

1888.

NEW ZEALAND.

GOLD-DISCOVERY AT MAHAKIPAWA

(REPORT ON), BY THE INSPECTING ENGINEER, MINES DEPARTMENT.

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr. G. F. Richardson, with Leave of the House.

The INSPECTING ENGINEER, Mines Department, to the UNDER-SECRETARY of MINES.

(Memorandum.)

Mines Department, Wellington, 3rd August, 1888.

IN accordance with your instructions I visited the locality of the recent gold-discovery at Mahakipawa, and have now the honour to report on the same as follows:—

DISCOVERY OF GOLD.

The gold was discovered by Charles Jackson, who first commenced to prospect the Mahakipawa Creek about the middle of January last, and was subsequently joined by Matthew Patterson, William Campbell, Hugh Patterson, and James Norton, whom I will term in this report "the prospectors." They found good prospects of gold in crevices and pot-holes in the rock at the side of the creek, using the tin dish. After prospecting in the creek in this manner for some time, they got some boards to make sluice-boxes, in order to work the ground in a more systematic manner. They had to carry these boards from the Mahakipawa Arm of the Pelorus Sound, a distance of nearly five miles, and, in order that they might not be observed, they carried them over the open flat at night and "planted" them in the bush at the mouth of the gorge, being able to carry them through the bush in the day-time without attracting attention; but before they were able to get the boards up as far as the ground they intended working they were traced by two men, and it was then that they at once informed the Warden at Picton of the discovery they had made. This was on the 23rd of May, and up to that time 1oz. 16dwt. of gold was all they had obtained—by washing with the tin dish.

SITUATION OF PROSPECTORS' CLAIM.

The prospectors' claim is situated about two miles up the Mahakipawa Creek from the head of the flat held as freehold by Mr. Cullen. The creek-bed all through the gorge is very narrow, and full of large quartzose-schist boulders, with a steep sideling all the way from the top of the range down to the creek. The creek-bed varies in width from about 12ft. to 20ft., and the depth of drift-shingle or gravel on the bed-rock also varies according to the fall of the creek: in some places there is not more than 4ft., and in others as much as 12ft. The large quantity of water in the creek where the prospectors' claim is situated, during the winter months, renders working it a difficult undertaking, for every flood fills up the workings level with the natural bed of the creek.

Owing to a heavy flood which took place on Saturday last, the 28th ultimo, and which not only filled up all the prospectors' workings, but carried away their sluice-boxes, all operations in the creek were suspended at the time of my visit, and there was no opportunity of prospecting the wash-drift lying near the bed-rock. The prospectors, however, informed me that they got about 12oz. of gold in cutting a tail-race to work their ground, but had not got their claim properly opened out when the flood referred to destroyed all their work.

EXTENT OF GROUND.

The area in which payable prospects of gold have been obtained extends from a little above the mouth of the gorge in the main creek to near the head of the right-hand or south-western branch, a distance of nearly four miles. In this distance there are twenty-two claims from which payable prospects have been obtained—namely, ten claims in the main creek, including that of the prospectors, and twelve in the south-western branch; there is also one claim on the sideling above the prospectors' claim, and one claim in the eastern branch, where payable prospects have been obtained.

The main creek, as already indicated, divides into two branches, the junction being about 420 yards above the prospectors' claim. One branch goes towards the south-west, and the other winds round in an easterly direction to a saddle which divides the Mahakipawa Creek from the head-waters of the Ada River. The eastern branch has a much greater depth of drift-shingle and gravel on the bed-rock than either the main creek or the right-hand branch, and only one claim in this branch has yet been bottomed.

At the head of the flat below the mouth of the gorge, on a terrace situated in Mr. Cullen's private property, there are several parties prospecting; but, with one exception, I did not hear of any of these claims being on gold. The claim referred to belongs to Davis and party, who obtained over 1oz. of gold from the bottom of a hole. This party have fixed up a wire rope from their claim to the creek, and send down the wash-dirt by this means to be washed.

CHARACTER OF THE GOLD.

Very little gold has yet been obtained from this field: the men are only beginning to get their claims into working-order. Pullman and party showed me about 5½oz. of gold, and several other samples were shown me in Picton. All the gold is very coarse, the smallest pieces being about ¼dwt., and some 7oz. nuggets have been obtained: the largest piece shown me was 1oz. 12dwt. The gold is all mixed with quartz, and, judging from its appearance, it has travelled some distance: all the pieces I saw were considerably rounded and water-worn. Being intermixed with quartz, it gives the impression of having come from a quartz reef, which will probably be found near the top of the range. When examining several of the nuggets minutely with a magnifying-glass the centre appeared to consist mostly of quartz, with a thin film of gold covering it. This might be the result of rich quartz specimens being broken up by the action of the travelling shingle and boulders in the stream, the gold being bent over the remaining portions of the quartz. I think it is probable that a rich quartz reef will be found at or near the head of the south-western branch as the creek-bed gets worked up.

