

Mr. R. W. HOLMES, sworn and examined.

7. *The Chairman.*] You are a Civil Engineer in the employment of the General Government?—Yes.

8. I understand you are personally acquainted with both the central route and that which is known as the Ngaire route?—I am acquainted with the whole of the Ngaire route, but only partially acquainted with the central route.

9. Perhaps it would be more convenient if you would make a statement as to the character of the land on both routes so far as you know it, taking the land along the Ngaire route first from the point of divergence?—The first few miles of that route is covered with pumice principally; then the country gradually improves, until at about twenty miles it is good land fit for settlement; that continues right away through to Ngaire, except that part of the country along the Tangarakau, which is too rough for settlement.

10. You mean the central part?—Yes; about sixteen miles of it. I should say about one-sixth of the whole distance is too rough for settlement; and about ten miles from the north end, which would be about a tenth of the whole distance, would be poor country; the balance is all good land; with the exception of this one-tenth, the soil is good over the whole of it.

11. With the exception of that sixth part you refer to, is it fit for small-farm settlement?—Yes.

12. What are the general characteristics of the country; is it very rugged; are the valleys of any great width, or are they narrow?—They get narrow towards the top ends; they widen as they descend.

13. What would be the width of the widest valley on the route?—About a mile and a half I should think.

14. Are there many a mile wide?—They vary.

15. You are speaking of the average?—Yes; that is about the average.

16. Would there be many valleys that would be half a mile wide?—Yes; about three-fourths of the whole of them would be about that width.

18. When you say three-fourths of them are so wide, let me ask you how far you include up the hill-side?—I have always reckoned that you could settle the land to about half way up; the ridges get steeper and steeper as you ascend.

19. Then, on this three-fourths of the number of valleys cultivation could be made half way up the hill?—Yes.

20. Beyond that would the hill be too steep for cultivation?—Yes; I think so, as taking the bush off would cause slips.

21. Can you state what the character of the bush is on this route?—White pine, rimu, matai, mairi, and hinau.

22. Does the timber continue up to the hill tops?—Yes; except in Tangarakau. On some of the ridges there the pines are replaced by birches.

23. Over what length of country would that be?—Ten miles, perhaps, at the summits of the highest ridges.

24. Not more than that?—No; not more than that.

25. Now, tell us what you know of the central route?—I know from Marton up to Kerioi.

26. What is the distance?—Eighty miles from Marton junction.

27. You only know the north end, where it is common to both?—Yes.

28. State what you know of the character of the country from Marton?—As far as the Muri-mutu Plains it is all good country; but the open country, on the plains themselves, is poor.

29. Is Kerioi on the plains?—Yes.

30. How does the country from Marton to Kerioi compare for quality and adaptability for settlement with the land you have described on the Ngaire route?—It is much about the same; there is not much to pick and choose between the two; both are very much the same in character; that character extends clear across from the Ruahine Range to the sea-coast at Taranaki.

31. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would there be the same difficulty in both as regards slips?—Yes.

32. *The Chairman.*] If I understand your evidence rightly, out of 103 miles on the Ngaire route there would be about seventy-six miles of country quite as good as that between Marton and Kerioi?—Yes; it would compare very favourably with that on the central route.

33. You have stated that the country from Marton northward is as good as that on the Ngaire route?—Yes; it is about the same.

34. *Mr. Blake.*] Take it from Marton to Rangatira?—It is good land.

35. *The Chairman.*] Do you say there would be seventy-six miles on the Ngaire line of as good land as that between Marton and Turangarere?—Yes.

36. In your judgment would the difficulties of railway construction be greater on the Ngaire route than on the central?—They are easier on the Ngaire route.

37. You say that the Ngaire route is more favourable for railway construction than that on the central route—from Marton northwards?—Yes.

38. Have you been engaged on any of the sectional surveys?—Yes; I had charge of the surveys of the Ngaire route as far as the Ohura Valley from Ngaire. That included the whole of the difficult part of the line. I have also located a portion of the central route.

39. What portion?—About eleven miles south of Turangarere: that is on this side of Murimutu.

40. That is on the proposed extension beyond the present work?—It is all located ready for contract up to Turangarere.

42. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Will you tell us the position of the railway at the present moment?—The line is open for traffic to Rangatira; that is eighteen miles from Marton junction. There is a further length of four miles under construction that will be open for traffic by Christmas time. Then there is a further length of eleven miles under construction.