

REPORTS ON THE PRACTICABILITY OF CONSTRUCTING A ROAD FROM WANGANUI TO TAUPO.

No. 1.

Copy of a Letter from Mr. H. C. FIELD to the Hon. W. Fox.

SIR,—

Wanganui, 21st December, 1869.

Respecting the practicability of constructing a road from Wanganui to Taupo, I have the honor to report, that I have succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations in discovering, *vid* the Mangawhero Valley, a far easier and more direct line to Taupo than I had hoped to find in the Wangaehu.

I left town on the 29th ultimo, in company with Mr. A. A. G. Pilmer, late captain in the Colonial forces, having previously written to an Atene Native, who appeared to be the only one who had visited the Mangawhero for very many years, and who had offered his services as a guide, desiring him to join us at Te Pukohu. He failed to come however, having, I believe, been at the Ranana meeting at the time, so we pushed on without him, and had no cause to regret his absence.

After proceeding up the Mangawhero to the point at which we had proposed to cross to the Wangaehu, we ascended the Pukekahu ridge, on which we were surprised to find the Otairi track still so well defined. Owing to the ridge being for the most part a mere razor-back, and the track having been constantly used by the pigs as a line of communication, it is still so open that a horse might be ridden along the greater part of it. From the first high point on the ridge we obtained a fine view of the Mangawhero Valley, beyond the point to which my nephew and myself had ascended it. We found that it was a broad well-defined valley, with comparatively low hills on its eastern side, and that for fully fifteen miles it was perfectly straight, running in a northerly direction exactly towards Ruapehu, after which it trended towards the north-west. A belt of bush several miles wide crosses it just above the point Mr. Monro and I had reached; but beyond this, as far as we could see, the valley and the adjacent land on the eastern side were open. We also noticed that between the bend of the valley and Ruapehu, the dividing ridge separating the Mangawhero from the Wangaehu was for several miles fully 200 feet lower than its ordinary level either towards the north-west or south-east, and that a number of easy-looking ridges led up from the Mangawhero to this low part of the ridge.

On reaching the Wangaehu, I found that the valley, though broad and level, was very winding, and enclosed between very high hills. Its general direction also trended for some miles considerably towards the north-east, and the whole, as far as the eye could reach, was filled with heavy bush, full of supplejack. I found, too, that the course which my experience of the Wanganui and Mangawhero rapids had led me to suggest as a means of ascending the Wangaehu, viz., cutting a line up it, and fording the river on the rapids from time to time so as to keep on the level ground, would be quite impracticable, the river not only running between precipitous banks about 50 feet high, but having, instead of ordinary rapids, a succession of roaring cascades, down which the water rushed in deep channels between huge boulders, the whole as utterly unfordable as the deep pools between the cascades. I have no doubt, from what I saw of it afterwards, that a good road-line could be got up the Wangaehu Valley, and a still better one probably by leaving it again after a few miles, and following up some of the leading ridges extending from it towards the source of the Turakina; but any such line would evidently make the distance from Wanganui to Taupo many miles longer, and probably be not nearly so good as that by Mangawhero. I therefore determined to return at once to the latter river, and follow it upwards. The wet weather we experienced, and the dense nature of the vegetation, delayed us greatly, and added much to the labour of examining the ground and selecting a line of road, so that it was not till the afternoon of the 21st instant that we arrived at Murimotu; but we had the satisfaction of finding an easy line with very little bush along it.

After reaching the point mentioned in my former report, as that at which the line would diverge towards the Wangaehu, instead of turning off it would be better to continue for about a mile across a fern flat to the mouth of a small stream, after crossing which the line would pass for a few hundred yards over a similar flat, and then enter the bush by a rather lower flat, covered by heavy timber, and extending upwards along the river-side about half a mile. For the next half mile or so the line would run at a height of from 50 feet to 100 feet along the face of a hill sloping gently downwards towards the river, and then descend and pass for about a mile farther along another heavily timbered flat. Beyond this the river for some distance washes the base of a steep hill, and then makes a sharp bend to the westward round another steep face, returning in a C curve to its former direction after an interval of about a mile. It will be better, therefore, at the end of the last-mentioned flat, to ascend the hill for about 100 feet by a spur which runs conveniently for the purpose, and passing behind a small toi flat, and over a low saddle, to cross a small stream just above a waterfall about 15 feet high. Thence crossing a hollow, filled with large trees, and over another low saddle, the line would run for nearly a mile along a hollow filled with koromiko scrub and scattered toi bushes.

An extremely well-beaten pig track, which requires little beyond the removal of a few fallen or leaning trees to make it available for pack-horses, then affords a means of crossing a small bush gully on the western side of the hollow, and ascending to a koromiko table on the other side of the stream,