

1287. Untimbered?—Partially untimbered.
1288. What do you mean by open country?—Open valleys, fern and light scrub. This applies only from 58 to 72 miles.
1289. Is that sufficiently good land for agricultural purposes?—Yes; in the valleys and slopes.
1290. What proportion do the valleys bear?—It is rather difficult to state.
1291. Just give us your general opinion?—Say, 30 to 40 per cent.
1292. And what sort of soil is it there?—The quality of the soil for the first ten miles is heavy clay.
1293. I am speaking of the part between miles 60 and 90?—It is very good soil up to, say, 72 miles; but it becomes light beyond that.
1294. Will it cost much to clear and make ready for ploughing?—It is clear now.
1295. It is fit for ploughing at once?—At about 70 miles you enter upon the Murimotu Plains.
1296. And from 70 to 90 miles it is the same country?—No.
1297. Are you sure that the track, as laid down on these maps and described in the different reports, is the same track that you cut?—The track I cut from 44 to 58 miles overlooks the present graded line.
1298. Have you been on the low part?—Not in the lower end of the Hautapu Valley, but I have been in the upper part.
1299. What portions of this line up to ninety miles have you actually been where the track goes?—I might state that I followed along this line for the first forty-four miles from Marton; then my exploring line struck the ridges, and I kept at the top of the ridge to the 58th mile.
1300. Were you speaking of these valleys and agricultural land from your own actual knowledge or simply from hearsay?—From my past four-and-a-half-years' experience of the country.
1301. You have been through that country before, then?—Yes; about the Murimotu Plains. I have repeatedly been over the first thirty-five miles, and from 58 to 86 miles.
1302. Then, I understand you to say you have a general knowledge of the country for the last four years?—Yes.
1303. Have you been on either of the other lines?—No.
1304. *Mr. Gore.*] What kind of land is it between miles 60 and 90: what is the geological formation?—I believe where the actual line goes it is rather light soil; but to the left you get into the bush, and it is very fair soil.
1305. Is there any pumice on the soil?—On the inland, or eastward, side there is volcanic sand; also on the actual line. But southward you get into the bush, and it is fairly good soil.
1306. *Mr. Fergus.*] I suppose you have had some experience of settlement, both agricultural and pastoral?—Yes.
1307. Supposing this land was opened up by railway, what would this agricultural land, as you call it, be most fit for: grazing, or raising crops?—There would be a fair proportion fit for cropping.
1308. Do you think it would be the wisest thing for a man who took up land there to crop it?—No; I should say a person would take up land there for pastoral purposes; but you could plough the valleys and slopes, and crop them both with wheat and oats.
1309. Do you think wheat and oats would grow there?—Yes, I think so; in fact, they do grow well up at Murimotu.
1310. What would be a fair-sized holding for a farmer there?—The holdings would vary according to the quality of the land—from 240 to 640 acres.
1311. Do you think 640 acres of purely pastoral country would be enough for a man there?—It depends on what his ideas are as to what would be sufficient.
1312. Do you think he could live on such an area?—I think so.
1313. Decently?—Yes.
1314. From the 23rd mile up to the 90th mile, how many people could be settled along the country, at a rough guess?—
1315. *The Chairman.*] Taking five miles along either side of the line?—You would have to take more than five miles, because it taps the Otamakapua Block of 140,000 acres.
1316. Well, take what distance you like?—I have not gone into such calculations at all.
1317. *Mr. Fergus.*] Six hundred and forty acres comprise a square mile, you know?—Of course, it is only a question of figures.
1318. In other words, could you settle as many people along that line, from 23 miles to 90, as there are at the present time between Marton and Foxton, in proportion?—Far more.
1319. Why?—On account of the size of the holdings.
1320. But you do not quite understand me: I am talking about the possibility of settlement. In other words, do you think this country is as good as between Marton and Foxton?—It is a different kind of country.
1321. Do you think it is as good all through?—I believe it is decidedly better in places.
1322. *The Chairman.*] But what is the country, on an average?—I scarcely think it so good.
1323. *Mr. Fergus.*] Why?—I believe the swampy land between Marton and Foxton is much richer, and would carry a far larger population. A small farm on the swampy lands between Marton and Foxton would be far more valuable than the same amount of country on the other part.
1324. Is it not a fact that between 60 and 90 miles it is all light pumice soil?—Inland it is, to the east.
1325. And covered with black birch?—I have not seen any black birch. I have seen red birch, especially between 80 and 90 miles, at the end of the Wanganui track.
1326. *Mr. Montgomery.*] You said there were open valleys between 60 and 90 miles: what size were the valleys?—I think some of those valleys would be 40 chains across.
1327. And what are those valleys—fern or timbre?—Light stunted fern about Ngaurohe.
1328. What are the hills?—Limestone.