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SEVENTH PROGRESS REPORT

OF THE

ROYAL COMMISSION ON STATE FORESTS AND
TIMBER RESERVES.

THE FORESTS OF THE COUNTY OF DELATITE;

BEING THE KING RIVER, WINTERIGA, DUERAN, TOO-ROUR,
TOOMBULLUP, AND MINOR RESERVES:

THEIR RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT, AND CONTROL.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND

By Authority:

ROBT. S. BRAIN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

THE FORESTS OF THE COUNTY OF DELATITE.

PROGRESS REPORT.

*To His Excellency the RIGHT HONORABLE THOMAS, BARON BRASSEY,
Knight Commander of the Most Honorable Order of the Bath;
Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Colony of
Victoria and its Dependencies, &c., &c., &c.*

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY—

On behalf of the Royal Commission appointed to investigate the general question of forestry and forest control and management in Victoria, we have the honour to present the following Progress Report:—

INTRODUCTION.

The county of Delatite embraces an extensive district in the north-eastern part of the colony between the Dividing Range and the Upper Murray. In shape it is roughly triangular, the apex being the town of Wangaratta, the North-Eastern railway line its western side, the Ovens River its eastern side, while its southern boundary, running westward from Mount St. Bernard, a peak of the Australian Alps, near the source of the Ovens, is formed by the Barry Mountains, the Delatite River, Brankeet, Merton, and Menham's Creeks, the watershed line of the Strathbogie Ranges, and Hughes Creek, a tributary of the Goulburn, as far as the point where the North-Eastern railway crosses that stream near the township of Avenel.

While a broad strip of territory in the western part of the county running parallel to the railway mentioned consists of fairly level or undulating land, and the lower courses of the Ovens, King, and Broken Rivers, and of their principal tributaries, have on either side wide fertile flats, the greater part of the county is exceedingly rugged and diversified, being intersected by numerous mountain and hill ridges. In the south-west are the Strathbogie Ranges, southward of Mansfield the Blue Range, towards the centre of the county the Samaria, Dueran, and Wombat Ranges, a long ridge called Futter's Range, extending from Rodney southward to the head of Holland's Creek, a number of spurs running northward from the Main Divide and the Wombat Mountains, and the Black and Buffalo Ranges, between the King and Ovens Rivers. These mountains form the watersheds of numerous streams running in a northerly and north-westerly direction towards the Murray, the principal of which are the Ovens, Buckland, Buffalo, Rose, King, and Broken Rivers, and the Hurdle, Meadow, Black Range, Boggy, Fifteen-mile, Ryan's, Middle, and Holland's Creeks. The elevation of the peaks of the Main Divide near the southern boundary of the county is considerable, the highest being Mounts Buller and Howitt, 5,911 and 5,715 feet respectively. Next to these are the Buffalo Peak, westward of Bright, 5,645 feet, and Mount Samaria, in the Dueran Range, 3,138 feet.

As regards its geological features, the western and south-western part of the county, from the Upper King to the neighbourhood of the North-Eastern railway, is chiefly granitic; the central part from the southern border to the Wombat Ranges consists of the older sandstones and conglomerates; the eastern part, lying between the Ovens and King Rivers and the Dividing Range, is silurian (with the exception of the granite ridges which form the Buffalo Mountains); while in the northern part of the county, where the Ovens and its tributaries converge, the formation is chiefly tertiary clays and alluvial flats. Nearly all the extensive tracts of arable land in the county are either alienated or are in course of alienation under the leasing sections of the Act of 1890, and the areas of fair soil which remain in the possession of the

Crown are chiefly narrow creek flats and valleys on the watersheds, or basaltic and granitic table-lands within or adjacent to the proposed forest reserves. These reserves are mostly in the broken and mountainous parts of the county, and in defining their limits considerable care appears to have been taken by the Lands Department to exclude any large areas fit for successful settlement, although in some cases fertile belts on the tops of the ranges have been included on account of the excellence of the timber. A marked peculiarity of the Toombullup and Tolmie districts, which contain some of the best soil in the county, is the frequent and abrupt change from granite to sandstone and conglomerates, and from these to basalt, many of the ridges being capped with volcanic loam of great fertility. The average annual rainfall in the mountain regions is considerable, varying from 35 to 45 inches, according to the elevation.

I.—THE PROPOSED RESERVES.

The areas scheduled for reservation for forest purposes, and shown as State forests or timber reserves on the new county plan, are as follows:—

King River (81,000 acres).

This reserve is essentially a mountain forest, extending southward from the northern boundary of the parish of Cambatong to the watershed line of the Australian Alps, and having within its borders the sources of the Broken, King (west branch), and Delatite Rivers, and of many small tributaries of these streams. The King River here flows through a deep narrow gorge, and the elevation of the spurs and ridges as the head of the watershed is approached rises from 3,000 to nearly 5,000 feet. Snow lies on the higher lands for several months in the year, and, owing to the alpine climate, the smallness of the patches of arable land in the gorges, and the broken and inaccessible nature of the country, the proposed reserve is quite unsuitable for agricultural settlement. On the other hand, in its present condition under forest cover, the narrow valleys and table lands afford excellent pasture for cattle during the summer months, and portions of the reserve have been occupied for many years for this purpose. The timber, of which there are immense supplies, consists of blue, ribbon, and white gum, mountain ash, peppermint, and messmate, the finest belts, as a rule, being in the valleys or on the lower spurs with a northerly or easterly aspect.

Proposed Addition to the Reserve.

