

1873.
NEW ZEALAND.

RAILWAY: FOXHILL TO GREYMOUTH.

(INSTRUCTIONS TO AND REPORT BY MR. CALCUTT ON THE LANDS PROPOSED AS SECURITY.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

The UNDER SECRETARY to Mr. T. CALCUTT.

SIR,—

Public Works Office, Wellington, 7th June, 1873.

I am directed by the Hon. Mr. Richardson to request you to proceed by first steamer to Nelson, and to place yourself in communication with His Honor the Superintendent of Nelson.

From the enclosed letter* of introduction, you will learn that His Honor has been requested to afford you every assistance for rapidly inspecting and reporting generally on the lands proposed to be granted to the Government as security for the suggested Southern Railway in the Nelson Province.

You will be good enough to take the earliest opportunity to travel as far as practicable over the line of railway, which will be pointed out to you, with the view principally of ascertaining whether any, and if so, what proportion, is fit for settlement and cultivation; and also what proportion (roughly) is really good timbered land, easily accessible to the railway. The land proposed to be granted and pointed out for inspection is in the watershed of the valleys through which the railway is intended to run.

As soon as possible after your inspection, you will report to the Government, and return to Wellington.

I have, &c.,

JOHN KNOWLES,
Under Secretary.

Thomas Calcutt, Esq.

No. 2.

Mr. T. CALCUTT to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 5th July, 1873.

In accordance with the instructions contained in Mr. Knowles' letter to me of 7th June last, No. 810, directing me to proceed to Nelson to inspect certain lands proposed to be set aside for railway purposes between Foxhill (Nelson) and Greymouth (Westland), to ascertain principally whether any, and, if so, what proportion would be fit for settlement and cultivation, and also (roughly) what proportion was really good timber land, I have the honor to report that, accompanied by and under the guidance and direction of Messrs. Mackay and Sayle, gentlemen appointed respectively by His Honor the Superintendent of Nelson and by the Members of the "Inland Communication Committee," to point out the country, I have travelled through and over (so far as it is possible so to do for the dense bush) nearly all the valley and terrace lands lying between the watersheds of the Buller and Grey Rivers, from Foxhill to Point Elizabeth.

The route chosen by the gentlemen guiding me was from Foxhill over Spooner's Range, down Norris's Valley to a ford a little above the junction of the Motupiko and Motueka Rivers; thence along the Motupiko and Hope Valleys to Newport's, on to the junction of the Owen and Buller Rivers at Dillon's; thence along the north bank of the Buller River to its junction with the Mangles; and thence to a ford on the Buller at the Government Clearing, across to Rowe's at Hampden. From Rowe's we returned along the south bank of the Buller up the Mangles River, crossing the Blackwater and on to Mr. McGregor's Station on the Tiraumea Plains (the first open land I had seen since leaving Motueka Valley). From McGregor's we continued our way to Hunter's Station on the Upper Matakītaki. From Hunter's we proceeded down the plain for about four miles, crossing the Matakītaki, Glenroy, and Warbeck Rivers, to the homestead of Mr. Moonlight, situate at the junction of the Warwick and Marina Rivers, and on to Mr. Walker's Station. Here is the Marina Plain, con-

* This letter was a merely formal one, and was not copied.

taining about 23,000 acres of open land, and now leased to Mr. Walker. From the plain we pursued a return course for about ten miles, when we crossed the Matakītaki River, continuing our journey down the banks of that river past Hunter or May's Store back to Rowe's at Hampden. Leaving Rowe's we again crossed the Matakītaki, proceeding down the south side of the Buller to Ribbie's, passing the homesteads of Mr. Handyside and other freehold and leasehold settlers. Crossed the Buller at Ribbie's, along to Oxnan's; thence still along the river bank, fording the Newton River, eventually reaching the Lyell Township. Crossed the Buller here for the last time, and on to Christy's Ferry near the junction of the Inangahua and Buller Rivers. From thence our course lay for above four miles alongside the Inangahua to the landing, where we crossed the river continuing our journey to Reefton. Starting from Reefton we passed Square Town; on through the valley of the Little Grey; through McHardy's run to the junction of the Little and Main Grey Rivers; over some open land known as "Totara Flat," through the main Grey Valley, the Ahaura Plain, to the town of Ahaura. From thence the route lay across and down the Ahaura River, Nelson Creek, and on to the Arnold (the river dividing the Province of Nelson from Westland). From this point, for convenience of travelling, the road was followed to Greymouth.

