

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER, 1892. (Mr. E. G. WRIGHT, Chairman.)

Mr. J. PALMER, M.H.R., sworn, and examined.

Mr. J. Palmer: I left Auckland with a party, including the Native Minister, Mr. Lawry, M.H.R., and others, on Monday, the 18th January last, for the purpose of exploring the route to Stratford. We reached Te Kuiti by rail; from thence we rode across the proposed central route to the point of divergence at the Ongarue River. At the last part of the central route we found the land extremely poor, especially about the point of divergence, the growth being simply scrub. From the ridges we could see Lake Taupo to the south-east, and the lands to the south, and the class of country was all just the same as that already described as covered with simply scrub. I have previously been over that part of the central-route country up to a straight line from Tokaanu to Taumaranui, at both of which places I have been, and thus I can describe that part of the country as I have just done. To go back now to the point of divergence of the Stratford and central routes: I have described the land on the south and south-east; on the west was the proposed Stratford route, and here our journey on that route commenced. Soon after leaving the point of divergence, we saw that the land began to improve, and when we had reached a distance of about five miles the land became decidedly good, and for the next five miles the land continued to improve, till we were now in a splendid class of country, and had reached the valley watered by the Ohura River. From this throughout the journey we did not meet with a bad acre of ground right to Stratford. The Ohura Valley is partly wooded, partly fern, some of the stalks of which were nearly an inch in diameter, and the remainder ti-tree country. The soil was of the papa-rock formation, and the growth prolific in some places where grass had been dropped at old camps. Some single stalks of the grass would reach up to the horses' withers.

The Chairman: Before you go on I would like you to give us some idea as to the length and breadth of the valley.

Mr. Palmer: We travelled down the valley a couple of days, and it extended still further.

Mr. Mills: You might state approximately the distance.

Mr. Palmer: We went about fifteen miles a day, and I should conjecture the valley to be, say, three miles in width and upwards of thirty miles in length. After leaving the Ohura Valley we got into a flat country mainly timbered with tawa, pukatea, rimu, kahikatea, and a little totara. This was a valley watered by the Mangaroa Stream. The soil of this Mangaroa Valley was of the same nature as that already described—namely, papa-rock. We travelled up this valley till we came to the Huatahi Flats, and went up a narrow little gorge in the Huatahi Creek, this having no valley. We then crossed the watershed, the Waiaraia Ranges, about 500ft. above the creek-level, through which the line of railway would have to be tunnelled for a short distance. On the tops of the Waiaraia Ranges, and indeed on the tops of all the ranges, we found the land equally as good as the land in the valleys. We traversed the valley formed by the Heao River, where the land was of the quality I have already described. It was bush land with rather more totara and rimu than the other land. The trees were so high that it was impossible to kill the pigeons if they sat near the tops of the trees; all we could do when we fired at them was to knock their feathers out.

1. *Mr. Mills.]* Would the place be suitable for sawmills?—It would not pay to have sawmills so far in the interior of the country as this. After crossing the watershed we struck the little Paparata Creek and went down the valley of this creek to the Tongarakau River. Round this watershed the railway will run, and a slight tunnel—

The Chairman.] I may say, Mr. Palmer, we will be calling expert evidence as to the engineering and construction of this line, and this will obviate the necessity of your going into that evidence. We are more anxious to hear from you the nature of the soil and the class of the country.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you. As expert evidence is to be called, I will confine my remarks as you suggest. To go back to the point in my evidence that I left—namely, we went down the Paparata Creek to the Tongarakau Gorge. Just before we reached the Tongarakau River we crossed the Paparata Creek on a seam of coal, over which there was a slight waterfall. This seam was about 10ft. in thickness, and the coal was black coal and very compact.

2. *The Chairman:* This was about forty miles from the point of divergence, was it not?—Yes. We went down the Tongarakau Gorge, which is very hard to travel. It is a very narrow deep gorge, with precipitous ranges on either side. There is a slight plateau of about 100ft. wide throughout this gorge, on each bank of the Tongarakau River. The Tongarakau Gorge itself, although the land is good, would be unfit for anything but a domain, as it is too precipitous, and it would not do to fell the timber off it, but it would make the most beautiful natural domain in the whole colony on account of its exquisite ferns and foliage. In the Tongarakau River, at three different places, we could trace seams of coal, but they went down into the river, and we could not tell their depth.

3. Was it brown coal?—No, it was black coal.

4. Was it bituminous coal?—Yes.

5. There is a road proposed from this point to the Mokau?—Yes, there is a road surveyed out of this gorge that will go to the Mokau. It is surveyed up a very narrow creek valley out of this gorge in a westerly direction, about a point commencing about seven miles from the junction of the Paparata and Tongarakau. We ascended from the Tongarakau Gorge up the Waingarara stream, up which the proposed railway will run, crossed a narrow ridge, which will require about 100 yards of tunnel, and descended into the Tuhoraparoa Valley. The nature of the soil all this