

men who have been through it. The line just touches the skirt of the pumice. As far as Waimarino I would say that the land on the west side of the line is some of the best land for pastoral purposes in this Island.

2. That is in the Wanganui Valley?—In the basin of the Wanganui River. Having said this much, I might say further that my knowledge of the country north of the Waimarino is of a very imperfect character. I have ridden along the route there. It goes through country which appears to be somewhat of an inferior character. There is a very valuable totara forest between Waimarino and Taumarunui. It is alleged to be 25,000 acres in extent. The country on the east side of the line between Waimarino and Taumarunui is not, I think, of a very high class. It is hilly; it is pumice as well. From all that I was able to observe of the country on the west side of the line, it is good pastoral country, and towards Taumarunui it is especially so. There is a good deal of good land for pastoral purposes on this side of the line. On the east side, north of Taumarunui, there are some fair pastoral hills; not rich, but still fair country—as good, I would say, as that on the west side. I may also notice that it is a peculiarity of this country, contrary to that which obtains generally, that the valleys are the poorest. This appears to be a consequence of the pumice drift that comes from the interior. The hills on either side appear to me to be fair second-class pastoral hills. I cannot say anything of the country north of Poro-o-tarao. Starting from Hunterville, and going as far as Turangarere, or a little further north than that, the line will open a large extent of country, and, so far as I am able to judge, some of the very best in this country. Hautapu Valley is a fine piece of country, with a forest alleged to be 3,000 acres in area. There is very valuable timber in it. Once you pass the river you get into very fine open limestone country stretching away eastward towards the backbone of the Island. I do not think I can say much more on this subject. A question has been discussed about the witnesses to be called to give evidence before this Committee. The names of several gentlemen have been suggested to me as persons who, if called upon to give evidence, could give valuable information to the Committee. The opinion which I have heard expressed to the effect that the Committee would not summon a cloud of witnesses before them, who would be simply repeating each other's testimony, has induced me to refrain from submitting any list of persons who are well acquainted with the country along the line for the same reason. But I would recommend that Mr. Cicely be called; he has an intimate acquaintance with the whole of this country. I should also like that Mr. A. Harris, a very intelligent man, who has land in this Waimarino country, should be summoned. He has taken up land for special settlement there. He could give the Committee information as to the character of the country west of the line opposite Ruapehu. The character of that country, it appears to me, has been very much misrepresented. I would make to the Committee one other suggestion. There is in the Rangitikei district a Mr. Simpson, who has an intimate acquaintance with all this country. He was our Sheep Inspector for twenty-five years. He could give valuable evidence respecting the carrying capacity of that country. His judgment would be considered thoroughly reliable on a question of that kind. There is a further suggestion I would make, with due deference to the Committee. I should like if the Committee would procure from the Railway Commissioners returns of the traffic of the line at the southern, and also at the northern end. That would give the members an idea of the traffic already at this southern end; it is a traffic that is yearly increasing by leaps and bounds.

3. *The Chairman.*] When you speak of the country in the Awarua district as being good pastoral country, capable of carrying two sheep to the acre, is it of a character fit for settlement in small farms?—Yes; the country lying east of the Rangitikei River between Rangitikei and the Ruahine Ranges is more undulating than the country on the west side. It is, on the whole I think, fit for small holdings—that is to say, relatively. A good deal of it will eventually become agricultural country.

4. You say that about Ruapehu the central route skirts the pumice country lying to the east: have you been through the country on the west so as to be able to speak with precision on that point?—No; I said when I was making my statement that I had not been through that country, and that I was speaking only partially from what I saw—that is to say, looking over the country from a vantage point, I could see from the character of the timber with which it is clothed that it must be a good country. Those who are experienced know from the character of the timber the quality of the country. Speaking generally I should say that the whole of this is good land. I may say in connection with this that small-farm associations, after spying out the land, have taken land right up to the line, showing that it must be good country having been examined.

5. As to the general character of the country for railway construction, is it a very rugged class of country; or, how does it compare with the country between here and Manawatu, for instance?—I will endeavour to answer that question: when you leave Hunterville, proceeding up the Porewa, a tributary of the Rangitikei River, you go up the valley a little way and cross a low saddle descending again into the valley of the Rangitikei. The first engineering difficulty is where it descends into the valley, where you have to cross the Makohine Gorge. After that is crossed the line meets with few engineering difficulties up the valley of the Rangitikei. When you leave the valley you ascend the Hautapu, which is a tributary of the Rangitikei. No engineering difficulty presents itself on this part of the line. The first engineering difficulty is on the west side of Ruapehu, where there are deep gorges. There must be expensive bridging there. When you get away from Waimarino you keep descending until you come to the Wanganui River itself. I would not say anything of the line past that, for I do not feel able to say anything with the accuracy I should like.

6. *Mr. Carncross.*] Have you any knowledge of the other route?—I have not, except that I passed the point of junction. It appears to me to be second-class pastoral country. I cannot give you any other evidence on the subject, as I have not been over the proposed line.