

of which I was a member, sent up two prospectors, who began operations from Tapuaehawa. They found that the farther they got west and south the better the prospects were. The gold country, if it is at all payable, is probably near the central line. There have been specimens found on the side towards Mokau River. At the present time there is in Wellington—I saw him in town this morning—a man named Mathew Barry, who has been in the Tuhua country, and from whom you might get information as to the gold-bearing prospects of the country—as much as he will give you. He was only turned out of that country a few months ago by the Natives.

Mr. D. FRASER, Farmer, Rangitikei, examined.

196. *The Chairman.*] You are aware that this Committee has been appointed by the House of Representatives to take evidence with a view of selecting the best route for the main trunk railway-line through this Island?—Yes.

197. It has been suggested that you are able to give us some information on the subject. Would you tell the Committee whether you have been through any of the proposed routes?—I have been up the Marton line from Marton, on three different occasions, as far as opposite Tongariro, and then down to the east of Lake Taupo, and out on the other side of Lake Taupo to Tuhua. I have also been from Napier by coach to Taupo down to Ohinemutu, and back from Ohinemutu through the horse-track to Cambridge. I am not acquainted with the country on the west side of Ruapehu.

198. Will you tell us what sort of country it is, starting from Marton, up the central track?—For the first ten or twelve miles from Marton it is all clear, open land, and occupied. Then, there is a valley, of some twelve or fourteen miles, called the Pourewa. A track goes up there, and about fourteen or fifteen miles from the clear land there is a track called Murray's Track, which goes round on the east side of the Otairi Hill and joins the Hautapu some distance up. All the land from Marton to the foot of the Otairi is of excellent character—splendid land, heavily timbered—principally pines. The soil is very good. There is broken land too, of course, but even on the tops of the hills it is very good, with the exception of this Otairi, which is a very narrow ridge, and there is a small piece of birch land, and the soil is not good. Then, I have been right up the river, and at a place called Makohine there is a flat on the terrace above the bed of the Rangitikei River, ranging from half a mile to a mile and a half in width. I have been over the old track which the Natives used to travel, about twelve miles from the mouth of the Makohine. The land is all good there. Above that, to the mouth of the Hautapu, I have not traversed. At the head of the Hautapu there is a waterfall called Turangarere. I have been there and crossed to where the head of the Rangitikei takes its rise.

199. *Mr. Larnach.*] Is that the waterfall which falls about 60ft.?—No; it is a small waterfall. I should say it is not more than 15ft. or 20ft. The land there is clear, open land, and very good soil. Just about twelve miles from there is a track across to Birch's station. They have a large number of sheep there—about thirty or forty thousand. That track continues down to Napier. Then, there is another track that branches from there to the West Coast. It goes through a good deal of clear land down to a place commonly known as Hazeldeen's, and leads down to the Wanganui. That is all good soil right along, although broken in many places; but nowhere along the river is there what you would call really flat land; it is undulating land, but one-fourth, at all events, is ploughable, and fit for farming use.

200. *The Chairman.*] Clear of timber?—There is a good deal of it clear now. On my first visit there, in 1852, there were a great number of Natives settled all the way along there. In fact, from the mouth of the Makohine up to the mouth of the Hautapu, and above it, they used to grow wheat. I have bought as much as eight thousand bushels from the Natives there at a time.

201. *Mr. Larnach.*] You are still speaking of the country abutting on the central line?—Yes, on both sides of the Rangitikei. The land from the mouth of the Makohine, I understand, is all Native land upon the west side, with the exception of a portion of the Otairi Block, which the Government have—some sixteen or eighteen thousand acres. On the opposite side of the river, there is the block called Otamakapau, going up as far as the mouth of the Kawatau; it goes from the east, and is nearly opposite the junction of the Hautapu. The timber on the terraces and flats there is of very good quality—a great deal of totara, some of the finest patches of totara I have seen. There is a small piece of twenty or twenty-five thousand acres of clear land in about the centre of this Otamakapua Block which is reserved.

202. *The Chairman.*] A Native reserve?—A Native reserve, but it is occupied now by Europeans. The bulk of the timber in the Otamakapua, along the side of the Rangitikei, is not so heavy. A good deal of the land is covered with koromiko and scrub.

203. Are you of opinion, from your observations, that the great bulk of the land that would be tapped by that line is fit for settlement?—All from a short distance of this end to the Ruapehu. I think all that is fit for settlement. The soil is excellent all the way along, and it would open up a piece of land out as far as Rangitikei, where the birches are. Of course it is very difficult for any one to give a definite opinion who has merely travelled through without any object. My first object was to take that piece of land lying between the Hautapu and the Rangitikei River—a V-shaped piece of land of about twelve miles across from Turangarere, and running down to the junction of the Hautapu and Rangitikei Rivers. But there was a dispute among the Natives themselves, and I could not take it. It was quite good enough for me if I could have made arrangements to have taken it.