

along which the track would wind for another mile. Thence crossing a small stream it would ascend along a dry bush gully to a low saddle, on reaching which there is seen on the other side a long wooded hollow, separated from the river by a low wooded ridge, and containing three small lakes. Descending into the hollow, and skirting the eastern end of the lakes, the track crosses another small stream, and then passes over another koromiko flat close to the river. Two other streams, with another koromiko flat between them, have next to be passed, after which the line reaches a rather steep hill-face, on which a large slip has recently occurred. At present the slipped earth affords a passage below the slip; but as the river bears strongly against it, it is evidently being washed away, so that it will be better, though of course more expensive, to carry the line above the slip. The country now opens completely, and for three or four miles the line could be taken nearly straight across a succession of koromiko and manuka flats by the river side, crossing by the way several streams, one of which, about 8 feet wide, and a few inches deep, is the largest along the whole line. The valley now bends suddenly towards the north-west, and from the neighbourhood of the bend six or eight long ridges rise from near the river, and run northwards towards the low part of the dividing ridge between the Mangawhero and Wangaehu Valleys, affording a choice of routes. I had not of course time to examine these ridges so as to determine which was the best, but they are all of them not only practicable but easy, the only difference being that while those which start lowest down the river, and rise to the very lowest part of the dividing ridge, necessitate either the following of that ridge (which is rather winding and broken) for several miles, or else a descent into the Wangaehu Valley, several miles below where it emerges from the plains, those which start highest up, and run most directly towards the end of the Murimotu plain, necessitate a divergence from the direct line, and the crossing of several more streams at the Mangawhero end, as well as attain a greater elevation at the dividing ridge. On the whole, it seemed to me that one which has a large patch of manuka trees on a flat peak of it about a mile from the river, or the next one to the westward of it, would probably be found the best; but it would be desirable to examine them all before deciding on the one to be adopted. The whole of these ridges are covered at their lower ends by koromiko scrub, which gradually develops into scrubby bush as they rise, and becomes tawa and manuka bush as they widen out into rounded tables in approaching the dividing ridge. From the dividing ridge, the line would descend into the Wangaehu Valley at or near the point at which it emerges from the plains. The distance from the Mangawhero bend to the plains is from nine to ten miles, and the rise to the dividing ridge from 250 feet to 300 feet. The total distance from Wanganui to the plains by this route would be certainly under fifty miles, and I believe will not greatly exceed forty-five miles.

The cost of forming a pack-horse track along it would be somewhat more (probably nearly £100 more) than I previously estimated. This arises from several causes. In the first place, those who lately visited the Murimotu placed it rather too much to the southward of Ruapehu, and allowed too much by several miles for the slope of the mountain. These and the necessary divergences from a direct line make the total length a little more than I had calculated on. Secondly, the bush and scrub are infinitely more dense, and more encumbered with supplejack and bramble, than anything I had ever before met with, except in an occasional patch about the head of a bush gully or on the banks of a stream. But the principal source of extra expense is the wet weather, which evidently prevails in this as in other high wooded regions, and for which a very liberal allowance must be made. Even at this the very driest time of the year, we had only five days without rain during the whole month we were absent from Wanganui; while on the other hand we were storm-stayed in our tent the whole of six days and great part of several others, and travelled in a continual shower-bath all the rest of the time.

As far as the formation of the ground is concerned, there is no difficulty whatever in constructing an excellent line of road, and I was particularly struck by the utter absence of swamp; in fact, except a few heads of raupo on the margin of the lakes, I did not see a trace of swamp all the way from Ongahi to the end of the line. It is only here and there among manuka scrub that there is even a soft place, and this arising merely from the rain saturating ground loosened by the rooting of the pigs. The only difficulty of any consequence consists in the scarcity of material for road metal; but this is a fault which seems to be common to all the blue-clay country hereabouts. The rapids of the Mangawhero and Wangaehu and the flats about the lower part of the line will afford a large amount of granite boulders and coarse shingle, which may be broken up, and I saw one thin seam of gravel in the bed of a stream near Pukekahu; but for the last fifteen miles before reaching the plains I could find no indication of anything harder than a soft sandstone, and but little even of that. The metal for a road would therefore probably have to be brought from the plains and foot of Ruapehu, where it can be obtained in any quantity; but there would be no necessity to metal a pack-horse track, the immense quantity of scrub adjoining it being sufficient to keep it in a rough state of repair for many years to come. I found that the country through which the line goes is almost as much a *terra incognita* to the Natives as to ourselves. From Okuraponga upwards I sought in vain for the smallest trace of the country ever having been occupied, and am satisfied it has never been so. The younger men of the tribe to whom it belongs, and who live near the Wangaehu Bridge, admit that they have never seen it, and know nothing of it except by the report of three or four of the old men; and these last have not visited it for so many years, that either their recollection of it is very imperfect, or they are ignorant of the changes that have latterly taken place. For instance, these old men all agreed in describing the country about Paparoa (a very long and turbulent cascade at the bend of the valley) as being covered with fern and a few tutu bushes. This was probably a correct description fifteen or twenty years ago, but since then the pigs have destroyed nearly all trace of fern, and its place has been supplied by koromiko. This, again, is now fast dying out and giving place to larger scrub, among which forest trees growing up indicate that, unless occupied, the whole district will in a few years be a mass of scrubby bush. At present it would make excellent cattle runs, and the construction of a track through it would of course tend greatly to hasten its occupation for that or some similar purpose. From some of the high points to which we climbed to examine the Mangawhero Valley, and particularly from some on the dividing ridge near the end of the line, we got a good view of the country to the