

48. Do you consider the land at the highest elevations suitable for small settlements?—Yes. We selected in all 15,000 acres. On the Makotoku Block (shown on the plan) we selected 7,200 acres.

49. What was the number of that block?—I could not say; it was unsurveyed land.

50. Did you make any other selections?—Yes. We saw land beyond that—a very large extent of alluvial and undulating land—which I suggested to the Marton Association to select from when I returned. They have done so. Then, we looked over the Raeiti Block, of about 30,000 acres; but the purchase of the whole of it has not been completed by the Government. Twenty thousand acres I estimated to be level, and I selected since 3,000 acres out of that block for the Clifton No. 2 Association. That was the only portion of which the title was complete. Then I went on the Taumarunui track as far as the Manganui-o-te-ao River, and found the land was very good and level, except on the Raeiti terrace. I did not select that land because of the altitude. We did not go farther in that direction than the bridge.

51. When you were selecting blocks of 20,000 or 30,000 acres, what means had you of ascertaining the acreage?—We had a surveyor with us. There were Government surveyors on the ground who gave us assistance afterwards—Mr. Mansford and Mr. Lewis. There are two more blocks we looked at—Taparau, of 5,000 or 6,000 acres of mostly open land, and Otuahe (Native owned), all bush and very good.

52. What season of the year was it when you were through that country?—It was in October, 1891.

53. What experience had you of the climate?—That is the latter end of winter. The lambing season had just set in.

54. What kind of weather did you experience?—It was very wet the whole time, with cold sleet and snow.

55. How long were you there?—We were there a fortnight. I estimate there are over 60,000 acres of practically level bush-land fit for small settlement in that neighbourhood, and the timber would be very accessible and profitably used for sawmilling.

Mr. ROBERT KIRKPATRICK SIMPSON, sworn and examined.

56. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am a sheep-farmer.

57. Residing where?—Near Marton.

58. Have you any special knowledge of the country which the central line of railway is intended to travel over?—I have been through the country twice, and once into the interior. I have not followed the present railway-line; it was not laid off the last time I was through there.

59. How far did you travel north?—I went down as far as Taupo, round Lake Taupo, and back again. I travelled all the country between Rangitikei River and Kerioi.

60. The country about Lake Taupo is very wide of the route of the railway?—It lays on both sides of it. Kerioi is not very far from the railway. I have travelled over the country in that direction.

61. Do you know anything of the character of the land on the Waimarino Block?—No; I have not been there.

62. Then your knowledge is practically limited to the country between Marton and Kerioi?—Yes.

63. That is good settlement country, is it?—Yes; I should think the whole of it is good. Getting over on the Murimutu Plains, beyond the railway-line, the land becomes lighter—I mean on the east side of the railway-line.

64. Do you know anything of the Awarua land—Native land?—Yes; I have a good idea of the quality of the land there. Although I have not followed the railway-line, I have been on the block.

65. Is it land well adapted for settlement?—I should think it is all very good land; it is land of first-class quality, and not so broken as a great deal of the land already settled.

66. How many sheep to the acre does the average land in that district carry?—All the bush land is the best average carrying-land. There have been from two and a half to three sheep to the acre upon it. I do not think any of the land laid down in grass would carry less than that average.

67. Is the grass permanent pasture?—I should think it is—the grass in the Hunterville district. The earliest is from twelve to thirteen and fourteen years down, and it is still very good, carrying as many per acre as it did at first. There is a request to put a bridge over the Rangitikei somewhere to open up the district.

68. At what point?—There are two points mentioned. [Witness indicated on the map the position where the Otara Bridge ought to be, as affording access to a block of about 100,000 acres of good land.] I may state generally that all the bush-land is of good quality east and west of the Rangitikei River. I might state further that I was deputed by the County Council some twelve years ago to go and decide between two rival routes to connect the west coast with the Murimutu Plains into the interior. I travelled all through this bush, and I took the opportunity of getting the men who were with us to dig the ground in several places with a spade to test the quality of the soil, and I found on the highest ridge of land before going on to the plains beautifully rich soil. I do not know the depth of it. That is land a little to the west, and will be drained by the line.

Mr. FRANCIS HENRY DILLON BELL, Mayor of Wellington, sworn and examined.

69. *The Chairman.*] It has been suggested to the Committee that you have personal knowledge of the part of the country over which it is proposed to carry the Northern Main Trunk