Mr. RALPH DONKIN, sworn and examined.

12. *The Chairman.*] What is your profession?—Civil engineer. I reside at Mokau.

13. You gave evidence before a Parliamentary Committee of 1884 on the subject of the Main Trunk Railway. Have you any further knowledge of the country since then?—Yes; I have examined the whole of the country since that time.

14. What part of the country have you examined, or do you mean the whole of it on both routes?—I have been over the Stratford route before 1884, and I have been over the northern parts of the Stratford route since 1884, and as far south as Taumaranui on the central route.

15. Have you been over the trial line from Waitara?—Yes, several times, as indicated here. I have cut a track to show this line the whole way through from Urenui to Taumaranui. From the Waitara, instead of going over or through the high ridge as it was surveyed when the Mimi line was surveyed, I propose to follow up the Urenui River and up one of the branches for about fourteen or fifteen miles; then by a short tunnel I get from the Urenui into the Waitara Valley, and thus pass the ridge between the two watersheds; then I follow up the Waitara River on the left bank going up to an old Maori track, and then I join the Stratford route about forty-five or forty-six miles from Waitara—about the junction indicated on the Government plan. After traversing the Stratford route for about ten miles till you reach the Heao; you then leave that route and strike west to the watershed of the Ohura.

16. Then from the point indicated near the Upper Wanganui, your track lies to the left of the Upper Wanganui to Taumaranui, where it joins the central route?—Yes.

17. Have you taken any levels across the country which you have traversed?—No, I have not taken any levels with the exception of those taken by aneroid barometer. It is perfectly easy country to work. The only difficulty in getting from the watershed of the Urenui River to the Waitara River is that it would require a tunnel of 120 or 130 yards.

18. Is the rest of the country suitable for the construction of a railway, and easy?—Yes, well adapted for the construction of a railway.

19. There would be no heavy works?—No heavy work at all.

20. Can you say whether the route has been explored by anybody else?—Only some surveyors have been in a portion of it, but not for the purpose of making road or railway surveys.

21. In crossing from Waitara River to Taumaranui are there no high ridges?—There is only one, and it is a mere nothing to get over; and you follow on the left of the Wanganui from the Ohura River where there is a low ridge; and there is also a ridge from the Waitara watershed into the Tangarakau River easily passed over.

22. When you speak of there being no engineering difficulties, do you speak with experience in laying out railways?—I have been laying out railways all my lifetime. I have been engaged as railway engineer in England and also in the colonies.

23. Can you mention any of the works upon which you were engaged?—I laid off a number of railways for the New South Wales Government.

24. What railways?—From Bathurst to Orange, and from Orange to Wellington.

25. Any others?—I was also upon the Canterbury railways as Assistant Railway Engineer.

26. Under whom?—Under Mr. Warner.

27. What railways did you lay out in Canterbury under Mr. Warner?—Only for a short distance, the line that runs from Oxford to Sheffield. Although not connected as Railway Engineer in Victoria, I was engineer for the water-supply in Melbourne.

28. Were you the Chief Engineer for the Yan Yeen water-supply after Mr. Bullock Jackson?—Yes, after Mr. Jackson. My former employer in England was Mr. J. F. Bateman, of Manchester, and Westminster, London.

29. As you have traversed the whole of the Ngaire route, and some portions of the central route, does the land of the country which you have indicated compare favourably with that, and does it offer greater facilities for settlement?—Yes, it offers greater facilities than either the Statford or central route, and a railway could be much cheaper constructed; there would also be a saving in distance of about twenty-three miles.

30. When you say a shorter distance, do you mean the connecting of the railway systems from the two extremities of the Island?—Yes.

31. You mean not that it would be a shorter distance as between Wellington and Auckland, but that it would be a shorter length to connect the railway systems of the North Island at Waitara than with the railway at Stratford?—Yes, that is correct; it would be shorter to connect the railway system from Waitara to Taumaranui; there would be a saving of about twenty-three miles less of line to be constructed.

32. With regard to the land on each side of this line, what would it open up?—It would open up several hundred thousand acres of excellent land. It is good land all along the line, and it is not bad land from Stratford to Ngaire, but it is chiefly opened by roads around Stratford. My reason for going from Heao to Taumaranui, instead of the point of divergence near the tunnel, is that Lake Taupo is about twenty-five miles from Taumaranui; and before very long a high road will be made there, and there is already a good horse track.

33. By extending the railway from Waitara to Taumaranui, would that connect the railway system of the North Island without leaving the New Plymouth district in an isolated position, as would be the case if the line branched off from Ngaire?—That is so.

34. Do you wish to make any further statement?—Perhaps I might say something with regard to the cost of the two lines. The estimated cost of the Ngaire line by the Government is £1,166,000; whereas my estimate of the cost to connect Waitara with Taumaranui is sixty-five miles at £8,000 a mile: making a total of £520,000, which shows a net saving of £646,000.

35. You think the railway could be made from Waitara across by the line you have indicated to Taumaranui for about £8,000 a mile?—Yes, Sir, as against £1,166,000 for the construction of the Ngaire route.