

suggest that some compensation for the evil done in exterminating our ground-birds might perhaps in some measure be obtained on the West Coast by introducing opossums to it. Opossum-furs are of considerable commercial value, and would, no doubt, in a very few years range as an article of New Zealand export; moreover, opossums as an article of food are, I am informed, by no means to be despised.

To return to the exploration: I descended the Okuru from the top camp to the junction of Princess Creek on the 5th May, and next morning commenced ascending that creek with the view of finding my way into the Burke country. From the ranges up the Actor River a fairly good view of Princess Creek Valley was obtained, and the low depression between Mount Citheron and Mount Victor seemed to indicate a possible pass; and my examination of that part of the district confirmed the correctness of my surmise, and proved the existence of one of the easiest and best passes in the south. The ascent from the Okuru to it, and the descent into the Burke from it, by one of its small tributary creeks, is quite gentle, and the pass itself is a true pass, perfectly level on the top for about 60 chains, with an average width of about 20 chains. Its altitude is only 1,820ft., or about 30ft. lower than Haast Pass, and the vegetation on it consists of about 50 acres of swamp-grass, and around the edges of that, black scrub and light birch trees.

Abreast the pass, to the west of it, and about half a mile from the top of Mount Victor, there is one of the most imposing mountain-gateways I have seen. The Victor Range at that spot is cleft in two down to a level only about 300ft. to 400ft. higher than the pass I have been describing. The width at the bottom of this cleft is about 2 chains. The walls on both sides consist of solid rock rising to a height of about 1,500ft., with an inclination very little removed from the perpendicular, for the distance of the rock-walls from each other at that height seems to be only 5 or 6 chains. From thence the Mount Victor face continues to be steep to the very top of that mount (6,319ft. high), whereas on the other side of the gateway the slope towards the top of Mount Medeon is gentler. This gateway leads into Emil's Creek, and is, I believe, impassable. I much regret I could not, owing to our getting short of provisions, afford to spend a day or two over a thorough examination of this wonderful freak of Nature.

The descent of the Burke River was very arduous: it is a wild river, with cataracts following each other in quick succession, which makes travelling in the river-bed impossible. Being specially desirous of examining the east or inland side of that river, I picked my way down along its western bank, which is very much steeper, and hence more difficult than the eastern side; but I was compensated for the extra labour by being enabled to obtain a splendid view of the whole of the inland slopes, and to note special features of interest in connection with railway- or road-construction.

At the junction of Strachan's Creek with the Burke we found ourselves completely blocked. Strachan's Creek is a large creek tumbling down in a succession of cataracts and waterfalls between perpendicular rock-walls from 100ft. to 150ft. in height. As the span from bank to bank was too great, and there was therefore not the slightest chance of effecting a crossing by means of dropping a tree over the creek, we travelled up its southern side to an altitude of about 1,830ft. before we were able to descend into the creek-bed, and then, with the help of a few saplings which we managed to rest on big rocks lying in the centre of the creek, we effected a crossing. However, our troubles were not over, for another branch of that same creek, equally rock-bound, drove us up to the grass-line, where, at an altitude of 3,600ft., we camped for the night. But even in the open we found next morning that we could not cross that creek, and we had to follow it up to the very top of the spur—4,450ft. high. From that point—marked K on the map—the range and slopes on the inland side of the Burke, along which the railway-line will have to be taken, could be seen to great advantage, and after fixing the salient points we descended into the Haast Valley at a point near the junction of the Burke and the Haast.

The Burke River is one of the most remarkable rivers in Westland, and the grand cañon it passes through between Strachan's Creek and the Haast junction rivals many of the famous cañons we read of in the Rocky Mountains of America. The Burke, between Strachan's Creek and the Haast junction, falls about 400ft. in a distance of barely  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles, and runs between rock-walls from 200ft. to 300ft. high—rock-walls not perpendicular, but absolutely undercut by the wear-and-tear of ages, for the width of the river at the bottom is nowhere less than 50ft., whereas on the top there are several places where a 10ft. or 12ft. bridge would span the terrible chasm. To look down it makes one shudder, for the depth is so great that nothing but a glimmer of the tumbling and boiling waters below can be seen now and then.

I would strongly urge that a bridle-track be constructed up to this place, to give tourists coming through the Haast Pass an opportunity of seeing one of Nature's grand works, the like of which is not to be met with anywhere in New Zealand.

Our arrival at the Haast Valley brought my exploration trip to an end—not that I had accomplished all I intended, for I purposed also to examine the head-waters of the Wilkin, with a view of finding out whether there was a pass into the Waiatoto River. Further exploration, however, was found to be impossible, for during the night succeeding our descent into the Haast Valley a heavy fall of snow took place, which proved to be the permanent winter coat, as it never again disappeared from the open grass-lands on the mountain-tops. I therefore spent a few days in examining the Haast Pass road, and then paid off and disbanded my party.

Now, as regards the railway route: In 1881 Mr. W. H. Clarke, an officer of the Public Works Department, under instructions from the Engineer-in-Chief, explored and reported upon the best route for a railway from Lake Wanaka to the West Coast *via* Haast Pass. This report and plan is now before me, and I have shown the route indicated by Mr. Clarke in red on the map accompanying this my report. With the information about the country then at hand, I must say, at the outset, that Mr. Clarke has recommended the best route that could be had—namely, across the Haast Pass and down the southern bank of the Haast River. With the data now available the route will have to be altered as shown in blue on my map—*i.e.*, after crossing the Haast Pass the