

99. *Hon. Mr. Ormond.*] I only want to know about the general boundary, if you will kindly give it?—The land purchased from the Natives is about up to Waikanae. Then come the inchoate transactions. The purchased land extends up to the Waikanae.

100. *The Chairman.*] When the inchoate transactions are disposed of, will there be a large quantity of this land open for sale?—It is forest land, very rough and broken, and at the back numerous wide ravines. Here and there may be found spots available for settlement, and ultimately it will be settled upon, but not until a good line is laid down.

101. What is about the distance from Belmont to Waikanae?—About eighteen or nineteen miles.

102. From Waikanae does the estimated distance of available country narrow?—Yes.

103. How far does that extend?—It opens out crescent-shape, and extends to about Ohau. It is not so narrow as may be supposed.

104. Then after we pass say Ohau, the country opens out and continues so to Manawatu?—Yes.

105. And it is really in the neighbourhood of Manawatu that the country is available for a district?—Yes; south of the Manawatu River. South of that river and Otaki there is a great deal of land available.

106. Have you any general idea as to the quantity. The Commissioner of Crown Lands says there are 490,000 acres?—I had this block surveyed, and up to the summit of the range there were from 400,000 to half a million of acres; but I could not say all of that land was available. On the contrary, in my own opinion, the portion that might be called available land, and some of it excellent, is about 150,000 to 200,000 acres. I do not think there is any land in the country superior to it.

107. You spoke just now of the inchoate purchases. Are you aware of the way these lands were passed through the Native Land Court?—In what way?

108. You spoke of the purchases being incomplete, and that they might with due exertion be completed?—Yes; they passed through in very small parcels, and in strips of land, to my mind, in a most incomprehensible manner at the time. Still, I may be excused for saying that there is a good deal of mystery in connection with such matters. I am bound to say a very considerable sum was spent, and it was the primary desire of the Provincial Government to have this land. The Judges said in open Court that they never had a more satisfactory survey of lands submitted to them for investigation.

109. Can you say whether or not the country north of Otaki has passed through the Court in strips several miles in length?—Yes; I would recommend a search being made for the map that was produced before the Court.

110. Do you approve the action taken with respect to acquiring those purchases?—Up to a certain point I do. The thing was left in my hands. There came a time when an officer in the Native Department, who was placed under me, acted in a manner I could not justify, and Sir Donald McLean insisted that he should be removed. By Mr. Booth, who succeeded him, there was a different degree of progress made. The definition of certain reserves remained to be done. Speaking generally, and still quite accurately, I may say that the whole of that land was purchased. I should have to refer to the officer to be able actually to state the particular blocks. In the main there were payments made over the whole of that block, and I believe myself that these, too, have been honest payments—I mean understood by the Natives. Repeated interviews had taken place with them, and they all gave the sale their entire acquiescence.

111. *Hon. Mr. Ormond.*] Perhaps I might get at what I want by saying the purchase of those blocks is in this position: Starting with the knowledge that the land has passed through the Native Land Court in strips, we find then the position of the purchases. Whereas two blocks may be purchased, there may be one or two not bought, and so on right through. The position is this: that although the purchases are considerably advanced towards completion, still there is a large amount of interest not yet acquired. Owing to the unwillingness of the Natives the purchases remain in that state?—I cannot say. The thing was taken out of my hands. I am bound to say that more important things were engaging the attention of those who presided over these matters, but it might have been acquired long ago absolutely. I state that, having had a great deal to do with it. I am sure this is understood that when a large purchase like that is brought up to a sort of white heat, when it is allowed to cool a great many difficulties arise, and I believe that is just the position the matter is in.

112. It is very difficult.—I may say this, that I believe I am quite right, and I ought to say it, that I exercised every influence I had, personal and official, to “choke off”—I believe that is the proper term—all private purchasers, and I did it most successfully. I believe that private purchasers coming into the field is the key to the subsequent complications. Tempting offers were made, and bits were picked out here and there, and every kind of impediment has been thrown in the way. That is the key.

113. I did not hear the whole of your evidence, Sir William. Might I ask did you speak of the other line, what is called the main line?—Yes; what I said was that, whatever way the line was made, more bifurcations than one were required. I believe we have got to penetrate from the east to the west along the Hutt-Waikanae line. Higher up you have also to penetrate at the Manawatu Gorge.

114. Can you give any information as to the relative value of lands that would be opened up by the line from Belmont to Manawatu, and the line from Masterton to Woodville?—From Masterton to Woodville there is a great deal of valuable land. That the Minister for Public Works will know. There is a block standing in the way, containing 62,000 acres, which I hope will be acquired. I believe negotiations have been sufficiently gone on with. There is no doubt that the whole of the country is exceedingly valuable. All the country thereabout is Crown land, except the 62,000 acres.

FRIDAY, 31ST AUGUST, 1877.

Mr. RICHARD SMITH, Horokiwi Valley, examined.

115. *The Chairman.*] What is your name and occupation?—Richard Smith, Horokiwi Valley, sheep-