

18. *The Chairman*: As to settlement, do you think that the character of the land on the central route renders it as fit for settlement as that on the Ngaire route?—Well, my opinion is this: that the land from Hunterville to the Napier Road is fit for settlement. I think the railway should be constructed to there. What is wanted is land to feed the railway from, and unless this can be done, your land is not worth much.

19. Is the land fit for settlement, right through to Stratford, except the first ten miles?—Yes. Of course I am only speaking of what I saw going along the line.

20. *Mr. Carnecross*: And as to the Waimarino Block?—I have not been along it, and have no personal knowledge of it, never having been on it.

21. *Mr. Mills*: What class of milling timber is there on the Ngaire route?—Well, we did not see very much timber that I would judge to be fit for milling, unless you formed settlements there. Otherwise it would be impossible to deal with the timber owing to the difficulties of transportation.

22. Can you form any idea as to the length and breadth of the valleys through which you passed?—I understand them to be very large. I can hardly give you any true idea as to their size. When I spoke of the Hutt Valley, I was only giving my impression which at best was formed from a view much limited at times. Where the river had overflowed its banks, some of these valleys were inclined to be swampy, but they could be easily drained.

23. *The Chairman*: Is the bush on the Ngaire route generally inferior?—I saw very little totara; rimu and pines seem to be the chief timber trees.

24. Was there any evidence of the spread of grass or clover seeds?—Yes; wherever the surveyors had been it had sprung up and we had to wade through it.

25. That was in the valleys, I suppose?—No; sometimes on the top of the ridges.

26. Was the growth equally luxuriant there?—Yes.

27. *Mr. Mills*: In the event of the railway being constructed through there, do you think that there will be enough timber to feed it with?—Well, I could hardly go so far as to say that. In looking at timber, you must consider the general contour of the country, and the way you are to get it out for export.

28. But is there enough timber to feed a line, in your opinion?—Yes; I think there is for a considerable time.

Mr. F. LAWRY sworn, and examined.

*Mr. F. Lawry*: Early last December I started from Hunterville, which is practically the terminus of the constructed part of the central route. I was accompanied by the Hon. Mr. Cadman, Mr. Wilson Hursthouse, and a guide. From Hunterville till we struck the Rangitikei River, we found the land to be of excellent quality, especially for grazing purposes, but too broken to be generally useful as an arable country. The quality was very much the same all through till we struck the Rankitikei River, where we found the land to be very flat, but also very gravelly. We struck the river, say, at the end of the first five miles, and after we had left the gravelly beds, we came across some of the finest country I ever saw, running right through the Awarua Block, and continuing to Turangarere, where the coach road from Napier meets the railway-line. Through the Awarua Block the road has been cleared a chain wide; it is practically level, and in very many places the Hon. Mr. Cadman and myself rode into the grass growing, and tied it over our horses' withers. My horse was sixteen hands high. I never saw finer land in this colony than we passed through in this block, or any better suited for settlement, and there was very little change in its quality until we reached Turangarere, where the main road from Napier joins the railway-line; but soon after we left the latter place we struck the pumice country on the Murimutu Plains.

29. *The Chairman*.] How many miles was that?—From three to five. Practically the first-class land ends at Turangarere. We continued through well-watered, but pumice land to Kerioi, following the course of the railway-line to this place. The next day we diverged from the railway-line, which in its northerly course passes across the Murimutu Plains and strikes the Waimarino Bush four or five miles south of Ohakune. We made the divergence at Kerioi for the purpose of inspecting a large block of bush country, under offer to the Government, known as the Puketapu Block. For this reason we went up the bed of the Wangaehu River, on the south side of Ruapehu, and from thence across the country to Tokaanu, finding no land *en route* suitable for settlement purposes. Leaving the latter place, we proceeded past the head waters of Lake Taupo and the Waihi Native settlement, and also the settlement of Porua, through an open country largely impregnated with pumice, and of inferior quality. About fifteen miles from Tokaanu we entered the Puketapu Bush, and travelled through it for a distance of ten or twelve miles, emerging therefrom on reaching the valley of the Tuhua River, a tributary of the Wanganui, down which we travelled a distance of ten or twelve miles, making two days' journey from Tokaanu to the Wanganui River, which we struck about four or five miles above Tamaranui, and crossing the river near the mouth of the Tuhua, we entered upon the Waimarino Block. I may say that another object in inspecting this block was to see if its quality was of a nature to give additional reasons for adopting the central route; but as the whole country is more or less pumice, I did not think it gave any new reasons for it, as very little of the block, or of any of the country we saw, is fit for settlement purposes. We then followed down the railway-line to Tamaranui, and from thence to Te Kuiti, finding no great engineering difficulties in the way of railway construction; but as the whole country is a region of pumice, it can never support a population, or produce freight for a railway.

30. *The Chairman*.] You are, of course, aware that that part of the country is common to both routes?—No, Sir; not as far as Tamaranui. From Mokau to the point of divergence it is. Well, after this I returned to Auckland; but, thinking that it would not be fair to express any opinion till I had seen the whole of both routes, I made a second journey, accompanied by Mr. Monro Wilson, and a guide. From Tamaranui we followed up the banks of the Wanganui River, and for six or seven miles the country was very flat, but all pumice. About seven miles up the river we left it on our left, and began to ascend a very high bluff. We then entered what is known as the Waimarino