

3. Amongst other advantages gained by the delay in organizing the department, the abolition of the provincial system of government, which has become an established fact, must not be lost sight of, as under it any scheme of forest conservation for the benefit of the colony at large would, I fear, have been found impossible.

In my detail of inspection tours, I refer of necessity to the several provincial districts which I visited; but in the subsequent treatment of the subject I avoid as much as possible any consideration of the old provincial boundaries and distinctions, and endeavour to treat the subject, as I should wish it to be approached, from a purely colonial point of view.

4. I should explain that the cause of Stewart's Island and the South-west Sounds not having been inspected and reported on was, that no Government steamer could be made available for the work as originally arranged. This was matter of much regret and disappointment to me and Professor Kirk, whose services I had specially secured to visit those localities, the flora of which is, comparatively speaking, little known and undescribed. A good deal of valuable time was subsequently lost on the West Coast, owing to the floods in January and February, which rendered the rivers impassable and the forest impenetrable. This somewhat curtailed my inspections in the northern districts of the South Island, as I had to return to Wellington in order to submit this report before the end of March; but on the whole, with the exception just alluded to, which may be considered a misfortune but not a fault, the programme of inspections, which I think it will be allowed embraced all that could be done within the time, has been fairly adhered to, and should enable me to have formed definite opinions entitled to some weight of the nature, extent, and value of the New Zealand forests, and the measures for their management most likely to prove beneficial, and at the same time least antagonistic to the current of public or popular opinion.

5. I must in justice to myself refer to the very meagre amount of information on record, or even apparently procurable, as to the actual extent of forest in the hands of Government, its situation, value, &c. The papers relating to State forests presented to both Houses of the General Assembly in 1874 contain all that I found available on the subject, and they avowedly consist mainly of estimates and the expressions of individual opinion on the part of Superintendents of provinces and others. On returning from my first tour in the Auckland Province, I issued a series of queries which were sent to the Commissioners of Crown Lands, with the view of collecting all the information procurable. An abstract of their replies in tabular form is given in this report, from which it will be seen how very inadequate the information, most of which has been but recently furnished, still is. In some instances, notably that of Taranaki, the report formed a most useful guide, and saved much trouble and loss of time in useless inspections of private forests, with which it has never been proposed that the State should interfere; but in the majority of cases the replies have been of little or no practical value. This is perhaps not to be wondered at, in the case of a comparatively young colony without any officers whose special business it is to procure or furnish such returns. I simply refer to it as a want which has caused me considerable difficulty and inconvenience. One of the first duties of the State Forest Department would be to acquire accurate information, and prepare statements and maps of the forest areas not already alienated from the Crown. Until this is done, we must to a great extent be working in the dark, ignorant of our actual resources and the proportion of forest area remaining from year to year.

6. In concluding these preliminary remarks I need only add that I do not in this report make any attempt at an exhaustive description of the forests of New Zealand, still less of its flora: to do so would be a work of time far in excess of that at disposal, and I have no doubt, as has been stated, that had that and that only been what was required it might have been furnished better by others more conversant with the New Zealand flora than I am, and possessing high attainments as botanists, to which I lay no claim. I venture, however, to think that this is not the main object aimed at, and have therefore, whilst availing myself as much as possible of the local and scientific knowledge procurable, endeavoured to limit the scope of the report to practical descriptions and suggestions based on the general principles of State forest conservancy throughout the world.

For most of the information on geological and botanical points and distribution I am indebted to Professor Kirk, whose help in identifying trees has been of the greatest service, and whose efforts in the cause of forest conservancy and planting have been unremitting, and merit the highest acknowledgments on my part, and, I think, on the part of the colony at large.

7. The botanical name of each tree is given on its first mention by its English or Maori name, so that there should be no doubt as to what description is meant, and I have endeavoured to be uniform in the use of the English names throughout. In case of any doubt, however, reference should be made to the classified list of the timber trees, in which the botanical, Native, and English synonyms are given. The term Beech, in lieu of the more commonly used but erroneous Birch, is made use of throughout when reference is made to trees of the genus *Fagus*; and the terms Black, Red, and White Pine represent respectively the *Podocarpus spicata*, *Dacrydium cupressinum*, and *Podocarpus dacrydioides*. This explanation may, I trust, serve to obviate confusion or misconception of the exact description of tree referred to.