

ART. LV.—*Notes upon a Find of Kauri-gum in Rangitikei, Wellington Province.*

By S. A. R. MAIR.

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SOME five-and-twenty years ago a broad expanse of dense bush separated the lower Rangitikei from the extensive plains of Murimotu, or Inland Patea, lying to the south of Ruapehu. Right from the Whanganui River to the Ruahine Ranges did this forest extend, and, except for occasional canoe services down the Rangitikei River, it completely barred all communication with the ports of Cook Strait. Many acres of the plains had even then long been used for grazing sheep, brought in overland from either Hawke's Bay or Taupo, by which routes wool, &c., had to be packed out. This led to an agitation to open communication through to Rangitikei, as the Maoris were supposed to have previously had a track through the intervening thirty or forty miles of bush. With this object the Government and Rangitikei County offered a reward of £250 for the best line of road, and by this means the bush was thoroughly explored by Natives and pioneer settlers, with the result that a track was opened through about midway between Turakina and Rangitikei Rivers. This line, known as Murimotu Road and Murray's Track, was only one of several routes offered for the reward, and evidently, by being adopted, was considered to be most serviceable. Leaving the lower Rangitikei it followed up the Pourewa, a large feeder of the Rangitikei River, and, climbing out of its source over the Te Kumu Ridge, about 2,500 ft. high, it rapidly descended a sharp ridge into the Mangaone Stream, a feeder of the Mangapapa, which in turn flows into the Turakina. Rising out of the Mangaone up and over a western ridge off the high Matawa Range, the track traversed some miles of gorgy and hilly country, emerging into the Pateketete clearing, and then into the valley of the Hautapu, up which it wound to Ngaurukehu and Turangarere, where the Ruanui, Taupo, and Moawhango-Napier Roads were intercepted.

Whether the explorers of Murray's Track had known of the previous existence of any ancient Maori track between the Rangitikei and Patea I am not aware, but have since been informed by Major Mair that such a track did exist, and was used from the very earliest times by the interior Maoris visiting those on the south-west coast. From Major Mair's testimony I find this track from Turangarere to the Mangaone was almost identical with Murray's Track. From there it rose the spur to Te Kumu Ridge and there divided, the western branch head-

ing the source of the Pourewa on the northern side, and, after passing around Tauporae, followed a spur down to the Turakina River, just below where it is joined by the Mangapapa. About here are to be seen many remains of old cultivations and fortifications, possibly being a place of retreat, as it is at the head of the portion of river navigable for canoes, and some forty or fifty miles from the coast. The eastern branch skirted the source of Pourewa, falling into the valley of the Makohine, another tributary of the Rangitikei, and again ascending the Whakawae Ridge and descending to the Otara kainga, near where Ohingaiti now stands. From there to the coast communication would be easy either by canoe or down the valley of the Rangitikei.

The subject of these notes, a large piece of kauri-gum, was discovered by some bushfellers lying on a leading ridge parallel to the one which Murray's Track follows, immediately to the south and about 30 chains from the Mangaone Stream. One of the bushmen, in preparing to boil the "billy," observed what he expected was a round stone, and, as such is a curiosity in this country entirely devoid of gravels, he inquisitively struck it with the back of his axe, to find it splintered into fragments of gum. Finding it would burn he utilised the most of it to boil his precious "billy," but luckily he retained a few pieces, and I afterwards obtained a few ounces from him. From his description the lump would be several pounds in weight, and was completely moss-covered, and lying half buried in the mould near the crown of a sharp ridge, in dense bush; and there were absolutely no indications of any track of any kind, the undergrowth being, if anything, denser than usual. There would be no old Native clearings within ten or twelve miles of the spot as the crow flies. As will be observed by the sample forwarded with this, the gum is a hard, brittle, semitransparent gum, to all appearance just as if taken out of the ground.

Upon ascertaining that the find was really kauri-gum, a mild sensation was caused among the immediate settlers, who were then led to believe their lands had once been clad with kauri, and would in future be rushed by diggers anxious to search for the buried wealth. However, possible such a thing may be, but it is most improbable.

Geologically the country throughout this part consists of the lower and middle beds of Tertiary clays, commonly known as "papa," and covered with a comparatively thin coating of clay mould. The existing forest consists of totara, rimu, kahikatea, matai, tawa, titoki, kowhai, &c.

The presence of this kauri-gum in such a locality, together with the traditional record of an ancient track by the Maori,

may be taken as conclusive evidence as to the actual existence of such, and also go to show that kauri-gum was put to some use by the ancient Maori, or a lump of several pounds would not have been carried upon a long and presumably fighting trip from the far north.

It may not be generally known that the kauri will flourish in the extremes of weather in this part of the Island. In my garden at Hunterville I have a fine tree, about four years old, which makes a growth of 9 in. each year. It was obtained from a Wellington nurseryman, and has several times been transplanted, and, in its present situation at 900 ft. above sea-level, has experienced several severe snow-falls lasting days at a time. It is now about 4½ ft. high.

#### APPENDIX BY CAPTAIN MAIR.

Traversing the large tract of forest which lies between the open-country about Rangitikei and the Murimotu Plains were two well-known ancient war-trails, which were much used in the sanguinary wars that occurred during the early part of last century. One of the aforesaid war-paths came from Hawke's Bay and Taupo, joining at Pungataua, thence crossing the cañon of the Moawhango by a narrow plank (settlers still use a log on same site) it followed along the Whakauae Range out to a clearing called Otara on bank of Rangitikei, thence to Pourewa, and on to Marton. The other track branched off from the former at Turangarere towards the west, thence down the valley of the Pourewa to Marton. It was by these two war-trails that the three *hekes* or migrations composed of the Ngatiraukawa under Te Whatanui, Te Heuheu, and other great chiefs, came to assist their kinsman Te Rauparaha in holding Kapiti as against the populous but less warlike southern tribes. Armed bands were, in fact, constantly passing over this country, and the large lump of kauri-gum recently found in this district had evidently been brought from the Thames, Lower Waikato, or Raglan district by one of these very numerous war-parties.

The old-time Maori carried kauri-gum for several reasons: first, for burning under sheets of green bark to procure lamp-black (kauri), from which the tattooing pigment was made; secondly, for use as torches; and, thirdly, for chewing. To prepare the latter the old gum was kept in boiling water till quite plastic, then juice procured from the milk of the *puwha* (thistle) was mixed with it to make it soft and elastic for masticating.