

155. Have you noticed how they are standing? Are they showing any signs of decay, or have you formed any idea of how long they will last?—From the experience I have gathered, I should say they would last up to six or seven years, if they are good first-class hard kauri sleepers. They have taken up a lot of kauri sleepers between Auckland and Remuera, where they had been down for six years, and this place is equally well drained. There are better sleepers now obtained on the line, and they are being used by the Government at 3s. 6d. or 3s. 3d.; these have to be delivered at Helensville at that price.

156. Then, you think puriri sleepers could be obtained along the line for 3s. 3d.?—Well, I like to be inside the mark.

157. Supposing that you had only the natural resources to rely upon for traffic on the line—settlement, and cultivation, and that kind of thing—you would have very small traffic on the line at present?—Yes.

158. You regard gum-digging as a very fluctuating thing?—Well, it is steady to a certain point, but beyond that it fluctuates. For instance, the diggers will take some time to work what is called the Manganui Swamp, where they will be leaving when the wet weather comes. The diggers are now working what is called Muriwai—in fact, the gum is coming down the line now which otherwise would be shipped *via* Kawerua.

159. *Mr. Macarthur.*] Have you any arrangement with the diggers about royalty on the company's endowments?—No; it was not thought worth while to put on a ranger to insist on it.

160. Is there any regulation as to taking kauri-gum in the endowments?—There were regulations, which it was the duty of the Engineer to look after, and they were posted up at the bushes.

161. What is the usual royalty paid by men to other people?—I have no idea. As a rule, I believe, a yearly rental is paid for a field. I could not say.

162. At present the men taking the gum are paying you nothing for it?—Well, the gum does not altogether belong to us. I believe it was leased to Mr. Mitchelson and brothers on condition that they thoroughly drained it; and they estimate that the drains will cost £600.

163. Do you know anything about the conditions of the agreement?—No; except that above stated. They have a ranger looking after it. Of course they reported to me that men were digging on the swamp.

164. You have no instructions as to enforcing the agreement?—No; none whatever.

165. *The Chairman.*] Have you access from the main road to the present terminus?—Yes—on sufferance only, I believe.

166. Are the Natives charging anything for the use of it?—Yes. I may say that I was told the Natives were charging a small rental of 7s. a week to each trader. I know they were charging that, and I do not know whether it has been altered. There is access by the main Hokianga Road, which crosses the line at Ahikiwi, 14 miles 22 chains from Dargaville.

167. *Mr. Macarthur.*] What does coal cost you here?—It has cost me £1 10s., but I am now getting it for £1 4s. It is the best Newcastle coal. A hundred tons could be got at £1 1s.

168. Have you ever considered the advisability of burning wood instead of coal?—We do not consider it would be a saving, but I have not tried the relative merits.

169. Is there any down-grade on the line at all, or is it all one continuous grade?—There are three going from here to Oparake. The heaviest is 1 in 53, and they are very short. The sharpest curve is an eight-chain radius.

170. You require very little steam-power?—We might come down half the distance without steam.

171. Have you a ballast-supply along the line?—Yes, and there is any quantity of it; and it would be a matter of arrangement with the Natives. It is of good quality, but expensive.

172. How many sleepers have you in stock for continuation of the line?—1,786 I think would be the exact number. There are ten rails only—that is to say, we have nothing for Mr. Fallon's contract.

TUESDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 1890.

MR. ARTHUR BLUNDELL WRIGHT examined.

173. *The Chairman.*] You are a road engineer in connection with the Crown Lands Department?—Yes.

174. You have been over the country, I understand, between Taheke and the head of the Kaihu Valley?—Yes.

175. By the district known as the Waiouku Plateau?—Yes.

176. Would you inform the Commission the nature of the land on that line of road?—Yes.

177. State it as shortly as you can, and as to its suitability for settlement?—Looking at the map, the road-line I have laid off runs along the top end of all the rivers that are flowing into the sea. From the top of the hill to the Waimamaku the first portion is slightly broken; then it cuts flat country of very good quality. In fact, the whole of the Waimamaku Valley is splendid land. Then from the head of the Waimamaku Valley to the Waipoua the land is of good quality, but not so good as the Waimamaku. From the Waipoua into the Mangakahia it is good land. From the Waipoua again to the Waima branch of the Kaihu the land is broken, and of not such good quality. Then in the open bight between the Waima and the Mangatu the land is of inferior quality.

178. What is the total length of this road-line from Taheke to the Kaihu Valley?—I should say about twenty-four miles, but there has been no survey made.

179. You have merely made an exploration survey, I understand?—Yes; that is all.

180. Generally, is the land suitable for small settlers?—From Taheke to Waipoua, one-half the distance, the land is suitable for small settlers.

181. Then the other half, from Waipoua to Kaihu?—The sections would require to be larger, the country being rougher.