Eastward of and adjacent to this area is a large tract of 83,000 acres, stretching northward from Mount Howitt to the parish of Matong North, the configuration and physical features of which are similar to those of the King River forest, although the timber is said to be of inferior quality. The Inspector of Forests and the staff surveyor for the Benalla district have recently made a careful examination of this mountainous country (*vide* Appendix), and have recommended its permanent reservation as an extension of the King River forest. This proposal will be dealt with by us when we report on the Crown lands further northward, now open for selection in the Whitfield district, the alienation of which is objected to by certain local splitters and farmers until the valuable timber growing on them has been removed.

Winteriga (45,000 acres).

The Winteriga reserve is situated eastward of the King River, between that stream and the Buffalo Ranges. As a whole it consists of rugged and mountainous country, the Black Range running through it from north to south. The formation is silurian, but towards the northern end the black slate and schistose ridges run down to undulating land with patches of clay and loam. In the centre and southern part the timber is chiefly messmate and stringybark of good quality, interspersed with bluegum and peppermint; in the northern portion it is mostly box and stringybark, over-mature and of inferior quality. Although the latter part, which is in the parish of Whorouly and contains about 5,000 acres, includes a considerable area of hilly country, there is some rough grazing land in it, and as the quality of the timber which it bears does not justify its retention in the permanent reserve, we are of opinion that it may be excised with advantage to the public interest, and made available for selection, the northern boundary of the parish of Bungamero being fixed as the northern limit of the forest.

Dueran (14,260 acres).

This forest, known also as the Mount Samaria reserve, is situated about 12 miles north of Mansfield. The greater part of it consists of a high mountain range running in a south-easterly direction from Mount Samaria towards the Broken River. The formation is chiefly granitic, with sandstone towards the southern end. The timber as a whole is of good quality, and comprises bluegum, messmate, stringybark, and peppermint. In working the reserve, the natural outlets for the transport of timber from the higher ridges are by long spurs leading to the Mansfield-Benalla road on the western, and to the Mansfield-Tolmie road on the eastern side. On a narrow tract of table land behind Mount Samaria there are cappings of basaltic soil in broken patches, which are covered with good messmate. The total area of this class of land is estimated at 500 acres, but owing to the steepness of the ridges it is inaccessible to wheel traffic. A large portion of the reserve is covered with virgin timber, but there is no mill established in it at present. Indeed, there is little timber-cutting in it of any kind, the roughness of the country and its distance from railway transport being so far obstacles to the utilization of the excellent bluegum and messmate which it bears. The total area of 14,260 acres recommended for permanent reservation consists of the present timber reserve (about 7,800 acres), and 6,460 acres of rangy land of similar character on the borders of the reserve.

Toorour (33,860 acres).

The Toorour forest is situated about 20 miles to the north-west of Mansfield. It embraces the eastern spurs of the Strathbogie Ranges, and its principal feature is a long ridge some 13 miles in length, which runs through it in a south-westerly direction. The formation is granitic and the soil generally of poor quality, with the exception of strips of chocolate loam on a table land of the main ridge, the area of which is estimated at 1,000 acres. The timber consists of bluegum, messmate, stringybark, and peppermint, the trees being long-barrelled, straight, and fairly sound, with a diameter of from 2 to 5 feet. The best mature timber in the northern portion, chiefly stringybark and peppermint, was cut out some years ago by splitters. On the eastern slope of the main range, and particularly along the course of Brankeet and Hell-hole Creeks, there are fine belts of bluegum and peppermint. One mill is now working in this part of the reserve, and supplies the Mansfield district and the mines at Maindample and Doon with sawn timber. Props and laths for the mines in question are being obtained from two blocks of 1,700 and 460 acres respectively in the parish of Tallangalook, on the eastern border of the forest, and, after full inquiry, we have decided to approve of the recommendation made at Mansfield in evidence, that these lands should be added to the reserve.

On the north-eastern border of the forest, in the parish of Toorour, part of the main ridge has been left out of the reserve. This area has been subdivided into blocks of 500 to 660 acres for grazing purposes, but as the steep slopes are heavily timbered and covered with enormous boulders of granite, the land is quite unsuitable for profitable occupation. At the foot of the range there is on either side some fairly level land, some 16 to 20 chains in width, which would be readily taken up if excised from the mountainous part, and while the latter should, in our opinion, be added to the reserve, the flats could be subdivided anew and offered to the public for selection. Southward of the strips of grazing land on the eastern side of the range, and between it and the Benalla-Mansfield road, is an area of about 800 acres of undulating land forming the north-eastern corner of the Toorour reserve, which bears inferior stringybark and peppermint, the mature timber having been long ago cut out. This land, we have been assured by residents in the district, would also be taken up for grazing purposes if it were subdivided, and as the timber is of hardly any value we recommend its excision from the reserve, with the view of its being offered for occupation.

Holland's Creek (5,350 acres).

These lands, situated near the head of Holland's Creek, in the parishes of Dueran and Toombullup, are covered with a fine growth of mature and half-mature bluegum, peppermint, and messmate, a great deal of which is fit for milling purposes. The formation is principally granitic, and the country is too steep and broken for profitable settlement. Part of the area bearing good timber consists of blocks abandoned by selectors, and its reservation was strongly recommended by witnesses

examined by us at Tolmie. It has since been inspected by Messrs. Lavery and Blackburne (see Appendix), who agree that it is unsuitable for occupation, and that, as the timber is of superior quality, it should be reserved. The total area is 5,350 acres, in two blocks of 4,380 and 970 acres respectively. On the south-western side of the larger block there is an abandoned grazing area, specified in section II., the timber on which is of good quality, and this should be withheld temporarily from occupation till the best of the material can be utilized.

Toombullup (26,400 acres).

