

great impetus to settlement in that district; and not only that, it will prove a very valuable extra route for tourists. There are a large number of people now going up since motor-cars came into vogue. Many years ago, as you are aware, the Napier-Taupo Road was the best route for tourists, but when the Rotorua line was opened from Auckland the whole of the Napier-Taupo Road traffic died. Since the motor-cars have come into use the Napier-Taupo traffic has revived, and a very large number of Hawke's Bay residents go up every year, but do not go any further than Taupo. If the line were opened to Taupo it would save a whole day in transit, because it takes a day to go down to Rotorua and another day to Auckland. On the face of it, that must encourage tourist traffic.

40. *Mr. Buick.*] Are you acquainted with the land on the western side of Tokaanu?—Yes.

41. What is the land there—bush?—All open fern pumice country. It is better, for some reason—I do not know why, not being a geologist—than the country at the northern end, but apparently as far as you can see it looks just the same. It is all pumice, but the whole of that country is susceptible by treatment of growing very fine crops. The only thing is that I think we shall not live to see it cropped, because it is not taken up.

42. If it were tapped by a railway do you think that area would be settled?—Yes.

43. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Do you know the track from Lake Rotoaira into Lake Taupo, over the hill?—Yes, I have been over it many times.

44. Would you include that land on the track in your description of land which is as good as can be found anywhere?—Yes, if you mean the old Native track from Lake Rotoaira. It climbs the spurs of Pihunga and goes through the bush to Tokaanu. I should certainly call it first-class land when it is cleared.

45. A party of us went up the Main Trunk line, and turned off across the Waimarino Plains, skirted Lake Rotoaira, and made as straight as we could to Tokaanu. The track lay over pretty steep country past Lake Rotoaira, and then down straight to Tokaanu. Would you class that land in the description you gave us just now?—As long as you are in the bush. I would not when you get outside. You will get a line of demarcation as sharp as the edge of the table, and only a few feet away you get into pumice.

46. Would you be surprised if three or four practical men, some from the Wairarapa and some from Rangitikei, differed from you as to the quality of the land?—No, I would not be surprised. I have lived too long to be surprised at anything.

47. And you would not be surprised if men—presumably competent men, who have made their living out of land for many years—would not be able to agree with you?—No, sir.

48. Would you not fairly assume that they would be better judges of land than a person who had not gone through that ordeal?—I would like to say that I struggled very hard to make my living out of land on a sheep and cattle station, but I gave it up and came into Wellington, and have done better. With all due submission to your knowledge, and all your friends with you, I think a man who has lived on the spot for so many years, and has been over that track at least twenty times, would probably see deeper into things than you did by just walking over the track. I think I have something on my side there.

49. You are aware of the land-hunger all over New Zealand?—I have heard a lot about it.

50. You say the want of population has been the cause of this land not being taken up: why did not the land-hungry people go there?—They are not likely to unless they can get better communication. It is the absolute centre of the North Island of New Zealand, and further from the coast than any other part, and they are not likely to go there until they get the carriage. The want of communication is a perfect bar to it at present, because of the cost of transit.

51. You say that a man can find very bad land there if he is looking for it?—Apparently very bad land, but I qualify that because, although it is perfectly true that there is land that is not good, I have seen cabbages, turnips, and other vegetables grown upon what appears to be pure pumice. On the top you will see disintegrated pumice 2½ in. deep, but if you turn that over and bury it, and let it lie for a couple of months, you can grow any vegetable or fruit-tree you like in it. I think that country all round Lake Taupo has been absolutely left through people thinking it was no good at all, and it is going to be as good as a large part of New Zealand.

52. *Mr. Raw.*] Do you mind telling us whether it is a fact that the wheat which was grown at Tokaanu was grown entirely on the flat on some swamp between there and Waihi, where the ruins of the mill now stand?—It is only a short distance from Tokaanu. The mill was only a couple of hundred yards from the accommodation-house, and not on the Waihi side at all. All the wheat grown there was grown on the Tongariro delta flats entirely. On the higher ground, on the slopes, is where they grew their potatoes; but the wheat was grown on the Tongariro flats.

53. That is alluvial soil there?—It is the detritus of the Tongariro River.

54. Who were the owners of that land?—The Natives bought the township some time ago. I suppose Te Heu Heu has just leased it.

55. Do you know Mr. Grace's property there?—Yes.

56. That is on the alluvial flat, and was about where the wheat was grown?—You puzzle me now—I do not think it is. Mr. Grace has removed his residence two or three times. He was not there the last time I was up there.

57. My object in asking you is that we have heard a great deal about the value of this land and its capabilities for growing wheat, and I suggest that the wheat grown at Tokaanu was on the alluvial flats, and does not apply to the ordinary lands termed pumice lands?—That is not so.