

40. Looking at the class of timber, without reference to what you saw blown over, would it, in your judgment, indicate good soil?—If I had not seen the pumice stone I should have said that it was good soil.

41. Well, then, did you ascertain what the depth of pumice was below the trees?—No, I did not.

42. You could not see whether it was a few inches or a few feet —No, Sir, I could not. What I have referred to brings us up to ten miles south of the Taumarunui. The next portion of the bush to the Waimarino Plains, for a distance of about fifteen miles, is through a rather rough bush country. The land is not so good, and the timber is not good there. On the Waimarino Plains itself the portion I saw I should say was almost valueless. It was covered with tussock grass, and there were many wet patches. The clumps of bush were nearly all birch. There were fine streams of water running through the land. I do not think the land is of any value at all.

43. To what extent of the route would your last remark apply?—Well, to the last seven or eight miles that we rode over, before we left it to go on to the Taupo track. I joined the route again near Turangarere, and from that down to Hunterville is a totally different country; it is beautiful sheep country, with some of the finest soil I ever saw. There is a totara bush—not very much—we did ride through some very fine totara. On the flats some totara trees are very large. The soil is very good for gardens or for any kind of cultivation. I should say it is a limestone and papa rock country. Sometimes you would see limestone cropping up, and in the streams you would see papa rock.

44. As to the ruggedness or otherwise of the country on the two routes, which would you consider the most favourable for a line of railway?—Well, there is nothing very rough on the portion of the central line I saw, except from Taumarunui to the Waimarino Plains. I do not think the grades stated in the original reports could be got there. I am only speaking from riding through, and not from actual survey.

45. Is the country generally, on the central route, as easy for the purpose of railway construction as on the Ngaire route?—Well, there is a rough piece close to Hunterville. It would be heavy work there. The line was in course of construction while I was there, and there is a very heavy piece of work there.

46. Would there be any portion on the Ngaire line as heavy?—In the Tongarakau section there would be heavy cuttings and some tunnels, I should think.

47. Then, apart from the general quality of the soil, which line would open up the greater area of land fit for settlement—we come now to the quantity and not the quality?—I think the central line would open up a greater quantity of land.

48. The quantity on the Ngaire route would be apparently limited by the watersheds to the westward, and the Wanganui River to the eastward?—There would be really no connection between Upper Waitara lands and the railway, as there is a high range which cuts it off.

49. Then the strip of country to the west of the Ngaire route feeding the line would be a narrow one?—Yes, it would be a narrow belt of country. On the south-eastern side again there would be no connection with the Wanganui River.

50. There would be a limited area on both sides?—Yes, but when that section reaches the 75 miles to the Ohura Valley, it would open that up just as well as the central.

51. Would the central open up that country?—Yes, that portion of it just as well as the other line would.

52. *Mr. Rhodes.*] As far as the colony is concerned generally, which line would you prefer?—My opinion is it would be better to make neither line, and open the country in a different way.

53. I should like your opinion as to what you think?—That is the opinion I have always expressed. The best way, in my opinion, to open up the country would be by a road from Turangarere to Tokaanu, at the south end of Lake Taupo; and by a ferry boat or steamer to the north end of the lake, and thence on to Rotorua; and from Rotorua by rail to Auckland. From Turangarere to Pipiriki by a good road; and from Pipiriki to Wanganui by river steamer.

54. From Turangarere, a road to Pipiriki would serve that part of the country?—Yes; from the Waitara a good road could be made to Awakino, on the west coast; from the Awakino up to the Upper Mokau, which is a good country; and thence on to Te Kuiti terminus. That would give through communication in two days from Wellington to Auckland, without going to sea at all, and it would open up the best part of the North Island now remaining unoccupied. A very small proportion of the money that would be required to construct either line of railway would make both of the roads referred to right through.

55. *Mr. Blake.*] Would a line from Sentry Hill, New Plymouth, to the Taumarunui cross very high and rough country?—Yes, it would cross very high country at the watershed, at the head of the Waitara.

56. Would that be a favourable route for the construction of a railway to join the central?—I think it would be quite out of the question to get a railway through.

FRIDAY, 16TH SEPTEMBER. 1892.

Mr. JOHN SKINNER, sworn and examined.

*John Skinner:* I am a private surveyor and valuer for land-tax purposes. I know most of the country traversed by the Ngaire route—not along the line itself, the whole way, but the country all around it, from side to side.

1. *The Chairman.*] Have you any knowledge of the central route?—Not a great deal: from Taumarunui northward, and for a short distance south.

2. Will you state briefly to the Committee what you know of the quality of the land on the Ngaire route, and of its fitness for settlement, starting from the point of divergence?—There is one portion I do not know—from 70 miles to 90 miles. I know the country from the 70-mile peg to