

7. The soil is not strong enough to carry permanent pasture?—It is pumice sand. There is some splendid totara growing on it, but directly you get below the surface 6in. or 7in. it is very light sand like soft brown sugar. You can stick your finger in it without doubling it up, although any one riding through the bush and looking at the luxuriant growth would think it beautiful land.

8. If you were about to select a block for settlement to make a home upon, which would you prefer, the low land on the Ngaire, or the high land on the central?—Oh! the low land, most decidedly; but not because it is low—the elevation has nothing to do with it.

9. It has something to do with the climate?—Not enough to make it worth considering. There is no snow on the Ngaire Road, or any part of it. You get a little at Waimarino, but I doubt if there would be any more frost at Waimarino than in many parts of the Ngaire Road.

10. If a statement is made with reference to the disadvantages of Turangarere that gardens are at a discount in this country, as only those vegetables will grow that will stand frost all the year round, would you consider that a fair description?—That description would equally apply to both lines, Sir. Frost all the year round? Oh! no.

11. Do you consider from your knowledge of the country that that statement is very much exaggerated?—Well, I should say it was very much exaggerated, if the expression conveys to me what it would to the general public. If you say frost all the year round I should imagine the statement would convey the impression that there was frost once or twice a week at least during the whole year. I think, as a matter of fact, that you cannot find any place on this Island where it would run that, unless on the snow peaks of some of the mountains, but at this place as a rule there is no frost between November and March.

12. So far as climate is concerned, you think that should be no bar to settlement along the central route?—Not the least, as regards climate.

13. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would they be liable to be blocked in by the snow?—I think not. When I say that, I would add that it might be necessary to use a snow-plough occasionally.

13A. No very great danger of it?—No, I do not think so.

14. *The Chairman.*] Have you experienced a winter in that region?—I have been travelling there during the last winter. On the opposite side of the railway-line is where I have been. They have had about 2ft. of snow last winter on the east side of Ruapehu. I have been living at a place called Te Kuiti [indicating position on map]. The climate there, I have no doubt, is about the same as all along that country.

15. Along the Ngaire?—As regards frost, yes; not rain.

16. Do not let us mix up the two routes in the matter of climate.—I do not think you can, because the climate is practically the same.

17. Notwithstanding the difference in altitude?—Notwithstanding that.

18. Much stress is laid upon the value of the Ngaire route as a means of communication between Auckland and the district to the south of Mount Egmont. Do you think there is any special value in that respect?—Of course, it would be a means of very good communication; but I do not think the fact of opening up communication between that district and Auckland would be of very great practical benefit—the benefit would be in opening the intervening country for settlement. What I mean is that settlers and people to the south of New Plymouth do not want anything particularly from Auckland, and Auckland does not want anything particularly from there.

19. Or if they should, they would get it probably more cheaply by sea than by railway?—Far cheaper; and there is a curious fact about that. I do not know whether it is so now, but a few years ago it was so, that Auckland merchants only some 120 miles from New Plymouth could not compete with merchants residing in Lyttelton, Wellington, and Dunedin, who were from two to five times the distance away. That always struck me as being a very strong piece of evidence; for if they cannot compete by sea then they cannot do so by rail, because a ton of goods by rail would cost three or four times as much as by sea.

20. So that the particular value of the line would be as a means of permitting settlement and opening up country for cultivation?—Of course, it would be an advantage to have quick land communication from one end of the Island to the other, but I do not think that it is worth the money. It is a luxury we cannot afford yet.

21. Assuming that the district is occupied and cultivated, what would be the ordinary nature of the exports?—The exports would at first be live stock and dairy produce—that would be at first; eventually, of course, there would be considerable quantities of fruit and other small stuff.

22. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would fruit stand the railing?—I think so. I was just going to say the traffic of all this country would come south. Whichever line is made I do not think they are going to drive it from here to Auckland.

23. *The Chairman.*] You think that south of Taumarunui the whole traffic would tend towards Wellington?—Yes. I do not say it would all come to Wellington, because there are several other ports, such as Wanganui, Patea, and Waitara, and New Plymouth, all of which are open to interprovincial traffic. Not much intercolonial traffic has taken place as yet, that I know of, from these ports. If this Stratford route is made, the stuff from the point of divergence, at Ongarue, at any rate, will all go to Eltham—it is not going to Auckland, a distance of 158 miles by this map.

24. *Mr. Rhodes.*] How long would it take anybody to go over these two lines?—Well, it would take you ten days or a fortnight [witness pointed out the route on the map]. You would get a good knowledge of the country by going along there about thirty miles, then take rail to Hunterville. During the coming summer I think there will be a coach right through to Taupo. [Witness then pointed out on the map the course he suggested should be taken to Auckland.] That would take a fortnight, supposing you started from Wellington, doing what you could by rail, then by steamboat and horseback.

*The Chairman:* That would not allow time to travel over the Ngaire route.