

is longer than that, but if the line were extended to Bowyer's Stream they would be able to go three trips a day.

276. Does it not seem to you somewhat obscure how such a short extension should make so large a difference in the question of cartage?—Well, at present they can only make one trip a day.

277. But they cannot make even one trip a day when they come to Ashburton instead of to the station?—If they come to the Ashburton it generally takes them three days to come and go. Waggoners as a rule only make two trips a week.

278. Then, they prefer to make a journey of three days instead of one?—Yes, because they get the back cartage.

279. I was told at Mount Somers that the principal difficulty arose from the want of the necessary station accommodation at Anama?—That is more the case for produce. I had a threshing-machine last season, and we threshed 6,000 sacks of grain, equal to 24,000 bushels, in that district, of which not 1,000 came down by the line, because there was no accommodation in the way of sheds at the Anama terminus.

280. That was the only reason for not taking it to the neighbouring station?—That was the only reason I heard. I asked the people why they did not send it to the station, and they said it was because there was no accommodation. But in the case of timber it does not matter if it lies there for a few days.

281. How does the combined railway freight and cartage, with loading and unloading, compare with the direct cartage to Ashburton?—The difference is quite immaterial.

282. Then, do you think the carters lower their rates in order to compete with the railway?—They have never lowered them. We paid the same rates eight years ago that we do now.

283. *The Mayor.*] To what extent would it reduce the price of Mount Somers coal if the extension were carried out?—The freight would be about 6s. 6d. per ton. The rates for carting from Mount Somers would be £1 per ton.

284. *The Commissioner.*] What is the cost of cartage of timber?—About 4s. 6d. per 100ft., and about £1 to £1 2s. 6d. per ton; sometimes as much as £1 5s., but it varies according to the quantity.

285. That includes all the charges—the carters themselves load and unload?—Yes.

286. Do you know what the distance is from the present new terminus of the railway at Cavendish to the coal mine?—No.

287. You are not acquainted with that district personally?—Only the bush land and the agricultural land on this side.

288. You have not seen the coal seams which are reported to exist in Taylor's Creek?—

289. *The Mayor.*] The saving on coals would be about 13s. a ton if brought down by rail instead of by cartage?—Yes.

290. *The Commissioner.*] You told us that the cartage was 20s.?—Yes.

291. But the coal mine is seven miles beyond the present terminus?—I am only speaking of the railway.

292. *The Mayor.*] Then, you think that the price of the Mount Somers coal would be under £1 in Ashburton?—I have been told so by the coal proprietors.

293. Do you not think that the Mount Somers coal would displace the Malvern coal entirely?—I do not like to say "entirely," because people have fancies; but I believe it would be largely consumed.

294. *The Commissioner.*] Do you know who the coal mine on the Stour Creek belongs to?—No.

Mr. EDWARD COOKSON, examined.

295. *The Commissioner.*] What is your occupation?—I am a coach proprietor. I had a mail contract for eight or nine years from Ashburton to Mount Somers. I used to take the road up the Forks, by the Spread-eagle, and then crossed the river near Valetta, where the South Branch, the Alford Stream, and Buccleugh Stream all meet in one place, thence I went up back of Buccleugh, and from there on near the point at Bowyer's Stream, and on to Mount Somers.

296. Does that passenger traffic still continue?—No; since the line was opened it goes from the terminus.

297. Can you give me any idea of the amount of passenger traffic?—Sometimes it was more and sometimes it was less. I could not give the number of passengers, as it was so irregular. It was very good in the early part of my contract; in fact, it was very fair, take it right through, until after the opening of the Methven line, when it fell off, as the passengers went by the Methven line.

298. There still remained to you some traffic?—A little, but it did not pay.

299. Do you think there would be any increase of passenger traffic if the line were extended to Bowyer's Stream, as proposed?—Yes; but it would get none of the people from the Forks.

300. Why would it not get any of the Forks passengers?—It would be a long way from the Spread-eagle to the station, and I do not think any of those people would go round that way to come down here. I used to get a good many passengers from that road, and I used to get them from Westerfield.

301. Do you think there would be any passengers from other parts of the country except the district in question, as shown on the map?—You would not get any passengers from the Forks.

302. Is there any passenger traffic to be got from the district to the southward, over the Hinds way?—Not many of them, as the country is in large holdings. The extension as proposed would make no difference to that part of the country as far as passenger traffic is concerned. It would increase the passenger traffic from the bush, if convenient; but there are a lot of people at the Methven end who would still go to Methven.

303. Then the passenger traffic would be divided?—It is divided. I know I have found it out. Had it not been for the Methven line I do not think there would have been a line in New Zealand which would have paid better for general traffic than the Mount Somers line.