It must be understood that in thus describing the route taken I have done so in the shortest manner possible to be intelligible, and that the description does not include the various deviations made by me (wherever practicable) to thoroughly examine the nature of the soil and timber. By the courtesy of His Honor the Superintendent of Nelson, I am enabled to forward with this report a very excellent map prepared by Mr. Wrigg, which will be of great service in showing the line of country traversed; the amount of forest land; the rivers; and the open land.

I now propose to give the opinion I have formed as to the area of the level forest and open land in the many valleys and terraces I passed through and over, between the two watersheds; in so doing, however, I hope it may be understood that in traversing a heavily timbered country it is most difficult to get a thoroughly correct estimate of the areas in the numerous small valleys. I have given the question full consideration, and, kindly assisted, as I was, by Mr. Woolley and other gentlemen connected with the Nelson Government Survey Staff, I believe my figures may, in the aggregate, be confidently relied on.

I understand that the land (through the route taken) from Foxhill to Newport's, a distance of eighteen miles, for a considerable distance on both sides of the proposed line, has been sold. I thus start from that point, namely eighteen miles from Foxhill, and take the forest land first:—

	Acres.
From Newport's to Dillon's	5,000
„ Dillon's to Government Clearing	5,000
„ Rowe's to McGregor's	500
„ McGregor's to Moonlights	4,000
„ Junction of the Marina, and Warwick to the Buller	4,000
„ May's Store, Matakītaki, to Rowe's	2,500
„ Rowe's to Ribbie's	1,500
„ Ribbie's to Newton River, and up Matiri	5,000
„ Newton to Christy's	2,500
„ Christy's to Watershed of Little Grey	60,000
„ Reefton Saddle to junction of Main and Little Grey	18,000
„ Junction of Greys to Alexander River	15,000
„ „ „ to the Arnold	14,000
„ Junction of Arnold to Lake Brunner	5,000
„ „ „ to Point Elizabeth	5,000
On the Ahaura	9,000
	<hr/> 156,000
The open land I estimate as follows:—	
McGregor's, Tiraumea Plain	3,000
O'Laughlan's Flat	500
Hunter's	3,000
Horse Terrace	50
Frog Flat	200
Marina Plain	23,000
Upper Matiri	6,000
Little Grey	10,000
Grey to Alexander	6,000
Ahaura Plains (including Kopara)	6,000
	<hr/> 57,750

A gross total of 213,750 acres, of comparatively level forest and open land, is thus arrived at, out of which (as I learn from information supplied at my request from the office of the Superintendent of Nelson) 6,000 acres of the very best of this land has been sold in small quantities, and 5,409 acres are held under agricultural lease, subject to the power by the lessee to purchase the fee-simple thereof at 20s. per acre, any time within the first three years of his term. Making these deductions from my totals, we have a net total of 202,341 acres, of river flat, low terrace, forest, and open lands, within the watersheds.

Mr. Wrigg, in his report of 31st March, 1868, addressed to the Provincial Secretary of Nelson Province, states that the total flat land which would probably come within the land proposed to be given to the company constructing the line, would be 152,000 acres.

Mr. A. D. Dobson, Provincial Engineer to the Nelson Government, in a report to the Inland Communication Committee, under date 23rd December, 1872, states the quantity of land available for settlement at 222,000 acres.

Mr. T. Mackay, one of the gentlemen who accompanied me over the land, states in a report of his to the same Committee on 13th December last, the number of acres that can be utilized at 261,000, but confines the quantity adapted for agriculture at 51,000 acres only.

