

Population.—Map No. 1 shows how the country accommodated by the proposed railways is settled. The information as to the population is given on the authority of the Registrar-General, who kindly accelerated the compilation of the recent census returns for this purpose.

As may be gathered from the figures on the map, by far the greater portion of the settlement is on the coast. With the single exception of Reefton there is no large centre of population anywhere inland; and even on the coast the people are mainly congregated between Ross and the Grey, and again at the Buller.

Including the City of Nelson and the Town of Blenheim, the total population in the area affected by the railways amounts to 51,648; and of this number 9,015 are in Marlborough, on the connecting line between Tophouse and Blenheim.

It is, in the first instance, only intended to make the East and West Coast and Hokitika-Nelson lines. Their combined length is 300 miles. Dividing the population by this we have 142 persons to the mile. But it would not be fair to take this area only as a basis of traffic, for the East and West Coast Railway has the populous districts of Canterbury to draw upon. There is a population of 97,000 within a radius of 60 miles of Springfield, the point where the railway debouches on the plain. As it is difficult to determine what proportion of this population would be served, it is better to leave the East and West Coast line out of the calculation altogether. Taking the population served by the Hokitika-Nelson line, which is easily ascertained, and dividing it by the distance, gives 202 persons to the mile of railway.

Comparing these numbers with those in other parts of the colony, where there are no large cities, we find that on the New Plymouth-Foxton Railway there are 209 persons to the mile, and on the Napier-Woodville line 242 persons. In the whole of south Otago as far north as Clutha there are 120 persons to the mile of railway. It should also be borne in mind that in the case of Nelson and the West Coast the population is taken before the line is made; whereas the other districts have enjoyed the benefits of railway communication for some years.

Taking the four counties on the western side of the watershed, which it is proposed to connect with the rest of the colony by rail, the state of the population is shown by the following:—

—	1871.	1874.	1878.	1881.	1886.
Westland	10,781	9,820	11,606	10,246	10,170
Grey	8,275	8,204	7,767	7,483	8,750
Inangahua	4,711	4,886	{ 2,970	2,927	3,152
Buller			{ 3,557		
Totals	23,767	22,910	25,900	24,214	27,320

Pastoral Settlement.—In proportion to its extent the pastoral settlement within the area affected by the railways is very small. This is easily accounted for—the prevalence of bush. As already shown, there are only about 1,750,000 acres of open grass country out of a total of 6,750,000. There are 7 runs in the Waimakariri watershed, carrying about 93,000 sheep. With the exception of a few hundreds here and there among the settlers, and a small flock at Lake Brunner—about 10,000 in all—there are no sheep on the western side of the range.

The latest returns show that there are about 102,000 sheep in the districts between the Upper Buller and Nelson, and about 282,000 between Tophouse and Picton. The above figures give a total of 487,000 sheep in the country accommodated by the proposed railways.

There are a few good herds of cattle on the West Coast, in the country south of Hokitika and the river-beds and upland valleys near the main range; but they are not nearly sufficient for the local demand, which is mainly supplied from Canterbury and Wanganui. The settlers in the vicinity of Nelson and Blenheim rear considerable numbers of cattle; but comparatively few of them find their way to the western markets—they are mostly absorbed by the adjoining towns. Altogether there are between thirty and thirty-five thousand head of cattle within the area affected by the railways, the half of which are on the West Coast.

Agricultural Settlement.—From the point where the East and West Coast Railway leaves the Canterbury Plains, at the 5th mile, to Belgrove, the end of the West Coast-Nelson line, there is no agricultural settlement worth mentioning, and cultivation only begins on the connection between Tophouse and Blenheim, within ten miles from the latter place. In 1885 the total area of land under crop in the four western counties was only 2,121 acres.

Oats for horse-feed is grown at Castlehill, and again in small isolated patches on the West Coast; but the quantity hitherto produced is very small—in no way approaching the local demand. In 1885 there were only 1,408 acres of oats grown in the western counties, the greater portion of which would probably be cut for oaten hay. The local demand is therefore met almost entirely by supplies from outside.

A few grazing and dairy farms have been reclaimed from the forest, more particularly in the valleys of the Hokitika, Arahura, Grey, and Buller Rivers. Vegetables and ordinary fruits grow well in all parts of the country, and of late years have been extensively cultivated.

Mining Settlement.—Hitherto the mainstay of the West Coast has been mining—first alluvial gold-digging, and latterly quartz-reefing and coal-mining. As the ordinary alluvial ground became exhausted large hydraulic claims were taken up, and since 1871 the quartz reefs of Reefton and Lyell have yielded considerable quantities of gold, and given employment to a large number of people. Coal-mining has also of recent years become a large and permanent industry.