

It has been decided to overprint postage-stamps at $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., 3d., 6d., and 1s. for the Island of Aitutaki.

It is not intended meanwhile to overprint post- and letter-cards for the islands named.

PACIFIC CABLE.

The colony is to be congratulated on the consummation of this highly important undertaking. The cable, which was opened for traffic between New Zealand and Australia and Fiji on the 9th April of last year, was completed to Bamfield, Vancouver Island, on the 31st October following, and opened for international business on the 8th December.

The steamer "Colonia," with the Vancouver-Fanning Island section of the cable, left London on the 12th July, 1902, and arrived at Vancouver on the 14th September. She landed the Vancouver shore end at Bamfield on the 18th September, and completed laying the deep-sea portion of the cable to Fanning Island on the 6th October. The shore end, which was on the "Anglia," was spliced and landed the following day. This vessel, which had proceeded to London after laying the Southport, Norfolk Island, Doubtless Bay, and Fiji sections, reached Honolulu on the 30th September with the Fanning Island-Fiji section and the Fanning Island shore end of the Vancouver cable. She commenced laying the Fiji section the same day as that on which she landed the shore end of the Vancouver cable, and finished her work at Suva on the 31st, thereby establishing communication by the State-owned cable with Great Britain and Europe, Canada, and the United States.

Congratulatory messages on the completion of so important and far-reaching a project affecting the Empire were exchanged by the Acting-Governor, the Premier, and the Postmaster-General with the Secretary of State for the Colonies; the Acting Governor-General of the Australian Commonwealth; the Earl of Ranfurly, the Governor of New Zealand, at Hobart; the Prime Minister of the Australian Commonwealth; the Chairman, Pacific Cable Board; the Prime Minister, Ottawa; the Agent-General; and others.

The deep-sea portion of the Vancouver-Fanning Island cable, the longest in the world, was laid without a hitch in the record time of about twenty days, and the contractors and others connected with the work are to be heartily congratulated. It may be mentioned that the "Colonia," a steamer of 7,976 tons, was built specially for conveying from London, and laying, the Vancouver-Fanning Island section.

The Fiji-Fanning Island-Vancouver sections were subjected for thirty days to the usual tests, with excellent results. Indeed, the tests on the Fanning Island-Vancouver section, which is 3,458 knots in length, proved that, instead of a speed of only 70 to 80 letters, 102 letters per minute could, under normal conditions, be relied upon, thereby demonstrating that the working-capacity of the cable was much higher than the expert evidence had indicated. The cable was handed over to the Board, at the end of the thirty days (as provided by the contract with the manufacturers), on the 17th November. But, as already stated, it was the 8th December before the cable was opened for international traffic.

The Telegraph Maintenance and Construction Company, the contractors for manufacturing and laying the cable, carried out their contract in a highly satisfactory manner, the cable-laying being actually finished nearly two months within contract time.

The cable had only been opened for business about three weeks when the newly erected land line across Vancouver Island, connecting with the cable at Bamfield, was interrupted, cutting off communication *via* the Pacific with Europe and places east of Vancouver; and, unfortunately, there were six subsequent interruptions to this particular line up to the 9th February last. The line, from the nature of the country it traverses, having proved unreliable, it has been decided that a short length of cable from Bamfield to Alberni, about thirty-five miles, shall be laid, and that part of the land line across the island, which has given so much trouble abandoned. The work is to be completed by the end of July. The other telegraph-lines across Canada gave no trouble whatever.

The Pacific cable traffic is transmitted across the Atlantic by the Anglo-American and Commercial Telegraph companies. Following the opening of the Pacific cable a much faster cable service between the colony and America and Europe has resulted, and the time has also improved on the Eastern Extension Company's lines. Messages *via* the Pacific from London frequently reach the colony within the hour, and the average time of transmission may be put down at about three hours, which should be regarded as a really good service.

The Pacific traffic is steadily growing, and since the completion of the cable the colony's telegraph business by both routes has increased by about fifty per cent.

On the opening of the Pacific cable for through traffic, the ordinary rate to Great Britain was reduced from 3s. 4d. to 3s. a word, a previous reduction from 5s. 2d. to 3s. 4d. having been made by the Eastern Company as from the 1st June last year; Government messages from 2s. 4d. to 1s. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and Press from 1s. 2d. to 1s. a word. The following reduced rates were also brought into operation: To Vancouver and San Francisco, 2s. 4d. per word; to New York, 2s. 8d. per word; a reduction of 2s. 6d. and 1s. 8d. per word on the rates formerly charged *via* Eastern. Corresponding reductions came into force for America generally.

The average number of messages transmitted to and from New Zealand prior to the opening of the Pacific cable was about 425 per day. The present average is nearly 600 a day by both routes.

The date and handed-in time were not at the outset inserted in international messages *via* Pacific passing over the Atlantic cables, but this was subsequently arranged for, as from the 30th January last, on payment of a fixed annual sum by the Board to the Atlantic cable companies. The date, hour, and minute to the nearest five minutes are now inserted in the preamble of messages from Europe, and messages from Canada and the United States bear Vancouver date and time.