

it was simply almost like a sea, a vast plain. The country is all fit for settlement. On the Stratford line I do not profess to know much about the country beyond perhaps thirty-two miles from Stratford. The country is considerably broken. With regard to the Mokau line, up to Urenui the country is fairly level, but I am informed that up to where it crosses over the mouth of the Mokau River it is very broken. The great bulk of the country from Te Awamutu, by either of the west coast lines, is Native land, open to be acquired by the Government, and thereby made a means of paying the cost of the railway. Taking the central route, the end is almost entirely in the hands of private persons right down to Lake Taupo. Leaving Lake Taupo and passing through the Murimotu Block and Rangipo, that line is also private property under lease. In fact, there is very little left of Native land along that part of the line. Between Te Kuiti and coming down to Manga, on the western side of Lake Taupo, there is Native land, but all from Lake Taupo right to Rangiaowhia is in the hands of private persons.

174. *Mr. W. White.*] I think Mr. Sheehan said that the land on the central route from the 130th to the 30th mile is good land. Is not there a lot of pumice stone on that?—It mostly runs through pumice country. What I said was that I could speak of the line thirty miles from Marton; that is good land.

175. *Mr. Fergus.*] As a matter of fact, there are one hundred miles of the central route that you do not know anything about except from hearsay?—I know it from Te Awamutu down to the south side of Lake Taupo, and from Marton about thirty miles up from the other end. The nature of the balance I know from the reports of my men.

176. Your personal knowledge though leaves one hundred miles out?—It may be so. I do not profess to know anything of the line from the south of Lake Taupo to a point about thirty miles from Marton, personally.

177. What is the character of the land from the south side of Lake Taupo, so far as you can gather?—I have said that the reports brought to me by persons in my employ, whom I sent out to make investigations as to the nature of the land, say that the soil is fairly good, but the country is very much broken.

178. Not any pumice?—Very little pumice. Pumice is mostly found on the western and northern sides.

179. Either the central route or the Stratford route serves the good land which you know absolutely of your own knowledge?—I should say that the Stratford line would serve more of the good land, and land that the Government might acquire.

180. From your knowledge of the Marton and Stratford routes, on which has there been the most population?—On the Stratford route.

181. There are more Maoris settled on the Stratford route even now than on the Marton route?—Yes. Almost away down to Lake Taupo there is hardly a settlement on the central route.

182. You are of opinion that the Stratford route would serve best for opening up the good land there?—Unquestionably.

183. It would suit the central line as well?—Yes.

184. Are you aware that there are any Maori settlements along the route from Stratford upwards?—About twenty miles after leaving Stratford you come into the Mokau country, and that the most densely-populated country in the North with Maoris.

185. Is it not a fact that the Natives are mostly along the coast, and not in the interior?—They are mostly on the coast. All the tribes go down to the coast in certain seasons for a change of food.

186. That would account for the fact that there are more settlements on the Stratford route than on the Marton route?—Yes.

187. Is the Maori population extensive from Marton upwards to Murimotu?—No. The Maori population follows the course of the Wanganui River to a large extent. On the Murimotu-Rangipo side there is no great population.

188. And in the Tuhua country?—Yes, there is.

189. The Marton railway runs through the Tuhua country?—It runs closer to it than the other line does. The access to it from the central line would be closer than the proposed route.

190. *Mr. Larnach.*] I understood you to say, Mr. Sheehan, that in the central line the greater part of the land is in the hands of private individuals?—Yes; not all by freehold—by sale or lease.

191. Do I understand that on the Stratford or western line they are chiefly Native lands, or lands held by the Crown?—The Crown holds little or nothing. The land is what you might call virgin country, in the hands of Natives.

192. And that land is chiefly good?—Chiefly good land.

193. If all the circumstances were nearly equal, what line would you favour from your knowledge of the country, and looking to the future?—Of course, in giving an answer to that question you must allow for a certain amount of prejudice. I think the best line of those before the Committee is the Stratford line.

194. If possible, I should like you to abolish all prejudice, and look to the future settlement of the country?—Of course, I am only human, Mr. Larnach, and I cannot avoid prejudice to a certain extent; but, trying to avoid it, in my opinion I think the Te Awamutu-Stratford line would open up the most country available for settlement. I might mention that in 1878 Dr. Hector went through that country at my request—from Waitara into Alexandra—and there is a report of his tour somewhere in the blue books. It gives an account of the country, and refers to the indications of minerals.

195. Nearest to which line is it supposed the auriferous country exists?—There is a part of the country up there supposed to be auriferous. In 1871 the Provincial Government of Auckland,