COUNTRY ROCK.

The whole of the bed-rock in this district resembles the Otago schists in the vicinity of Skipper's and the Shotover mines, being in thin foliation and full of quartz; indeed, it is a thinly-foliated schist, extensively intersected by quartz veins. The same class of rock is met with in going from Picton to Okiwa Bay, at the head of Queen Charlotte Sound, after passing Iwirua Point: it seems to run through a belt of country extending from Wakamarina to Kenepuru Sound, and I am informed the same rock is found at Jackson's Head. Gold-bearing rocks exist throughout a wide area in this district, but prospecting has not been carried on to prove whether auriferous deposits are to be found.

MINING POPULATION.

The total number of men on the field at the time of my visit was about two hundred, of whom ninety held claims in which payable prospects had been obtained. The present extent of known auriferous country will not admit of a large population, as the ground that is considered likely to be payable is almost wholly taken up already; so that any new-comers must be prepared to go prospecting. The sideling of the range is very steep, and in many places nothing but bare rock shows on the surface; so that there is not much dependence to be placed on finding a large amount of alluvial gold on the sides of the range.

Those who have claims in the creek-bed will probably not be able to get much gold for the next two months, as the floods will always destroy their workings, the creek-bed in most places being too narrow to admit of the water being kept to one side. There is, however, a likelihood of a good deal of gold being got when dry weather sets in; and the field, as far as one can judge from the present prospects, is likely to last for about two years.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE FIELD.

There are good indications that auriferous-quartz lodes will yet be found in this neighbourhood; but it is extremely rough country to prospect. There is also a probability of gold being found on Mr. Cullen's land on the flat through which the creek passes; but, if so, it will be expensive to work, on account of the large quantity of water there will be to contend with; so that the ground will have to be rich before it can be profitably worked. The terms on which Mr. Cullen at present allows the miners to prospect on the terraces are 10s. a month for half an acre of ground.

ROADS.

There is at present a good summer dray-road from Okiwa Bay, at the head of Queen Charlotte Sound, to the Mahakipawa Arm of Pelorus Sound; and I was informed that the Government is about to construct a jetty at the head of Okiwa Bay, at which steamers can call and land goods, which can then be taken by drays to Mr. Cullen's homestead, and thence by drays through his property to the mouth of the gorge. Mr. Cullen offers to allow free access through his property until such time as the field is properly tested.

There is a road-reserve through Mr. Cullen's property, but it cannot be used until the road is constructed; and this would involve the erection of several bridges, as the banks of the creek are not suitable for fords at some of the places where the crossings occur on the road-reserve. Mr. Cullen is, however, agreeable to exchange for the present surveyed line of road, if the Government deem it desirable, another piece of land going alongside the terrace, which would be much more suitable for a road than the present reserve, and at the same time improve his property, as it would not cut up the good land on the flat to such an extent.

The road that requires immediate construction is a horse-track from the mouth of the gorge to the forks, a distance of about two miles and a half. This, I estimate, could be constructed along the sideling for about £450. The only way of getting to the diggings at present is either to go up the creek-bed—which is only practicable when the creek is low, and then only for foot passengers, who have to jump from boulder to boulder—or by a track along the sideling on the northern side of the creek. The latter can scarcely be termed a track, as there are places where a dog can scarcely follow a man; indeed, it is hard work to travel a mile an hour on this track without provisions or swag.

The Hon. the Minister of Mines has authorised a survey to be made of a horse-track from the mouth of the gorge to the forks, and its construction subsidised to the extent of £225. The construction of this track will be proceeded with at once, so as to enable provisions to be delivered on the field, and the surveyor can at the same time see if a better line of road can be got through Mr. Cullen's property than the present road-reserve. An exchange of the same amount of land would be given by Mr. Cullen, he being allowed the present road-reserve. The road could then be constructed at any time if required.

Annexed is a plan showing the locality of the goldfield and the place where the road requires to be constructed to give access to the diggings.

The Under-Secretary of Mines.

HENRY A. GORDON,
Inspecting Engineer.

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