

MINERALS OTHER THAN GOLD

There has been a further decline in the production of minerals in which interest had been stimulated by wartime needs. Production of both mercury and mica ceased early in 1945, while the export figures for scheelite concentrates are a mere fraction of those achieved during war years.

The world shortage of base metals and the high prices for the metals and the ores of those metals resulting from this have created some interest in prospecting for the ores of copper, lead, and zinc, which, though of widespread occurrence in New Zealand, have not as yet been found in deposits of economic value. It is of interest in this connection that a shipment of copper-ore, the first for many years, has recently been made to Australia.

Production of the less spectacular minerals such as clays and limestones continues to increase, and the production of agricultural limestone for 1946 was a record and approached closely to the million tons mark.

Scheelite.—Mining operations for scheelite were continued by various small working parties in the Glenorchy district, but on a much reduced scale. During 1946 the equivalent of 27 tons of concentrates assaying 65 per cent. WO_3 was produced and shipped, as against 34 tons in 1945 and 145 tons in 1944, the peak year of wartime production. The collapse in the price of scheelite that followed the 1914-18 war has not been repeated, and the Glenorchy producers were able to enter into a contract with an English firm of ore-buyers for disposal of their concentrates at an acceptable price. Since completion of this arrangement there has been a marked and continued rise in the price of scheelite concentrates overseas, and the future market for scheelite-ores, with expanding uses of tungsten, seems assured. Producers in the Glenorchy district, in common with other sections of the mining industry, have had difficulty in securing suitable labour, and the recent drought has hampered operations.

Mercury.—There was no production of mercury during the year, and the property and plant of Mercury Mines, Ltd., has continued on a care-and-maintenance basis. The price of mercury has slumped to a fraction of the price obtained during the war owing to resumption of the marketing of mercury by the international mercury cartel from rich and extensive deposits in Spain and Italy. The present price-level precludes all possibility of production in New Zealand at a profit.

Manganese.—A shipment of 402 tons of manganese ore was made by the tributor of Mirandite Products, Ltd.'s, mine at Clevedon to Australia, which realized £1,686. Work was continued at the mine, and it is expected that another shipment will be made during 1947.

Copper.—After experiencing considerable difficulty in securing shipping space it was at last found possible to make a shipment of 580 tons of copper-ore to the smelter at Port Kembla, in Australia, from the copper-ore occurrence recently opened up at Pakotai, near Whangarei, in North Auckland. The ore proved to contain approximately 13 per cent. of copper, 3 dwt. of gold, and 33 dwt. of silver per ton. However, before the real worth of the deposit can be assessed considerable prospecting work is required, and it is expected this will be undertaken at an early date.

Iron-ore.—From the deposits in North Auckland and at Onekaka 7,406 tons of iron-ore were obtained for use in gas-purification, the manufacture of stock lies, and in the cement industry, the greater part of this production coming from the North Auckland occurrences.

Uranium.—Investigations into the occurrence of uranium-ores in New Zealand were continued by officers of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and during the year one of these officers was sent to Australia to investigate the methods