

1446. Five miles?—No; I know the whole of it between the Hautapu and Rangitikei, up as far as Erewhon. I have been over that a dozen or twenty times.

1447. Could you tell us the extent of black maire or ironwood there is in the forest to which you have referred in your evidence?—It is scattered through at least 100,000 acres.

1448. Pretty thickly distributed?—In the vicinity of Rangataua, it is extraordinarily thick.

1449. Is not that black-maire wood the hardest and most durable wood in New Zealand?—I believe it is.

1450. Even harder than the Australian iron bark and red-gum?—It is.

1451. *The Chairman.*] How much of the Stratford line have you been over?—Between miles 40 from Stratford and 70 only. In carrying on surveys up the Wanganui River I went into the country through which the Stratford line passes, up as far as the junction of the Waikaka with the Ohura.

1452. That is from 40 to 70?—Yes.

1453. What is the nature of that country?—About the vicinity of mile 40 the country is extremely broken—sandstone peaks covered with black birch. I should say that that country extends for fifteen miles on either side of the Taumatamahoe track, which crosses at right angles.

1454. Northward of that track?—About ten miles northward the track passes along a high ridge commanding a good view. I think I am speaking within limits when I say that the broken country I saw is fifteen miles in length at least. It is extremely broken. I have not seen more broken country in the whole of the Wanganui District.

1455. Is there any of it fit for settlement?—None whatever. The land in the upper portion of the Wheao Valley is of good quality, but there is no great extent of it.

1456. There appears to be a great mountain ridge there?—There is.

1457. And would that be accessible to the railway?—Only the upper portion. The land between the Ohura and Wanganui Rivers, up as far as Tamaranui, is good land, about one-half being fern and scrub.

1458. That is the land eastward from mile 60 to 70 across to the central line?—Yes.

1459. Would that be tapped as well by one line as the other—by the central line as well as by the Stratford line, or would it be served better by the Stratford line?—I think it is immaterial; either route would tap that country. The Ohura for many miles above the fall is deep and navigable for boats.

1460. That is, from miles 65 to 75?—Yes.

1461. What is the land on both sides there?—There is very little good land on the west bank of the Ohura.

1462. What proportion of good land would you think there is on the last twenty miles you are talking about?—I should say about 40,000 acres.

1463. Of good land?—Yes.

1464. And what proportion does that bear to the broken country?—Very small indeed.

1465. Then, do you know anything of it beyond that?—I have never been over that portion. I may mention that I found coal in two or three places on the Ohura River and also on the Wheao.

1466. *Mr. Larnach.*] How far have you been east and west of the thirty miles of the Stratford line that you know?—Never more than two or three miles to the westward of it.

1467. Is that country broken?—Very broken.

1468. How far have you been eastward?—I know the whole of the country east between the two lines.

1469. And is that country broken?—It is very broken in places. I have already said there are about 40,000 acres of good land in the vicinity of the Ohura; the bulk of the land beyond is good.

Major ATKINSON, M.H.R., examined.

1470. *The Chairman.*] The Committee has asked you to come here, Major Atkinson, with a view to obtaining any information you can give them with regard to the nature of the land alongside either of the proposed lines for the North Island Trunk Railway?—I am sorry to say, then, that I cannot give the Committee any original information at all.

1471. The Committee were given to understand that you had travelled over, or were acquainted with, a piece of the Stratford line?—No; it is true that I have been a little way into the country there, but that is nothing much.

1472. Is there any statement, then, that you would like to make to the Committee?—Do you mean as to my opinion as to which line should be adopted?

1473. *Mr. Larnach.*] You could give that in the House, of course?—Yes; I could give it in the House, or I could give it to the Committee now.

1474. *The Chairman.*] I may say that the question has been asked two or three witnesses who have already been examined by the Committee as to which of the proposed lines, in view of a possible Native difficulty in the future, would be most useful to the colony, and perhaps you might like to give your opinion on that point; also in respect to opening up the country?—I may state, at once, that I am decidedly in favour of the Stratford route for every purpose, as far as I understand it.

1475. We will leave it to you to make any statement you would like to make to the Committee?—If the Committee desire my opinion, and the general grounds on which I have formed it, I shall be very glad to state it.

1476. If you would kindly do so?—Well, I should say I am decidedly in favour of the Stratford route, because, from all the information I have been able to collect—and I have carefully gone through all the information at the disposal of the Government—it appears to me that the Stratford route would open up quite as much, if not more, good land, in proportion to the money to be spent