

Nenthorn Section.—This section extends from the Deep Stream section to near the Sutton and is 9 miles 13 chains in length. It brings the line to the flat country at the Sutton, the beginning of Strath Taieri. The works have just been completed and taken off the contractors' hands. They have throughout been carried on in a very satisfactory manner.

Bridges.—In addition to the Wingatui Viaduct there are 16 bridges on the Otago Central Railway between North Taieri and Strath Taieri. Their aggregate length is 3,067ft., comprising 2 spans of 106ft., 1 of 100ft., 29 of 66ft., 3 of 55ft., 3 of 44ft., and 5 of 33ft. They are all as much as possible to the same pattern. Five of the piers of the Flat Creek Bridge are to be of malleable iron, but all the other piers and abutments are masonry aboveground, with concrete or masonry foundations. The superstructures are malleable-iron girders.

These bridges have been divided into five contracts—three for masonry and two for ironwork. Two of the former and one of the latter have been let. They finish the work to and across the Deep Stream.

The first of the masonry contracts, called the Silver Peak Bridges, includes the abutments and piers of three bridges. It was let on the 10th November, 1886; but the contractors failed to go on with the work. After some delay fresh tenders were called for, and the work was relet on the 10th March, 1886. A commencement is just being made.

The next masonry contract, called the Mount Hyde Bridges, includes the piers and abutments of five bridges. The contract was let on the 5th January, 1887, and the works have since been carried on energetically. The foundations for the Taieri Bridge piers, one of the principal difficulties of the contract, have been put in.

A contract for the superstructure of the bridges in the Silver Peak and Mount Hyde masonry contracts was entered into on the 19th February, 1886. Beyond arranging for importing materials and erecting plant, no work has yet been done. This is called the Taieri Gorge Bridges Superstructure Contract.

The remaining bridges extending from the Deep Stream to Strath Taieri will be let in two contracts, one each for masonry and ironwork.

GENERAL.

Plant.—In addition to the large quantity made at the Government workshops, various articles of plant have been manufactured for the department by private firms in the principal centres—for instance, steam-cranes at Wellington, and points and crossings at Dunedin.

Sleepers.—As shown by the schedule of contracts, a considerable quantity of sleepers has been obtained during the year. The creosoting works in Southland have been quite successful: 88,000 of the 150,000 sleepers contracted for have now been supplied. The creosoting-plant can turn out 15,000 sleepers a month when working full time.

Labour and Wages.—As will be gathered from previous remarks, there have been more workmen than work all over the colony during the past year. There have been "unemployed" agitations in all the large cities except Wellington, and relief-works of greater or less extent have been provided. The question has not, however, assumed anything like so large proportions as it did in 1879. As a consequence of the surplus of labour, wages have gone down. Artisans now seldom get more than 10s., and labourers 6s. 6d. or 7s. On the West Coast of the Middle Island, where there is more broken time, labourers still get from 8s. to 10s.

Number of Men on Works.—The following statement gives approximately the average number of men employed under the department on works and surveys during the past year, exclusive of contractors' men engaged away from the works:—

District.	Number of Employés.
Auckland	461
Wanganui	249
Hawke's Bay	244
Wellington	409
Nelson and Marlborough	152
Westland	174
Canterbury	459
Otago... ..	882
Miscellaneous	150
Total	3,180

ENCLOSURES.

This report is accompanied by the following enclosures:—

1. Maps of the North and Middle Islands showing the railways open, in progress, and proposed.
2. Diagram showing mileage of railways opened each year.
3. Statement showing lengths of railways authorized, constructed, and surveyed.

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JOHN BLACKETT,

Engineer-in-Chief.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works.