1914.

NEW ZEALAND.

WANGANUI RIVER TRUST

(ANNUAL REPORT OF THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

MEMBERS: Messrs. T. D. Cummins, Government nominee (Chairman); W. A. Veitch, M.P. for Wanganui; G. V. Pearce, M.P. for Patea; W. J. Polson, Chairman, Wanganui County Council; William Ritchie, Chairman, Waitotara County Council; W. G. Bassett, J. H. Burnet, and T. B. Williams, elected by the ratepayers of Wanganui (Note.—Mr. T. B. Williams is also Mayor of Wanganui); and Mr. Alfred Burnett, Chairman of Wanganui Chamber of Commerce.

REPORT.

SIR,— Wanganui, 1st April, 1914.

During the past working season the energies of the Trust have been mainly in the direction of keeping the river-channel open for the ever-growing traffic on the river, and securing a safe passage for steamers and launches at Tarepokiore (No. 128: see Mr. J. T. Stewart's map of the Wanganui River). Tarepokiore has always been a menace to navigation, more especially in flood-time, when a whirlpool was in evidence. The Trust has during the past working season expended most of the £1,000 subsidy here, and it is satisfactory to note that this previously dangerous place is now safe for traffic under all conditions of river. Not only is this so, but larger steamers can now negotiate this rapid, and are enabled to carry with safety the products of the settlements on the upper reaches to Wanganui.

It is estimated that during the season 1914–15 over two thousand bales of wool will pass through Tarepokiore. This estimate is a reasonable one, and the quantity before estimated is but a tithe of what must eventually come down-stream as the country in the upper reaches comes into profit. It is safe to say that in ten years some ten thousand bales of wool must travel down the Wanganui River as the country is opened up.

In my interim report, No. 97, attached hereto, I have referred to the conditions of the river as they are to-day, also to what is necessary in the future.

I may here remark that the Trust has been enabled, by the vote of £1,000 passed during last session of Parliament, to arrange for the construction and equipment of a suitable launch that will be useful for towing and other purposes. Tenders were invited for the construction of the launch, and the contract was secured by Messrs. Seager Bros., of Auckland. The launch will be equipped with a Thorneycroft oil-motor capable of developing 53 b.h.p. on kerosene, or 65 b.h.p. on petrol, and is 50 ft. long by 7 ft. beam. The acquisition of a powerfully driven oil-launch will very materially assist in providing more permanent structures in stone walls by the easy towage of punts to and from stone-deposits.

It is pleasing to note the valuable additions to the river-service fleet of more powerful and up-to-date oil-driven launches. The use of wire ropes and winches for hauling over rapids is almost relegated to the past.

The tourist traffic is assuming larger proportions, and I am informed the present season in this direction will prove a record one.

Tolls and dues levied for goods carried on the river-steamers are in an increasing ratio, and, despite the fact that when the Main Trunk Railway came into competition some years ago dues were reduced by 1s. per ton, the revenue from this source is increasing. This indisputably shows that the river is being largely used for development of settlement. Indeed, it has been the important factor for opening up a large tract of country that for years could not be roaded or brought to profit.

For details of conditions of the river I would refer you to interim report No. 97, attached.

I have, &c.,

The Under-Secretary for Lands, Wellington. T. D. CUMMINS, Chairman.

INTERIM REPORT No. 97.

As is usual, prior to my annual report I made an official visit of inspection of the river to note the works completed or in progress during the working season now drawing to a close. I was accompanied by two members of the Trust, Messrs. J. H. Burnet and W. A. Veitch, M.P.

The conditions of the river were generally favourable for inspection.

We left Wanganui on Sunday, the 22nd March, in the s.s. "Ohura," at 7 a.m., and arrived at Pipiriki at 6 p.m., on the way up noting any difficulties in navigation. On arrival at Pipiriki we found the river-gauge showing 30½ in. below the mark or zero established by the steamer-proprietors as a gauge. (I may here mention that the zero was established in the early history of the river service by the steamer-proprietors when it was considered to be suitable water to reach Pipiriki, or ordinary summer level.) We met with little or no difficulties on the way up-stream, despite the fact that the "Ohura" was carrying probably fifty passengers for wayside ports and some cargo.

We found the walls and groynes erected by the Trust proving effective. In the case of the stone walls that have been constructed, these are in marked contrast to the shingle and wire-net walls. They are permanent structures not affected by flood-water, whereas the walls constructed with shingle and enclosed by wire netting have not a long life, and must be only looked on as temporary structures, being liable to damage during flood, more especially by floating timber. From time to time these shingle and wire-net walls must be replaced by permanent stone walls. This will be a gradual evolution, and will be very materially assisted by the steel launch now being procured.

