

Mr. A. D. Dobson, Provincial Engineer to the Nelson Government, in a report to the Inland Communication Committee, under date 23rd December, 1872, states the quantity of land available for settlement at 222,000 acres.

Mr. T. Mackay, one of the gentlemen who accompanied me over the land, states in a report of his to the same Committee on 13th December last, the number of acres that can be utilized at 261,000, but confines the quantity adapted for agriculture at 51,000 acres only.

My estimate of flat, low terrace, forest, and open land is, as above stated, 213,750 acres; or, deducting the area sold and leased with purchasing clause, 202,341 acres.

It will thus be seen that out of the four different estimates, made at different times, and, so far as I am concerned, without the least interchange of opinion with the other gentlemen, there is no difference of opinion calculated to influence the matter to any material degree.

The forest land has growing thereon some very fine black and red birch, white, red, and black pines, and totara. The black birch, however, predominates to a very large degree, the next in number being, so far as I could observe, the white pine and black pines; next to the pines I should place the totara, some of which are the finest I ever saw. The best, I think, are in and around the Valley of the Inangahua. Some of the birch trees will measure 12 and 13 feet round at two feet from the ground, and run 70 to 80 and 90 feet high. The soil of the forest land generally is very light and poor, especially where the birch grows; indeed it may be truthfully asserted that in many places where the finest birch trees are found there is literally no soil—nothing but a carpet of moss and leaves, immediately underneath which are small boulder stones, shingle and clay, utterly useless in a very large proportion for any agricultural purpose whatever.

The timber, as I before observed, is excellent, and therein, and therein alone, as I thoroughly believe, is the only value of eight-tenths of the birch forest lands, and even that value (whatever it may be), without good and rapid means of communication, is very problematical. As a matter of opinion, I think that, with suitable and rapid means of communication with some good seaport, all the tolerably level and terrace forest land, one mile on either side of the railway (so long as any large river has not to be crossed), would realize 40s. per acre on an average; but beyond that distance, many years must I fear elapse before it would be of hardly any value. The land upon which pines and totara grow is better soil, although even that is light and sandy at the best, and not at all likely to stand a succession of crops. With some few exceptions, the best forest land within the watersheds is in and about the Valley of the Matakitaiki and Buller, near Rowe's, at Hampden and Oxnan's, and again six miles or so from the Lyell, down the Inangahua and Grey Valleys.

The cost of clearing this forest land fit for the plough would average from £10 to £15 per acre. Some of it could be sufficiently cleared for the sowing of grass seeds, leaving all the trees, stumps, and large roots in the ground, for from £4 to £6 per acre, but not less. In the face of such figures, the general correctness of which I maintain cannot be truthfully disputed, I need do no more than submit them to show how utterly fallacious it is to suppose for one moment that this forest land, even if the soil was all that could be desired, would, for generations to come, be utilized in any large degree for agriculture in its proper intent and meaning. Even from a pastoral point of view, the clearing would cost, as I before stated, £4 to £6, to which must be added £2 10s. at least for necessary grass seeds and labour, making a total cost of from £6 10s. to £8 10s. per acre, to which again must be added the cost of fencing. Such an undertaking would not commend itself to the capitalist or farmer, and to the man of small means it becomes practically impossible.

The open land is on the whole very poor also. Some small patches here and there have good soil, but the proportion of good land to the whole is very small, and when found is in some instances on river beds liable to be flooded and even swept away, as I saw had been the case already. The principal open land is a track of 23,000 acres, known as the Marina Plains, and, as I was informed in Nelson, very rich agricultural land. Such, however, is not the case. This plain is (as was all the other open land I saw) very patchy. It has been said the half of it is good agricultural land. In one sense this is probably nearly correct, but the true position is not made clear by such an assertion. In one spot may be found a piece of fair land (none of it first-class), comprising possibly 100 to 300 acres. Then we have perhaps a similar area of bare shingly land, through which no plough could be got. Next another piece of ploughable land, and again its opposite, and so on. I think it extremely doubtful if any one farm of 600 acres of good land in one block could be found on the whole plain. Moreover, its value as agricultural land is materially regulated by its position. As it now is, there is no way whatever of getting to it from any proper road, except by means of a wretched pack-track, just wide enough for one horse, and distant twenty to thirty miles from any centre of communication, thus practically shutting out all possibility of carrying on agricultural pursuits to any extent. The centre of this plain would be distant thirty-five miles from the Buller at its junction with the Matakitaiki, the nearest probable point at which an available railway station will be. Thus it is apparent that to convey produce from the plains to a railway station without roads and bridges is impossible, and to make such a road, and bridge even the smaller rivers and creeks, would in my opinion cost more than the value of the whole plain. For pastoral purposes, the present lessee, as I am informed, pays an annual rent of threepence per acre; but as Mr. Walker was from home, I cannot pledge myself to its strict accuracy, although I believe such is the case.

The same argument applies *pro rata* to Mr. McGregor's 3,000 acres (of which he is the owner of 700 acres of the best of it). This piece of land is distant fourteen miles or so from the nearest point a railway station (if brought *via* the Hope Valley) would be; and the value of the 2,300 acres (balance of the 3,000) is not worth one-half the amount required to make the necessary dray road to connect with the railway. Mr. Hunter's open land would also be under the same disadvantage—namely, distance from railway communication. The pieces of open land referred to in my schedule as O'Laughlan's Flat, Horse Terrace, and Frog Flat, are too insignificant to call for any comment. The open land on the Matiri I was unable, on account of the dense bush, through which man and horse could not make way, to reach. It is situate up the Matiri River, about fifteen miles from the junction with the Buller, and the same distance from the contemplated line of railway. Not being able to personally inspect the