

707. Do you not think that by either of those lines the good land would be served equally?—For fifty miles, I should say, they would.

708. *Mr. Fulton.*] The evidence you have given in answer to Mr. Fergus's questions with regard to the forty miles in the centre of the Stratford line is hearsay only?—Yes. I may say this: that I had fully intended to have travelled over the line, and started with that intention, because I am used to bush travelling, only the Natives prevented us from going farther. The Native Minister (Mr. Bryce) wrote a letter to the Native chief there, requesting him to assist me in every possible way, and when I asked the chief to send a few Natives with me to carry provisions and tents he refused my application, except on the condition that I took fifty armed men with me, which I declined to do. The Natives that obstructed us are the same Natives who robbed the Public Works Department and the trig. survey party, and I believe the property they stole at that time is still in their hands.

709. *Mr. Larnach.*] The forty-seven miles of country that you did not pass through is what you believe to be very poor?—I saw it pretty well; I went to the top of the trig. stations at each end, and looked at it with a pair of glasses. Then, coming down along the coast I also had good opportunities of seeing it. I do not think there is the equal of such country in the whole colony.

710. *Mr. Fulton.*] From what point of view?—For being so broken.

711. *Mr. Larnach.*] You formed an opinion as to which was the best line to construct?—Yes. There are two ways of looking at the matter. I am not prepared to give an opinion here. Of course, I have formed an opinion, but I do not feel justified in giving it here.

712. But you have formed an opinion?—Yes, I have formed an opinion.

713. Have you any objection to state what that opinion is?—Yes.

714. You decline to state it?—I decline to state my opinion here, but reserve to myself the right of stating it publicly on the floor of the House.

Mr. R. W. HOLMES, Civil Engineer and Surveyor, examined.

715. *The Chairman.*] You have been engaged in surveying one of these lines of railway?—In exploring it.

716. Which line have you explored?—The Stratford—Te Awamutu line.

717. Will you point out roughly on the map what country you have explored?—From Te Awamutu southwards to within fifty miles of Stratford, and about fifteen miles inland from Stratford.

718. Have you taken sections along that line?—Not levelled; only with the aneroid.

719. And how close together have you taken these aneroid heights. Is the section prepared from your aneroid observations?—Yes.

720. And are the distances marked on the plan I hold in my hand the particular spots at which you took observations?—Yes.

721. Did you take any in between them?—No; only at the points shown.

722. Have you taken any cross-sections along this route?—No.

723. Simply the heights as shown on the plan?—That is all.

724. Have you had any experience in laying out lines of railway before?—Yes.

725. Where?—In Taranaki.

726. Which line?—Southwards from Stratford to Hawera, and from Hawera southwards to Manutahi.

727. Had you much difficulty in finding this particular line of route?—Not a great deal.

728. Are you satisfied that you have got about the best line that can be got through that piece of country?—No; I think we can improve it in places.

729. To any large extent?—I think we can avoid the Tangarakau rough country between the 50th and 70th miles.

730. You think that can be avoided?—I think so.

731. You said you have been over the first fifteen miles?—Yes.

732. What is the nature of the country from a settlement point of view?—It is good.

733. Fit for settlement?—Yes.

734. Is there much timber on that?—It is all bush.

735. And serviceable bush for cutting?—Yes.

736. Then, there is a gap from fifteen to fifty miles that you have not been over yourself?—No, I have not been over that.

737. Has this part of the line been plotted from your observations?—From Mr. Ross's and Mr. Carkeek's observations.

738. From 50 miles along that line will you describe the country as you found it?—Between miles 50 and 60 the country is very broken—very rough; the river runs through almost a gorge along that part.

739. And you laid out the railway through that gorge?—Yes, to come right down it.

740. What is the width of the gorge?—The river would be almost a chain wide, and the gorge from ten to twenty chains at the bottom.

741. And do the hills rise steeply from that?—Perpendicularly.

742. To what height?—To about 300ft., and then it is very steep to about 1,200ft.

743. And with regard to the country from 60 miles?—Up to 80 miles the river valleys are very good land. They vary in width up to a mile and a half wide; flat grounds; the hills are low, none higher than 400ft.

744. Are they open?—Up to 75 miles the land is all bush, and then there are fern clearings interspersed with the bush. From 80 to 83 miles the valley narrows in considerably.

745. And the hills there: are they the same height?—As you get to the watershed they get higher.