawera, and thence to the south and west by an uneven diagonal line following the Ruahine Range and the Rangitikei River to the sea. Almost the whole of Taranaki and a large slice of the Wellington Province lies within the district, which was the ancestral domain of the tribes of Ngati-Hau, Whanganui, Ngarauru, Ngati-Ruanui, Taranaki, Ati-Awa, and Ngati-Tama.

The Taranaki Province, in which there are now six development schemes, is well known for its fertility, particularly the Waimate Plains, once the scene of many battles and now the richest of dairying-lands. Although there is not here the scope for the promotion of extensive development, it has been possible during the past year to commence operations on a small scale, and numerous other sections are being offered, and these will be investigated as soon as possible. It will be seen from the statistical tables appended that the returns from these new schemes are most satisfactory, especially when it is considered that most of them have been under the Department's control for only two or three months.

That portion of the Aotea district outside of the Taranaki Province is less closely settled, and for the most part the land remaining to the Natives is more suitable for sheep-farming than dairying. Embracing as it does the full length of three large rivers—Wanganui, Whangaehu, and Rangitikei—this district contains many areas, mostly river-flats, capable of development into first-class dairy-farms and the prospects of further intensive settlement are encouraging, many new proposals having been investigated. It is pleasing to note the enthusiasm displayed by all concerned.

Development is in hand both on the lands bordering the beautiful Wanganui River and on those previously neglected pumice belts on the southern shores of Lake Taupo and reaching to the foot of Mount Ruapehu. An area of 21,214 acres was offered to the Department and was gazetted during the year as the Manunui scheme. Numerous other blocks in the same locality have also been offered, but, pending the launching of the Manunui proposal, they have not yet been investigated: but this will be attended to during the ensuing year. There are great possibilities in this district, and the developmental policy will be the means of rehabilitating large numbers of young Maoris who, up to the present, have had no prospects apart from casual labour.

It will be seen that the advantages of placing their lands under the State's control are now becoming more widely known and appreciated in the Aotea district, and, judging by the numerous inquiries and applications made, there is ample room for further development. Nine new schemes have been launched during the past year, thus making the total number of State development schemes in the Aotea district twelve, covering an area of 27,709 acres. There are 49 established settlers and 249 labourers, upon all of whom are dependent 1,045 Maori people. The average number of men employed on employment-promotion contracts on private Native lands was 220.

Ranana.

This scheme is situated about forty miles up the Wanganui River, and has roughly a five-mile frontage on to the river, with an average depth of one mile and a half. It comprises a total area of 4,516 acres, of which 3,104 acres are actually in occupation by settlers, while the remaining area is in the course of development and is being used for grazing sheep and cattle. The whole property is well sheltered, and consists for the most part of easy hills. There are 25 settlers established, and these, together with 114 labourers, support 563 persons.

When the area was handed to the Department in 1930 for development, ragwort and other noxious weeds had obtained a very strong hold and were spreading rapidly. The dairy herds were of poor quality, while the pastures previously sown, when the area formed part of Morikau station, were run out, and the debts due to the dairy company had reached such a figure that the suppliers' equity had, in many cases, almost disappeared. In the early stages of development, therefore, expenditure was necessarily heavy, many of the liabilities being taken over, while heavy purchases of live-stock, building and fencing materials, manures, grass-seed, and implements and equipment of all descriptions were required.

The morale and health of the people improved immediately, and this improvement still continues. There have been no epidemics of any consequence for some years, and with the continual progress in housing and sanitation, there should be no fear of future serious outbreaks.

A heavy programme of work was undertaken during the year, but work at one stage was held up owing to shortage of posts. This was remedied by the construction of a concrete-post making plant on the scheme, and some thousands of posts were manufactured. During the year nine new cottages, and substantial additions to existing cottages, were erected, and all settlers are now well housed, although some still require larger buildings. Other work included 610 acres of clearing, 784 chains of fencing, 435 chains of draining, 227 acres of grassing, 185 acres of other cultivation, 315 chains of roading, the erection of four cow-sheds, and the installation of four small water-supply systems.

Consequent upon the application of a sufficiency of fertilizer in the autumn of 1937, there was a phenomenal growth of feed, and some settlers now have several stacks of hay for the first time in their farming experience. Over the whole scheme, feed was abundant throughout the year.