The Toombullup forest is chiefly in the parishes of Toombullup North and Whitfield. It embraces several mountain spurs, running northward between the King River and the Boggy, Middle, Fifteen-mile, Ryan's, and Watchbox Creeks, with the valleys of those creeks. The formation is largely granitic, with basaltic cappings on the ridges, but in the southern and western parts there are some belts of sandstone and siliceous conglomerate. As a whole, the timber is of good quality, and consists of bluegum, messmate, peppermint, stringybark, and on the higher levels ribbon gum. The soil on the basaltic ridges and the supplies of timber are dealt with at greater length under the heads of "Settlement" and "Management" respectively.

Southward of the reserve, and near the surveyed route of the proposed narrow-gauge line from Whitfield to Mansfield, are a number of detached blocks distinguished on the new county plan of Delatite as forest areas. As it is always a matter of difficulty to effectively protect or supervise isolated areas of this kind, we are of opinion that it is not desirable to retain them as permanent reserves, and therefore recommend that they be merely withheld from selection until the timber of commercial value on them has been removed.

MINOR RESERVES.

Loyala (1,200 acres).

This reserve, situated about a mile to the south of Mansfield, is a small tract of steep and rugged land, which has for a considerable period been drawn upon for the fuel supply of that town. The timber on it is chiefly grey box, with stringybark on the spurs, and a little redgum on the lower slopes. The soil is poor, and almost barren of vegetation, and the land as a whole is only suitable for the growth of the class of timber which it now bears.

Wombat Hill (1,700 acres).

The Wombat Hill reserve is situated in the parish of Wondoomarook, in the Strathbogie district, about 12 miles south-eastward of Euroa. The country is of a broken character, consisting of granite hills with narrow valleys containing patches of granitic and vegetable alluvium. On the slopes the soil is a decomposed granite, lying on a subsoil of red basaltic loam. The more elevated portion is poor grazing land only. The timber consists of bluegum, messmate, and stringybark, with a little redgum of inferior quality on low-lying land. The best timber was cut out by saw-mills many years ago, but there is now again a fair supply of mature trees from 2 to 4 feet in diameter, short-barrelled, but fairly sound, in addition to a stock of valuable young timber. A mill, which is at present cutting on private land in the vicinity, is about to be removed to this reserve.

Boho (2,030 acres).

The Boho timber reserve lies about 10 miles south-eastward of Violet Town. The country consists of rugged hills and deep gorges, the surface being largely covered with a scrubby growth of feather-leaved wattle and bracken. The formation is granitic, and the soil chiefly a granite schist with subsoil of basaltic loam. The timber consists of bluegum, stringybark, peppermint, and a little yellow box. The greater part of this area is covered with young timber of good quality, the diameter of the trees ranging from 2 to 4 feet. Many of the older trees are over-mature and very faulty in quality, the best timber having been removed by saw-millers.

Kelfeera Reserve (6,200 acres).

Is situated about 2½ miles southward of Benalla, between the Broken River and the N.-E. railway line. The northern and eastern parts of the reserve are fairly level, but towards the south it consists of low rises with gullies lying between. The formation is partly silurian and partly tertiary, the quartzose and schistose ridges at the southern end running down towards the north to clay and loamy flats, the open parts of which afford fair grazing. The timber consists of grey and red box, stringybark, and a little peppermint. The best mature trees were removed some time ago by sleeper-hewers and splitters, and at present supplies of fuel only are obtained from the reserve. It, however, bears a good stock of young mining and sleeper timber, and its situation in the immediate vicinity of Benalla and the North-Eastern railway greatly enhances its value as a source of supply for this class of material.

Lima Reserve (880 acres).

Is situated about 14 miles southward of Benalla, and is the eastern slope of a low range known as the Lima Hills. The western side up to the crest is already occupied by settlers, and the timber on it cleared off or ring-barked. The soil on the reserve is chiefly a granite loam, overlying a coarse granitic subsoil, and in some parts a red volcanic loam. At the foot of the range the detritus washed from the slopes has, with the forest mould, formed a deeper and richer soil, which affords excellent pasture. The timber consists of grey and red box, stringybark, and peppermint, unfit for milling purposes and faulty in quality. The mature box and stringybark would be fit for railway sleepers to a limited extent. In view of the more valuable forests in the district and the small area and inferior timber of this reserve, it is not necessary, in our opinion, to retain it for forest purposes. The land, we are assured, will be readily taken up for dairy farming, and after opportunity has been afforded to hewers to remove any trees suitable for sleepers, it should be made available for selection.

Wangaratta South (370 acres).

About a mile southward of the town of Wangaratta, between the North-Eastern and King Valley railway lines, is an area of 370 acres now classed as a temporary water reserve, 25 acres of which in the centre have been set aside as a site for a hospital. The land, being an alluvial flat, bears a thick growth of young redgum. As the forests of this valuable timber have been greatly curtailed in extent throughout the colony during recent years, we are of opinion that the area still available in this block should be made a timber reserve, and that early steps should be taken to improve the growth by thinning out the inferior stunted saplings.

Moyhu (6,310 acres).

This reserve embraces a high ridge and its spurs, overlooking the valley of the King, and is situated to the west of that river, about 18 miles southward of Wangaratta. The formation is chiefly granitic, dipping down to the tertiary area (clay and sandy loam) to the north, while in the gullies on the eastern and western slopes there are some small patches of alluvial soil. The timber consists of bluegum, stringybark, and red box, with a little grey and yellow box. The quality as a whole is somewhat inferior to that of the timber on the mountain reserves to the southward.

Wandiligong (4,200 acres).