In the past the Trust has suffered from the want of a suitable launch for towing punts to and from places where suitable stone is available on the banks of the river. I may here remark that it is noticeable throughout the course of the river that where walls are required for lifting the river over the shallows or scouring the rapids suitable stone for constructing walls is not available; consequently, recourse had to given to the utilization of walls constructed of shingle enclosed in wire netting. There is an abundant supply of suitable stone on the river-bank, but, unfortunately, the stone is frequently at some distance from requirements.

So far as the shingle-wire-net walls are concerned, the position is that they have a short life, through the galvanizing being worn off the iron wire and the friction of the shingle. Then, again, the wire netting on the tops is liable to be torn off in flood-water by floating timber, and the shingle escapes, thereby minimizing the effectiveness of these walls. They have, however, proved most useful, and in the early history of the Trust were indispensable; but, as I have before remarked, they are only temporary structures.

The future work on the river will therefore be the gradual replacing of shingle and wire-net walls by permanent stone structures or a system of locks. The latter proposition, however, although worthy of consideration and should be kept steadily in view, does not appear to be practicable in the meantime.

Present troubles are mainly damage to wire-net walls in flood-time and moving shingle. I am constrained to say that the latter is, and will always be, a continual and ever-present difficulty and expense.

It is and must be apparent to the most casual observer that at the junction of the Ongarue with the Wanganui River many thousands of tons of shingle are annually deposited in the river, which in the ordinary course works it way down-stream. Freshets and floods carry this shingle seaward, and it is interesting to observe that the shingle, comparatively large at the junction, gradually becomes smaller as it reaches the outlet to the sea at the mouth of the river.

During the winter months, when the river is in a more or less flooded condition, drifting shingle deposits in the shallows, more especially below where the walls have been constructed, and this is where trouble comes along when the river falls to summer level.

Shingle is also deposited in the wider places of the river that are not confined by walls or groynes, and when the river is below normal summer level shoals are in evidence. These shoals are the bane to steamer traffic, and always will be. To my mind, having an experience of over fifteen years, I am constrained to say that for all time, unless the river is locked, moving shingle will be present, and will be a continual source of expenditure in the way of maintenance.

To put the matter of my recent visit squarely, I say without hesitation, and after due consideration, that the Trust must in the first place know and appreciate the fact that shingle and wire-net walls are but temporary structures; that they must be gradually replaced by permanent stone walls; and that the shingle that will for all time be deposited in the river will require annual attention. This, of course, is and can only be considered maintenance.

If the Trust were assured of an income of £2,500 per annum I have no doubt that not only could the steamer-channel be maintained, but the permanent stone walls be gradually constructed to take the place of the wire-net walls now doing excellent service.

In continuation, having briefly referred to matters pertaining, I must say we reached Pipiriki at 6 p.m.

On the following morning we proceeded up-stream by the oil-launch "Waiora," a powerfully driven boat of some 70 horse-power, with a Thorneycroft engine. On leaving Pipiriki the water was 32 in. below the mark. We arrived at the Houseboat at Ohura, some fifty-eight miles nearer Taumarunui, at 6 p.m.

The following morning, at 7 a.m., we went on with the "Waiora" as far as Kokakonui, where a good wharf has been recently constructed, and changed over to the "Wai Iti," also an oil-driven launch with Thornycroft engines of 60 horse-power. Thence we proceeded to Taumarunui, where we arrived at 5.30 p.m.

The conditions of river were as previously described, and the launch had no difficulty in negotiating the various rapids.

The following walls were noted for repairs :—

No. 14, Towhenua : Slight repairs.
No. 17, Porokurangi : Slight repairs.
No. 26, Omaka : Repairs to be attended to this season.
No. 33, Pouwhakamaru : Repairs to be attended to this season.
No. 66, Owhata : Slight repairs.
No. 84, Ruangarahu : Repairs to be attended to this season.
No. 90 and between 91 are two walls below Houseboat, both requiring repairs this year.
No. 91, Kahuitara : Requires repair this year.
No. 100, Waikukutea : Slight repairs.
No. 101, Otahapa : Slight repairs.
No. 104, Makomako : Now being repaired.
No. 189, Ngaporo : Repairs to be attended to this year.
No. 196, Paparoa : New wall required.

At the Houseboat the party was joined by the Trust's foreman, Captain Allan Marshall, who accompanied the party to Taumarunui.

On the down trip, which was commenced at 7 a.m. on Thursday, the 26th, the party consisted of the Chairman, Mr. W. A. Veitch, M.P., and Captain Marshall. Leaving Taumarunui, the launch carried some twenty-one passengers and some cargo. We arrived at Pipiriki the same evening at 6 o'clock, and on the following day at Wanganui at noon.

The visit was an enjoyable one, and of much value in an educational way to the party.

I may mention that a telephone-line is being installed on the river downwards from Taumarunui, and up-stream from Wanganui. I have given instructions for Captain Marshall's residence at Pehimahaki, above the Houseboat, to be connected. The cost will be about £5, and will be invaluable to the Trust in the future.

Wanganui, 31st March, 1914. T. D. Cummins, Chairman.

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