

sowing grass?—Yes; but this soil has been burnt so often. It is only necessary to burn prior to sowing grass, not after. We find that the oftener the land is burnt the worse it becomes. From 70 miles to 60 miles, with the exception of about two miles on the west side, is good country—hilly, but good valleys. From 60 miles to 50 miles the line goes through a piece of very rough country immediately contiguous to the line, birch-spurred, very rough. But two miles back from the line the country is better and fit for settlement. From 50 miles to the 40 miles the country is fit for settlement—hilly, with bush, but all suitable country. The land around the upper Wangamomona, a tributary of the Wanganui River, is very good. From 40 miles to 30 miles we get into another watershed. It is rough country, which would go into larger blocks. It is mere pastoral country. There is very little level land in this portion. The highest land is past the 35 miles, and from there on to Stratford it is good land for settlement. There are sheep runs in it. From there down to Eltham it is all occupied.

51. How does the quality of the soil on that route compare with that of some of the settled parts of the colony? Is it as good as the land in the Manawatu Valley, near Palmerston?—Oh! no; it is not so good.

52. Is it as good as the Rangitikei?—I do not know that there is much difference between the Rangitikei and the Manawatu land.

53. What part of the colony can you name as about equal to it?—It is difficult to say. This soil is peculiar to its own. It is equal to the Whanganui country within a radius of ten miles of Wanganui. The Wanganui country is all papa country; the Manawatu land seems more clayey. With the exception of the black-birch ridges it is all fit for settlement of some kind—agriculture eventually, when it is all felled.

54. How much is fit for small-farm settlement?—Only about 25 per cent. is fit for settlement on the 200-acre principle. It is country not fit for 200-acre sections. There are blocks that are suitable, but, taking it as a whole, it is too small; 500 acres up to 2,000 acres is about the farm which the average of the land would require. The timber in many places is suitable for milling purposes. There are no minerals other than coal to be found on the route. Coal is to be obtained in any quantity.

TUESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 1892.

Mr. C. W. HURSTHOUSE, re-examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you proceed to give us further information, Mr. Hursthouse, in reference to this matter?—I do not think I can give you more than will bring in what has already taken place—as to quality of land and so on. I think there is more in this than I thought when I left off the other day, but if not out of order, I would suggest that some members of the Committee should go over the country themselves, because I am perfectly sure that the evidence will be very conflicting as to quality of the land, and probably some members of the Committee are judges of country.

2. But you see every man judges of land according to his own standard; that is the difficulty about it?—Yes; but if he sees both parts of the country he can compare them regardless of his standard. That is all I have to say, excepting that if my opinion is worth anything I would say that I do not see the least necessity for either railway at present. I think it would be far better for the colony to open up the country by roads, which would carry settlers along with them. No doubt that will delay the question at present, but I think there is not enough evidence to warrant anybody in settling which is the best route to pursue—that is, with regard to the engineering difficulties.

3. You mean the surveys are not sufficiently complete?—The exploration, to begin with, is not sufficiently complete. It would be perfectly absurd to say that either route is laid out on the best plan, because the country has not been perfectly explored, and it would take many years to do it. The country is of a broken nature on both sides for a great distance, the ground being covered with a dense bush. No man could see more than 50 yards at a time, and it is like feeling around with a stick in the dark. You can see nothing distant. If roads are made approximately to where the lines are at present, in a few years the country would be known, and then would be time enough to say which would be the best line. We can open up along the Stratford route—there is nothing done to it as yet—in the way of a bridle-track. We can make a very good track through the bush for about £15,000 to connect the road already going to the eastward from Stratford with the bridle-track at Ongarue. We could get a very good stock-driving road for about £15,000. That would include felling bush 3 chains wide so that grass could be had all along the line. The money would be well spent, because it would be the precursor of a permanent road. The expenditure of £15,000 would be quite sufficient for a year or two.

4. Your estimate does not contemplate any wheel traffic?—No; not for £15,000—horses and cattle, and so on; but I think that probably for about £8,000 or £10,000, perhaps less, the road could be completed, but not metalled.

5. That would make it possible to drive through?—Yes; I think so; and that estimate includes grassing the 3 chains, sowing it with grass as soon as the bush is burnt off.

6. The evidence has up to now been generally in the way of eliciting points of advantage on the two different routes. I would like you now to give the Committee what you think of the disadvantages. If you look at the section on the wall behind you, that indicates some high land for seventy or eighty miles on the central route, is that of a character fitted for settlement?—Well, it is not so high as to be unfitted; it is not the matter of height that would go against it, but the quality of the soil. Waimarino Plain is very bad soil. The good land would begin about here—Taumarunui, that is good land; but I must say that this [indicating on the map] is not good land, it is forest from Waimarino to Taumarunui. It would be all very well for a few years, but after that it would be worn out.