My estimate of flat, low terrace, forest, and open land is, as above stated, 213,750 acres; or, deducting the area sold and leased with purchasing clause, 202,341 acres.

It will thus be seen that out of the four different estimates, made at different times, and, so far as I am concerned, without the least interchange of opinion with the other gentlemen, there is no difference of opinion calculated to influence the matter to any material degree.

The forest land has growing thereon some very fine black and red birch, white, red, and black pines, and totara. The black birch, however, predominates to a very large degree, the next in number being, so far as I could observe, the white pine and black pines; next to the pines I should place the totara, some of which are the finest I ever saw. The best, I think, are in and around the Valley of the Inangahua. Some of the birch trees will measure 12 and 13 feet round at two feet from the ground, and run 70 to 80 and 90 feet high. The soil of the forest land generally is very light and poor, especially where the birch grows; indeed it may be truthfully asserted that in many places where the finest birch trees are found there is literally no soil—nothing but a carpet of moss and leaves, immediately underneath which are small boulder stones, shingle and clay, utterly useless in a very large proportion for any agricultural purpose whatever.

The timber, as I before observed, is excellent, and therein, and therein alone, as I thoroughly believe, is the only value of eight-tenths of the birch forest lands, and even that value (whatever it may be), without good and rapid means of communication, is very problematical. As a matter of opinion, I think that, with suitable and rapid means of communication with some good seaport, all the tolerably level and terrace forest land, one mile on either side of the railway (so long as any large river has not to be crossed), would realize 40s. per acre on an average; but beyond that distance, many years must I fear elapse before it would be of hardly any value. The land upon which pines and totara grow is better soil, although even that is light and sandy at the best, and not at all likely to stand a succession of crops. With some few exceptions, the best forest land within the watersheds is in and about the Valley of the Matakitaiki and Buller, near Rowe's, at Hampden and Oxnan's, and again six miles or so from the Lyell, down the Inangahua and Grey Valleys.

The cost of clearing this forest land fit for the plough would average from £10 to £15 per acre. Some of it could be sufficiently cleared for the sowing of grass seeds, leaving all the trees, stumps, and large roots in the ground, for from £4 to £6 per acre, but not less. In the face of such figures, the general correctness of which I maintain cannot be truthfully disputed, I need do no more than submit them to show how utterly fallacious it is to suppose for one moment that this forest land, even if the soil was all that could be desired, would, for generations to come, be utilized in any large degree for agriculture in its proper intent and meaning. Even from a pastoral point of view, the clearing would cost, as I before stated, £4 to £6, to which must be added £2 10s. at least for necessary grass seeds and labour, making a total cost of from £6 10s. to £8 10s. per acre, to which again must be added the cost of fencing. Such an undertaking would not commend itself to the capitalist or farmer, and to the man of small means it becomes practically impossible.

The open land is on the whole very poor also. Some small patches here and there have good soil, but the proportion of good land to the whole is very small, and when found is in some instances on river beds liable to be flooded and even swept away, as I saw had been the case already. The principal open land is a track of 23,000 acres, known as the Marina Plains, and, as I was informed in Nelson, very rich agricultural land. Such, however, is not the case. This plain is (as was all the other open land I saw) very patchy. It has been said the half of it is good agricultural land. In one sense this is probably nearly correct, but the true position is not made clear by such an assertion. In one spot may be found a piece of fair land (none of it first-class), comprising possibly 100 to 300 acres. Then we have perhaps a similar area of bare shingly land, through which no plough could be got. Next another piece of ploughable land, and again its opposite, and so on. I think it extremely doubtful if any one farm of 600 acres of good land in one block could be found on the whole plain. Moreover, its value as agricultural land is materially regulated by its position. As it now is, there is no way whatever of getting to it from any proper road, except by means of a wretched pack-track, just wide enough for one horse, and distant twenty to thirty miles from any centre of communication, thus practically shutting out all possibility of carrying on agricultural pursuits to any extent. The centre of this plain would be distant thirty-five miles from the Buller at its junction with the Matakitaiki, the nearest probable point at which an available railway station will be. Thus it is apparent that to convey produce from the plains to a railway station without roads and bridges is impossible, and to make such a road, and bridge even the smaller rivers and creeks, would in my opinion cost more than the value of the whole plain. For pastoral purposes, the present lessee, as I am informed, pays an annual rent of threepence per acre; but as Mr. Walker was from home, I cannot pledge myself to its strict accuracy, although I believe such is the case.

