

The possession of an unlimited supply of good coal is not of much value if it is inconveniently situated; and I am free to admit that there is a considerable drawback to the successful working of the Brunner and Ngakawau Rivers, caused by the absence of a good port of shipment; and although it is intended to improve the ports of the Grey and Buller Rivers, yet they are ports on shingle and sand-bearing rivers, with shifting channels, and bars of no mean order, on a lee shore, exposed to the full force of ocean swell of thousands of miles fetch, and all the money the whole Colony of New Zealand could spare would not make them even third-class ports.

Nevertheless, the steps taken to connect the mines with the ports are judicious, because, notwithstanding the disadvantages above referred to, there will still be a trade in coal, as back freights or limited shipments in specially constructed vessels carrying small cargoes. But no ocean steamers or ships can load otherwise than by tender.

What is required is abundance of good coal easily workable, within a short distance of a capacious port or well-sheltered bay, with safe anchorage for vessels of the largest tonnage.

Nelson possesses such a place, and which I will briefly describe here; and if you think it by the description suitable, I will name the place in my next. (I have some further information to get.)

The place of shipment would be on the weather shore of a bay sheltered round twenty-four points of the compass, and from the prevailing winds. The remaining points are not exposed to any ocean swell, the anchorage is unexceptionally good, and deep water to be had within a short distance from the shore, no rocks or hidden dangers are in the vicinity; that faithful nautical monitor, the lead, can be used with certainty, as the bottom is gradually shelving for miles. A wharf suitable for large vessels, say up to 2,000 tons, could be constructed under £10,000, and would be within four miles of abundance of very fine steam and gas coal, superior to Newcastle, within three miles of another seam of good house coal, and ten miles of a third seam of the acknowledged best coal for closed grates, with no engineering difficulties to the construction of a railway; vessels could arrive and depart with safety all hours of the day and night, uninfluenced by tide, and unaccompanied by a pilot.

The place is only a few miles out of the direct line of Cook Strait. There is abundance of timber for the construction of wharves, or works, water-power to work hydraulic cranes; and at no great distance, minerals of value can be had.

In another letter I shall send particulars as soon as able. In the mean time,

I have, &c.,

D. M. Luckie, Esq., M.H.R., Wellington, New Zealand.

WILLIAM AKERSTON.

Mr. W. AKERSTON to Mr. D. M. LUCKIE.

SIR,—

Nelson, 24th August, 1873.

Reverting to the subject of my last letter, subsequent inquiries have only confirmed the facts therein set forth.

Your surmise in telegram as to the locality is nearly correct. The place referred to is near to Tomatea Point, Golden Bay, about half-way between Pakawau and Collingwood, and in the neighbourhood of which place is abundance of iron ore, plumbago, marble, and limestone.

In the course of inquiry, Port Hardy was spoken of as a possible rival coaling station. Looking at the map, it seems inviting, standing boldly out in the line of Cook Strait; but although it is a deep-water harbour it is very seldom used, from the following reasons:—

The anchorage is very deep, the bottom rocky and uneven, the shore steep to; very heavy tide-rips run across the entrance; the harbour is liable to sudden and violent squalls, with the possibility of sailing vessels being wind-bound occasionally.

However, were coal discovered there in a convenient place, there is no doubt the port would be largely used; the objections above noted would of course have less force in the case of steam vessels properly under command. There are many advantages in favour of Tomatea Point over Port Hardy, the latter being on a barren island, lying off the most barren part of the Province, washed on all points by angry and troubled tidal waters, over rocky and dangerous shores, and fully exposed to the prevailing winds and sea.

Should you require any special information on the matter, not referred to here, I shall be glad to furnish it to you if within my power.

I have written strongly and truthfully on the matter; as, having settled in New Zealand, I should feel glad to see the country independent of New South Wales for a coal supply. That our mineral as well as agricultural wealth will be opened up by the public works policy I have no doubt; and, in conclusion, should the Government now turn their attention to this portion of the Colonial estate, large and substantial benefits will accrue to the whole of New Zealand.

I am, &c.,

WILLIAM AKERSTON,

Marine Surveyor by appointment of His Excellency
Governor Gore Browne.