

I felt exceedingly disappointed that the impassable break between Howe's Knob and Mount Franklin compelled me to abandon the contemplated circuit of the Franklin Range and the Dividing Range; but I had the satisfaction of being able to obtain several sets of observations for the fixing of all prominent features. Under any circumstances I would not have been able to do much more than I had done, for while again descending into the Actor Valley the rain set in, and continued almost without intermission for four days, causing the rivers to run bank-high, and putting a complete stop to everything in the shape of exploring.

On the 1st May the flood had subsided, and we shifted camp to abreast Princess Creek, and on the 2nd we reached the top camp on the Okuru. From it I explored the Okuru headwaters and passes thereabouts. The pass, or, more properly speaking, the saddle, by which the Maori Wakatipu Jack must have crossed into Westland, separates a small branch of the Blue River from a small creek running into the Okuru River. It is a purely "razorback" saddle, not more than 10ft. wide on the top, and with sides dipping at an angle of 65° for about 1,500ft. into both the Blue River and the Okuru. In ascending this saddle a rope had to be used, and it is a puzzle to me how the Maori managed to get across it without some such help: it seems most likely that he ascended the gentler slopes at the side of this saddle, where the dense vegetation gives every facility for climbing, and that he made his descent into the Okuru from a point at least a thousand feet higher than the saddle itself. The altitude of the Maori Saddle is 4,170ft., and it could be pierced by a tunnel not exceeding 20 chains in length at an altitude of about 2,600ft. The working up to it from the Blue River side is very easy, as far as I could see—the Blue River Valley is a nice open one, and the hills slope gently into it; but the "get-away" from the Maori Saddle down the Okuru is very difficult—galleries would require to be cut into almost perpendicular rocky cliffs for a mile and a half between the saddle and the Princess Creek.

The other saddle—Topsy's Saddle—leading into another branch of the Blue River, is too high, and hence useless for practical purposes; moreover, the head of that branch of the Blue River itself, and as far down as I was able to see from various points of observation, is very gorgy, and bound throughout by steep rocky sidelings.

The Dividing Range at the sides of the Maori and Topsy Saddles rises to very great heights, and some of the peaks thereabout are visible from the sea-coast. One of these mountain-tops especially—Mount Bertha, 5,870ft. high—offered a splendid opportunity of fixing the surrounding country. From it the Open Bay Island, four miles off the mouth of the Okuru, is plainly visible, and the valley of that river is seen to extend, in almost a straight line, from the Dividing Range to the sea-coast. At the very head of the Okuru there are several grass-flats, but they are situated at such a height, and are so much shaded from the sun's rays by Mounts Argus and Actor, as to make it certain that for many months in the year these flats must remain covered with snow.

While at this stage of my narrative I may be permitted to digress somewhat, and introduce a subject which, though not directly connected with topographical surveys, does still somehow dovetail into that work: I refer to the rabbit "nuisance," and the ferret, weasel, and stoat "blessing." During the past summer several weasels and ferrets were caught and killed at the Okuru and Waiatoto settlements. These creatures were taken close to, and some within about a mile from, the sea-coast. To the question as to where they come from there could be only one answer: nobody introduced them into Westland, and hence they must have been the progeny of those imported by the Government, and must have found their way across the Dividing Range from either Otago or Canterbury, or both. But, in the absence of any signs of rabbits about the coast settlements, it is difficult to understand what brought these creatures over. This mystery was effectually cleared up on my exploration trip. We were prepared to meet with rabbits on the first day's travel inland, but we were disappointed. It was not until we got near the Actor, about nineteen miles from the sea-coast, that we noticed the first traces of rabbits, and it was not until we got to the very head-waters of the Okuru that we saw the rabbits in numbers. The ferrets and weasels, no doubt, came up to the Dividing Range with the rabbits, but as soon as they discovered our ground-birds—our kakapos, kiwis, wood-hens, blue-ducks, and such like—they followed up the more palatable game. This is what brought the ferrets and weasels down to the coast settlements, and the rabbits on our side of the dividing range will henceforth be left undisturbed and be allowed to spread as they please. Past experiences have satisfied me that rabbits never will do much mischief on the West Coast. Years ago they were turned out in several parts of Westland—parts most favourable to them, open lands and sandhills—but they all died out. The climate is evidently too damp for them, and they certainly will never thrive in our dense bush-country. But, as regards the ferrets, weasels, &c., they will thrive, and will continue to thrive until the extermination of our ground-birds, which has now begun, is fully accomplished. That I am not prophesying evil without good grounds I may prove by the following: In all my explorations on the coast, the certainty of getting a good supply of birds made it possible to keep the provision-swags, which men had to carry, within reasonable weights and dimensions. On this last trip of mine rather more than the usual amount of provisions was taken, but, in spite of this precaution, the party had to be put on short rations for the last three days—namely, one scone per man per day. The further inland the more plentiful the birds, used to be the rule; but that is reversed now. At the head of the Okuru and the Burke some nights passed during which we never heard the screech of the kakapo or the shrill whistle of the kiwi; and, as for blue-ducks, we saw only three during the whole time we were out. In former times, while camping near the head-waters of any of the rivers, the fighting of the kakapos amongst themselves, and the constant call of the other birds around the tent and camp-fire during the night, often kept people from sleeping. This has all changed now: at least in the southern part of the West Coast absolute stillness reigns at night, and there is nothing now to keep a traveller from sleeping except—owing to the absence of the birds—an empty stomach.

While passing through Southland lately my attention was directed to the wonderful adaptation of the Australian opossum to the New Zealand climate and New Zealand forests; and I would beg to