

CATLIN'S RIVER RAILWAY.

With the exception of the completion of the Catlin's Tunnel contract, very little was done on this line during last financial year, as the amount available was scarcely sufficient to justify the resumption of co-operative works until further provision was definitely made. With the view of securing some return from the moneys already expended on the uncompleted portion of this line it is proposed to resume operations shortly and to complete the railway to Owake (Vial's), at the 18-mile peg, as early as possible. The expenditure on the line last year amounted to £5,002, and it is proposed to ask for a vote of £7,500 for the current year.

SEAWARD BUSH RAILWAY.

The works on this line have progressed well during the year. The formation-works as far as the Gorge Road are almost completed, and work is in hand for a distance of 52 chains beyond this point for the purpose of opening up a very convenient and extensive ballast-pit which has been discovered at that mileage. The bridges are also well in hand, and the platelaying will be started shortly. Contracts have been let for the supply of the sleepers required, and the rails are in stock at Dunedin.

The Government is of opinion that a further extension of this line to tap the country lying to the eastward of the Mataura River is desirable. It is thought that the line should be extended as far as Waimahako, a distance of 23 miles 26 chains from the junction of the railway with the main line from Invercargill to the Port, and a little less than five miles from the point to which the works are now in course of construction. The cost of this extension will be about £30,000, exclusive of permanent-way materials. An appropriation on account of the work is included in the estimates for the current year. The first work to be undertaken will be the bridge over the Mataura River, and this will be put in hand as soon as the necessary drawings and specifications are prepared. The vote proposed for the current year is £15,000.

SLEEPERS.

In connection with the supply of sleepers for several of our railway works, the House will perhaps be surprised to learn that it has been found advisable, and indeed necessary, to obtain them from the west coast of the Middle Island. With the view of thoroughly testing the market, however, the Government recently advertised for tenders for seventy thousand sleepers, publishing the advertisement in the Kawakawa, Dargaville, Hamilton, Whangarei, Auckland, Gisborne, Te Aroha, Woodville, Wellington, Havelock, Westport, Greymouth, Hokitika, Kumara, Christchurch, Dunedin, Balclutha, and Invercargill papers, with the result that ninety-eight tenders were received for the supply of, altogether, 319,000 sleepers, viz.: Silver-pine, 142,900; kauri, 70,500; birch, 47,400; kamai, 31,000; totara, 18,700; matai, 7,500; rata, 1,000. The tender-price for 4,500 of the totara sleepers being reasonable (viz., 3/5½ to 3/8), tenders for these were accepted; as were also two tenders for a total of 10,000 red-birch sleepers at 2/6. The remainder of the totara and birch sleepers tendered for were either too high in price or of unsuitable quality: the birch timber from the localities affected being known to be of an unsuitable character. The tenders for all the kauri sleepers were declined, as the prices quoted were considered to be too high. The tender-prices for the silver-pine sleepers ranged from 2s. 5d. to 3s. 4d., and all those which would cost under 2s. 10d. f.o.b. at Greymouth were accepted, as it was ascertained that sleepers at this price could be delivered on the railways where they were required at a lower price than the local tenders for same. Twenty tenders for silver-pine sleepers were thus accepted, providing for the supply of 51,000 sleepers, and, with the exception of one contract for 10,000, all were let, in lots of from 500 to 3,000, to parties of settlers, practically on the co-operative principle.

As regards the fitness of silver-pine for sleepers, the Government is advised by the Engineer-in-Chief that silver-pine is hard, close-grained, not liable to warp or crack, and one of the most durable of New Zealand timbers, especially when buried or placed in contact with the ground, in which positions its lasting