This area, consisting of rangy and broken country, is situated in the parish of Wandiligong, on the eastern border of Delatite, and extends from the Ovens River in a southerly direction to Eurobin Falls. The formation is chiefly silurian, the granite foot-hills of the Buffalo Mountains running down to schistose and gravel ridges. The timber is principally messmate, peppermint, and whitegum, and a considerable quantity of it is reported to be fit for milling purposes. Several years ago large supplies of laths were obtained from the reserve and the adjacent lands for the Rutherglen mines, but many of the splitters have now left for the King River district. As we have not yet been able to make a personal inspection of this block, we have decided to postpone the question of its reservation until we deal with the neighbouring forests in the county of Bogong.

II.—RESERVATIONS AND EXCISIONS RECOMMENDED.

After carefully considering the situation and physical features of the forest lands mentioned in this Report, and the extent and quality of the timber supplies thereon, we recommend that they be dealt with as follows :—

<i>To be Permanent Forest Reserves.</i>		Estimated Area in Acres.
King River Forest, chiefly in parishes of Mirimbah and Cambatong ...		81,000
Winteriga Forest, chiefly in parishes of Winteriga and Bungamero ...		40,000
Toombullup Forest, in parishes of Tatong, Toombullup North, and Whitfield (subject to future excision of agricultural areas on table- lands, estimated at 2,500 acres, after removal of timber of commer- cial value)		26,400
Dueran Forest		14,260
Too-rour Forest (subject to future excision of agricultural areas on table- lands, estimated at 1,000 acres, after removal of timber of commer- cial value)		33,860

<i>To be Timber Reserves.</i>		Estimated Area in Acres.
In parish of Loyala		1,200
In parish of Wondoomarook		1,700
In parish of Boho		2,080
In parishes of Benalla and Kelfeera		6,200
In parishes of Moyhu and Myrree		6,310
In parishes of Dueran and Toombullup (Crown lands near head of Holland's Creek)		5,350

To be Withheld from Selection till the Timber of Commercial Value is Removed.

	Estimated Area in Acres.
(a) Detached blocks, distinguished on the new county plan of Delatite by vertical red lines, situated between the King River and Toombullup Reserves, and near surveyed route of proposed narrow-gauge railway from Whitfield to Mansfield, 544, 648, 720, 1,680, 128, and 629 acres	4,349
(b) Block of 264 acres near McDonald's Gap, together with adjacent block of 600 acres, formerly occupied by R. E. McGrath, on surveyed route of proposed Whitfield—Mansfield line ...	864
(c) Block (575 acres) on west side of Holland's Creek, in parish of Dueran, adjoining proposed State Forest of 14,260 acres* ...	575

To be Excised from Scheduled or Existing Reserves and made Available for Selection.

	Estimated Area in Acres.
In parish of Whorouly, northern part of Winteriga Forest ...	5,000
In Merrijig, near Buttercup Creek†	216
In Dueran East, on tributary of Broken River†	434
In Borodomanin, on Mount View Creek†	470
In Moorngag, at north-east end of Too-rour Forest	800
Lima Timber Reserve	880

To be Excised for the purpose of being laid out as a Township.

Area at the south-east corner of allotment 21, section 3, parish of Whit- field (James Hackett's holding)	30
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III.—MANAGEMENT.

Supervision.

The reserves situated westward of the King Valley are in charge of one forester, who resides on the Broken River, between the Too-rour and Dueran Forests, and some 20 miles to the south of Benalla. His district as forester and Crown lands

* Allotment No. 100.

† Detached forest blocks.

bailiff also takes in a large part of the county of Moira, and includes the redgum reserves on the Murray, from Strathmerton on the west to Wahgunyah on the east, the reserves on the lower course of the Ovens River, and the Killawarra Forest. The supervision of the northern areas entails journeys of nearly 60 miles from his headquarters, and, as he has an assistant stationed at Yarrawonga who can undertake the whole of the patrol and royalty assessment work in connexion with them, we are of opinion that he should, without delay, be relieved of the charge of these reserves, and instructed to do duty in Delatite only, where the oversight of the large and important forests, together with his work as bailiff in connexion with the settlement of Crown lands, will fully occupy his time. The revenue received last year from the forests of Delatite, embracing some of the most valuable timber areas in the colony, was about £300 only. The cost of supervision, including pay of forester, horse allowance, and travelling expenses was about £250. The Moyhu Reserve, on the west side of the King River, is now patrolled at somewhat infrequent intervals, while the extensive Winteriga and Upper King Reserves cannot, owing to the size of the forester's present district, be supervised at all. The latter forest, owing to its remoteness from railway transport and the absence of roads, is almost inaccessible to timber-getters; but we have reason to believe that in the Moyhu and Winteriga Reserves there is at times a good deal of unlicensed cutting of fencing and mining material, and it is essential that both of these areas should be regularly patrolled. Owing to the broken nature of the country and the long detours necessary to visit some parts of the mountain forests in Delatite, it is a matter of great importance to secure the services of another officer to act as assistant to the forester. We do not think that it is necessary to make an additional appointment at present, and the necessities of the case will be fairly met by arranging that the inspector under the Vermin Destruction Act who is stationed at Maindample, on the Mansfield railway line, shall, in carrying out his ordinary duties, assist in patrolling the Too-rour, Mount Wombat, Dueran, and Upper King Reserves.

Timber Supplies.

