

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 1896.

Mr. Bernard Shaw presided at the monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania on Monday, September 21st, and there was a good attendance. The subject for discussion was the West Coast routes, introduced at the previous meeting by Mr. T. Stephens.

### NEW MEMBERS AND VISITORS.

Mr. Robert Sticht, metallurgist, Mount Lyell; Dr. E. T. MacGowan and Mr. R. Fitzarthur Waller were elected. Also Major C. M. Officer, F.G.S. (London), and Mr. W. H. Palmer, C.E., two visitors.

## WEST COAST TRACKS.

The discussion on this subject was resumed.

Mr. T. STEPHENS said: As the report of the second party despatched to explore the country lying to the west of the Mount Field Range had now been received he might, by way of postscript, add a few words to the paper read at the last meeting. The work of the recent expedition, which was undertaken under conditions of exceptional hardship and difficulty, had not done much towards the exploration of the particular tract of country to which he had directed attention; but it had shown that there are obstacles to a route along the River Gordon, which, though they should not be regarded as insurmountable, would necessitate a considerable expenditure of time and money before a practicable track could be opened in that direction. He had, therefore, indicated upon the chart an alternative route. Taking the Humboldt Divide and the country about Mount Lyell as the two extreme points, this route should be carried westerly to some point between the junction of the Serpentine on the south and the Denison on the north side of the Gordon, where a convenient crossing place can be found on the last-named river. There a depôt should be provided. An opportunity would thus be given for examining both banks of the Gordon towards Macquarie Harbour, but the main object should be to push through the unexplored country between the Rivers Franklin and Denison to the Linda track, and thus make accessible that large area which is still described on our latest maps as "unexplored."

Mr. E. A. COUNSEL (Surveyor-General) said Mr. Stephens had dealt very fully with the country being opened up from Glenora, and he (Mr. Counsel) would deal with the subject under three headings, namely, (1) the results following track cutting into unexplored country, showing how districts had been opened up on the lines of those in various parts of Tasmania; (2) the conditions under which the work might be undertaken; (3) future exploration. Under the first heading the speaker made out a forcible argument for continuing the making of these tracks in the unexplored parts of the West Coast. As to the Mole Creek route spoken of by Mr. Stephens, with branches, they must be fairly tested before a definite course as to them was taken. They would no doubt serve very important districts, but the danger was of their being at too high a level for winter traffic. Strange to say, the Gordon and Rasselas route was still undetermined, notwithstanding the fact that the country intended to thereby so open up (as well as to provide communication to the West Coast) was almost accessible by a main-road (Dawson's road) as far back as 1860; and notwithstanding the fact that actual surveys and settlements were made as far west as the base of Frenchman's Cap in 1853. At that date a block was actually leased at the base of Frenchman's Cap. The Rasselas Valley route would no doubt be improved as the examination of the country progressed. As to the Tyenna route, explored by Mr. Innes who

reported that a route between Mount Humboldt and the navigable part of the Gordon was impracticable, that applied to the south side of the river, the connection being blocked by the Franklin and Wilnot ranges, which attained a maximum height of 3,245ft. above sea level; but Mr. Innes believed it was possible to obtain a passable track by keeping to the south of Mount Wedge, passing through the Huon plains, and round the south end of the Franklin range, bearing thence to the lower Gordon. This route was not looked upon with favour generally, though it would have its advantages. Much of the criticism on Mr. Innes' action had been made without due consideration of the difficulties he had to encounter. The Government had undertaken to explore both the Gordon and Rasselas routes during the summer, as far as tracks were concerned, and that should afford satisfaction to those interested. It was an interesting question whether the track south of Mount Wedge, suggested by Mr. Innes, should be made open to traffic, and so bring the Huon district in connection with the West Coast. The cutting of tracks in the manner indicated would not cost very much, and was exceedingly desirable. He next referred to routes north of the Gordon and Gould's explorations and routes, which went through mineral country.

Hon. B. S. BIRD approved of the suggestion made that the country unexplored should be opened by tracks of some kind not for trade only, but what was even more important, for prospectors to traverse, for after them would come trade. He expected to see Port Davey yet made the main port of the West Coast. It would be a grand natural harbour with railway communication between the metropolis and the West Coast.

Mr. HOWARD WRIGHT thought that one wise course would be to open up the upper Dawson's-road from the Florentine, which would take prospectors to the Gordon Bend. There was no reason why traffic should not be facilitated to pass that way in a month or two, and with stores at Huntley. He thought it would be better than wasting money over a track from Tyenna to the head waters of the Gordon.

Mr. R. M. JOHNSTON explained his reasons for favouring a Huon route. He agreed with Mr. Wright that bases of operations would have to be established. He believed there was a great area of country yet unexplored which was highly auriferous.

Mr. PALMER, C.E. (Victoria), who had recently come through to Hobart from Lyell by the Linda route, strongly recommended the establishment of depôts along a route as it was being cut. As to a railway, there were no serious engineering difficulties. There would be no extreme grades. The greatest difficulty was to get through the timber. The greater engineering difficulties could easily be got over by an electric railway. Grades inaccessible by ordinary locomotives were easily surmounted by electric trains with very considerable power. This had been amply proved on the Canadian Pacific Railway where it crossed the Rocky Mountains. There the locomotive train was left, and an electrical train substituted for 34 miles. The greatest engineering difficulty would be at a point near West Mount Field, where there was a very steep gradient. The country possessed any quantity of water power. That was one great advantage in the whole region. If a million horse power were required it could be got.

Hon. HENRY DOBSON dwelt on the importance of providing the West Coast routes to Hobart in a thoroughly practical but inexpensive manner. He did not quite agree with Mr. Bird that a route *via* Huonville was the best. It must go north of Huonville. Every pound spent in this way, so far, had been justified by enormous developments. He advocated the formation of a Council of Mines to act independently of party.

Major OFFICER spoke of the enormous value the cutting of tracks had been in Victoria. It was the duty of the Government, and the duty of the people to urge the Government to cut tracks wherever found desirable. He spoke of the extent to which the trade of the West Coast, which should come to Hobart, was going to Victoria, and that could only be diverted by a railway.

The reading of Mr. Rodway's paper on fungi was postponed, owing to the lateness of the hour at which the above discussion closed.

The meeting then terminated with votes of thanks to Mr. Stephens, Mr. Counsel, and the chairman.