

[EXTRACT.]

Wanganui, 20th August, 1897.

IN the Waimarino country the quantity of valuable timber is enormous. The labour of preparing this land for grazing purposes is very great, and, as a rule, the soil and climate do not allow of sufficient grass to make this labour remunerative. The cost of felling the bush is from £1 15s. to £2 5s. per acre. The timber is so large and so durable, and there is such a quantity of it, that the ground is littered with logs, and it takes many years to make a good clearing.

A very large area of this fine forest has been already taken up by settlers—in the great majority of cases in areas of 200 acres. Most of the settlers are working-men, and can barely contrive to comply with the clauses of their leases, which compel them to improve so much a year—*i.e.*, to destroy so much timber every season. After it is destroyed the settlers have not the means to stock or fence their clearings; still, hundreds of acres are being felled and burnt every year.

The timber is acknowledged to be the most valuable crop the land will ever produce. On an attached sheet I show results of measurements actually taken to ascertain the number of trees per acre, their size, and variety. In its natural state, on Crown and Native lands combined, I reckon there were approximately as follows (*vide* attached tracing):—

				Acres.
Good milling timber, on flat and easy land	...	...	...	62,700
Good milling timber, on undulating land...	...	...	...	11,600
Fair milling timber, on easy ground	...	...	...	17,500
				<u>91,800</u>

This block extends along the line of the proposed railway for about twenty miles, and no part of it is more than six miles off the line, with almost level access to it. The greater part of this area has been allotted to settlers, but a very large portion of the allotted land has not been occupied at all, or thrown up after a short occupation. Some is Crown land yet unallotted, and the remainder is Native land not yet acquired. The Native land is the Raetihi Block and Pakihi (17,450 acres), of which 13,640 acres contain good milling timber.

What I would suggest is that all sections containing good milling timber which are unallotted or forfeited should be reserved, as well as all Crown land of similar value; also, that all Native land suitable for milling should be reserved as soon as it is obtained. On all these lands the timber should be put up to tender only when the line reaches them; after being cut out they should be disposed of for grazing purposes.

There is plenty of rough land unsuitable for milling, but even more fitted for settlement than the heavy flat bush that may be opened by pushing on the Raetihi-Ohura Road. This country, though rough, is covered with light, good-burning bush, and is much warmer than the flats. The timber on the coastal districts is being rapidly exhausted. The most important assets to the trunk railway are the Waimarino forests; and, if the bush is allowed to be destroyed in the present manner, by the time the railway reaches them much of the best timber will have disappeared.

I may mention that Mr. Penrin, of the Victorian Forest Department, was much struck by these facts.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.

G. T. MURRAY, Road Surveyor.

APPENDIX H.

NORTH ISLAND MAIN TRUNK RAILWAY.

REPORT ON THE CHARACTER OF THE LANDS AFFECTED VIA NGAIRE, WAITARA, AND AWAKINO ROUTES, BY MR. H. M. SKEET.

Department of Lands and Survey, District Office, New Plymouth,
3rd August, 1899.

SIR,—

In compliance with the instructions contained in your telegram of the 17th May, 1899, and that of the 22nd idem, Mr. H. M. Skeet, District Surveyor, has examined the land on the probable routes of railway-lines—(a) Ngairé to junction with Central route at Kawakawa; (b) Waitara to junction with Ngairé route at Waingarara; (c) Waitara *via* Awakino to junction with Central route at Mokau Railway-station—and I now enclose his report, with a lithograph map illustrating it.

Although written on the 30th June last, the report was delayed at Mr. Skeet's request, for the reason that the Native Land Court was then defining the interests of the Crown in lands affected by the proposed routes, the particulars of which (on the Ngairé route) have only just reached me.

In addition, some 21,618 acres in this Land District, and certain areas in the Auckland Land District that would be opened up by the Awakino route, have recently been purchased by the Crown from the Native owners, but, as no definite information is available, I am unable to locate the purchases on the map accompanying the report, the Native Land Court maps being still in the custody of the Auckland Survey Office.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.

JOHN STRAUCHON, Chief Surveyor.