First in importance at the present time, owing to the quality and extent of its timber, is the Toombullup Forest, situated on the upper courses of the Boggy, Fifteen-mile, Middle, and Ryan's Creeks, and including within its bounds the ranges which are between these streams. In this reserve there are very large supplies of bluegum, the mountain variety of the same tree known as ribbongum, messmate, peppermint, mountain ash, and stringybark. The bluegum, chiefly found in scattered beds, is of very fine quality, and is largely cut by the mills for general building and construction, as well as for coach-builders' material. The messmate and peppermint growing on the basaltic or granitic table-lands and slopes also furnish excellent sawn timber, while the stringybark, messmate, and peppermint on the eastern areas overlooking the King Valley are now being cut in large quantities by splitters for mining and fencing material. Of the three mills now working in the reserve, two are situated on Ryan's Creek, on the western side, the timber cut at each having to be carted over rough and almost impassable tracks, some 25 miles, to Benalla. The third was until lately near the head of the valley of the Fifteen-mile Creek, but owing to the great difficulty of transporting the timber to Moyhu, on the King Valley line, a distance of 17 miles, it has been removed to a new situation on the Whitfield table-land, where it will be within 6 miles of the terminus of the railway. The output of these mills is a little over a million superficial feet of timber annually, and they employ 38 men. The only other reserve in which a saw-mill is licensed at present is Too-rour, bluegum, messmate, and peppermint being cut. The output for this year is given as about 180,000 superficial feet, five men being employed.

Transport.

Since the opening of the narrow-gauge railway from Wangaratta to Whitfield the hardwood industry on the reserves and Crown lands on the west side of the King River has been greatly developed, and the cutting of mining timber, sleepers, and fencing material has afforded regular employment to a considerable number of men. The railway, terminating as it does in the valley, 30 miles from Wangaratta, serves only the eastern part of Toombullup Forest. Some of the best belts of timber on the western side are fully 30 miles from Benalla, the present natural outlet owing to the fall of the country in that direction, but large areas on the table-lands and at the head

of the creeks have an outlet, where the northern spurs run out from the main range, towards McDonald's Gap on the summit of that range, and to Tolmie on the southern slope, descending towards Mansfield. In the working of the forest, the extension of the railway across the mountains would unquestionably be a great advantage, as, in addition to serving the settled country in the Toombullup and Tolmie districts, it would render accessible the large supplies of timber on these areas and in the northern part of the King River Reserve. The line has been surveyed through to Mansfield, a distance of 36 miles from Whitfield, and 66 miles from Wangaratta. The ascent from the King Valley to the table-land is very abrupt, Whitfield being only 810 feet, and Degamero, at the foot of the range, 935 feet above sea level, while McDonald's Gap, the site of the high-level station on the summit, is 2,744 feet and Tolmie 2,457 feet. The main Toombullup range, which may be regarded as the centre of the settled district lying to the northward, as well as of a large area of valuable forest, is several hundred feet higher than the latter station.

IV.—SETTLEMENT ON FOREST AREAS.

All the evidence at our disposal, as well as careful examination of the country, leads us to the conclusion that a grave mistake has been made in the past in permitting the arable lands of the Dueran, Whitfield, and Toombullup districts to be occupied in blocks of 300 to 800 acres, instead of confining selection to much smaller allotments. Owing to the thickness of the forest growth, the cost of roughly clearing the cultivation paddocks (leaving the large trees standing) ranges from £3 to £5 an acre, and this burden, together with the difficulties of transport, has resulted in many of the selections being abandoned. Even those occupiers in the Toombullup Ranges who have the advantage of rich volcanic soil have a hard struggle to keep their holdings, owing to the distance from railway carriage and the impassable condition of the rough bush tracks in winter and spring. Several witnesses have stated to us that when they first applied for selections they asked to be allowed to occupy 100 to 200 acres, as an area sufficient for their purpose, but they were compelled to take blocks of 600 acres and upwards. In the endeavour to secure better grass, they proceeded to ring-bark the whole of the growing timber in what was then comparatively open forest, but the result was the upspringing of a thick undergrowth of eucalyptus scrub, silver wattle, and bracken which destroyed the value of the land for pasture. This is particularly the case in the Tolmie and Toombullup districts where with difficulty the settlers have managed to keep down the scrub in their cultivation paddocks, while allowing the remainder of their holdings to remain waste land.

In its general features, the country extending northward from the Wombat Ranges towards Benalla and Wangaratta is of a rather remarkable character. The large tract of sandstone formation running north-westward from the Main Divide through the Mansfield district gives place to granite ranges, and from these, between the watersheds of the King River and the Boggy, Fifteen-mile, Middle, and Ryan's Creeks, a series of flattened ridges covered with basalt extend northward, dipping down to silurian rises and clay flats along the lower courses of these streams. Further westward, along the borders of the Toombullup Forest, the changes in formation are very abrupt, granite alternating with sandstone, and siliceous conglomerates overlying a red basaltic subsoil, being the chief characteristics. The result is that the soil of these ranges is very unequal in quality, the best being the strips of basalt on the ridges and the patches of alluvium on the creek flats. The basaltic cappings on the tablelands furnish a volcanic loam of great fertility, equal to the best Bullarook soil in the judgment of settlers who have removed to Delatite from that district. With a mild sub-alpine climate, and a rainfall of from 30 to 45 inches, this land is peculiarly adapted to the growth of the hardier cereals, such as oats, barley, and rye; of potatoes, maize, pease, and beans; and of fruits, such as apples and pears. The principal crops are oats and potatoes, and of these very heavy yields are obtained.

