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SIXTH PROGRESS REPORT

OF THE

ROYAL COMMISSION ON STATE FORESTS AND
TIMBER RESERVES.

THE STANLEY AND CHILTERN FORESTS:

THEIR RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT, AND CONTROL.

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

By Authority:

ROBT. S. BRAIN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

STANLEY AND CHILTERN FORESTS.

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 :

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

STANLEY FOREST.

I.—AREA AND SITUATION.

This forest, which is classed as a Timber reserve, is situated eastward of Beechworth, in the county of Bogong, and contains about 46,000 acres. Its configuration generally is rugged and broken, the Bowman's Forest range and several other hill ridges traversing the central and western portions, while towards the north-west the country is more of an undulating character. The formation is chiefly silurian, and for many years past alluvial mining has been carried on throughout the reserve and its neighbourhood. The forest is the source of several small creeks which flow into the Ovens and Kiewa rivers. The rainfall over this area is considerable, the average annual record for a number of years exceeding 40 inches, while for the period of eight months ending in June last it was 33 inches.

II.—TIMBER SUPPLIES.

The timber consists of messmate, stringybark, and peppermint, with bluegum and white gum in the gullies. The best belts are found to the east and south of the township of Stanley, which lies nearly in the centre of the reserve. Some years ago five mills were in operation in this forest, but the number is now reduced to two. Timber cutting has been carried on for about 40 years, and it is not expected that supplies of mature milling logs will be obtainable much longer. Indeed, during our inspection of the reserve we noticed that many of the logs brought in for cutting barely reached the regulation diameter limit of 2 feet. One of the mills, it is stated, is about to be removed eastward to the Dederang reserve, where there is a large stock of mature timber almost untouched. The quantity of sawn stuff cut last year by the mills in Stanley Forest was over one million superficial feet, 24 men being employed in connexion with this output. A market for the timber is readily found at Beechworth, Albury, Chiltern, and Tallangatta. The young trees now standing in the forest are, as a whole, of very fair quality, and there are some fine belts of immature bluegum which should be carefully protected and reserved for milling purposes. Wheelwrights and coachbuilders in the North-Eastern district recognise that it furnishes an excellent timber for their work, as well as for general construction, and it is certainly unwise to permit so valuable a tree to be available for props, fencing, and fuel, under the authority of miners' rights, as is the case at present. In addition to mill timber, large quantities of props are cut for the mines in the Chiltern-Rutherglen district. Laths for these mines used also to be obtained there, but the supply is exhausted, and for some time past this class of timber has had to be conveyed from Tallangatta, Bright, and Whitfield, the distance of the splitting grounds from the mines ranging from 40 to over 90 miles.

CHILTERN FOREST.

III.—AREA AND SITUATION.

The Chiltern Timber Reserve, which is also in the county of Bogong, lies north-westward of Stanley Forest, and extends from the Beechworth and Yackandandah railway line to the neighbourhood of Barnawartha and Mount Pleasant, within a few miles of the River Murray. Its area is estimated to be about 61,000 acres. In the southern and south-eastern portion of the reserve is a range of hills, the highest elevation of which is the Pilot Peak; but in a north-westerly direction the country becomes of an undulating character, with long stretches of fairly level land. In the southern portion of the reserve the formation is granitic, and in the northern silurian; the Black Dog Creek, which rises in the Pilot Range and flows in a north-westerly direction into the Murray, forming for a considerable distance the boundary line between the two classes of country.

IV.—TIMBER SUPPLIES.

The timber in this reserve is chiefly stringybark and red ironbark, with a considerable quantity of red box, and a little grey box and redgum. The belts of stringybark and ironbark, though badly overcut for many years past, are of very fair quality. The box is pipey, and of inferior quality; while the redgum, which is also of poor quality, is confined to the small creeks and swamps.

STANLEY AND CHILTERN FORESTS.

V.—RESERVATION.

After careful inspection of the lands comprised in these two reserves, and examination of the timber thereon, we are of opinion that they should be permanently reserved for forest purposes, subject, however, to the excision for occupation under the Land Act of four areas, the situation and extent of which are dealt with in Section VII.

VI.—MANAGEMENT.

The reserves are under the supervision of one forester, who is stationed at Beechworth. The total revenue obtained from them last year was £900, and of this amount £567 was received from the sale of mining props alone. A fair revenue is now obtained from grazing licences, and in the Chiltern Forest there are no fewer than ten of these in force, and one in Stanley Forest. The total amount received from this source was £200, one area of about 12,000 acres bringing in £134 per annum. The grazing quality of the land in the granite country is very poor, 5 to 10 acres being required to carry a sheep throughout the year. The expenditure is confined to the pay and horse allowance of the forester, and, for the same year, amounted to £168.

