

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 30th June, 1899.

I have the honour to report that, according to your instructions, I have examined the land along the several suggested lines of connection between Taranaki and the Main Trunk Railway (North Island), and report as follows:—

*Ngairi Line.*

First mile, starting from the railway near Eltham, is through land in a high state of cultivation; then two miles through damp ground near the Ngairi Swamp; the next two miles through first-class land, newly brought into use; three miles and a half more (to the Patea River), through the Pukengahu Block, first-class agricultural land. The Toko blocks continue on to the 15th mile, all rich agricultural land, greatly improved and occupied; Huikama Block, from the 15th to the 23rd mile; the holdings here are larger, well improved, and stocked. Contiguous to this block the country is generally settled in areas, from 100 to 800 acres, now being improved. 23 miles to 26 miles is through Mangaere Block, part of which is divided into a small-farm improved settlement, and other parts held under ordinary systems of tenure; all the sections are improved. 26 miles to 31 miles, through the Pohokura Block, which is divided into large holdings made into sheep- and cattle-farms; areas, from 600 to 3,000 acres, well improved and stocked. In most cases the land would be classed as agricultural and first-class pastoral. 31 miles to 34 miles, down the Makahu; the Ross Special Settlement is on one side and general settlement on the other. 34 miles to 38 miles is through land divided into sections from 200 to 700 acres, pastoral land. From the 38th mile to the 50th mile is through the improved small-farm settlement of the Wangamomona Valley, with the land on both sides of the settlement cut up into larger sections held on the general tenure system; first-class pastoral. 50 miles to 54 miles, from Raekohua over the ridge to Waingarara, and on to Tangarakau; this portion takes in some broken country, pastoral, fit for larger holdings. 54 miles to 62 miles is up the Tangarakau Gully, where the land on both sides for two miles is much broken, with black-birch spurs, not suitable for agricultural purposes. The timber and coal on this portion would be a large source of revenue. Up the Paparata, over the saddle, on to Heao to the 67th mile is good pastoral land. 67 miles (Heao) to 71 miles (Parae), along the valley, is good land fit for general agricultural purposes. On the eastward the Ohura Valley, a valley of good general settlement land, would drain into line. About Parae, the head of the Heao Stream, there is about 1,000 acres of light bush and scrub. From Parae to Huhatahi the line runs over a ridge; good first-class pastoral land. 75 miles (Huhatahi) to 80 miles (Mangaroa) is through first-class agricultural land, soil good, all forest. Mangaroa to Ohura, two miles heavy bush land, first-class quality. On the north side is Ellis's fine clearing of 500 acres; on the south side standing bush; easy sloping hills. The line from the Ohura Crossing to Nihoniho, for a distance of six miles, is through patches of bush, fern flats, and poor fern hills. On the north side of Ohura it is all forest land of good quality; a portion of this has been set apart for an improved-farm settlement. From Nihoniho, 85 miles, to 88 miles, Taupirikura, the line is near the Ohura Stream; the land on north side is bush, of good soil; on the south side fern slopes, spurs, and hills of moderate quality. The land continues the same to Otahu; on the south side the ridges and spurs are more broken, with the bush-line lower down; fair pastoral. The next length, from Otahu to Kawakawa, 12 miles, is through pumice-flats, poor fern slopes and ridges, inferior country; on the north side the land is forest, soil of better quality, good pastoral. From Kawakawa to within three miles of Poro-o-tarao Tunnel the country consists of small flats near the streams, terraces, and good-looking rolling hills, with patches of bush on the higher land. The soil is not good, there being too much pumice, and fires have burnt the first soil; the land is only fit to be cut up into large sections. The last three miles to Poro-o-tarao is a mixture of bush more suitable for settlement.

Regarding the quality and quantity of land available for settlement or occupied along the Ngairi line: Starting from Eltham to Pohokura, with a ten-mile belt on each side, for the first fifteen miles it would give 128,000 acres of first-class agricultural land, occupied and well improved. Timber would be a large source of revenue. In this length I have cut off the area of the first five miles for the present constructed railway. The next sixteen miles would give 210,000 acres of land, 100,000 of which would be agricultural, 110,000 first-class pastoral. With the exception of portions eastward, this land is occupied, and in a state of great improvement. Timber, again, would be a considerable source of revenue. From the 31st mile, Pohokura, to Wangamomona, a distance of eight miles, would give 80,000 acres of first-class pastoral land, suitable for sections of 200 acres to 1,000 acres. This portion has not a great number of settlers as yet; they reside along the main road. From Wangamomona to Raekohua, a distance of sixteen miles, is partly up the Wangamomona Valley, where the improved-farm settlement is situated. This is nearly all occupied in small holdings. The back portions are more suitable for larger holdings—300 to 1,000 acres. This is about 150,000 acres of mixed country, 130,000 of which is Crown land, the remainder Native land. From Raekohua to Tangarakau, some 10,000 acres of fair pastoral country, with a good patch of general agricultural country on the Upper Waitara and head of Waingarara (that the Moki Road would tap)—say, 10,000 more. The Tangarakau portion of eight miles, for two miles on each side of line, is much too broken for successful agricultural purposes. The timber is mostly black-birch, that, with the other timbers, would be fit for cutting, as the means of access allowed. Coal outcrops in many parts on this portion. From Paparata to Heao, 12,000 acres of agricultural and pastoral land would be available. Heao to Parae, good agricultural land. This portion would drain all the fine land of the Lower Ohura Valley, some 30,000 acres; westward the Waiaria Range would prevent much beyond 8,000 acres being utilised. The roading of the Ohura country would not be an expensive matter. From Huhatahi to Ohura there is an area of 50,000 acres of pastoral and agricultural land, 10,000 of which would be agricultural, which would be tapped by the roads that would come in from Mangakara, and Waitohena