

COAL MINES.

The mines on the West Coast of the South Island, on which the colony must chiefly depend for its future supply of bituminous coal adapted for its steam services, await only the completion of engineering works that are in progress for their full development.

These works are being proceeded with as rapidly as circumstances admit, and there is every reason to believe that in the course of a few years the colony may become to a great extent independent of imported coal.

The extent of the Grey Coal Field on the south side of the river, opposite to the Brunner Mine, has been practically tested during the past season, by a company to which an extensive leasehold has been granted, so that two mines will be in full working order by the time that the railway to the shipping port is opened for traffic.

At Westport the railway line has been surveyed and determined on, and the first portion is open for tender. This section will open communication with stone quarries, from which the material will be obtained for the formation of the wharfage which must be constructed, before it is possible to effect large shipments of coal without damaging severely the river banks. Meanwhile a thorough topographical survey is in progress of this most valuable and extensive coal field, with the view of facilitating its subdivision into mining areas that will afford the greatest facility for the economical working of the coal. The geological survey of the district is at the same time receiving attention; and during the past year the ascertained limits of the carboniferous area have been greatly extended.

The Collingwood Coal Field, where the natural facilities for shipment and the extent of the field are all that can be desired, unfortunately labours under the disadvantage, so far as yet known, of possessing only thin seams in comparison to the immense deposits further south. Nevertheless, seams sufficiently thick to be remunerative have been proved by exploratory works that have been in progress during the past two years, and which for the present may be considered as completed. Some further expenditure has been suggested for the construction of a short line and wharfage, and the application received due consideration.

The existence of valuable ironstone, together with other requisites for the manufacture of iron, will, it is urged, attract capital to the district; and the local demand for the coal thereby created may enable comparatively thin seams to be profitably worked.

In other parts of the country assistance has been given wherever there is a prospect of the coal seams being of material service to the colony; but the principle has been adhered to, that substantial assistance should only be given where the coal is adapted for steam-generating purposes.

Experiments made with the locomotives on the railways in Otago have shown that the deposits of brown coal which exist, not only in that province but in most other parts of the colony, may be depended upon for the supply of our railway system.

The expenditure on exploration for coal during the past year has been £2,405 12s. 10d., with a contingent liability of £1,236 2s. 11d.

NATIVE LAND PURCHASES.

The purchase of lands from the Natives was not under the control of the Public Works Department last year, the Honorable the Native Minister having been requested to take over its entire administration. In previous years it was mainly in name that it was dealt with by the Public Works Department.

PUBLIC DOMAINS AND BUILDINGS.

I have now to mention a branch of the service which was transferred to the control of the Public Works Department during the past year—that of Public Domains and Buildings. The Report of the Colonial Architect is attached.

If you, Sir, and honorable members will turn to that Report, you will find that the Colonial Architect has had very heavy work throughout the year; and it will be found, on reference to the Estimates, that a larger sum has been put down