

(No. 92.)



1870.

T A S M A N I A.

H U O N.

MR. ROBERT CRAWFORD'S REPORT.

Laid upon the Table by the Minister of Lands and Works, and ordered by the House to be printed, 22 September, 1870.



Hobart Town, 19th July, 1870.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to submit the following Progress Report upon my inspection of the Crown Lands and Roads of the Huon District.

At this season of the year a more extended critical examination of the country (by other than existing roads and tracks) could not be made without much loss of time and additional expense; but I have traversed so many of the tramways, roads, and tracks (specially from the south-west and west side of the Huon River), as to enable me to form a close approximation of its capabilities and requirements. The road on the south-west bank running to the Town of Hull is in a bad state of repair, and from this to and beyond Mr. Whiting's selection a mere horse track—now being cleared on to the Picton River. There is no Crown Land on this route available for profitable settlement. The Town of Hull and some 3000 acres adjoining, rugged stony she-oak hills, with coarse herbage: would graze a moderate number of strong sheep, and give a commonage for cattle grazing.

A short distance below the Town of Hull a road has been partially formed for about 3 miles south, leading into a basin of timber,—reported upon by Messrs. Laffer and Davies May 29, 1866, and the same which Mr. Innes' proposed tram-line from the Franklin was to tap. The former gentlemen are of opinion that this is the natural outlet for the timber, and I agree with them, for a considerable area. So far as the road goes it does not open up any good land, nor is any portion of the land on either side likely to be taken up. Lower down the river another road running south goes through a vein of very good land and timber, the greater portion of which that is available has been taken up. This road very steep, and in very bad order; it also leads up into the above-named tram-line, but the line would not serve the requirements of the settlers on this southern slope. From the west bank of the Huon there are numerous roads running nearly parallel to each other at short distances into the back lands, all of which are in very bad order. The swamp road, to which your attention has been called by memorial from the settlers located in the vicinity, is no worse than the others; and I agree with Messrs. Laffer and Davies that there is no sufficient area of good land or timber beyond the present locations to warrant an exceptional expenditure on the present line, or for extension. The Government (metalled) road, constructed for 2½ miles at a cost of £2000, and now in bad order, traffic continuing for about another mile over a wretched slab road. This road has been cleared 15 feet wide for a distance of 6 miles in all. Beyond the present locations the land is of inferior quality (except in small patches), generally very stony, and not likely to be taken up except for the timber. Lloyd's, Fitzpatrick's, Castle Forbes, and other roads running west from the main Huon Road are all in the same bad condition, and character of country at the back still more inferior and rugged. From Castle Forbes Bay to Honeywood the main line is in bad order, and the cross roads almost impassable, produce being conveyed principally by the private tramways. Mr. Hill's line of tram runs along Coombes' Track west towards the Arve River for about 5½ miles from the Kermantie River. The principal portion of the land along this route of tram has passed from the Crown,—sections of good land throughout, and partially settled upon. Another line runs from this (at the junction) through private land (Crisp's selection) for about 2 miles. A continuation of this line would open up a good bed of timber and fair agricultural land. A bridge at the junction of these tramways across the river is of consequence to the settlers in this locality, and the cost is estimated at about £50. At another part of the river, for the Geeves Town settlers and road to Southport, a position was pointed out for a second bridge, but I am of opinion an excellent ford could be made at a moderate expense which would be sufficient for present requirements.

Geeves' tramline follows the course of the Kermantie for a considerable distance. The greater portion of the land on the line has been sold, but an extension of this line north-westerly towards the River Arve would lead, it is said, into an extensive area of fine agricultural land. From the Kermantie River to Surges Bay inferior country, generally, both for land and timber. From thence the timber improves gradually for about 3 miles, when a vein of good second-class agricultural land is reached, heavily timbered with very fine white gum, lightwood, &c., continuing so for about 2½ miles, when the country again becomes more rugged and land inferior throughout (except in small patches) to Port Esperance. This vein of good land and timber would be most economically reached and worked from Surges Bay.

From Port Esperance to Southport the country is generally very inferior as to quality of soil, the only exception being a narrow vein of second class, about 4 miles from Southport, but there are fine beds of valuable timber.

The Southport slab road (4 miles cost £2000) does not open out any good land for settlement: a small area of second class alone likely to be taken up. The road in a bad state of repair, and but two small holdings settled upon on the route. The best splitting timber along the line has, however, been pretty well cleared out, and the only advantage so far to the Crown from this large outlay has been a small return from timber licences. I would advise this area to be thrown open to free selection at a reduced price.

The country around Southport and south and west,—barren, heathy land, button-grass plains, peaty soil generally, interlaced with belts of fine timber, chiefly stringy bark.

On the eastern side of the Huon River, towards Port Cygnet and Gardner's Creek, thence through the Sandfly Basin Track to the Town of Leslie, on the main Huon Road, there is a much larger proportion of good agricultural land than on the western side; good beds of timber also, although not so extensive. A considerable area of the best lands has passed into private hands, and except a portion of what is termed the Sandfly Basin but small areas of good land here and there remain to the Crown.

