

1492. Have you looked into the Engineers' estimates?—I have carefully consulted the Engineers themselves, but I have not looked into their estimates; I am not competent. I do not think it will be an expensive line to make.

1493. But the Engineer who went over the line, Mr. Holmes, puts in an estimate for one thing alone—ballast—which he says can be got at 2s. per yard, and there is really no ballast along the line?—Do you know, according to the history of the New Zealand railways, whether it can be done for that price?—I have not the least doubt myself that there is plenty of ballast. We thought there was no ballast in the country for years, and went without metal roads in consequence. When the country at the back of Mount Egmont was opened by rail, it was found to be one of the easiest to make in the whole country.

1494. But the estimates of the Engineer, on which you have formed an opinion that the line could be constructed for £1,000,000, seem to be grossly under the mark?—I go upon the broad principle that one line is one-third less than the other in length. I do not believe, from my general knowledge of the country, and after talking with the officers, that there will be much difference in the cost per mile.

Mr. H. E. FIELD, Waikanae, examined.

1495. *The Chairman.*] Will you tell the Committee whether you have traversed or are acquainted with any portion of the country through which the proposed lines for the North Island main trunk railway run?—Yes; I know a great deal of it.

1496. What part of the country do you know?—In the first place, I know the country about the head of the Wanganui River very well.

1497. Have you travelled along the route from Marton northwards?—Yes.

1498. When did you travel over it?—About five or six years ago. On different occasions I have been over it. When I went over it six years ago there was no talk of the railway.

1499. Can you describe the country in details?—I think there is a report of mine respecting part of it in the Survey Office on the general character of it.

1500. Can you tell the Committee what is the nature of the country for the first twenty miles out of Marton?—That is settled?

1501. Is it good country?—Yes.

1502. Is it thickly settled?—For the first ten or fifteen miles out of Marton it is all farms, and I believe it has since been settled farther on.

1503. Going beyond the part that is settled, what is the nature of the country there, taking a strip of about five miles on either side of the line?—It is principally heavy bush, but good country; no steep abrupt hills.

1504. Do you consider it fit for settlement?—Yes, I do. It is quite as good as the country that has been settled about Manawatu.

1505. How far along the line does that good country extend?—All along the banks of the Rangitikei River. There is one portion of that that I have never been over myself, and that is the lower portion of the Hautapu.

1506. You are aware that the Rangitikei River leaves this line and runs out an average of something like ten or twelve miles from the proposed line of railway. Is all the land between that of good quality?—The proposed railway-line, after leaving Marton, goes up the Pourewa Valley, and then strikes across to the Rangitikei River higher up. I believe that was the line I sketched out myself to Mr. Marchant. I think the present line follows that pretty nearly. It follows up the Pourewa Valley, and then across to the Rangitikei, thence up the Rangitikei to the Hautapu. From the mouth of the Hautapu to a place called Tarangarere, which is about fifteen miles farther on, I do not know the country; there is a gap there that I do not know.

1507. That is, practically, between miles 40 and 50 on this map (No. 1) which you do not know?—Exactly.

1508. And northwards of that?—Northwards of that, to the 100th mile, I do know. I have been all over the ground.

1509. What sort of country is that?—From Murimōtu and Wangaehu to Manganui-a-te-ao it is principally level, rich country, beautifully timbered.

1510. What sort of timber is it, then?—Principally red pine, rimu, totara, and maire. The maire is very fine indeed.

1511. What proportion is there of maire?—In places it is two-thirds maire; it depends on the situation. The maire grows principally on the slopes of the hills where there are hills, and is scattered about on the flats.

1512. How far does that extend, north and south, and east and west?—I should say there is level good land of 100,000 to 150,000 acres.

1513. Interspersed with maire?—It has maire spread pretty nearly all over it. In one or two places there is a little birch fringe on the banks of the rivers, just a few trees deep.

1514. To the northward of that again, do you know anything about the route?—I know it along part of the western side of Ruapehu.

1515. What is the nature of that land?—It is an incline from the mountain. There are no spurs to speak of. The only spurs of any consequence are about Manganui-a-te-ao, and there they will be easily got through.

1516. I want to know more of the nature of that country for settlement purposes?—The whole of the country round the west of the mountain is good for settlement. There is not the same extent to the west of the mountain, however, as there is to the south-west.

1517. Travelling north from that, do you know that country?—I know the country about Tamaranui, and for a short distance up the Ongarue.

1518. That is, between miles 130 and 160?—Yes; there is some open country about the junction