In addition to the ordinary licence-fees for milling and splitting timber the following royalty rates are in force:—Mining props, per 100 running feet, 6-in., 1s., 8-in., 1s. 6d., 10-in., 2s.; 3ft. 6in. blocking legs, 3 inches in diameter, per 100, 1s. 6d.; 7-ft. blocking caps, 3-in., per 100, 3s.; 2ft. 6in. panelling props, 1½-in., per 100, 3d.; redgum and ironbark poles, first 20 feet, 4s., and 2d. each additional foot; other kinds of pole timber, half rates.

The cutting of ironbark timber under the authority of miners' rights in the neighbourhood of Chiltern, by persons who are not miners, has been a constant source of trouble in the supervision of these reserves. On account of its good heating qualities, ironbark has for a long period been used for fuel there, and for several years past it has been cut in very large quantities and carted into Chiltern for the use of the townspeople. In this way not only trees approaching maturity, but many thousands of straight young saplings were cut in the face, considerable areas being completely denuded of live timber. When this wanton destruction was brought under our notice by the local forester, we at once communicated with the Minister of Lands, with the result that some months afterwards a proclamation was issued forbidding the cutting of any timber under 18 inches in diameter in certain parishes in the vicinity of Beechworth and Chiltern. On representations being made from the district that this restriction hampered miners in procuring timber for their claims and for domestic purposes, it was partially revoked, and, as the regulations now stand, ironbark is protected up to a diameter of 18 inches at 2 feet from the ground within a radius of 10 miles from the Beechworth Post-office against holders of miners' rights, but above that diameter it is unprotected.

As regards the *bonâ fide* miners or prospectors, the evidence and reports of the late forester go to show that large quantities of straight ironbark saplings have been cut by them for shaft timber, fencing, and firewood, although there are ample supplies of other kinds of timber available for these purposes. One of the most wasteful uses to which ironbark and stringybark saplings have been devoted is the erection of palisade fencing in 6-ft. lengths around the miners' residence areas. As regards firewood generally, it is estimated by the same officer that three-fourths of the fuel used by miners at Chiltern and Beechworth is cut from saplings under a foot in diameter.

The question of miners' privileges, in so far as regards the free use of timber, has been specially referred to us, and will be dealt with in a separate report. In the meantime, we may state that while, in our opinion, every reasonable facility should be given to *bonâ fide* miners to procure suitable timber for their work or for domestic purposes, great care should be taken that there is no abuse of these privileges, especially on the part of persons who are not miners, but take out rights at a nominal cost for the purpose of getting fuel from the reserves without payment, and who in defiance of the spirit of the law destroy valuable ironbark and bluegum when other timber equally well adapted to their requirements is available.

With the view of protecting the belts of bluegum in Stanley Forest, we recommend that a proclamation be issued at an early date forbidding the cutting or removal of this tree when of less diameter than 24 inches at a height of 3 feet from the ground, except under special permits at royalty rates. Further, in order to protect both bluegum and ironbark of any size from being cut indiscriminately by holders of miners' rights, we recommend the making of a regulation forbidding the cutting or removal of these trees under the authority of any miner's right unless they shall have been first marked for cutting by the forester in charge of the reserves. With respect to other kinds of timber, such as messmate, stringybark, box, and peppermint, the same regulation should forbid the cutting or removal for fuel or fencing of any live trees of less diameter than 2 feet at a height of 2 feet from the ground, unless the holders are also in possession of free permits for thinning purposes.

As considerable areas of Stanley Forest have been stripped of mature trees, it is of great importance that the young bluegum, messmate, and peppermint timber should be effectively protected against licensed cutters till it attains maturity. The forester having a large district to patrol, many opportunities are afforded to timber-getters to take trees under size without being discovered. It is also pointed out by the forester and local residents that prop-cutters invariably take the finest and straightest young timber, and where trees of suitable size for props are found in clumps, strip them in the face instead of thinning them out. In order to keep a better check on the operations of prop-cutters, and to secure the restocking of the forest with milling trees, we recommend that selected areas, containing the best belts of young timber in this reserve be closed to all cutting, except under thinning permits at royalty rates, until such timber attains maturity.

VII.—LANDS FOR SETTLEMENT.

During our visit to the Stanley district, application was made on behalf of residents in the neighbourhood that an area to the south-west of the township should be excised from the timber reserve and made available for selection. We have since received through the Minister of Lands a petition from Stanley to the same effect, in which it is pointed out that there are no ordinary Crown lands open for occupation in the vicinity, and that the provision of small allotments, especially for the mining community, would be a great boon. Several witnesses at Chiltern also urged that settlement should be permitted on areas in the neighbourhood of the Eldorado pre-emptive right and the township of Barnawartha. In dealing with the applications we have been confronted by the difficulty that, while it is obviously the desire of the applicants to obtain from the State small freeholds in these reserves, it has long been an established policy in the colony to withhold from alienation in fee simple areas which have been proved to be auriferous. After careful examination of the soil and timber, and in view of the fact that no other Crown land is obtainable, we have decided to recommend the excision from these reserves of four blocks for occupation, but as they are within the auriferous area of the North-Eastern district, no occupation should be permitted without the express sanction, in writing, of the Mines Department. The first of these lies to the north-west of Stanley on both sides of the road leading