The main slab road to the port is in good order (4 miles cost £1000 per mile), but the extension from this and the other cross roads and tracks are in a very bad state, no road rates having been levied for some time. It would require a more extended inspection than could be given at this time to enable me to report fully on Crown Lands available for settlement on this side of the river.

I have thought it necessary (although tedious) thus to enumerate the principal roads and tracks which have been gone over, so that I may more clearly submit for your consideration that this section of country (which may be termed the Franklin District proper) from the south west and west banks of the Huon River, including Port Esperance, Southport, and country west to the River Arve, is placed under exceptional difficulties as to settlement. A very small proportion of this extensive area is occupied; reference to the map will show chiefly a narrow belt from the south side along the western banks of the Huon to the Kermandie River. From thence to Recherche Bay the country becomes more and more barren and rugged and less capable of settlement. All that has been explored (and numerous tracks have been cut and explorations made, especially west of the Franklin settlement) does not exhibit any extended area of good agricultural land. There are numerous fine beds of valuable timber, and interspersed throughout will be small sections suitable for settlement; but the chief value of the country is in its timber: will never sustain an agricultural population of any extent; the soil generally (even of the small areas suitable for cultivation) inferior; a thin deposit of vegetable mould overlying a poor loamy clay; clay cropping out frequently. A soil that would bear a few good crops and then be almost barren, unless under judicious husbandry: well adapted, however, from position and climate for orchards, and, in favoured spots, for hop-growing.

This section of country being thus exceptionally placed, I am of opinion, should have special legislation applied to it. The Crown forests are valuable, and the timber trade important, as an industry giving employment to a large population.

The natural highway and by which the chief products of the district are sent to market is by water from the many points of shipment on the Huon River and ports in the channel. The configuration of the country being very rugged and hilly, numerous roads at right angles to the river and points of shipment are required to penetrate the interior, especially from the bank of the Huon, the chief of which have already been remarked upon. These internal roads seem to have been almost entirely overlooked by the Road Trustees and Board of Works in favour of what is termed a main line running parallel with the river, which, however desirable for light vehicles and travellers to Hobart Town at a more advanced stage, in nowise assists the transit of their produce to market. Had the Road and Board of Works funds for years past been applied to their more legitimate purpose on these cross roads they would have been in much better order, and the settlers in a better position to forward their produce to the many points of shipment on the river. Slab roads constructed as they have been in this district do not seem to meet the requirements of the heavy traffic, with the exception of the Port Cygnet line, and that was laid after the heavy timber traffic had almost ceased. The others are in a bad state of repair, although laid but a short time. I am of opinion that tramroads are the most economical in opening up the country. If laid down with 14 feet slabs and a gauge of 4 feet rail, the heavy timber traffic would be carried on at a much less cost, and as the timber was worked out the line would still be available as a road for drays with lighter produce. An ordinary slab road is estimated to cost (by competent authorities in the district) from £350 to £400 per mile; a well-constructed tramway (14 feet slabs 4 feet gauge rails), from £250 to £350.

The present system of granting timber licences should, in my opinion, cease. Large areas of fine splitting timber are weeded out for a paltry consideration, and the land left to the Crown in a worse condition for sale or settlement than when in its original state. Numerous fine trees fallen to rot and waste away, as well as the enormous *débris* left, it is calculated that not more than one-fourth of the timber is utilised. Yet, after the area is run over in this manner, it remains waste or unproductive for years after. As an example, take the Port Esperance and Southport slab roads, constructed at a heavy cost (some £4000), into fine beds of timber. A rush is made, the areas for miles denuded of the best splitting timber, and not 1000 acres of the land sold and settled upon;

the population dwindling away so soon as the cream is taken off. This seems nothing less than giving a bonus for the destruction of the forests, and to encourage a migratory splitting population whose habits and tendencies shall not be of the most thrifty order. Such shameful waste is the more to be regretted as the real welfare and progress of the district is dependent upon its valuable forests of timber. I have asked several of the most competent employers of labour and dealers what may be the average return and value from an acre of fairly timbered land. They vary from a net balance at the shipping point of £35 to £50. I give the lowest estimate as stated to me.

Thus from an average acre of timber:—

	£
40,000 palings, sold at 60s.....	120
100,000 shingles, at 8s.....	40
	160
Of this paid to the splitter—Palings, at 40s....	£80
Shingles, at 4s.....	20
Cartage.....	25
	125
Balance distributed among bargemen, dealer, &c.....	£35

This may give some idea of the value of a good bed of timber.