A good illustration of the difficulty of successful settlement on the poorer granitic areas is afforded on a tableland between the watersheds of the Fifteen-mile and Ryan's Creeks, at a height above sea-level of some 3,000 feet, and in country almost inaccessible at present to wheel traffic. Here, a tract of about 8,000 acres was taken up some years ago, the allotments being fenced in with posts and wire, and the timber ring-barked. The land was covered with a forest of fine large trees, chiefly mature messmate of milling quality from 3 to 5 feet in diameter. After a struggle

of several years to keep their holdings, the selectors had to abandon them, and the white skeleton trunks of the trees, broken-down fences, decaying huts, and thickets of scrub and bracken attest the failure of the attempt to make homes in the forest under such difficulties of soil and situation.

Under a careful plan of subdivision the rich volcanic lands of the Whitfield, Tolmie, and Toombullup districts might have been allotted in blocks of 150 to 200 acres, which many of the present occupants agree would have been ample for their requirements; while near the edge of the basaltic formation, where the soil runs into granite or sandstone, the area of the holdings might obviously have been somewhat larger. Had such a course been pursued when farmers were encouraged to select land in the district, the plateaux and valleys would now maintain a much larger population, and, as a result of closer settlement, they would probably have better roads to serve the broken country in which they live, as well as a stronger claim to railway communication. Even at the present time it is not too late to rectify the mistake made in many of these large subdivisions, as a number of the lessees, finding it impossible with their limited means to clear and profitably stock or cultivate their holdings, wish to surrender to the Crown considerable areas. One of the earliest settlers on the Toombullup plateau, whose selection largely consists of good volcanic soil, seeks to give up 170 out of the 320 acres which he occupies, and his case is typical of many others.

Owing to the increasing demand for fairly good land in Delatite, accessible by the main roads and tracks, it is of great importance that every endeavour should be made to encourage new selectors to take up these surplus or abandoned areas wherever, owing to the quality of the soil and the situation, there is a prospect of successful settlement. On most of these lands the mature forest has been destroyed, and nothing is gained by allowing them to revert to the condition of a scrubby wilderness, to afford cover for wild dogs, rabbits, and other vermin.

In order to deal systematically with such blocks, we recommend that a competent officer of the Lands Department be deputed at an early date to make a careful examination of the lands fit for cultivation and pasture, which are either abandoned or which the present occupiers wish to surrender under the provisions of section 72 of the *Land Act* 1898, with the view of advising the Minister what areas can be made available for new settlers.

As regards arable lands within Toombullup Reserve, the strips of basaltic soil are divided from each other by belts of granite and sandstone, and hence are of very limited extent. Taking the plateaux between the King River and the Boggy, Fifteen-mile, and Middle Creeks, the total area of agricultural soil now available is estimated at 2,500 acres. The valley of the Fifteen-mile Creek may be regarded as a fair illustration of the land on the lower areas. As the watershed is approached, the flats become exceedingly narrow, varying from 100 to 300 yards in width. The surface is strewn with granite boulders and rubble, intermixed with small patches of alluvial soil, the detritus from the slopes above. In the valley of the Boggy Creek the flats are somewhat wider, extending from about 5 to 20 chains, the average being about 8 chains. The formation, as a whole, is similar to that of the Fifteen-mile Creek, but there are also some good patches of basaltic alluvium at intervals. All these lands bear valuable timber, chiefly bluegum, ribbongum, peppermint, and messmate, and while, in our opinion, they ought not to be retained in the forest reserve when it is finally demarcated, they should be withheld from alienation until the good timber is removed. At present several of these belts of good soil are difficult of access, owing to the broken nature of the ranges in which they are situated. When saw-millers and other timber-getters have made tracks, and by the removal of the thick forest opened the face of the country, the encouragement of settlement can be profitably undertaken. In delimiting the boundaries of these arable lands, great care should be exercised, and in order that the interests of both settlement and forestry may receive due consideration, the work should, we consider, be carried out by the Surveyor-General and the Conservator, acting in conjunction.

The new county plan of Delatite cannot be accepted as a thoroughly trustworthy guide to the quality of the Crown land now under lease in the Whitfield and Toombullup districts, for while on the eastern plateau two small areas only have been placed in the first class, allotments in the vicinity with equally good basaltic soil, and other blocks to the westward, have been put in the second class. Again, along the upper course of Holland's Creek, where the outcrop of granite runs down to the bed

of the stream, some allotments have been placed in the second class, although their quality as grazing land would hardly entitle them to be in the third. Doubtless this defective classification is due to the difficulty of making a detailed examination of the country in the short period which was available for the issue of the plans, and the subject is mentioned here merely to show that on account of the abrupt changes of formation and soil in these districts, the present classification of land on the borders of Toombullup Forest, even where it is correct, is not necessarily a guide to the quality of the soil of adjacent tracts within the reserve.

V.—PROTECTION OF TIMBER WITHIN A RADIUS OF 10 TO 12 MILES OF WHITFIELD RAILWAY STATION.

Just as this Report was going to press, we received through the Minister of Lands a petition from splitters, farmers, and other residents of the King Valley, urging that all Crown lands within a radius of 10 to 12 miles of Whitfield, the terminus of the narrow-gauge line in that district, should be withheld from selection until the large supplies of valuable timber on them can be utilized. The petitioners point out that the areas in question consist chiefly of poor rangy country, much of it already abandoned by selectors, that the transport of timber forms the principal traffic on the Whitfield Railway, that over 60 persons are at present engaged there in splitting laths for the Rutherglen mines, and that very shortly over 100 men will be thus employed.

