

## THE TUATAPERE BRANCH IS SHORTENED



THE 8½-mile Tuatapere-Orawia section of the branch railway extending westwards from Thornbury, west of Invercargill, was closed to traffic from Thursday 1 October 1970. When he announced this at the beginning of September, the Minister of Railways, Hon. J. B. Gordon, said the tonnage of goods carried over this section of line had fallen to a low level since the closing of the cement works at Orawia. Prior to 31 March 1968, the annual tonnage of goods carried was between 22,000 and 26,000 tons. During the year ended 31 March 1970 the tonnage was only 5,600 tons. The result was that the Department spent \$8,100 to work the line for only \$2,050 in revenue.

The railway from Makarewa, on the Invercargill-Kingston line, to Riverton was

opened in June 1879, and was extended in stages as far as Orepuki, 35.3 miles (42.8 miles from Invercargill), by May 1885. Later a further extension was put in hand, the final section being opened to Tuatapere on 1 October 1909, 47.8 miles from Makarewa.

Subsequently there was some dispute as to whether Orawia, 8.3 miles beyond Tuatapere, should be connected by rail with this line, or with Waikouro. In 1914 the then Minister of Public Works, Hon. W. Fraser, said he had received exhaustive reports, and had decided to adhere to the authorised route from Tuatapere. Work on the formation was thereupon put in hand, but stopped again in 1915 as a wartime measure.

ABOVE: "Ab" 726 prepares to leave Orawia one day about August 1968 with a goods train conveying the last bulk load of cement in a "Ubc" wagon. Production at the works had ceased in May.

Photograph: D. L. A. Turner

Construction of the Tuatapere-Orawia extension was resumed in October 1919, but with only a few men at first. The work was almost complete in 1924, a goods service being started by the Public Works Department on 17 September of that year, and the extension was handed over to the Railways Department from 20 October 1925.

The main terminal of services from Invercargill has always remained at Tuatapere. At first a mixed train ran from Tuatapere to Orawia and back early on Monday mornings in time to connect with the morning train to Invercargill; and the late-afternoon train from Invercargill, which ran daily except Sunday as far as Tuatapere, ran through to Orawia on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It then returned to Tuatapere for the night. This service, however, did not survive the depression. By 1932, passenger service beyond Tuatapere had been discontinued, and a token goods service was provided on Mondays and Thursdays, when the locomotive and crew off the morning train from Invercargill worked goods from Tuatapere to Orawia and back before taking up the afternoon mixed train working back to Invercargill.

## TUATAPERE BRANCH OPENING DATES

(Note—Mileages in this table are from beginning to end of rails, whereas other mileages quoted are from centre to centre of stations.)

| Section            | Miles | Date         |
|--------------------|-------|--------------|
| Makarewa-Riverton  | 17.82 | 9 June 1879  |
| Riverton-Colac     | 6.04  | 25 July 1881 |
| Colac-Roundhill    | 1.34  | 24 Sep. 1883 |
| Roundhill-Orepuki  | 10.45 | 5 May 1885   |
| Orepuki-Waihoaka   | 4.55  | 1 Oct. 1903  |
| Waihoaka-Tuatapere | 8.03  | 1 Oct. 1909  |
| Tuatapere-Orawia   | 8.16  | 20 Oct. 1925 |
|                    | 56.45 |              |

A rechainage from 1 April 1931 reduced the total length by 10 chains (0.13 miles) to 56.32 miles.

Passenger service between Invercargill and Tuatapere was withdrawn from 28 June 1954, when the remaining mixed trains were replaced by goods trains. Service beyond Tuatapere, however, has remained at two days a week most of the time, except for occasions when traffic warranted more frequent service. Cement works opened by the Southland Cement Company at Orawia about 1956 provided some boost to the traffic until they were closed in May 1968.

