

The amount of sectional surveys the department has on hand at the present time is very large—much more, indeed, than has been the case for many years past—which is accounted for mainly by the large number of special-settlement associations which have been formed, and by the extent of country now in pastoral holdings, but which has to be prepared for closer settlement by the beginning of 1893. The urgency of pushing on these surveys has been so strongly represented that the staff has recently been augmented by ten surveyors, who are fully engaged in the field. It is to be feared that the necessity of forcing these surveys during the winter season will result in increased cost per acre, in which direction also the nature of the country itself where most of the special settlements lie likewise tends. A large number of the association blocks are situated in country where under any circumstances the exploration and survey of road-lines is difficult, and this difficulty is increased by the comparatively small size of the sections—averaging 200 acres—which implies a great number of cross-roads, the whole of which must be on graded lines, and selected with the greatest care to insure practicable communications hereafter.

The absence of agricultural land, or of, indeed, any land perfectly suited to close settlement in any form, now left in the hands of the Crown is driving would-be settlers to take up lands that even so short a time as two years ago no one dreamt of looking at. It may truly be said that the department is embarrassed to find lands for occupation, those that are left being very inaccessible, and very rough in their nature. Settlement has far outrun the means of communication, and, unless greater means are placed at the command of the department to open roads to the lands still left, settlement on the lands must receive a check.

NATIVE LAND COURT SURVEYS.

The surveys for the purposes of the Native Land Court show a considerable diminution when compared with last year's work. They amount to 555,502 acres, as against 1,091,510 acres in 1891. The cause of this is principally due to a comparative cessation of the surveys in the King-country, where, however, a large amount of work still remains to be done to carry out subdivision orders of the Court. The lesser amount of money available for advances to the Maoris to enable them to carry on these surveys has had a deterrent effect on the work, for in few cases are they able to arrange for defraying the cost themselves. The Maoris cannot, of course, get Europeans to help them in this respect, most of the country being open to the Government alone to purchase, and consequently no security for money advanced can be obtained otherwise than by the Government. The area shown, however, does not represent the total amount surveyed for the Native Land Court, as the authorised surveyors prepared a large number of blocks at the cost of the applicants. All of these surveys have to be checked and recorded in the same manner as those made at the cost of the Government.

GOLD AND OTHER MINING SURVEYS.

There is a remarkable falling-off in the mining surveys for the past period as compared with previous years: only ninety-eight claims, covering 2,727 acres, were completed, as compared with 355 claims, containing 13,821 acres, in 1891. Nearly half of the number completed were in Nelson. This is always an expensive class of survey, due to the fact that the claims are very generally isolated, and come in for survey at different times. The average cost per acre last year was 8s. 1d., as against 5s. 9d. for the previous period.

ROAD AND RAILWAY SURVEYS, ETC.

There is a decrease in the mileage turned out during the past year as compared with the previous period, the figures being 333 miles, as against 519 for 1891. These road surveys do not form part of the regular section-work, but are outside of them, and consist of roads taken in exercise of the reserved rights, &c. During the past year a considerable mileage has been laid out in the Wairarapa district, consisting very generally of roads which had been formed many years, but never until now surveyed. This is a legacy left by the Provincial Government of Wellington. Wellington is not peculiar, however, in this respect; for the arrears of survey left by the several Provincial Governments in most of the provinces have been a perpetual drag on the department for the last fifteen years, and are not fully worked off yet.

MISCELLANEOUS WORK.

No system of tabular returns could well be devised which would admit of every item in such multifarious duties as are performed by the Survey Department being classified. Hence it becomes necessary to group all such items under the head of "Other Work." Included in this are the costs of inspection in the field, demarcation of boundary-lines, reports by surveyors, officers' leave, explorations, &c., all of which are important in themselves, but require no special mention, and fuller details of which will be found in the reports of the Chief Surveyors appended hereto.

CONSTRUCTIVE WORKS, ROADS, BRIDGES, ETC.

No diminution in the works of this class is shown by the annual returns, and, through causes which have already been alluded to, the ensuing year will probably see a considerable increase. Most of the works carried on by the department are conducted by the Chief Surveyors, by the Head Office staff of four road surveyors, and by aid of the County Councils and Road Boards where those bodies possess professional advice. It is with much regret I have to record the loss by death during the year of one of our road surveyors, Mr. J. C. Blythe, who for many years carried out extensive works for the department in the Auckland District.