A radius of 10 to 12 miles from Whitfield terminus would include not only Winteriga and Toombullup Forests, and the northern part of King River Forest, the reservation of which is dealt with in this Report, but also considerable areas now open for selection in the parishes of Myrree, Toombullup North, Toombullup, Dueran East, and Whitfield, on the west side of the King River, and in Carboor, Bungamero, Edi, Wabonga, Wabonga South, Matong, and Matong North, on the east side of that river. We do not consider that it is necessary to withhold from occupation any small detached areas among the selected lands lying westward of the Boggy Creek-road, but the third-class lands lying between that road and the King River should be withheld until we have an opportunity of inspecting them. As regards the lands eastward of the King River, in the parishes already mentioned, Messrs. Lavery and Blackburne have recommended (see the Appendix to this Report) that the area stretching to the Rose River in Wabonga, Wabonga South, and Matong North should remain open for selection. We can express no opinion as to the necessity for keeping these lands and the other third-class areas lying northward in Edi, Bungamero, and Carboor closed to settlement for an indefinite period without seeing them, but we will make arrangements to inspect them at an early date, and we recommend that in the meantime they also be temporarily withheld from occupation.

VI.—SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

The following is a summary of the recommendations made in this Report:—

1. The reservation as permanent forest or timber reserves, and the withdrawal from selection till the timber of commercial value is removed, of the several areas specified in Section II.
2. The excision from proposed or existing reserves, for the purpose of settlement, of the several areas specified in Section II.
3. The early withdrawal of the forester in charge from the duty of supervising reserves and Crown lands in the county of Moira, in order that he may be free to give more attention to the supervision of the Delatite reserves and Crown lands.
4. The utilization of the services of the Inspector under the Vermin Destruction Act, now stationed at Maindample, in the supervision of the reserves in the southern part of the county.
5. The early inspection by a competent officer of the Lands Department of the arable and grazing lands now occupied under licence or lease in the Tolmie, Whitfield, and Toombullup districts, in order that those persons who wish to surrender part of their holdings to the Crown, and thus provide additional land for settlement, may be relieved of the surplus areas.

6. The temporary withdrawal from the list of lands now open for selection of certain specified areas on the east and west of the King River (in accordance with the prayer of a petition from the district) until the Commission can inspect and report on them.

VII.—CONCLUSION.

The forests of this county, served as they are by the North-Eastern, Mansfield, Whitfield, and Bright railway lines, must, owing to their situation and the fine quality of the timber of mountain growth which they yield, always be one of the main sources of supply for the extensive district which stretches from the Dividing Range to the Murray, and from the Goulburn to the Ovens. In addition to meeting local requirements, the saw-millers occasionally get orders from New South Wales for ordinary hardwood, and, while Albury is one of their best markets, consignments have been sent as far as Culcairn, Wagga, and Junee, while the bluegum in special sizes finds a ready sale in Melbourne for coachbuilders' material. The development of alluvial mining in the Rutherglen-Chiltern district, and the failure of supplies in the reserves nearer to the Murray, have caused contractors and splitters to turn their attention to the Whitfield and Winteriga Forests. Already large supplies of laths, props, fencing material, and poppet-legs are being sent northward from these reserves, and it is evident that for a long time to come they will be drawn upon for this class of material.

On the other hand, the importance of the larger reserves from a climatic point of view must not be overlooked. On their maintenance under forest cover depends to a large extent the regular flow of the fine streams which, running northward to the Goulburn and Ovens, make Delatite one of the best-watered districts in the colony. A tract such as the King River Forest may at first sight seem an extensive area to withhold from settlement, but when it is remembered that, owing to its elevation, ranging from 3,000 to nearly 5,000 feet, a great portion of it is covered with snow for several months in the year; that the spurs and foot-hills which run out from the Dividing Range within its borders form a network of small streams which are the sources of the King, Rose, and Broken Rivers; that, irrespective of its elevation, the rugged and difficult nature of the country, and the smallness of the strips of good soil in the deep gorges and valleys, make it almost inaccessible as well as unfit for agricultural settlement; and that the best use to which the plateaux and more open parts can be put—the pasturage of cattle in the summer season—can be secured while keeping it under forest cover, we do not consider that any reasonable objection can be urged to its reservation, nor does the King River Forest as regards its configuration and physical features differ in any marked degree from the other reserves dealt with in this Report. With but one exception—the Kelfeera reserve, near Benalla—they are situated in or form part of rugged mountainous country. By their natural situation and elevation, and by having within their recesses the sources of streams and springs, they are worthy of preservation as well from a climatic as from a timber point of view, and for these reasons their retention by the State is a matter of the highest importance.

A. L. TUCKER, President.
 ALF. S. BAILES.
 THOS. BAKER.
 J. BALFOUR BURTON.
 D. J. DUGGAN.
 DAVID HAM.
 DAVID KERB.
 CHAS. SARGEANT.
 HUGH MACKAY, Secretary.

APPENDIX.

Forests Commission,
Parliament House,
Melbourne, 28th September, 1899.

SIR,

In addition to the examination of the country between the Main Dividing Range and the Winteriga Reserve, and of the areas proposed to be added to the Too-rour Reserve on its eastern side, respecting which letters have already been sent on behalf of the Commission to the Lands Department, the Chairman will be obliged if Mr. H. Lavery, Staff Surveyor for the Benalla district, and yourself, will report—

- (1) Whether the small area lying south of Mansfield, classed as a timber reserve on the new plan of the county of Delatite, should be made a permanent reserve for forest purposes (*vide* Mansfield evidence, Q. 3793).
- (2) Whether any of the forfeited Crown lands referred to in the attached letter of Forester W. C. Williams, on the west and north of the Dueran Reserve, should be added to that reserve.
- (3) Whether the land on Holland's Creek, referred to in the evidence taken at Tolmie (about 600 acres, Q. 3794), should be permanently or temporarily reserved, or withheld from selection till the timber is utilized.
- (4) Whether the block near the Fifteen-mile Creek, about 600 acres, formerly occupied by R. E. McGrath (evidence Q. 3800), near the route of the proposed narrow-gauge Tolmie railway, should be added to the proposed reserve, or withheld from selection till the timber is utilized.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

HUGH MACKAY.

