

25. Therefore the value of the Crown land would not have been so great had it not been for the acquisition of the other portion: is that so?—No, I think it would not.

26. Do you agree with Mr. Walshe that it has put 2s. per acre on the land in value?—I will express no opinion as to the value of that land. It certainly has improved it, but to what extent I am not prepared to say; I did not go into it.

27. You have not seen sufficient of the land to say?—No.

28. By what you have seen of it, do you think the purchase was a good one for the State or not?—Without expressing any idea as to the value of the land, I think it was.

29. *Mr. Statham.*] When did you first have anything to do with this matter, Mr. Strauchon?—Officially when Mr. Russell came to ask me about the fencing. It probably was in May or June of this year.

30. Is there any other method of taking this land except to acquire it by agreement?—Well, we could take the road under the Public Works Act at any time.

31. But the other part—could it be taken?—You could take what is considered a severance under the Public Works Act, but you would not want to take a wide piece like this for severance.

32. In regard to this portion of 1,404 acres, you could not take that under the Public Works Act?—Portion of it, but the whole of that could not be taken under the Public Works Act.

33. Could that have been taken in any other way—as, for instance, under the Land for Settlements Act?—No; this has nothing to do with land for settlement.

34. Did you know anything about the negotiations that were going on for the purchase of this land?—Nothing whatever. I saw it in connection with the parliamentary proceedings the year before, but I knew nothing at all about the land till I was up there, when the Native told us that that was the land over which there had been trouble in Parliament in connection with Mr. Russell.

35. Can you tell us whether at the time of the purchase Mr. Russell was the owner of the land?—So far as the documents go he was not, but I cannot say anything from my own knowledge.

36. And do you consider this land has improved Mr. Russell's property?—I do not think so, because he had all flat before, and there is no formation yet to speak of.

37. Did it take away from its value?—I should think it did a little. A road through your flat land is always a nuisance, because it entails double fencing and alteration in paddocks.

38. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] Assuming that road had been taken under the Public Works Act, would Mr. Russell have been entitled to much by way of compensation owing to the severance?—I should think that would be an element in it.

39. But would it have any appreciable effect?—I should say, for a considerable period it might.

40. He would have been entitled to claim for severance?—I would not take it as an advantage to my land in any way.

41. You have already said that you considered it judicious to purchase, broadly speaking?—Yes, I think so. I am giving no opinion of the value.

42. *Mr. Guthrie.*] Was Runanga No. 1A on the Pohokura side fenced before?—Yes, it was all fenced. You go in through a gate.

43. That is the boundary-fence of the block?—Yes; that was already fenced long before I was there.

44. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] Is the creek running up there a deep, broad creek?—Yes, a beautiful stream of water.

45. Is it easily forded?—Yes, it is a beautiful stream. There are some magnificent falls in it below the main Napier Road.

46. It had not the effect previously of practically isolating one portion of Mr. Russell's land from another portion?—No, you could cross it at almost any portion.

47. And anywhere where those little streamlets are running into it?—Yes.

48. *Mr. Guthrie.*] Have you any documentary evidence on the file of any offer being made of a road-line through this property by the Government?—I could not say. I was not interested in the file until the question of fencing came up. The file is here, and an answer to that could easily be obtained.

49. You consider that this strip of land is worth the amount paid for it?—I express no opinion on the value, because I have not sufficient knowledge. I only passed up, and two or three hours afterwards I came down again. I was not looking at it for that purpose.

50. I mean in regard to homestead-sites for the other block?—Most decidedly, it is valuable in that respect.

51. Do you know of any allowance that has been made for this boundary-fence that was on this property originally?—Not to my knowledge. I think it all went into the purchasing price.

52. And a new fence had to be erected on the other side?—Yes; that was part of the contract.

53. Are you aware it was part of the contract?—I had turned it up. After Mr. Russell mentioned it to me I said I would see whether it was part of the agreement, and I turned it up and found it was part of the agreement. It is quite clear in the agreement that the Government have to fence.

54. *The Chairman.*] Are there any other means of acquiring a block of land like this except by private agreement?—No, I do not think there are.

55. You have to take it under the Public Works Act?—Yes. If you declared the block a public work you could take the lot, but you could not declare that a public work very well.

56. You could take the road under the Public Works Act?—Yes.

57. But could you take this 1,404 acres under the Public Works Act?—I think it would be stretching the point too much to take it under the Public Works Act. That is only my impression.