

consecutively into the Ohura, Mangaroa, and Eao Valleys, passing through the Tangarakau country, and thence into Stratford. From Wharehunga right through to Stratford the line passes through dense bush, with small patches of fern here and there. The land in the Ohura and Mangaroa Valleys is exceedingly good, and, as the bush is not of so heavy a character as that at the Stratford end, it could easily be cleared and the land put under grass. This portion of the country is well adapted for occupation by small settlers. From the Ohura a branch line was prospected by Mr. Mountfort to join Mr. Rochfort's line twenty miles from the Ohura, but, in my opinion, either the central or Mokau-Ohura line is preferable to it, and it has in fact no special value, as either the central or Mokau-Ohura line would open up all the country through which it passes. The bush land from Wharehunga to where the line enters the Tangarakau country is of a broken character, but the quality of the soil is good, especially in the Ohura, Mangaroa, and Eao Valleys. As will be seen by referring to the maps, about forty miles of exceedingly-broken country are met with in the Tangarakau District. The line through these ranges will be most difficult and expensive to construct, and will open up no country fit for settlement. The timber met with on this portion of the line is principally birch. At the Stratford end the line again emerges into splendid country, the land for twenty-five miles from that township being undulating in character, with some very rich flats, and the bush becoming lighter as the distance from Stratford increases, until a point about thirty miles from Stratford, towards Tangarakau, is reached, where the land becomes broken again. With ample time and more extended explorations it is possible that a somewhat better line could be got through this broken country, but very great improvement in it is not probable; and that great difficulties have already been surmounted in surveying this portion of the line will be evident from a glance at the character of the country indicated on the maps. The total length of new line by this route is roughly estimated at 148 miles, fifty-five of which pass through open country, the rest being bush. The country opened would comprise agricultural, pastoral, mineral, and timbered land. Outcrops of gold are also to be seen in several parts of the Ohura and Tangarakau Districts, and gold is said to exist on the Tangarakau and Upper Mokau. The estimated cost of constructing and equipping this line is £7,000 per mile, or a total of £1,036,000; but it may be found after making permanent surveys that the length of line can be shortened somewhat.

684. I think I understood you to say that you had not travelled the whole of that line?—No; excepting the centre piece. In other words, I have travelled the whole of the Stratford line with the exception of the distance between 30 and 77 miles. I may say, before proceeding further, that the reason I did not traverse that piece was because the Natives obstructed us and forbade us to go through. When, one day, we returned to the camping ground of the day before, after being turned back, we found our beds, tents, and provisions had all been burned.

685. *Mr. Fergus.*] It was not on account of the nature of the country, then, that you did not travel over those forty miles or so?—No; it was only on account of the Native difficulty.

686. It was quite possible for you to get through?—Quite possible.

687. Is there any land along the route, from twenty miles out of Stratford for a distance of sixty miles, suitable for settlement?—The first thirty miles is magnificent country.

688. But I am leaving that part out of the question. I am commencing at a point, say, thirty miles out of Stratford. Is there any land beyond that, up to sixty miles, suitable?—I should say not very much; it is very broken.

689. It would not be worth while for any one to take it up?—There are forty miles unfit for settlement, I should say.

690. Beyond that, say seventy miles out of Stratford, what is the country like?—It is fit for settlement. It is really good country up to Te Awamutu.

691. That is a distance of how many miles?—About seventy-eight miles, making 108 miles of good land altogether from Stratford.

692. What proportion of that land would be agricultural and what pastoral?—It is all pastoral, but very rich pastoral land.

693. There is not very much agricultural land of it?—No.

694. Consequently the population would be of a more scattered character than if it were agricultural land?—Yes; I do not think there is any agricultural land on either of the routes, except a small quantity at Turangarere. There is a small portion equal to Canterbury.

695. Are there any evidences of Maori settlements along that line?—No, there are not.

696. And on the other line?—Not along the line, but in the Mokau country there are Natives settled there. I was rather surprised to see so few Natives in any portion of the country through which I travelled; I expected to see a very great number.

697. You know something about coal?—Yes.

698. You saw some coal there?—Yes.

699. What is its character?—It is only brown lignite.

700. You did not see any real coal?—Yes; at the Upper Wanganui.

701. But *real* coal?—No.

702. Any on the central or western route?—No; it is all lignite. But it is of a dark colour; a darker colour than what we have north of Auckland, but it fritters in the same way on being exposed.

703. Do you think the central or western route would open up the best timber country?—The central line, certainly. In the Upper Wanganui I saw the finest totara forest I ever saw in my life.

704. And you also say there is a large quantity of coal on the Marton-Te Awamutu route?—Yes.

705. As much as you saw on the other?—No.

706. Would the line from Te Awamutu down to the first sixty miles of that line equally serve the good country if made either by the central or Stratford route?—There are about fifty-five miles from the Auckland end and about seventy on the other.