

line: have you any special knowledge?—No. I rode through from Hunterville to Taumaranui in company with Captain Russell, Mr. Fergus, and Mr. Macarthur, and anything that I know of the nature of the country is derived from my conversation with Mr. Macarthur as I rode along. I am not a judge of the quality of the soil. I had the advantage of riding in company with Mr. Macarthur.

70. Did you travel as far as Taumaranui?—Yes.

71. Then you might state, in general terms, whether you think that is a class of country that would be attractive to settlers?—From Hunterville to Hautapu—Part 30?

72. Thirty miles from Rangitikei?—Certainly; judging from the fact that the country under bush presents the same appearance as the cleared country between Hunterville and Rangatira, where we saw what stock was being carried on the cleared portions of country. The track itself is overgrown with cocksfoot grass.

73. We have the evidence of a good many witnesses as to that part of the country. I intended my question to apply rather to the land between Turangarere and Taumaranui?—Well, I should say, No; that it was not a country that would be attractive for settlement, until you get to Waimarino. At the point between Waimarino and Taumaranui there is a magnificent totara forest.

74. Whenever that totara forest may be in demand as a marketable article, could the timber not be carried down the Wanganui River?—I thought so; but I did not know that totara will not float, and it certainly would not be possible to raft any large rafts supporting totara-logs down the Wanganui River for some distance from the forest. The lower part of the forest, I believe, strikes the Wanganui River a considerable distance below Taumaranui. You can see the forest stretching away to your left down to the Wanganui River, a very great distance; and, for aught I know, the totara forest probably does reach at its western point the Wanganui River, a great distance farther down; but I should suppose—of course, I am no judge of these matters—that it would not be possible to raft the totara down, as it would not float itself in separate logs. The river is narrow at Taumaranui.

75. That is to say, not float when it is green?—I do not know. I am told it will not float at all. If the totara will float, I have no doubt it can be taken down the Wanganui River.

76. You say if there is a demand for totara?—There is a demand for totara.

77. I say, whenever there may be a special demand for this block, as there are other blocks available?—There is no totara forest anything like it that I have ever heard of or seen. Nobody who has not seen that forest can have any conception of its character. Mr. Macarthur, who was of course very well acquainted with totara-forest bush, told me there was nothing approaching it anywhere else. You can ride a very considerable distance, probably a quarter of a mile, without seeing anything but totara. That is the best example I can give of the totara bush. It is not totara dotted among other bush, but it is other bush dotted among totara.

78. Have you any knowledge of what is known as the Stratford route?—None at all, except what I have read.

79. *Mr. Duncan.*] Do you know anything about the land beyond Taumaranui?—No, not for more than six or seven miles.

80. Is there anything attractive for settlement up in that direction?—No, I should think not.

81. That is all pumice soil?—It is pumice soil, but I fancy the pumice extends a very little distance westward. I should think you would not find that the totara forest is all pumice. As you go down towards the Taumaranui, the track is cut deep into the hillside. You then get down to pumice, but that is close under Ruapehu—close up to the volcanic line. I do not think pumice is on the surface on the westward slope.

82. *The Chairman.*] Did you notice any artificial grasses growing along the track between the Murimutu Plains and Taumaranui?—No, I cannot remember. My attention was principally directed, as far as I was concerned, to the land near my own district (Wellington City), which I was taking interest in. Further on, I was taking more interest in the scenery.

83. Do you wish to make any further statement to the Committee?—You have been asking me what I have myself seen when I went over this country; but, as Mayor of Wellington, I should like to say to the Committee that the people of Wellington consider that the honour of the colony is pledged to the construction of this North Island Trunk line, and that the loan moneys have been specifically appropriated to it—I mean the one million loan—and that the public creditor lent the money for this particular line.

84. I would like to ask you whether you think the public creditor would be in the slightest degree prejudiced if the money borrowed was expended on another line of greater promise; or, if spent to better purpose in any other part of the colony, could the public creditor be in any degree prejudiced?—Certainly; it is a question of promise at the best. You are undertaking to judge for the creditor that it will be a better line. If you are satisfied with it, you are not entitled to judge for him, I should say. Looking at it as if it were a case of a private borrowing, anybody can understand that if A borrowed money from B for a special purpose and spent it on another object, A would find himself, if not in the dock, in some less objectionable position. I do not understand why, because A is the colony, that it should be allowed, or that the colony should have the power to divert borrowed money to any purpose other than the specific object of the loan. I do not see, Sir, what is the object of earmarking the loan in a schedule to the Act if you are going to repeal the Act. My answer to your argument might be put in this way: Are you prepared to spend this money on, say, a breakwater for the Gisborne Harbour, if you happen to think that money so spent would be expended on a beneficial public work?

85. Yes; there is another way of putting it. Did the public creditor lend this money on the special security of certain lands, or upon the credit of the colony?—Oh, upon the credit of the colony; on the faith that the colony would observe its contract.