from that township to Beechworth, extends to the Beechworth water reserve, and contains about 300 acres. A considerable portion of it is already subdivided into small blocks, most of them ranging from 5 to 10 acres, and is intersected by surveyed roads. The land is rather heavily timbered, but the soil, to a large extent a coarse red loam, is, judging by neighbouring holdings, of fair quality, and suitable for the growth of fruit trees, potatoes, and green fodder. The second block, which has similar soil and timber, is due south of Stanley, extends towards Myrtle Creek on both sides of the road leading to Myrtleford, and contains about 700 acres.

The third area lies about 4 miles to the south-east of Chiltern, between the Pilot and Black Dog Creeks. It is sparsely timbered with redgum, stringybark, red box, and apple tree of poor quality; while the soil is chiefly a granite schist, with patches of red and grey loam. This piece of land is situated in the northern part of the parishes of Eldorado and Wooragee North, and also includes a small portion of the south-east corner of the parish of Chiltern. We are of opinion that the land to be excised for occupation, in this part of the reserve, should not exceed 2,000 acres.

The fourth area is in the north-eastern corner of the Chiltern reserve, in the parish of Chiltern, and a short distance westward of the township of Barnawartha. It is thinly covered with inferior grey box and stringybark. The formation is silurian, the soil being a grey loam of fair quality. The area to be excised for occupation should not exceed 1,200 acres.

VIII.—PROTECTION OF ADJACENT RESERVE.

Eastward of Chiltern Forest is a tract of heavily-timbered country, known as the Middle Creek reserve, and containing about 7,000 acres. Its configuration is very rugged, ranges of granite formation alternating with deep gullies. It is said to be accessible for the transport of timber from the north and east only. The dredging claims in the neighbourhood depend on it for supplies of timber, the quality of which is very fair, messmate, the common stringybark, and peppermint being the principal trees. The land is quite unsuitable for agricultural settlement, and as, on the other hand, it is naturally suited to the growth of timber, we recommend that it be made a permanent reserve for forest purposes.

IX.—SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

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

1. The permanent reservation for forest purposes of the areas known as the Stanley and Chiltern Timber reserves, distinguished by vertical red lines on the new plan of the county of Bogong, subject, however, to the excision for occupation purposes of the lands specified below.
2. The excision for the purpose of occupation, subject to the express approval, in writing, of the Mines Department, of—
 - (a) Two areas, to the north-west and south of the township of Stanley, not exceeding in all 1,000 acres.
 - (b) An area between the Pilot and Black Dog Creeks, in the parishes of Eldorado, Wooragee North, and Chiltern, not exceeding 2,000 acres.
 - (c) An area in the north-eastern portion of the Chiltern Timber reserve, westward of the township of Barnawartha, not exceeding 1,200 acres.
3. The early issue of—
 - (a) A proclamation forbidding the cutting or removal of live bluegum (*E. globulus*) of less diameter than 24 inches at a height of 3 feet from the ground (except under special permits at royalty rates) :
 - (b) A regulation forbidding the cutting or removal of live ironbark or live bluegum of any size for firewood, fencing purposes, or shaft timber under the authority of any miner's right, unless such trees shall have been marked for cutting by the forester in charge :

(c) A regulation forbidding the cutting or removal for fuel or fencing under miners' rights of live trees of other kinds when of less diameter than 2 feet at 2 feet from the ground, unless the holders are also in possession of free thinning permits.

4. The closing of selected areas in Stanley reserve containing the best belts of immature timber to all cutting, except under thinning permits, until such timber shall have attained maturity.

5. The permanent reservation for forest purposes of an area of about 7,000 acres, situated eastward of Chiltern Forest, and known as the Middle Creek reserve.

X.—CONCLUSION.

While these reserves cannot fairly be regarded as forests of the first class, their situation within the extensive auriferous area which stretches towards the River Murray in the north-eastern district renders them of great importance as a source of supply for mining timber. With proper protection of the young bluegum, stringybark, and peppermint, Stanley Forest will again furnish large supplies of milling and fencing timber and laths, while with similar care and attention the belts of red ironbark in Chiltern reserve may be expected to furnish sleepers for the Government railways. As shown in this report, the soil of these areas is almost wholly unfit for successful agricultural settlement in large blocks, but the silurian formation, and to a less extent the granite, produces a useful and durable class of timber. Taking all the circumstances into consideration, the maintenance of the reserves as State Forests is the best use to which the land can be devoted, while at the same time the more open parts can be let under annual licences as at present for the grazing of sheep.

A. L. TUCKER, President.

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Parliament House, Melbourne,
27th September, 1899.