

SANDS AND SANDHILL FORESTS OF THE AUCKLAND CONSERVANCY

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SYNOPSIS

In Auckland the demand for sound timber far exceeds the supply. Within the range of this assured and rapidly growing market lie over 100,000 acres of coastal sandbelts admirably suited both for the growing of high quality timber and for the maximum use of machinery in the establishing and harvesting of forest crops.

In planning, foresters must make adequate provision for increased recreational use of these areas. They must also maintain safeguards against reversion to mobile sand.

In New Zealand the climate of public opinion is becoming increasingly favourable towards forestry. In Auckland the demand far exceeds the supply of round timber and the greatest hope for the future in meeting this demand lies in the urgent development of the coastal sands into permanently producing forests.

At Aupouri in the far north is a forest potential of over 70,000 acres with access to deep-water ports. At Woodhill are 34,000 acres, and just across the Kaipara Harbour mouth another 20,000 acres, giving 54,000 acres, all easily and quickly available to the Auckland market. In addition, a number of smaller areas give an additional potential forest area of some 20,000 acres. Where else in New Zealand is there available over 100,000 acres of potential forest land in two compact blocks, eminently suitable for the full use of mechanical equipment, with assured markets and, in terms of present-day land values, almost free?

Sandhill forestry offers a greater than normal appeal to New Zealand foresters. Exactly why this is so is hard to say. Perhaps it is because there is an attraction towards the winning of the first quick battle against the moving sand; perhaps it is because there is a great opportunity for the use of machines and for the development of new methods; perhaps it is because at heart we are all beachcombers. There is no doubt that sandhill forestry offers a unique variety of experience. Where else could one receive a fire report which read, "Tankers and crew were sent out to a burning whale, fire under control at 5 p.m."? Whatever the attraction or attractions are, the result is good. The Conservancy has a staff dedicated to sandhill forestry and to the solution of its many and peculiar problems.

The title of this paper allows sufficient latitude for a departure, at least briefly, from the purely forestry theme. This departure should yield a double gain, first by providing a better appreciation of the peculiar problems involved in forestry usage of the sandhills, and, secondly, by leaving a relatively virgin field for the papers which follow.

The sandhill belts of the Auckland Conservancy total about 187,000 acres, of which 165,000 acres form mile-wide belts along the west coast. At Kawhia and Raglan in the south, the beaches are short but they rapidly give way to the long sweeping stretches

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of the Kaipara, Hokianga and Ninety Mile Beaches. These last three beaches alone contain over 150,000 acres of sand. On the east coast, there are about 22,000 acres of sands, 18,000 acres of which are divided between the three sweeping reaches of Mangawhai, Bream Bay and Exhibition Bay, all lying to the north of Warkworth. The remaining 4,000 acres are split into a number of short and narrow belts fringing deeply indented bays where the problems of the sands are mostly social ones and usually far removed from practical forestry.

In Dr L. Cockayne's *Report on the Dune Areas of New Zealand* (1911) he gave the total area of sand as 184,000 acres and included beaches as far south as Opotiki on the east coast. The total of 187,000 acres given here goes only as far south as Tauranga. The discrepancy can be partly attributed to more accurate mapping, partly to some progradation, notably at the entrance of the Kaipara Harbour, and partly to the misuse of land through grazing; this was foreseen by Dr Cockayne when he wrote: "*At the present time the neglect of wounds in the turf by the farmer is perhaps the greatest source of danger to the adjacent fertile lands*". The italics are Dr Cockayne's.

Since Kupe first landed on the Hokianga sands about 1,000 years ago, until the present epoch of the frenzied toheroa hunters, the coastal sandhill belts have played an important part in the development of New Zealand. In early time, when the hinterland was heavily wooded, communications were along the north to south roads formed by the beaches, or from east to west by canoe traffic up the rivers. Travel through the forest was usually confined to hunting trips, portages between harbours, or short trips on foot across the watersheds dividing the east coast from the west. These north-south highways also provided a plentiful food supply and so naturally they became the scenes of most of the pre-European battles between tribes, as they strove for ownership of fishing grounds.

The early explorers and missionaries generally followed the same routes as the Maoris. Marsden, in particular, carried out extensive travels along the sands of the West Coast and left his name as a landmark near Muriwai. As farming became widespread, the beaches became stock routes; at present the Ninety Mile Beach is still used for seasonal cattle droving from the far north.

During the last thirty years, metalled roads and stock trucks have reduced the importance of the beaches as highways, but at the same time an increased population has given the beaches a new and permanent usage, that of recreation for thousands of New Zealanders. This usage must intensify as the national population increases and foresters would be failing in their public duties if they neglected to make recreational use an integral part of management plans for these forests.

These sandhill belts are often looked upon as dead waste areas which are there to be reclaimed and used without much further thought. Nothing is further from the truth: the sand belts are tension zones which lie between the sea and the solid land. The forces which build up the tensions are enormous and they never relax. It would be foolish indeed if, in forest planning, it was considered that, once the moving sands were fixed, they could be forgotten. Nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout

the whole planning two things must be remembered: first, Cockayne's warning — if neglected, these new forests can be over-run from the sea as other and earlier forests have been over-run; and second, that this is a new kind of forestry with most of its lessons still to be learned.

The problems which have to be solved in the future will not be dealt with here, beyond saying that there are many we know about and without doubt there are many more of which at the moment we are ignorant, perhaps fortunately so. Whatever the problems are they will be solved. The future of the sandhill forests is exciting and without doubt assured.