

New Big River Mine.—Shortage of men has affected this mine in common with all others in the district. The tonnage crushed was 4,163 tons. A dividend absorbing £2,400 was paid, bringing the total dividends paid by the company to £100,800. Very little development-work has been done for the year, and has been confined to No. 11 level. Under the present conditions of labour-supply and the greatly increased cost of mining requisites it is difficult for a company to undertake any large development schemes.

North Blackwater Development Syndicate.—During the year this syndicate was compelled, pending the erection of air-compressing plant, to discontinue the eastern crosscut at the 1,000 ft. level of the Prohibition shaft at 315 ft. Chambers were then cut for the Nos. 1 to 6 levels, and a start was made to crosscut at No. 6 (1,200 ft.). The first of the gold-bearing reefs cut in No. 7 was met, but work then ceased underground until such time as the new winding and steam plant is erected. Good progress is being made with this, and it should be in commission within a few months.

Progress Mine.—A little development-work was done on Nos. 10 and 11 levels without any very satisfactory results. Only one shift of men has been employed during the year in underground operations, and there was an average of twenty less employees than during last year. During 1917 19,840 tons were treated.

Wealth of Nations and Energetic Mines.—Owing to a fire which took place in April destroying the poppet-heads, winding-ropes, practically all the surface buildings, and doing considerable damage to the boiler and winding plant, mining operations had perforce to cease, and as it was not possible under the war conditions existing to secure new winding-ropes no further work was done for the year. Prior to the fire, however, 3,720 tons of quartz was crushed. As far as the work went it would appear that there was an improvement in the values per ton treated.

HOKITIKA AND ROSS.

Mount Greenland Company.—Work was carried on steadily in a small way throughout the year. Only seven men were employed altogether, and 567 tons of quartz were mined and crushed. Practically no development-work was done. Owing to the out-of-the-way locality of the mine great difficulty is experienced in securing suitable labour for it.

WESTPORT.

Bagley's Reward Mine.—Three men were employed here during the year repairing and restoring the old Columbia Reef plant, and putting in a drive to intersect the discovery made there last year at a spot where the work will not be affected by slip country. The reef has not yet been cut.

STILLWATER.

Victory Mine.—A little development-work was carried on, but work was mainly concentrated on the erection of the battery and aerial tramline. These are now approaching completion, and crushing should be started within a few months.

General Remarks on Quartz-mining.

Apart from the work referred to in connection with the mines little or no prospecting has been done for quartz reefs in any part of the district. Men have been so scarce that few could be spared for this class of work, and the high prices to which all mining requisites, such as drill-steel, explosives, candles, wire ropes, &c., soared have had a great tendency to further discourage any efforts in this line.

The mines have all been inspected at frequent intervals and every endeavour made to see that the regulations were strictly observed. No fatal accidents occurred, and the only accident of any kind that happened was one in which a miner at the Big River Mine lost an eye as the result of an explosion. As far as could be learned the mate of the injured man was firing four charges in a face. Some difficulty occurred in getting one of the fuses to light, and in trying to set it off the men apparently remained too long in the neighbourhood, with the result that the other blasts went off and they were struck by the flying debris. One man was only slightly injured; the other was struck in the face and, as mentioned before, suffered the loss of an eye.

One mine-manager was prosecuted for failing to provide adequate ventilation, but the case was dismissed.

A few applications were received from men for assistance in the nature of a subsidy to enable them to prospect in certain localities. In one case assistance was given at the rate of £1 10s. per week per man for two men for some months, but nothing of any value was found.

Dredging.

The dredging industry in the district has fallen back badly during the year.

The Ahaura dredge, after being closed down for a considerable part of 1917, made another effort, but the results were so unsatisfactory that it only worked a couple of months, ceasing altogether about the end of April.

The Worksop No. 2 dredge started operations at the beginning of the year, but only worked a week or so, when it was decided to cease for good, as the payable ground was evidently worked out.

The Slab Hut dredge worked about half the year, and closed down for the same reason.