

173A. How does the pumice land compare with, say, that at Rotorua, Matamata, and Putaruru?—The Rotorua country is very similar to it. The Matamata country has been farmed for so long and so heavily manured that at the present time it looks different, but in its essentials it is very much the same. I mean that at first the area at Matamata was very much the same as the Taupo pumice country. The country at the back of Putaruru can be brought in all right; but I do not consider it to be quite as good as the lands in the Rotorua-Taupo area. The natural growth upon it is not as good, or as vigorous. A great deal of the land in the Rotorua-Taupo area is covered with manuka 15 ft. or 20 ft. high. That on the Tokoroa country is not so high.

174. Then you think the pumice country is stronger country than the Tokoroa country?—I am sure of it; and it is more easily worked.

175. You consider that with the knowledge of to-day the Rotorua area would be a better proposition than in 1922?—Quite a different proposition.

176. Have you any idea of the returns of the Tokoroa Cheese-factory since 1922?—I cannot say that I have, but I know the factory has been doing very well.

177. What do you say is the area of land that would be served by the railway?—In my judgment it would be about 2,000,000 acres. The report of the Commission says 1,250,000 acres, but the Commission took no notice of the land in the Rangitaiki Valley.

178. *Mr. Makitanara.* Does that include the Tihoi Block?—No.

179. *Mr. Massey.* The land could be handled more cheaply to-day?—Yes; and community helps very much. If you have sale-yards, schools, and public halls in a district, and other conveniences of civilization, every new settler helps every other settler. I think that may be taken as an axiom.

180. The more you reduce the costs, the bigger the profits?—Certainly.

181. Are you of opinion that a railway can be built cheaper than a road?—There was some discussion on that point at the last Royal Commission, and I have here a transcript of the evidence. Mr. Dyson, Chief Government Engineer for the district, was giving evidence, and he was being examined by Mr. Mackintosh Ellis, Director of the State Forest Service, who stated the traffic from the Government plantations would amount to a continuous stream of trucks carrying 9 and 10 tons. Mr. Dyson was asked what such a road would cost, and the questions and answers were: "Q. Would it cost as much as your railway? A. 24 ft. wide? Q. No. What is your standard? A. 12 ft. Q. Take a 12 ft. basis? A. I consider it would cost as much as a railway-line, probably more." What is your own opinion about it?—Well, I am not an engineer, but I do say the material to make the road will have mostly to be brought into the country, and of course the foundation for a road in a good deal of that pumice country is not very solid, and the road will have to carry heavy traffic. It is not like building on stone or solid clay foundation.

182. You have no metal in the Rotorua district?—There is plenty of rhyolite; cannot say whether that would comply with the Government requirements; I am not an engineer. I am sure that the Public Works Department has an estimate, and I have several times asked that it should be produced. My opinion is that we have very little metal. Why the Public Works Department should hesitate to produce its estimate I cannot say.

183. How many miles are you away from the Rotorua line?—Thirty-five miles.

184. I presume you have considerable trouble in handling stock?—The difficulty has been the motor traffic on the road. Lambs, for instance, are shifted in January, and then the road is very dusty. You get a motor-car dashing into the front of your mob, and breaking it up, and as soon as you get the mob gathered up again another car dashes into it from behind.

185. *Mr. Makitanara.* Have you suffered loss on that account?—I personally have not, but some of my neighbours have. The damage is to the condition and appearance of your stock before you get it to market. If lambs are rushed about, broken up, and smothered in dust, they arrive at the yards with what is called their bloom off.

186. *Mr. Massey.* Are you also of opinion that with an improved road the motorists would be inclined to drive much faster, therefore the difficulties would be considerably increased?—Yes. I, as a settler, would advocate putting a good gutter across the road every 200 or 300 yards.

187. Have you any idea how much weight fat lambs lose between the time they leave their pastures and their delivery into the trucks?—To make a general sort of estimate, I would say about 2 lb. per day, and they would lose about 5s. in appearance.

188. How many days does it take to drive your stock from the pasture to Rotorua?—Lambs take four days, and bullocks three days.

189. How much do you consider you lose on fat bullocks?—About £1 per head, besides the expense of the driving.

190. Can you give an opinion as to why this land has not been developed up to the present?—One great reason is that no small sections are available. The Crown has only large blocks. There is a great area of Native country. As to the privately-owned blocks, Mr. Butcher and I have nearly all the privately-owned land, and there is very little available. I have applied for permission to subdivide my land, but the conditions imposed have been very onerous. There is no sense in spending more on roads than you will get for the sections.

191. *Mr. Samuel.* Is there much Native land in your whole area?—A very large area. I should say more than half is owned by Natives.

192. Have the Natives ever asked for this railway?—Yes.

193. Have they ever suggested that they would be willing to have their land taxed for its construction?—Yes. They were willing to pay 1s. per acre on the land to help the cost of the railway.

194. The whole of the Natives?—Practically the whole.

195. This railway would benefit the district to a large extent?—To a very great extent.