

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 16TH AUGUST, 1877.

Mr. J. G. HOLDSWORTH, Commissioner of Crown Lands, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Provincial District of Wellington?—Yes.

2. Are you acquainted with the country lying between Paikakariki and Palmerston?—Yes, generally.

3. Can you state what portions remain in the hands of the Natives?—I cannot.

4. What is the general character and extent of the land between these two points?—436,000 acres, of which about 17,000 have been sold, balance of about 419,000 acres unsold. With regard to character, 250,000 acres are good agricultural land, the remainder, including the western slopes of the Tararua Range, so far as is known, is of good quality, capable of bearing pasture.

5. Is there much timber land?—Nearly two-thirds of total area is timber land.

6. What quality of timber?—Totara, red and white pine, matai, and manuka, all of which are valuable timbers. Matai constitutes a leading feature, but in the Otaki Block a considerable quantity of totara exists.

7. Have you any knowledge of the country between Belmont and Pahautanui?—More or less broken. It is all timbered, and the soil is generally good. The whole of the small-farm block is already taken up, and the intervening land is about to be surveyed and opened for sale.

8. Is the extent of country large beyond Fitzherberton, on the north of the Manawatu, which would be brought into connection with Wellington if proposed railway were constructed?—Yes.

9. Can you state, if means of communication to the south of Manawatu existed, the extent of country which would be opened?—The whole would readily sell, provided means of communication either by railway or road existed.

10. What is the average price at which land would sell?—None below £1 per acre, a great deal at £2 to £6; outside the timbered country a large area of valuable pastoral land exists, the average price of which would be £2 10s., or more if opened up by roads or railways. A considerable demand has been made for land in this block.

11. Do you know population of District of Rangitikei-Manawatu?—No; you would probably get that information from the Registrar-General.

Mr. G. A. BEERE examined.

12. *The Chairman.*] Your name is?—George Armstrong Beere.

13. You are a civil engineer?—Yes.

14. You made a survey from Hayward's to Pahautanui, with the view of constructing a railway?—With the view to construction of a road.

15. Did you examine its suitability for construction of a railway?—I did.

16. Did you report to Mr. Smith, Chairman of the Pahautanui Road Board?—Yes; and report produced is the report.

17. Do you know the line of country from Paikakariki to Fitzherberton?—I have been over it a good deal at the Fitzherberton end and the Wainui end.

18. Have you a general knowledge of the country?—Yes; the flat land is mostly swampy, capable of easy conversion into agricultural land, not deep raupo swamp.

19. If opened by a railway, would land sell readily for settlement?—I am of opinion that it would.

20. At what price would it sell?—From 10s. to £1 per acre.

21. Are you aware of the price of land near Fitzherberton?—Yes; it has fetched very high prices.

22. What extent of land available for settlement would proposed line open up?—The whole country from the foot of Tararua Range is suitable for settlement; in equal portions, agricultural and pastoral.

23. Is the climate good?—Yes; a fair average of the New Zealand climate.

24. Is it well watered?—Yes.

25. Can you state the average value of the land if a railway ran through it, and it was put up in convenient blocks for settlement?—I think £1 per acre.

26. Are you aware of any sales effected in Fitzherberton lately?—Yes.

27. At what price?—Between £4 and £5 per acre.

28. Are roads made there?—No.

29. If opened up by a railway and put up for sale in suitable blocks for settlement, do you consider that land would fetch more than £1 per acre?—I do.

30. Throughout the whole block?—Above three-fourths of it.

31. If it were decided to construct a railway, would it affect the marketable value of land?—Yes; I think the price would at once exceed £1 per acre.

32. *Mr. Ballance.*] Could that portion of land which is of a swampy nature be made available without much outlay of capital?—Swamps of expensive character to drain are not of large extent.

33. Do you know the Kiwitea Block?—I do not, but am familiar with the Douglas Block.

34. Is the land by the side of the projected line of railway equal in quality to the bush land on the Douglas Block?—Yes; it would bring about the same price, if sold.

35. What is your estimation of the value of land in the Douglas Block?—From £3 to £4 per acre.