

Bush, the country being somewhat broken, but covered with heavy timber; and it was at this point that we came across what I believe to be the finest totara bush in New Zealand. The trees were growing in groups, and some of them were 18ft. to 20ft. in circumference. We at first thought that land which could produce such trees must be very good; but we found that wherever the wind had caught the branches, and especially with a certain class of trees, they tipped right over, showing that when growing, they "sat" on the pumice. There was an inch or two of good soil, that seemed to be the result of vegetable decomposition. The trees had no tap-roots, and you could push a supplejack down into the pumice where the fallen trees had grown, in many places, as easily as you could into a bag of flour. We could form no idea as to how the trees had grown to such a size in that region of pumice. We could find no indications of grass on clearings; not even a bite for our horses. I suppose the length of the road over which the trees were growing in the first bush to be seven or eight miles; and it would be difficult to estimate the commercial value of that forest. There was no variation in the quality of the timber land, as far as we could ascertain, until we emerged into the Waimarino Plains.

31. How far would you be from Tamaranui?—About fifteen or sixteen miles. We had an aneroid barometer with us, and found that from the Wanganui River we ascended from 1,800ft. to 2,000ft. in about seven or eight miles, gradually rising until we struck the Waimarino Plains.

32. *Mr. Blake.*] Are the plains as high as that?—Yes; that is, I believe, what Mr. Wilson's aneroid registered. The Waimarino Plains are of immense extent.

33. *Mr. Mills.*] What length are they?—We went about ten or twelve miles across them, but they stretched away to the left, and so on to Ruapehu. The land was wretchedly poor, growing nothing but tussock, and in summer wild horses and cattle run about the plains seeking for food, and their condition caused me to think the plains are overstocked. With regard to the land on our right, coming south, it seemed to be the same pumice bush as before. Directly we crossed the Waimarino Plains, and came upon the second bush, the land seemed slightly to improve, but still seemed to be strongly impregnated with pumice. It was alluvial in some parts, and I would class it as second-class land. We rode on till we struck the Manganuioteau River, where we found a most fearful gorge, the width of which I cannot give. Its banks were perpendicular, and composed of a mixture of papa rock and clay, with a layer of pumice on top. Well, I calculated that this gorge would be about a quarter of a mile wide. We went down it by a natural opening, and came at the end upon the work done by the road-makers. They had cut a ledge about 3ft. or 4ft. wide. This ledge might have been half a mile long, winding in and out; and I expected our horses every moment to strike against the sides and topple over. Well, when we got down the distance I have indicated the track turned sheer round, and found a bridge over the river, 6 chains and 20ft. long, fit to bear the traffic of Lambton Quay.

34. *Mr. Blake.*] Who built this bridge?—The Government. It must have cost £4,000. You cross the bridge and come to the track once more, which is about 5ft. or 6ft. wide. All this time you are above the river, and you pursue a zigzag course up the ridge. Mr. Wilson will be able to tell you from his notes the height of the ridge we ascended in this zigzag way. We crossed over what may be termed the saddle—not very level, but with the land improving to the next creek, which is named Manganui. Here the thing is repeated over again—the same bridging and the same zigzagging; the only difference is that this gorge is not half as wide as the other, but is still spanned by the same useless and expensive bridge. The land is of better quality as Ohakune is approached, and for a distance of four or five miles of the track we found it very good indeed (that is, north of Ohakune), and fit for settlement. The first indication that I saw of good land was the way the grass grew wherever the surveyors had been, and there it grew most luxuriantly, and some cocksfoot growing was over 6ft. high on the road. The land is also good towards Ohakune to Kerioi till we struck the Murimutu Plains and again entered the pumice, which continues to Turangarere. From what I saw and heard from surveyors, there would be fifty or sixty thousand acres of land fit for settlement in the Waimarino Block, of which good land Ohakune might be taken as the central point. We were desirous of seeing the country between Ohakune and the Wanganui River, at Pipiriki. There is a very good road from Kerioi. It is practically finished to Pipiriki, made at an enormous expense, and with very easy grades; and I would say that two horses could easily take 30cwt. from Kerioi to Pipiriki over it in dry weather. Much of the country from Ohakune to Pipiriki is flat, alluvial, and heavily timbered, large areas of it being taken up by settlers from Bull Town, Marton, and other places. It seems to me that these settlers have taken up most of the land fit for settlement in the Waimarino Block. My principal object was to ascertain whether the most natural and the cheapest outlet for the produce of that country would not be by Pipiriki, thence to Wanganui by steamer; and I am quite satisfied that this would be found to be the cheapest and most expeditious method of getting the produce out of the settlements, of which Ohakune will be the centre.

35. *Mr. Wright:* This does not seem to bear on the merits of the two routes?—Yes; a steamer trades very frequently between Pipiriki and Wanganui; and it seems to me that all that is wanted is a little money expended on the river, snagging it, and dealing with the rapids, and so making it a much better highway for the settlers taking Ohakune as their centre.

36. What is the tonnage of the vessel that goes up to Pipiriki?—I do not know her tonnage. When the owners brought her out they expected she would draw, I think, about 11in. of water, but she drew more, and consequently frequently stuck in the river rapids. They have lengthened her now, and I hear she is able to make constant and regular trips to her destination.

37. Is she run in any season?—I think there would be just a month or two in the very height of summer when she could not reach Pipiriki, but even then she can go a long way up, and the settlers could have stores brought up the river in the large canoes, and goods taken down to the steamer. My own opinion is that it should be one of the first duties of the country to make the railway from Hunterville to Turangarere, because it is right through land adapted for immediate and profitable settlement. You would strike the road already made from Hunterville to Napier;