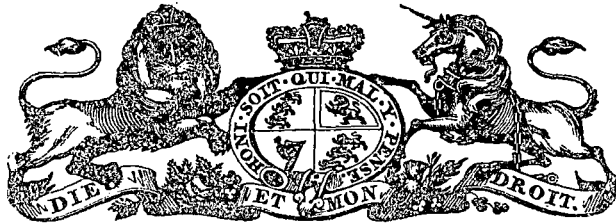


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1862.

TASMANIA.

PORT ESPERANCE AND SOUTHPORT.

REPORT OF THE SURVEYOR-GENERAL.

Presented by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed,
22 July, 1862.



Survey Office, 6th January, 1862.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor of reporting to you my return from the examination of a tract of country lying behind the coast lines of Port Esperance and Southport.

The result of my researches has been to confirm the oft-reported existence of a very considerable area of land of the very best description, and suitable for the growth of anything that the fine climate of the south is capable of maturing. This tract, I may add, is generally though not uniformly level, and therefore, when cleared of the scrubs that cover it, will be found admirably suited for culture.

I have said that the land lately visited by me is generally level; but, by this expression, I desire to be understood as speaking only of the summits of two large plateaux, to which my researches have been restricted, but the slopes of which, where they fall off toward their bases, are not only very steep but stony also.

The areas that I have recently examined may be pretty safely taken at 15,000 acres (exclusive of the tract between Walpole and the White Bluff, as yet too cursorily looked through for special report), but reports of unquestionable accuracy that have reached this office rate the entire breadth of rich forest land within ten miles of Port Esperance at about 50,000 acres.

Though these districts are generally well watered, I found no great supplies on the plateaux visited by me.

The land under consideration is covered with virgin forests of the most valuable kind, being equally well suited for either splitting or sawing purposes. The men who accompanied me (who belonged to Port Esperance, and who have been for very many years engaged in the preparation of timber for market,) assured me that about 30 per cent. of the trees were equally suitable for either posts, palings, laths, or shingles, each capable of yielding from about six to twenty stacks of palings,* and that the rest of the trees were almost uniformly suited for the saw. They constantly described the forests they traversed with me as the most beautiful they ever saw, and that there was nothing that they had encountered to equal them in point of excellence, or in the proportion of trees adapted for market requirements. The timber trees of these forests were the Swamp Gum and the Gum-top Stringy Bark.

I give the opinions of these men, because I was assured by the gentleman who recommended them to me (Mr. Chapman, of the Strathblane Saw Mills,) that they were thoroughly versed in all matters relating to the timber-trade of the place, and that they might be safely referred to for information connected with the business I had in hand.

The great drawback at present existing to the utility and value of these fine forests, is their distance from any shipping-place; for it is to be observed that, for a couple of miles back from the shore-line of the south, they have been so culled of trees suited for splitting purposes, that the work of conveying forest produce to the shore is one of very great cost to the splitter and of equal loss to the Colony. He has indeed to go farther and farther back every year, so that his trade must ere long die out altogether, unless some means are devised to enable him to work with profit the yet untouched inland forests described above.

Before approaching the subject of increasing the facilities of working these forests, it is as well that I should go a little into the details of the labour and cost of getting the produce of the same to the shipping-places. Split stuff is now very generally obtained at a distance varying from six to ten "carries" † from the water's edge or from some cart road leading thereto. If the "stuff" be deposited direct at the water's edge, the cost to the splitter is only one-half his daily earnings—that is, the carrier receives 500 palings of every 1000 that he *backs* down, ‡—that is when a carrier is

* A stack of palings consists of one thousand.

† A "carry" or "spell" is a distance of about three hundred yards.

‡ The weights carried by these men are immense: about 40 palings at a time (said to weigh between 4 and 5 lbs. each,) is a single load.

employed, which is generally done, as more profitable to the splitter than carrying out himself is. But if the stuff be deposited on a cart road only, there is then the further cost of cart hire, which I believe is usually about one shilling per mile for every hundred palings. By these operations connected with conveyance to the shore, six or seven tenths of the value of the stuff is lost to the producer of it,—a loss indeed that is utterly unparalleled in any other trade.

That this is a loss to the Colony, as well as to the splitter, will be evident to all after a moment's thought; for the labour thus employed or *wasted* over these carrying operations would be employed in production instead of service, if the difficulties that now beset the task of getting forest produce to the water's edge could be either removed or simplified.

We may estimate the loss sustained by the Colony by this wasteful service by a reference to the timber exports of past years, in the last four of which split timber of the value of £175,399 has been sent abroad, to which a fourth more may be fairly added for that prepared for home uses—such as for fencing, hut-building, roofing, for fruit cases, &c.—which will raise the worth of the timber split here during the past four years to £219,248.

It will be seen from the above that quite as much or even more labour (and that mostly skilled labour) is required for conveyance as for production; and which, were it not thus frittered away on a mere brute service, would be employed in doubling the manufacture of split timber, and thereby largely increasing our exports of it to those markets where it seems to be generally in demand, but which for want of roads is now entirely lost to the Colony, worth, as it is on an average, about £55,000 a year.

To intercept so serious a loss as this is, is a matter worthy the consideration and interference of the Legislature; and I would respectfully impress on you the necessity of urging your honorable colleagues to address themselves to Parliament for its aid to remedy so grave a defect in the commerce of the Colony.

As it may be thought presumptuous in me to point out to the Legislature the remedies for so disastrous a state of things as those above depicted, which its own wisdom is doubtless able to devise, I shall not presume to do so. But it will be excusable, and perhaps even profitable, to state the results of my enquiries amongst practical persons, how this loss of wealth might be stayed;—they are respectfully submitted for what they are worth.

From persons of this stamp I everywhere learned that the great difficulty we have been discussing might be removed or greatly lessened by multiplying the number of roads from the forests to the coast, the want of which is the cause of all this vast loss to the country. Ordinary carriage roads were everywhere denounced as utterly unsuited to bear the traffic that would assuredly be put upon them, and that *they*, therefore, would not do much towards restoring to our decaying timber trade its former vitality. Indeed the forests precedingly described grow so usually in deep rich soils that any considerable traffic on them would be speedily checked through the softness of the surface they would have to traverse. The repair of such road, used for timber conveyance, was described to me as costly in the extreme, whether made solid by ordinary road metal or by the laying down of slabs, ordinary fashion. The opinions of all seemed united in favour of tramways, not only as being most economical, but also as enabling us to work our timber successfully, even at long distances from the coast, which is at present unapproachable, and therefore valueless to the Colony. On such roads as these a single horse will draw four or five times as much as on an ordinary cart road, which circumstance must tend to reduce the formidable item of carriage to a mere fraction of its present amount, and thus enable our splitters to work forests which, under existing circumstances, are entirely unproductive of profit to the Colony.

I would very respectfully commend the Honorable the Executive to propose to Parliament a trial of tramways into the untouched forests that lie between Southport and Port Esperance, and again between Dover Rivulet and Surges Bay: Twelve miles of such road could be constructed for about £6000.

Should your honorable colleagues think favorably of this proposal, I would then urge them to withdraw from private selection all the Crown Lands lying in the space tinted with red on the accompanying tracing, and to sell no more land there until the tramways are formed.

Port Esperance offers great advantages for such a trial. It is unrivalled as a shipping-place; its timber is perfectly magnificent; and its population already considerable: 440 being the number given to me by the Resident Magistrate, Mr. Daldy; the most of whom are engaged in the timber trade.

I remain, Sir,
Your very obedient Servant,

J. E. CALDER.

The Honorable the Colonial Treasurer.