

the Natives. I may say, in answering this question, that I have attended all the Native meetings addressed by the Hon. Mr. Cadman, in the capacity of reporter for the *New Zealand Herald*, and I am satisfied that it is only a question of obtaining sufficient funds to enable the Native Minister to buy every acre of land that he requires, not only on that railway route, but anywhere else in the North Island. The Native owners are disposed to sell, and they are not only disposed to sell, but they are anxious to assist the Government in planting settlement upon the land; and in this connection I may state that there are from six to seven hundred young men in Auckland now, the bulk of them sons of bush settlers, who are simply waiting for an opening to take up any portion of the country lying between the pumice country at the northern end and Tanga-rakau River. On the other hand, there are settlers in Taranaki only waiting to take up land in the southern part. Speaking in general terms, the settlers would take up the whole of the land in small holdings directly it is acquired by the Crown. I have not heard of many persons who are desirous of obtaining any portion of the Waimarino Block on the central route, except the bit of good country about Ohakune.

Mr. JAMES MCKERROW, sworn and examined.

14. *The Chairman.*] You are Chief Commissioner of Railways?—Yes.

15. When the Committee inquired into the subject of the North Island Trunk route, in 1884, you stated in your evidence that you had no personal knowledge of the ground?—Yes.

16. Have you acquired any knowledge since then?—Yes, of the central route I have.

17. Well, perhaps you will give the Committee the benefit of your knowledge?—Yes. Beginning at the Hunterville end of the central railway, I have gone along the proposed course of the line a few miles beyond Makohini. I have also seen the country from various trig. stations to the east of the line as far as Hautapu; and I have been on the ground at the head of the Hautapu Valley, and from there north as far as the Waimarino country, and generally I have had a very good view of the country from the summit of Tongariro. And, further, I have carefully studied all the official reports that have been given on the subject, so that I have a very fair comprehension of the nature of the country through which the two routes run.

18. Can you state to the Committee how much of the central route is fit for settlement?—From Hunterville to Ongarue throughout the whole length of the line, on both sides, the land is suitable for pastoral settlement. At the present time a great part of the route runs through forest that would, of course, have to be cleared before it was available for pastoral occupation. The bush in many parts is valuable for timber, there being totara, rimu, white pine, black maire, and birch. When the time comes for the use of these timbers, there should be an important industry in saw-milling along the line at various points. With regard to the nature of the land up to the head of the Hautapu Valley, the line is in the Rangitikei basin, all the land being of good quality. After that you enter the Murimutu Plains, which is a large expanse of open country of rather inferior soil, being mainly a sort of pumice sand, although it grows natural grasses, and is occupied as a sheep-run at present. Then beyond that, through the Waimarino Block, the country is of an altitude from 2,000 to 2,600ft., and mostly under forest of excellent quality; where open, as it is for about five or six miles near the Native village of Waimarino, there is a good growth of natural grasses; and I noticed when I was there, in April, 1887, some cattle in very good condition, also sheep. The soil no doubt is composed partly of pumice; but I was surprised to find that it had all the appearance of being better and more fertile than I had formerly supposed when I gave evidence in 1884.

19. Have you any knowledge of the Ngaire route?—My actual knowledge from personal inspection does not extend to more than twenty miles in from the existing railway-line. I have been in from Inglewood and several other places on the railway-line. I may say that on any part within twenty miles east of the New Plymouth line, the land is of good quality, although hilly, and very suitable, when cleared, for pastoral occupation; and in time, I dare say, it will be suitable for agriculture, but not for many years, of course—not until the stumps are rotted out. As regards the other portion of the line, I only know of it from reading the report of surveyors and others who have traversed the route.

20. Looking at the question from a colonial standpoint, which would you consider to be the more desirable route to have for a main trunk line?—I should say the central route decidedly. I may state my reasons for saying so. The central route opens up by far the greatest extent of land. Further, it has a more important bearing on the connection of the railway systems of the North Island than the other route. It is forty-eight miles shorter as between Auckland and Wellington. Then, on the Ngaire route, moreover, the grades of the railway between the Marton junction and the proposed Ngaire junction on the New Plymouth line are very bad at various places, and for considerable distances together the grades are 1 in 35 with curves of short radius, so that if it becomes part of the main through line between Wellington and Auckland, these grades, which cannot very well be improved, will be a very great bar to any extensive or profitable through traffic. On the other hand, the grades from Wellington to Marton junction are fairly good, and also from Auckland to Mokau, where the railway at present terminates, the grades are also fairly good. Then, as regards the new portion of the central line, so far as my knowledge goes, the grades and curves are at least as favourable as on the new portion of the Ngaire route. There is one thing to be said against the central route as compared with the Ngaire, and that is, that by the latter there is less railway to construct, the difference being about thirty-three miles more on the central route than on the Ngaire route. Of the thirty-three miles, twelve miles of earthworks are now partly constructed on the two sides of the Makohine ravine, so that really there are only twenty-five miles more of new ground to break in making the central than the Ngaire route. As regards the difference of cost of the two lines, I cannot speak. No doubt the Public Works Department will be able to advise you on that.

21. Would you state to the Committee what difference in time, as between Wellington and Auckland, would be entailed by travelling round by way of Eltham?—That question would require