

ALFRED KINGCOME NEWMAN, M.P., sworn and examined. (No. 77.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What matter do you wish to mention?—When I was in Parliament on a former occasion I asked that the district around Ruapehu, Tongariro, and Ngaruhoe should be formed into a national park, and Mr. Ballance adopted the suggestion. The Philosophical and other societies have petitioned the Prime Minister to extend the boundaries of this park, and I understand the matter has been referred to this Commission. I visited the park last year, and it is of very considerable importance that the area should be enlarged. Unfortunately there are a number of rabbits getting in, and they are gradually eating out the herbage. The park is also the watershed of a large number of streams, the Wanganui River amongst them, and if the forest is removed the rivers will be disastrously affected, and perhaps the low-lying country will be subjected to floods. On the northern slopes of the park are some of the finest hot springs in New Zealand, and I am exceedingly anxious that the land where these springs are situated should be acquired by the Government for the benefit of the people of Wellington and the Dominion generally. There is a small Native reserve on the slopes of Tongariro at Ketetahi and Te Mari, and I have asked the Native Minister to purchase the Ketetahi springs. He told me he would negotiate for them. They would then be included within the boundaries of the park, and that is an additional reason why the area should be extended. A lot of the land proposed to be included is very poor country, and if it were turned into sheep-runs it would carry very few sheep. The railway is now running near the park, and we have around those mountains a very fine reserve which will be in time a playground for the people of Wellington. Hitherto it has been very inaccessible, but there are two or three roads leading into it, and if the Government will bridge three or four of the big creeks the Ketetahi hot springs will be brought within easy distance of this city. The nearest part of the park is within ten miles of the railway, and the principal necessity is that all the land down to the railway should be included in the park, as it is of very little value for settlement.

2. A portion of the land you advocate should be included in the park is, I understand, private land?—No; most of it is Crown land. On the eastern side of Ruapehu and Tongariro there are Native leases—forty-two years—held in huge blocks, and I believe that the owners are willing to surrender. The result has been that these people have held too much land, and it is all going back to the wilderness and to noxious weeds.

3. Have you any suggestions to make as to dealing with the rabbits in the park?—The work is being done with so few rabbiters that it is not being well done. The rabbits are exterminating the native flora, and more money should be spent in keeping them down. Of course, the flora is of vital importance to the usefulness of the park. It is quite clear that without my suggestion this Commission has power to recommend the Government to largely extend the boundaries of the park, and I hope you will do so.

4. Have you observed if any damage is being done to the climatic reserves by deer?—I know nothing about that matter, not being interested in the question of the deer.

5. *Mr. Clarke.*] Do you propose that the whole of the forest-area from the Waimarino end to Waionuru should be included in the reservation?—Some of the bush might be milled and some preserved. The bush that is cut may grow again, but at present denudation is going on rapidly in regard, not to the big trees, but the small flora. I think the reservation should go round from the railway-station at Ohakune and on to Waimarino, and so preserve the scenery for passengers by the Main Trunk line.

6. *Dr. Cockayne.*] You know that within the present boundaries of the park there is not a single tree, the boundaries being so high up the forest is excluded. Is not that so?—Yes; that is why I am here to-day—to get it included.

7. Have you seen the map Mr. Phillips Turner prepared of the proposed extensions suggested some years ago?—Yes.

8. Do you not think, even if you leave Ohakune out, where there is a good deal of milling-timber, that the whole of Hauhungatahi should be taken in?—Yes.

9. Because there is there a piece of forest that comes down close to the Waimarino Plain?—I quite agree. I think the two big canyons at Makinokau and Te Whero, with the trees on either side, should be preserved. I might say that there is an extraordinarily large number of rabbits in that area, principally of a black colour, and it is advisable that steps be taken to keep them down.

10. There were some deer turned loose around the mountain hut on Ruapehu, and they will certainly damage the indigenous plants. Should they not be cleared out of the park?—Undoubtedly they should. I think some were killed. The deer and rabbits both should go.

11. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] Do you know if the piece of freehold land from near Ohakune and right up the mountain has been acquired by the Government?—No. The Government have bought a lot, but I have not seen the recent plans. The plains I refer to would be included in what I want reserved.

12. Do you not think it would assist in preserving the park if some of the lower ranges were afforested?—Undoubtedly it would.

13. You think it would be wise if some afforestation were to be undertaken on the plains referred to?—Yes. I would propose to employ some of the prison labour in afforesting a lot of that country.

14. *Dr. Cockayne.*] In the bush at Hauhungatahi I understand there is very little milling-timber?—Very little. It is covered with a stunted bush in which the mutton-birds nest. The time has now come when the boundaries of this National Park should be enlarged and finally fixed.