

In spite of the dry season that obtained throughout the summer months, and which from January to March almost reached the conditions of a drought, it is pleasing to report that the reserves have not suffered much from fires. Unfortunately, such fires as did occur affected several of the reserves most continually under the public eye. The reserve at the back of the Borough of Picton suffered from two disfiguring fires that destroyed about 20 acres of light bush. These fires were lit by the owners of land adjoining the reserves. It is very disheartening to those interested in the preservation and re-establishment of native scenery to have their efforts nullified by such fires. The Department in its endeavours to improve the natural beauty of this picturesque port has set aside these reserves, and they were being rapidly converted from their former untidy condition into native bush. Two other small fires affected the Whenuanui and Tuamarina Reserves, but not to any marked extent.

The question of dealing with the fire problem is one of difficulty, for, as the adjoining owners point out, they must take advantage of the dry season to fire their fern and danthonia, and once these fires get away it is almost impossible to control them. The question has been given consideration, and the only solution that suggests itself is the compulsory notification to the Commissioner of Crown Lands of the intention to burn adjoining lands during the season, and the preliminary burning of a fire-break under the control of the Field Inspectors.

Another fire that had disastrous possibilities, but fortunately was checked before it had done much damage, occurred at the Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve, when some 4 or 5 acres were burnt, but had it not been for the strenuous exertions of the local member of the Scenic Board, Mr. C. J. Bryant, and his employees, ably assisted at a later stage by an officer of the State Forest Service and local residents, the whole of this beautiful and picturesque reserve would have been endangered. Such a loss to this district would have been irreparable. This fire was also caused by a fire lit on adjoining land getting out of control.

This latter popular reserve was visited by large numbers of picnickers and camping-parties throughout the year, and owing to the number of fireplaces erected by this Department prior to the formation of the Scenic Board there has been no danger of fires occurring through their occupancy, and the reserve has the further advantage of being on the main road and thus under constant supervision.

The reserves in the Sounds County attracted large numbers of camping-parties, as usual, and although some minor cases of vandalism have been reported, such as breaking down the wild cherry-trees to obtain the fruit, the occupation has been, generally speaking, of an orderly nature. The formation of a local Scenic Board to control the large reserves at Kumototo and Ship Cove in the Queen Charlotte Sound seems a question well worthy of consideration. The erection of more fireplaces and conveniences is a matter of some urgency, and the cutting of foot-tracks to enable the public to traverse the bush is very desirable. No great amount need be spent on these tracks—something in the nature of a surveyor's traverse-line with the underscrub cut to ground-level would meet all requirements.

The beautiful Tennyson Inlet Reserve is not so easily accessible to the public as the former reserves mentioned, but nevertheless attracted its share of visitors. The "Tamahine" makes fortnightly week-end excursion trips from Wellington throughout the summer season, and this reserve is generally the venue favoured for the Sunday trip. The question of the erection of a summer hotel or accommodation-house on this reserve is well worthy of consideration. Various applications have been made from time to time for this privilege, but have been deferred from consideration or recommendation for the reason that if such a structure is erected it should be of some magnitude and of such a nature to attract the best class of tourist traffic throughout the Dominion.

The development of the reserves in the southern end of the district has been advanced by the appointment of a Scenic Board to control the so-called Hundalee Scenic Reserves on the coast south of Kaikoura. These reserves are the favourite resort of the motor campers from Christchurch and other parts of the South Island, and also motorists from the North Island make this one of their resting-places on tour. The reserves consist of a narrow strip of land running along the coast for some four to five miles, and in the Christmas and Easter seasons they are thickly studded with tents throughout the whole distance. The Scenic Board was appointed early in December last year, and its operations have been markedly successful. A caretaker was appointed to control the orderly occupation of the reserves, his wages being paid from the fees collected from the campers. Marked improvement in the condition of the reserves is shown. Instead of being left in the usual unsightly condition, with stray tins and debris studded about the various camping-sites, they are now in a clean and orderly state and vandalism has been kept in check. The Canterbury Automobile Association has actively interested itself in the development of these reserves in the interests of its members, who patronize it in large numbers, and have made a substantial donation towards its improvement, subject to a certain sum of money being raised by local subscription or otherwise. The Railway Department organized a rail and motor excursion in March last which was well patronized, and it is possible that these trips will become a periodical feature in coming years. The erection of a cottage at Goose Bay and the installation of a permanent caretaker is contemplated by the Board when their finances permit, and if this can be done the loss caused by the death of the late Mr. F. Auchinleck, who for so many years so ably controlled these reserves for this Department, will be repaired.

The question of control of the Mangamaunu Scenic Reserves, on the coast north of Kaikoura, has been met to a certain extent by the action of the Kaikoura County Council, who supervise and issue permits to camp on the roads fronting these reserves.

During the year a number of honorary rangers were appointed throughout the district.