I am of opinion that this district might be opened up by private enterprise, assisted by the Government, in granting so much land for every mile of tramway laid down. I have made enquiries of several parties engaged in the timber trade, and I believe that a bonus of 80 or 100 acres per mile would give great encouragement to the trade, and open up the lands for settlement. In this wise a party or parties propose to erect a saw mill and carry on splitting operations, &c. They would also indicate a proposed line of tramway, and, when determined upon, the land on each side of this line should be laid off in blocks of 100 acres each; alternate lots to be granted absolutely to the constructors of the tramway. The tram to be given over, as completed, to road trustees who should levy reasonable rates of toll to keep it in repair. Persons of moderate capital and co-operative bodies of splitters could thus go into the valuable forests with advantage to the Colony and gain to themselves. As the sections granted for the construction of the tram became worked out, the intervening lots would be taken up at such an increased rate as would amply repay the revenue for the original gift of land. Some such scheme as this, and stoppage of the licence system, would, I believe, place the timber industry upon a more legitimate basis. The forests would be more carefully worked and utilised, tend to fix the population, and relieve the Government from the present unsatisfactory system of grants in aid for the purpose of opening up the country.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your very obedient Servant,

ROBERT CRAWFORD.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands and Works, Hobart Town.

Hobart Town, 20th July, 1870.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to return herewith the several documents placed in my hands with reference to certain roads in the Franklin District, and to report thereon as follows:—

First. On the memorial addressed to you from certain settlers in the vicinity of the Swamp Road.

This road is in very bad order, and produce can only be taken over it at a cost which materially embarrasses the producer. It appears from the memo. furnished by the Public Works Department that a sum of about £500 (special vote) has been expended in clearing it 15 feet wide for a distance of about 5 miles from the main Huon Road. It is settled upon either side for a distance of some 3½ miles, and the timber of the country, right and left, has been almost entirely cleared out for that distance, and partially so for some distance further. An extension and construction of the road would, of course, enable the splitter to go further in, but from the character of the soil and the timber having been so weeded out of the Crown Land I am confident very few, if any, further purchases of land would be made unless the road was carried right into a bed of timber (reported upon by Messrs. Laffer and Davies), to which it was proposed that a tramroad should be laid down. Although I could not at this season of the year go through all the tracks and the whole line of tramway surveyed by Mr. Innes, I have traversed so many of these and other lines running into the country, and from different points penetrated sufficiently far to enable me to endorse the report of Messrs.

Laffer and Davies in so far that there is no sufficient area of land suitable for settlement as would warrant an exceptional outlay upon this line. I am of opinion also that the natural outlet for the greater area of the above-named bed of timber is by a road on the southern slope of the range to the south bank of the Huon River, and which would also advantage a number of settlers on that side.

The memorialists lay stress upon an alleged promise made by the Government that, on purchase of the land, a tramroad should be constructed; but the late Surveyor-General effectually rebuts this statement (see Sessional Paper No. 88, 1869). No promise had been given in any case; and indeed the greater part of the land through which the road runs had been alienated from the Crown many years previous to the proposal of a tramway. Only one person purchased after the line was agitated for.

A sum of £2000 has been expended (special vote) upon a road running west through the town to the back Crown Lands only a short distance from and nearly parallel with this swamp road. The configuration of the country on the west bank of the Huon River, especially at the Town of Franklin, necessitates very many roads at short intervals apart to penetrate the back land. All of these are in an equally bad state, and, in justice to the settlers residing in their vicinity, an exceptional grant to the Swamp Road would not be warranted.

Second. The several roads brought under your notice by Mr. J. Chesterman—letter of 1st June last, and which enumerates the Swamp, Barnard's, Lloyd's, Fitzpatrick's, and Castle Forbes Roads, all running west from the Huon River at very short intervals from each other, going into the back lands from 2 to 4 miles, and only taking the river frontage for about 4 miles. Besides the above there are several others having their termini at the many points of shipment on the river. All are in a wretched state for transit at this season of the year, except $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles of metalled road constructed by Government, and this requires considerable repair.

This portion of the district enjoys the inestimable advantage of water carriage by the River Huon, having numerous points of shipment on its banks, and by which, for all time, the products of the back lands will be conveyed to market. Having this natural highway, the Road Trustees and Board of Works have expended their funds almost entirely upon what is termed a main road running parallel with and close to the river side, instead of supplementing the several roads above enumerated, which may be termed the river veins which give life to the settlement. I have examined the country through which they run, and beyond the present settled boundary I cannot advise that it is probable any considerable portion of the Crown Lands is likely to be taken up, even if these roads should be made good. I consider the expenditure upon the so-called main road, at the present state of the district's advancement, a mistake that the Road and Board of Works funds should have been applied for years past on these cross roads, and that even at the present time this portion of the Franklin District enjoys advantages of communication and natural facilities for conveyance of produce to market which few other parts of the Colony has.

The main road would be very desirable could it be accomplished throughout, but it is not essential to the advancement of the district. I am of opinion that, unless the Government are prepared to take up many other roads very essential to the progress of the agriculturists settled in outlying districts which I have gone through, placed at much greater disadvantage than the one under review, the present case would be equitably met by the application of the 10th paragraph of the Waste Lands Committee's Report of last Session, viz., ratio of amount to be given to road trusts from the Land Fund. The present settlers on these lines of roads by assessing themselves to the amount of one shilling in the pound will be supplemented by an equal amount, and if strictly laid out on these cross roads they would gradually be brought into order. On the question of extension of roads, I beg to refer to the suggestions as conveyed in my extended report on the Huon District:

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

ROBERT CRAWFORD.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands and Works, Hobart Town.