

the Hinemoa Stream, through which the tunnel has to be cut, is reached, the land begins to improve in quality, and from this point to Te Awamutu, a distance of fifty-two miles, the line passes through a tract of splendid open country, consisting of fern ranges, rolling downs, and flats, a good deal of which is ploughable. Even now, without any stock upon it, the whole country is covered with clover, growing amongst the fern. At Te Kuiti the land is exceedingly fertile; and, in my opinion, this district is entitled to rank as the garden of the Waikato. Taking Te Kuiti as the centre of a circle, and looking north, south, east, and west for twenty-five miles in each direction, the proportion of indifferent land that could be found would be very small. The total length of new line by the central route would be about 210 miles, 100 of which is through bush and the balance through open country; and, although only seventy miles of this open country is really good land, the area of first-class land at the southern end (the Turangarere and inland Patea country) which would be opened up would be very large. It may also with perfect truth be stated that the line would open up on one side 210 miles of good country, as the bush land is also good beyond dispute; and the line where it passes through the Murimotu Plains (which is the worst land along the whole route) is not, at the greatest distance, more than ten miles from the bush. The line would open up valuable mineral as well as agricultural and pastoral lands, gold, it is stated, being plentiful in the Tuhua country as well as in the Rangitoto Ranges, at the Waikato end of the line. Limestone is also to be found in abundance in the Hautapu Valley, at the back of the Waimarino, and from the Waimiha Valley right through to Te Kuiti. At Waimarino a township could advantageously be established, as from this place objects of great interest to tourists—Ruapehu, Ngaruhohe, Tongariro, Tokeano, and Lake Taupo—could easily be reached. The hot-sulphur bath on the slope of Tongariro is said to be the finest in the world. The line by this route would be easy of construction. The grades are all favourable, and there are no great engineering difficulties to be surmounted. The estimated cost of constructing and engineering the line is £6,500 per mile, or a total of £1,360,000." That is the whole of the report in reference to the central line.

671. *Mr. Fergus.*] You have described the limestone formation in one part of the country. What is the geological formation of the country all through—this end, for instance—is it limestone, or what?—The Marton end, after leaving the Rangitikei, and as far as Hautapu, is all limestone.

672. And from Hautapu northwards, as far as Te Kuiti?—From Waimiha to Te Kuiti it is all limestone country.

673. And where does the pumice commence?—At Murimotu.

674. And how far does it extend?—About fifty miles.

675. And from that point onwards it is magnificent country?—To the right of the line the pumice extends for a very great distance.

676. I suppose you know the country between New Plymouth and Stratford, along the route that the railway takes at the present time, or, say, between New Plymouth and Patea?—Yes; I have been through it.

677. Is this country, on an average, as good as the country on which that railway-line travels now?—No.

678. Is it as good as the country between Stratford and New Plymouth?—About equal to that. I do not think there is any land in the country to equal that between Patea and New Plymouth.

679. That is a patch of good land; but beyond that it is not so good. Well, you have seen the country on the Canterbury Plains—between Christchurch and Dunedin?—Yes.

680. Would you say that this line from Marton to Te Awamutu, which is nearly the same distance, would pass through, on an average, as good country as that?—I should say certainly not, because the line through which this line passes is principally pastoral land, and the line through which the Christchurch—Dunedin line passes is mostly agricultural.

681. *Mr. Larnach.*] How long were you on the new line?—Thirty days on both of the routes.

682. From end to end?—I was fifteen or sixteen days on the central line from end to end.

683. *The Chairman.*] Will you now continue your report?—"Western route.—I will now refer to the western route. In this route two lines have been explored: one following down the Awakino and Mokau Valleys to the sea, and thence along the coast to Waitara; and the other keeping more inland, and joining the Foxton—New Plymouth Railway at Stratford or Ngaire. The former of these alternative lines I have examined as far as where the latter route branches off into the Waikaka and Ohura Valleys. As far as I have seen it, the line by the former route is good, and passes through good country. It would also open up all the land towards the Awakino, but from the Awakino River to Pukearuhe, or White Cliffs, the line would run parallel with the coast, and the land along that portion of the route is exceedingly broken and of no value for settlement purposes. From Pukearuhe to Waitara there is a narrow strip of good pastoral land, running parallel with the sea, but the whole of this land is within easy access of the Waitara Railway. I therefore consider that the coastal line from Mokauiti to Waitara must be abandoned, as no practical good would result from its construction. Besides, I consider it highly objectionable to construct what is to be a trunk line along a route running parallel with and near to the sea, if at all possible to avoid it. I inspected the Stratford end in company with Messrs. Ross and Holmes, the engineers who have been engaged on the survey. For the first twenty-eight miles after leaving Te Kuiti we travelled by the central route until, on reaching Te Nira, the line branched off to the westward. From this point the railway would pass through open country until it reaches a Native village called Wharehunga, which is five miles south of Mokauiti and fifty-five miles from Te Awamutu. The whole of the land for this distance is of limestone formation, and the soil on the average is of very fair quality and in some places exceedingly rich. The land is generally undulating, with some broken portions, but on the whole is well adapted for grazing purposes. As will be seen from the map, the central and western routes are identical for some distance from Te Awamutu, and for a length of fifty-five miles from that place the land upon these routes is of a similar character and equally good; and, in point of fact, either of the lines would open up for fifty-five miles or so very nearly the same country. At Mokauiti the line leaves the coastal route and turns into the Waikaka Valley, and thence