

31. There appears to be altogether fifteen large viaducts between Turangarere and Taumarunui?—There are only three which can be called large. I am only judging from the ground over which I have travelled.

32. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would it be advisable to continue to construct the line prior to the purchase of the Native land?—This, of course, can only be a matter of opinion. My opinion is that at the north end it has been carried very many miles more than it should have been until the line had been acquired from the Natives. I think at the south end no further work should be done until the Awarua Block is purchased.

33. That is, so much of it as the Natives would sell?—Yes. I may say that if the line is constructed for a short distance above the junction of the Hautapu and Rangitikei Rivers, a distance of about twenty-five miles, that would give ample access for the settlement of the block; and I do not think the line should go further for some considerable time.

34. *The Chairman.*] Assuming that neither the central nor the Stratford line should be proceeded with for some considerable time, do you think it expedient to open up a dray road between Stratford and Ongarue?—I have very strong opinions on this point, Sir. I think it would be very much in the interest of the colony if most of these railways were stopped, and the money which would otherwise be expended upon them spent upon roads. It would go so very much further, and with good roads all necessary access would be obtained. The Stratford Road would give access to the Upper Waikato, which would be joined by the Inglewood Road, about twenty miles from Stratford, and it would be joined further by the Mimi Road perhaps another twenty miles further up.

35. *Mr. Blake.*] Even supposing the country were settled, it would be many years before it would produce anything but stock and dairy produce. There would be no agricultural produce?—No; the character of the country would lead to its being used for grazing or for dairying. The Stratford Road and branches being completed, with the Hunterville-Tokaanu on the east side of the mountain, and both metalled properly through the bush, I believe this portion of the interior would be sufficiently opened for some time to come.

Mr. ALFRED HARRIS, sworn and examined.

36. *The Chairman.*] You are a settler, living at Bulls, Rangitikei?—Yes.

37. What knowledge have you of the country the central line is intended to travel over?—There are special reasons why I possess a good knowledge of that part of the country. I obtained a detailed knowledge of it through being appointed by the Waimarino and Clifton Land Associations to prospect for a block for settlement.

38. You selected land for settlement?—Yes.

39. What land did you travel over in making your selection?—I did not come prepared to give evidence, having only yesterday received your notice; but I have a rough copy of a report which I made for that association, in which there may be some information of interest perhaps to the Committee.

40. Tell us what your experience was of the part of the country you travelled over in search of this land for selection, and what you found?—I may say, with regard to the country from Hunterville to Adams', Turangarere, I have only passed over the road. I prospected the country generally further north-west. I went up Hale's track from Fordell, and found the land to be settled as far as Bald Hill, adjoining Studholme's Ruanui Station. I was surprised to see the quality of the land. Although so rough, it would carry three sheep to the acre up to Bald Hill. Then we descend into much lower country to the westward, to the Ruanui Station, where there are 13,000 acres of land, all in English grasses. It is Mr. Studholme's small run. From there the manager for Mr. Studholme, Mr. Macdonald, guided us out to the Murimutu Plains. After leaving the station we passed through a totara bush—all very good undulating land, until we came to a Maori settlement called Rakatapama, at the head of the Turakina River.

41. We do not want a minute description of every mile you travelled; it will be more convenient if you can describe the country in general terms—the country that you went over?—Then we came to the plains. I was surprised to find the plains to be of a kind of light-red, decomposed, volcanic soil, with fine pumice underneath—or a sort of soft red sandstone in places.

42. Will you pass on to the ground you selected for the association?—With regard to the plains, it has been said the country would not grow English grasses. I saw English grasses growing there—also potatoes and oats. I saw grain yielding 40 bushels to the acre growing at Kerioi. From Kerioi we got into the bush again, at a distance of three miles, on to the Rangataua Block. We fully prospected that block for selection. In passing along the railway route, any one is deceived by the quality of the soil, because of the fringe of red-birch. For about half a mile from the surveyed railway route the land is very different. We made a selection for one association in this block, on the left-hand side.

43. What extent?—We selected 7,000 acres, which I consider first-class land—equal to Palmerston land, irrespective of the climate.

44. The climate would not be quite so good?—No; it is very cold, in consequence of the altitude.

45. What other blocks did you select?—We also went into the Waimarino Block, and we travelled in a number of directions for several days, camping in the bush. I found 30,000 acres of level land, mostly alluvial loam.

46. Covered with forest?—Yes; a dense bush, with tremendous trees 120ft. in height, growing closely together. It is the heaviest timber I have ever seen in New Zealand. The country as you go further towards the Wanganui River is hilly, but I think the soil is even preferable to that on the flats, because it is stronger.

47. Did you travel close up to the Wanganui River?—No; we did not go right up to the Wanganui River, as it was too rough; but I consider that the land will carry three sheep to the acre, because the climate is better. The sections there would be larger.