

dealing with a store for four years, and leaving his account all settled up, upon removal to another place was refused credit at a store belonging to the same storekeeper.

The following is the evidence given by Ellis Rees Ellis before the Gum Commission in 1893: I am a gum-digger on Harding's Lease. I wish to state that the general feeling of the diggers is against the proposal that any gum-lands of the Crown should be open for selection or sale, but that it should be kept for gum-digging. Men are digging now on the sections that have been withheld from sale. I think there is plenty of good land with gumfields adjacent in the country north of Auckland which might be opened for settlement. The diggers would have to pay more in royalty or license-fees the more land is closed to them by passing into private hands. I have been digger and bushman off and on for sixteen years. I am married, and should be very glad to settle on a piece of land if I could. I earn about £2 a week at gum-digging. I do not think it would be fair to other diggers for me to be allowed to take up 50 or 60 acres of gum-land. I believe ten out of twenty diggers would be glad to take up land and settle if facilities to do so were offered them. I do not know any gum-ground that I could pronounce to be worked out. It does not follow that ground is worked out because it is abandoned. A good deal of such ground is resorted to again by persons who have nothing better to turn to, and ground of that sort would be kept for gum-digging until the pressure of population makes it necessary to take up such land for settlement. The general opinion of the diggers is that an export duty will fall on them, and therefore they object to it. It seems to me analogous to the case of kauri timber, on which it was some time ago proposed to put a duty in bulk under the belief that the people in Victoria could not do without it, a belief which the event has proved to be mistaken. We are apprehensive that it may in like manner be proved that the consumer of kauri-gum can manage to dispense with it if an export duty is put on it. Moreover, the gold duty was really paid by the digger.

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MAUNGANUI BLUFF, 19TH JANUARY, 1898.

*William Reynolds*: I am a gum-digger and settler on 543 acres, Sections 17 and 17A, Wai-poua Survey District, purchased from Mr. Owen at 13s. an acre, part fern and part mixed bush. I have a partner in the land. I depend upon gum-digging to cultivate the land. I have been digging about sixteen years, principally in the Wairoa and in this district. I have been on Mitchelson's Lease. I was not satisfied with the way things were worked, and I left eight or nine years ago. Since then I have worked on the free fields, where I have paid a royalty, and have been satisfied with the results. I was dissatisfied while working at Mitchelson's Lease, because I did not think I obtained a fair price for the gum, and I paid too high a price for the stores. I believe I could have obtained £1 or £1 10s. per hundredweight more for the gum if I had been at liberty to sell it at any free store on the Wairoa. I quote one instance, which shows that too low a price was paid, or attempted to be paid, and it was this: The price of the gum was £1 14s., and instructions were sent up to reduce it by 7s. A number of us immediately left, whereupon the reduction was only effected to the extent of 2s. For the same sort of gum which we dig at Tutamoe we obtained from a storekeeper of the name of Brown £1 16s. a hundredweight, although it had to be brought twice the distance to the market. I think the matter complained of can only be remedied by passing a law which makes it incumbent on owners or leaseholders to charge a royalty only, leaving the digger free to dispose of his gum and to obtain his provisions wherever he likes. The gum on Crown lands and private lands is getting scarcer, and if it was not for the increased price paid now it would not be profitable employment for any gum-digger. Personally, I know of good payable gumfields only on some of the leaseholds now held by Mr. Mitchelson. I was working in the Opanake Forest for years. I was digging ground-gum, which must have been the product of former forests which have been destroyed by fire, or otherwise disappeared. This gum is of a superior description. The system that obtained at Mitchelson's was this: The digger would bring in his gum; the value would be fixed by the storekeeper; then the amount due for provisions, tools, &c., was deducted from that value, and the balance paid over either in cash or by cheque. We were never asked to leave the balance due to us in the hands of the storekeeper. At Mr. Harding's lease the gum business was worked in a different way from Mr. Mitchelson's. He charged a royalty of £1 per quarter, and the digger was permitted to obtain his provisions, tools, &c., wherever he liked, and sell his gum where he liked; but Mr. Harding reserved to himself the sole right of supplying meat and of doing all the carting necessary to bring the gum to the stores. For a distance of seven miles his charge was 1s. 6d. per hundredweight; for more than seven miles, 2s. He allowed the storekeepers to cart out provisions to the gum-diggers. I think it would be judicious, and for the good of the community, if the Government were to acquire all the private gumfields for gum-digging and for settlement. The Flax Lease, in the Kaihu Valley, held by Mitchelson Brothers, contains a large quantity of land very suitable for settlement purposes. I believe there is a difficulty in collecting license-fees, owing to diggers removing from one place to another, and if the Ranger was empowered to arrest the man on the spot when unable to produce his gum-license that state of affairs would probably soon come to an end. The diggers would much prefer to pay a yearly license-fee and have the right to dig wherever they wished. An export duty would be more equal than a license-fee, as it would touch all the gum obtained from freehold and private leaseholds, and I would have no objection to an export duty being imposed, provided that every penny so collected is expended on the construction and metalling of roads within the gum-fields. We gum-diggers in this district are of opinion that Owen's Swamp should be acquired by Government, and assistance given in cutting one main drain through it. It would be a field for years to settlers about Maunganui Bluff to earn a few pounds during the summer time. Petitions to this effect have already been forwarded to Government. Regarding the Austrians, I have no fault to find with them as men; they are well-behaved and respectable; but we object to them because they are birds of passage, coming here to make a few hundred pounds out of gum, and then going