

131. *The Chairman.*] Now, from 60 miles northward?—From 60 miles to about 85 miles the line flows generally the Hautapu Valley: a good deal of it open, fairly-good soil: a country well-adapted for settlement. The remainder of the distance, say to 95 miles, is generally what I should class as inferior grazing land.

132. What soil is it?—The main hills consist of limestone, but overlaid in places with pumice.

133. To what depth?—It is really a desert on the plain, consisting of bare shingle with very poor soil indeed; but to the eastward on the limestone hills there is very fair natural grass.

134. *Mr. Larnach.*] Are there any sheep there now?—Yes. It is occupied by Messrs. Moorhouse and Co., as a sheep-run.

135. *The Chairman.*] You have no information yourself, personally, beyond that?—I have not been on the ground beyond Murimotu. The Crown has a lease of the Murimotu and Rangipo Block, the area being about one hundred and forty thousand acres.

136. In what direction does it stretch?—The line runs through the southern extremity, the great bulk of the block lies to the northward. I have not yet mentioned the tenure of the land along this route. The Crown has an interest in the Otairi Block, about the 25th mile.

*Mr. Montgomery:* We can get that from Mr. Gill.

137. *The Chairman* (to witness).] Perhaps you will supply us with a list of the tenure of all the lands you have been describing?—I will do so.

138. You have talked of the Hautapu Valley: what is the average width of it—the average amount of flat land?—I could not speak definitely as to that. It was very wet weather when I swagged through it. I was exploring for a road-line. The flats may run from five to forty chains, but not continuously. They are small flats running along the terraces.

139. Then, generally, the tops of the terraces are flat?—Yes; sometimes a spur runs down ending in a bluff. The line passes along the terraces above the river-bed. That is the line I proposed for the road (referring to map).

140. What is the general nature of the soil on the terraces?—It seems to be deep good soil.

141. Are the terraces broken with ravines?—Very little indeed compared with the general run of valleys in that part of the Island.

142. *Mr. W. White.*] What quantity of agricultural land is there in the distance mentioned?—I have made no estimate.

143. Could you get an estimate?—I do not think there is enough surveyed data for that purpose.

144. How many acres are there of Crown lands that would be benefited by this line up to the eighty-five miles?—At a rough guess I should say about a hundred thousand acres. I could furnish information on that point better in a schedule form.

145. Of what quality is this Crown land?—The Otairi Block consists of five thousand acres of very good bush land, a mixed bush country with good soil; the balance is broken, hilly, inferior land. About fifty thousand acres of the Otamakapua is good average mixed-bush country.

146. *Mr. Fergus.*] Is there much private land along the line which would be served by this railway?—The private lands may be assumed to extend, at a guess, about twenty-three miles. That would be through the Rangitikei District, and then through the Paraekaretu Block on the west with the Rangitira Block on the eastward.

147. Is there none beyond that?—Then come Dalziel's and the Crown lands, where the line passes through the Otairi Block, which is partly in the hands of private individuals.

148. But I wish to know that which is absolutely in the hands of private individuals?—The northern portion of the Otairi is in the hands of private individuals, but I cannot give the area exactly from memory. Then there is the Ohingaiti Block. There is the Murimotu, 140,000 acres lease, and Hammond's, Marshall's and Curl's runs, a portion of the Otamakapua.

149. What is the character of the timber along the line, starting from Marton?—As well as I can recollect, up the Porewa Valley is mixed bush.

150. Totara?—Not in that part, I think. I saw totara, matai, pine, and rimu on the Rangitikei and Hautapu flats; totara on the hills; generally mixed bush of red pine, matai and rimu, &c., on the hills.

151. Is it of the same character all the way through?—It is generally of that character. At Otairi there is an area of black birch, but the general character of the country is mixed pine bush.

152. Do you know anything about the Stratford route?—No.

153. *Mr. Montgomery.*] When you refer to "agricultural land," do you mean arable land?—The land near Rangitikei is in private hands. About ten or twelve miles from Marton is under cultivation, and then it passes into bush.

154. That you do not consider arable land?—No.

155. Then, there is no arable land that you passed beyond the settled districts?—I think not. It is possible that at Ngaurukehu that portion might plough well.

156. Is that the country you spoke of as very poor land?—No; I spoke of the land coming out at Te Kapua as being good land.

157. In going through this part of the country, did you go off the line to the right and left, or did you make observations from the places where you went along?—I walked through the line, and have been all through the Crown lands. I have been through the country by what is called Murray's Line several times, also frequently, in various directions, from Wanganui.

158. My question was intended to elicit information as to the land on each side of the line, because in forest land you could not generally see very far?—No. I have been over the country a good deal, and on the high hills—what they call the Kawaeweka Range—a very high, steep hill.

159. *Mr. Larnach.*] Is it not a fact that a great deal of the bush land in this country is, when cleared, the best for agricultural purposes?—I would not say the best, but it would be very good grazing land. Some of the bush land is very rich indeed.