

57. You say there are about 250,000 acres of agricultural Crown lands beyond the Taieri?—Yes.

58. And the same quantity below?—Below and along the line.

59. Do you think that the construction of this line will increase population?—Not much.

60. Are you aware whether any applications were made to the Government to settle there which have been declined?—No; not declined: there have been applications to open the land.

61. Are there not lands now that are held in suspension until the railway is made?—There were at one time; but on the expiry of the pastoral leases in February, 1883, several blocks were reserved for settlement, all of which have not yet been taken up.

62. You told us the value of the land required for the purposes of the railway?—It adds about £5,000 a year to the Government. It was elicited in this way: there were £25,000 of revenue arising from this country being capitalised. It came to 15s. when capitalised. I think the Committee ought to have this before them. As to this £48,000, I question much whether it will be maintained, whether it will be got again on reletting.

63. Do you not think the level land will make it valuable?—It will not make a particle of difference.

64. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Do you not think that pastoral rents will fall?—Yes; I think they will.

WEDNESDAY, 23RD MAY, 1888.

Mr. W. N. BLAIR, Assistant Engineer-in-Chief, examined.

65. *The Chairman.*] What is your position in the public service?—I am Assistant Engineer-in-Chief.

66. Mr. Pyke wants to ask you some questions in connection with the proposed Otago Central Railway?—I shall be happy to answer them.

67. *Mr. Pyke.*] These maps on the table show the route of the Otago Central Railway?—Yes.

68. Will you tell the Committee whether you are thoroughly acquainted with the district, and that you have an engineering knowledge of the line; that you thoroughly understand it from an engineering point of view?—Yes; I am also well acquainted with the country through which the line passes.

69. Throughout?—Yes, throughout.

70. Does that line anywhere impinge from Lake Taieri upwards upon any gold-workings?—Not to my knowledge.

71. It is marked off on those maps?—Yes.

72. So that every one passing along can see where the line is intended to be carried?—Yes.

73. How long ago since that survey was made?—It was finished about 1883.

74. Does the line in any place, or at any part of it from Lake Taieri upwards, impinge on gold-mine working?—I do not think so. I do not remember any case in which it goes through any gold-mine works.

75. At Quartz-reef Point?—I do not think it impinges there.

76. At Dunstan Gorge?—No; I think it does not touch any gold-working: it is at a much higher level than where the gold is being got.

77. The gold is being got in the rivers?—In the rivers, not on the terraces.

78. A road passes through the gorge?—The line is generally above the level of the road.

79. Passing from the line itself I come to the country around it. Mention has been made of several valleys—the Maniototo Valley?—I would not call that a valley, it is an extensive plain; there are half a dozen streams coming into it.

80. What is the nearest point between any gold-working and the line in the Maniototo?—Hamilton's would have been the nearest if they were now working; but I am not sure that there are any workings at Hamilton's now.

81. *Mr. Rhodes.*] What distance is that from the line?—About four miles.

82. *Mr. Pyke.*] Then, the Naseby workings?—There are about eight miles.

83. From your knowledge of the country, would you suppose the Maniototo Plain to be auriferous?—No, I should think not.

84. What is the nearest point to St. Bathans?—About nine miles.

85. Is there any high range between there and the line?—Yes; there is the Raggedy Range.

86. Where is the outlet to St. Bathans?—By the Manuherikia River.

87. Where is the outlet where it joins the Manuherikia; there is a considerable range between?—The direct outlet is down a separate valley called Dunstan Creek, a tributary of the Manuherikia. It is about nine miles down to the junction.

88. Could these works be interfered with by any grant of land that could be given?—Do you mean any grant of agricultural land?

89. Have you been up the Dunstan Creek?—No.

90. On which bank of the river is Ophir?—It is on the southern bank.

91. Which bank is the railway on?—The railway is on the other side.

92. Could it interfere with these works?—No.

93. Pass from there to Drybread?—That is five miles in a straight line from the railway.

94. How far is it to Tinker's?—Much the same, or a little less.

95. What I want to know is the distance from Ophir to Drybread in a straight line?—About seven miles—scarcely seven; to Tinker's the same.

96. Do you know the outlet from Tinker's?—No; I am not intimate with the exact locality. I merely went up the main valley.

97. Is there a large plain called Lodder, and another called Spottis?—Yes; I think that they are together called the Manuherikia Plain.