

supposed to be done there twenty years ago. There are about seventy large dredges on that river now—at least, the greater portion are there now. They are getting ten times more gold now than then, and there is every prospect of its continuing. In regard to dredging claims being worked out, my opinion is that they will all be worked over again with more up-to-date dredges than they have at the present time.

111. *Mr. Sidey.*] They might adopt the suction process later on?—There is no telling what they might adopt in the future. We have not got to go very far back. Up to the Moa Flat is all gravel plains, and there is just as much gold there as on the bed of the river. The traffic on the road has actually increased more since the dredges were built than before. There is a perfect mountain of coal at Coal Creek that would be taken down to Lawrence and everywhere else. It costs £1 2s. 6d. to get down overland. Then the train could run right up into the beds. The railway would carry coal up and down for 5s. a ton. The whole of the river would then be flooded with coal.

112. *The Chairman.*] How far is this coal carried down from the pits?—They bring it down to the people and down to within about twelve miles of Lawrence. From Coal Creek, roughly speaking, to the lower end it would be over twenty miles. Then a considerable portion would be going up from Lawrence.

113. After they had it on the train how far would they have to cart it from the station to the dredges?—The railway could run right up to the bank of the river.

114. You would want a station for every dredge then. How far, on an average, would they have to cart it from the railway-station to the dredges?—They could leave it anywhere. They could stop the train and run a truck or two off. Some of the dredges would take two teams to keep them going.

115. What would the average carting probably be, say there were three stations within the forty miles? How far would they have to cart the coal from the station to the dredges?—It would be difficult to tell. The dredges are all along the river. It is lined with them. You would get five or six dredges almost close together. If there were sidings here and there that would do. The ground is almost level right down from the Beaumont to Coal Creek, and there is only one tunnel that would be needed on the whole of the line. It is all practically level.

Mr. H. J. H. BLOW examined.

116. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Blow, can you tell us whether this proposed railway-line has ever been surveyed?—Yes, there has been a very good trial survey.

117. What is about the probable estimate of the cost of the railway?—About a quarter of a million.

118. *Mr. Sidey.*] The chief cost would be for the first part of the distance, up to Rae's Junction?—No; I think the chief cost would be at the other end. You are in the course of the river for some miles.

119. Are there forty miles to be covered?—Thirty-eight miles. On the whole, it is not a difficult line, though it is not all quite level.

*Mr. Sidey:* It is level after you pass Rae's Junction?

120. *The Chairman.*] Do you know the district yourself?—Yes.

121. What is your opinion? If a railway were constructed, would it cost a quarter of a million pounds?—I am afraid the railway would not pay. Although railways have already been constructed in districts where it seemed at present there would be little traffic, yet they have created their own traffic; it has been a complete surprise to us.

122. Do you think there is a sufficient area of country there to be developed by a railway to warrant the construction of it?—I am afraid not.

123. *Mr. Sidey.*] Have you any idea as to the prospect of the increase of traffic or of the production which might be induced by the railway tapping the district?—I think the only traffic that would be largely increased would be the fruit traffic. That probably would increase. When in Roxburgh recently I was quite surprised to find that the fruit-growing industry had not progressed anything like what I thought it ought to have done in the past few years. Fruit is dearer in Roxburgh than it is in Dunedin.

124. You say that the reason why it has not progressed might be due to the lack of facilities for getting the fruit to the market?—Yes, I think that is certainly one of the reasons. Fruit is carried on the railways irrespective of distance. The whole of the carting in between would be absolutely saved to fruit-growers, so that they are very much interested in having railways no doubt.

125. *Mr. Tanner.*] Then, the railway would get no more money through fruit-growing?—No.

126. *The Chairman.*] From a colonial point of view or in the interests of the colony, which do you consider the most perfect route for the railway to be constructed—from Lawrence or from Teviot?—If ever a railway is constructed I think it ought to be from Lawrence.

127. *Mr. Bennet.*] Would it not be possible to construct a light line at much less cost?—Yes; but it would not be possible to work it economically. The grades on the existing railway between Lawrence and Milton are up to 1 in 35—the steepest grades on any railway in New Zealand except one—and to haul trade of any weight up those grades requires a train with a heavy locomotive, and that prevents light railways being constructed.

128. In the event of a trial of light-line railways being given, would not this be a very suitable line for it?—It would require a separate engine service, as an engine would have to stop at Lawrence. The heavy engine that comes from Milton could not go over your light line. I do not think that this would be a suitable place at all for a trial of a light line of railway.

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