James Blackburne, Esq., Inspector of Forests.

Melbourne, 7th October, 1899.

SIR,

We have the honour herewith to submit to you a joint report, asked for by the Royal Commission on State Forests, on certain proposed additions to forest reserves in the Mansfield and King River districts.

We have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servants,

J. BLACKBURNE.
H. LAVERY.

The Secretary for Lands, Melbourne.

Forwarded, with plan, for the information of the Royal Commission on State Forests.

T. F. MORKHAM, Secretary for Lands.

18th October, 1899.

[REPORT.]

Melbourne, 7th October, 1899.

SIR,

After making a personal and thorough examination of the country included in the proposed extensions in the above-named localities, we have the honour to report, for the information of the Commission, as follows:—

Parish of Tallangalook.

The land in allotments 68A, part of 70, and 72 and 75 is of poor quality and unsuited for agricultural purposes, being a high and steep ridge, extending southwards from the Too-rour country. It is clothed with peppermint, stringybark, and some bluegum, and, although the timber is not of equal quality with that found on the Too-rour Forest Reserve lying to the west of these allotments, there is yet a large quantity of it of considerable value, well adapted for mining and other uses, and, in our opinion, it would be both wise and judicious to add this territory to the adjoining State Forest.

Timber Reserve, Parish of Loyala.

This is a steep and rugged piece of country to the south of Mansfield, lying from one to two miles away. Its physical conformation renders it useless for ordinary purposes; and all the timber dead or lying on the ground, in accessible positions, has apparently been removed. The growing timber is greybox, with a little redgum on the lower slopes, and stringybark on the spurs. The land is practically barren, and of no use except for the growth of forest trees, and we consider that it may be permanently reserved without detriment to public or private interests.

Dueran Reserve.

This proposed State Forest embraces a high mountain range, running south-eastward from Mount Samaria, and, having examined the adjoining country, we are of opinion that the present boundaries may be extended so as to include the portions shown by the blue hatching on the accompanying plan, marked D./7.10.99. The land is growing some fair young timber, and would, we think, be of more value to the State as a forest area than it would be if applied to any other purpose, the soil being generally poor and the vegetation coarse, heathy, and comparatively of little use for stock.

Land on Holland's Creek.

This territory, referred to in the evidence taken by the Forest Commission at Tolmie on the 5th of May last—(Q. 3794)—lies on both sides of Holland's Creek, partly in the parish of Dueran, and partly in Toombullup. The timber is principally bluegum and peppermint of very superior quality, and it should undoubtedly be made a permanent reservation. We feel assured that the value of the timber is far beyond any sum that could be realized from the land were it devoted to any other purpose. We refer to the area lying between Holland's Creek and lots 10, 11, and 12, in the parish of Dueran, also the land not held under lease, licence, or grant, on the opposite side of the creek, in the parish of Toombullup, and also a portion of land in the same parish, lying west of allotments 19 to 24, and extending to Holland's Creek, the country being well timbered, and too steep to be suitable for profitable settlement. The land referred to in both these parishes is shown by blue lines on the accompanying plan.

Land formerly held by R. E. McGrath.—Tolmie evidence, Q. 3800.

This block, lying near the route of the proposed extension of the Wangaratta to Whitfield railway, would in all probability be heavily drawn upon for the supply of timber for construction purposes, and would therefore (taking into consideration also its isolated position) be of little use as a permanent reservation. We consider it should be retained by the State until the timber be utilized. McGrath's block is north of allotment 107, parish of Whitfield, and is indicated on the plan by cross hatched lines.

Mountainous Country in the Upper King and Rose River Districts.

On examining this district we found it to consist principally of very steep ranges which extend northerly from the Great Divide, with a series of lateral spurs on each side, which form what may be termed the framework of the country, the sloping sides of each spur forming distinct watersheds draining into small gullies, eventually forming tributary creeks which find their way into the King River on the one side, and into the Rose River on the other. These ridges and spurs, which are very rough and rocky in places, are clothed with timber, consisting chiefly of peppermint and blue and white gum; and while there are to be found occasionally some very good specimens of each kind, the general average of the timber is only moderately good; while the difficulty of access and the remoteness of the locality militate against any hope we might entertain that the timber growing here can have any commercial value for many years to come. On the other hand, the land is so poor in value, from a grazing point of view, that there is little prospect of its being utilized as ordinary pastoral country, and it would, we think, let as readily for grazing, &c., if it were State Forest as it would if placed in the 4th class under the Land Act. One large patch of somewhat superior country exists between the King and Rose Rivers, namely, in the parishes of Wabonga, Wabonga South, and Matong North, on the west side of the Rose River, and a narrow margin on the east side of the same stream. This land we consider to be fit for selection (3rd class) under the new Act, and we recommend that it be not included in the proposed additions to the permanent forest reserve in this locality, which we have shown by blue hatched lines on the plan submitted.

Suggestion of Mr. James Hackett, that a Township Reserve be made for Occupation by Splitters.

With regard to the letter from Mr. James Hackett, of 29th July last, in which he refers to the desirability of excising 15 or 20 acres of land at the south-east angle of his selection on the Whitfield table-land. We have examined the site in question, and see no objection to an excision being made for residential purposes.

J. BLACKBURNE, Inspector of Forests.

H. LAVERY, Staff Surveyor.

The Secretary, Royal Commission on State Forests, Melbourne.