

41. *Mr. Carnecross.*] And 40,000 acres have been sold, and realised more than the cost of the entire block?—Yes, that is so.

42. *The Chairman.*] When you say sold, you mean allotted for special-settlement purposes?—Yes, but if the Government are receiving interest on the capital value of the land I presume that is as good as being sold.

43. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Who pays the cost of the survey?—The Government.

44. *The Chairman.*] How much has the Government spent on roading?—I could not say; they have made a road through Waimarino suitable for horse traffic and dray traffic part way from Ohakune to Pipiriki.

45. That is along the line of the central railway?—Yes; with that exception and a road to Pipiriki, which road does not go all the way through Waimarino, but only on the very outskirts.

46. Do you think that the climate in this district is such as to favour settlement?—I think so. I have seen crops of apples growing there very luxuriantly, and the finest of fruit in the Manganui-o-te-ao Valley. Nearly the whole of the land to the eastward or north-eastward of the railway-line is practically useless.

47. We have abundant evidence on that subject, but we understand that you had special knowledge of the Waimarino country?—Yes, so I have, as I have said.

48. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would not the land spoken about along the banks of the Wanganui, which appears to be nearer the Ngaire route than the central route, would not that land be better served by this route than by the central?—The difficulty of getting communication from Retaruke Stream or Manganui-o-te-ao—these are the two principal streams—to the proposed Eltham junction would be very great, because the country on that side of the Wanganui River is very hilly and broken: hilly right along the banks of the river—precipices, in fact, some 50ft., 60ft., or 100ft., high. I do not doubt that the land would be better served by that line if the communication was not so difficult, but it would cost more than the country is worth to make roads through it.

49. *The Chairman.*] Whichever direction the traffic might take you would require roads from that district, whether to the central route or the Ngaire route?—That is clear, Sir; but there are no such difficulties to contend with as the crossing of the Wanganui River. You would have to make roads to get down to the bed of the river and up again to the normal level. I am not sufficiently informed to say what the cost would be, but the difficulties in the way would be very great indeed.

50. On the other hand would you not have a very large ascent to make to the central route?—Not so, Sir, because the highest country is near the edge of the river, although the general altitude of the country is higher than at the edge of the river in some places, still for some miles back the country becomes lower as it falls from the river.

51. The lower part of the river runs through a deep gorge?—Yes, that is so; the highest hills are on the edge of the river.

52. Yes; but the whole fall of the watershed is away from the central route across the Waimarino Block down to the Wanganui River?—Yes, that is the general watershed of the country, but you will find, if the altitudes of the hills are given on the trig. surveys, that the highest are on the edge of the river. There is another point that I think would be of great advantage in the course of a few years to come, if the central were made from Marton up to Taumarunui, as shown here. In the first place the traffic for tourists would be to make use of Tokaanu and Ketetahi hot springs, and in about twenty miles you get from Waimarino to the very finest sanitary stream—a stream running along the side of the mountain which the Natives use for curing a disease known as ngere-ngere.

53. What is the nature of the disease?—Leprosy. The scenery on the Upper Wanganui River is of the most beautiful description. I have not got an eye for the beauties of scenery myself, but I am told by those who should be judges that it is the finest in New Zealand. Nothing could be lovelier than the scenery from the river. Tourists could go down the river in canoes from Taumarunui to Wanganui; and then the canoes could be put on the railway trucks and taken back again to the starting-place. The traffic there will be very considerable in years to come. As an instance, too, of the suitability of the country for settlement, I saw at the edge of a Maori settlement outside Ohakune a crop of oats which I estimated would yield forty bushels to the acre. I never saw a better quality of grain in my life. I happened to mention it to someone who went there, and when they came back two years afterwards they brought some down in a hand-bag to show the quality. Then, coming back again, Sir, further towards Marton, we have there about 275,000 acres of Native land through which this line will run, and nearly the whole of it very good land. Comprised in this block are a number of smaller ones. I think that land would be most suitable for settlement, and I would undertake to buy from the Natives 100,000 acres of that within six months.

54. The Committee understand that negotiations are in progress for acquiring land there?—The Natives have told me that they have placed under offer 100,000 acres of the best of the land to the Government.

Mr. HUGH MUNRO WILSON, sworn and examined.

55. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation, Mr. Wilson?—Civil engineer, and County Engineer for Waitemata.

56. Are you a land surveyor?—Yes.

57. You have travelled over what is known as the Ngaire route?—Yes; known as the Stratford route.

58. Have you also travelled the central route?—Yes, I have, with the exception of about thirty miles between Turangarere and Kerioi. I missed that part. I did not go over some parts of it, but sufficient to pretty well know the nature of the country.