GENERAL REPORT

ON THE

COWICHAN VALLEY.

COL. SEC. OFFICE,
Victoria, 22nd March 1860.

The following Report upon the Country of the Cowichan Valley containing matter of interest to the Public, is herewith published for general information.

By Command of His Excellency,
WILLIAM A. G. YOUNG.
Acting Colonial Secretary.

GENERAL REPORT ON THE COWICHAN VALLEY.

To Joseph Despard Pemberton Esq., Colonial Surveyor, &c.

SIR,—I beg leave to submit for your information the following remarks on the capabilities of the Cowichan Valley.

The Valley may be fairly considered as about 15 miles wide upon the sea coast, but narrows rapidly as we ascend the river, insomuch, that upon the Westerly limit of the survey (11 miles from the Coast) it has a width of only 6 miles The surface throughout is either uniformly level, or lies in gentle swells, and until the Mountain sides are attained, scarcely any rocks or boulders are found, the rocky knolls and ledges so frequently found occurring in the southerly parts of the Island almost entirely disappear. It is well watered by the Cowichan river and its numerous tributaries. High ranges of mountains believed to be of secondary formation, with Calcareous Freestone, or Carbonate of Lime, form almost impassable barriers towards the North and South, and the whole subsidence of land between these mountains is evidently a deposit brought down by the waters. The distinctive nature of the soils throughout the Cowichan Valley is Calcarious, seemingly formed by the decomposition of Limestone rock, for while the other principles occur in different degrees, the properties of Carbonate of Lime almost invariably predominate. There is usually a depth of two or three feet, resting upon a sufficiently retentive subsoil of blue clay or gravel. The Earths, chiefly light, very porous, and composed of due proportions of clay, sand, carbonate of lime, and vegetable remains, are well constituted for absorbing and retaining moisture, and the general color from brown to black, with the entire absence of chalky or white earths, would likewise indicate a favorable soil for receiving and retaining heat. Samples taken from the Somenos Plains were found by experiment to absorb water sufficient to increase the volume of soil from one-eighth to one-fifth of its whole bulk. The low grounds are good, and would easily be brought into a state fit for cultivation. The only exceptions are those lying immediately at the foot of Mount Prevost and the Quamachan mountains, where the soil resting upon massive rock, has been converted into a spongy web Pabulum, and good for nothing. Much of the river bottom is a clay loam of a brown color, and an excellent soil for wheat, beans, turnips and red clover. The alluvial deposit of the Valley is, however, far from being all of a clayey nature, in many parts, chiefly on the southerly side, the mould rests upon a gravelly, and even a sandy deposit. This is likewise a rich soil as may be seen from the abundant crops of potatoes (among the most exhausting plants) raised by the Indians upon the same patches of land for a series of years. The Plain lands have soils either gravelly, or sandy and gravelly loams, eligible for barley, oats, rye, buckwheat, beans, peas, and the root and leaf crops, potatoes, turnips, and carrots, with the other usual garden vegetables. The humidity of the atmosphere may prove a barrier to the culture of Indian corn. I am unable to say, but I believe that this grain will one day form a staple, as it will assuredly form a profitable commodity, both of consumption and export. Wheat may likewise be successfully raised upon most of the soils in their natural state, and by proper tillage, upon all. And I am firmly persuaded that under a common, judicious system of farming, as good returns can be obtained from these lands as in any part of the Continent of America. The climate, it may be noted, is one especially adapted to the pursuits of agriculture, not being subject to the heats and droughts of California, or to the colds of the other British American Provinces, and the Eastern United States. The loamy soils everywhere possessing a depth of two or three feet, and containing a large proportion of the calcarious principle are especially eligible for fruit culture, and the oak

plains around the Somenos and Quamachan Lakes, with a sandy clay subsoil are exceedingly well adapted for fruit or garden purposes. Among the native fruits, the blackberry, mulberry, raspberry, strawberry, gooseberry, currant, and high bush cranberry would require little pains or culture to produce luxuriantly. The strawberry grows on the plain land nearly as large as the garden fruit. The varieties of plants are very numerous, a few only were noted growing on the plains and meadow lands, among which are the following:—Wild pea, wild beans, ground nut, clover, field strawberry, wild oat, cut grass, wild timothy, reed meadow grass, long spear grass, sweet grass, high ostrich fern, cowslip, crowfoot, winter cress, patridge berry, wild sunflower, marigold, wild lettuce, nettles, wild angelica, wild lilly, broad leafed rush, and reed rush. The fern attaines the great hight of six or eight feet, and the grasses have all a vigorous growth. The chief economical woods, are pine and oak, neither of which attain, however, to the great size observable in the other parts of the Island. The following are some of the trees and shrubs: Oak, red or swamp maple, alder, trailing arbutus, bois de flèche, crab apple, hazel nut, red alder, willow, balsam poplar, pitch pine, and various other species, balsam fir, cedar, barberry, wild red cherry, wild blackberry, yellow plum, choke cherry, black and red raspberry, prickly purple raspberry, swamp rose, bearberry, red elder, mooseberry, snow berry, blueberry, billberry, whortleberry, cranberry, red and white mulberry. It is believed that the country surveyed will prove rich in the economic minerals, sufficiently so to justify the Government in causing an investigation to be made at the proper time. Malleable lime and freestone for building purposes are abundant, with marble. Iron both bog and monntain ores. Indications of gold were remarked by the party upon the southerly slope of Mount Prevost, but no value was attached to these. Water privileges for the purpose of mills and machinery are not frequent along the coast, although the region abounds in large rivers and small streams. Several good falls exist a short distance above the mouth of Mill creek, in the Shawnigan District, and this creek has like facilities for mills at various other points to its junction with the Cowichan river. Other streams afford a sufficient extent of water privileges to answer the requirments of a large population, but these are all inland at a distance of several miles from the coast. The salmon is abundant, both npon the coast and in the river, and with the herring fisheries, will undoubtedly prove a lucrative branch of employment to a part of the future population. The cod fish and numerous other kinds are also caught in quantities by the Indians. In traversing the country several descriptions of game were met with, among which were the elk, deer, grouse, and wild pigeons, duck, and wild geese. From my observations and from the supplies constantly brought in by the Indians it was at once inferred that the country was plentifully stocked with most kinds of game. The Cowichan Harbor is somewhat exposed to the S. E. winds which, however, are of rare occurrence. The small Bay running up in the 6th range of the Cowichan District forms a good Harbor and anchorage. The access to the Cowichan valley by water is at all times easy, the distance from Victoria being about 35 miles, by land the communication will be more difficult. Passing by the head of the Saanich Inlet and along its west bank the distance would probably be 40 miles, and it is believed no natural obstacles would be found to render the undertaking a very expensive one. The whole area surveyed is 57,658 acres, of which, 45,000 acres of plain and prairie land may be set down as superior agricultural lands, the remaining portion being woodland, either open or thick, and which will likewise be ultimately occupied.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most Obt, Servt,

OLIVER WELLS.