The same argument applies *pro rata* to Mr. McGregor's 3,000 acres (of which he is the owner of 700 acres of the best of it). This piece of land is distant fourteen miles or so from the nearest point a railway station (if brought *via* the Hope Valley) would be; and the value of the 2,300 acres (balance of the 3,000) is not worth one-half the amount required to make the necessary dray road to connect with the railway. Mr. Hunter's open land would also be under the same disadvantage—namely, distance from railway communication. The pieces of open land referred to in my schedule as O'Laughlan's Flat, Horse Terrace, and Frog Flat, are too insignificant to call for any comment. The open land on the Matiri I was unable, on account of the dense bush, through which man and horse could not make way, to reach. It is situate up the Matiri River, about fifteen miles from the junction with the Buller, and the same distance from the contemplated line of railway. Not being able to personally inspect the

land, I shall take the most liberal view, and assume, in fairness to the Province, that it is good land, and worth £1 per acre. Admitting this, the fact of there being no road whatever, not even a bush track, renders it either in the present or future of little value. At present it cannot be reached, and to make a road would cost five times its value. A large proportion of the 10,000 acres on the Little Grey, generally known as McHardy's Run, is very light and poor, a considerable area near Square Town being utterly useless for either grass or corn growing. The open land between the Grey and Ahaura Town up to Mackley's is of much the same character—namely, very light shingly land. Wherever, as in the Totara Flat and some other few spots, anything like decent land existed, I found upon inquiry that it was private property.

Taking, therefore, the piece of country as a whole, and viewing it from an agricultural and pastoral point of view, it is not, in my opinion, adapted for the permanent settlement and support of a large number of people. That in some future time, when rapid and cheap communication is opened up, its timber will produce once for all a considerable revenue, I have no doubt; but that the land generally will be tilled within the present or next generation is not probable. There are so many millions of acres in the Colony of so much better land yet for sale, as to effectually prohibit any practical person from attempting what is next to an impossibility. That the country is also very rich in minerals I think admits of no doubt; and judging from the many observations made to me by the people living in the districts, it is in its minerals that the true wealth of the country lies. This question, however, formed no part of my duty (nor do I assume any practical knowledge thereon), and I merely venture to give the gist of my opinion and observation for what it is worth.

Below I append a short statement of my approximate value of the bush and open land in its present state, and under present circumstances as to roads, &c.:—

Say 150,000 acres forest (after deducting the 6,000 sold or leased) with	£
the timber now growing thereon, at 15s.	100,000
Say 22,341 acres open (after deducting 5,409 acres sold or leased), at 20s. ...	22,341
Say 30,000 acres light soil and shingle, at 10s.	15,000
	<hr/>
	£137,341

Supposing a railway to be in existence, and running through the country, I should say that about two-thirds of the forest land would be increased in value threefold. The value of the open land I do not (for the reasons before mentioned) consider would be materially altered, except perhaps in the vicinity of the Ahaura.

Another item of considerable amount would be the cost of survey in the event of this immense track of forest land being cut up into sections for sale. At present persons applying for agricultural leases pay the cost of survey, but that practice could hardly be carried out in a general survey of land for sale, and even if it were, the purchaser would indirectly take it into consideration. In Otago the Government give one shilling and sixpence per chain (in addition to the regular survey fees) for all bush land. That item alone would represent a large percentage on the amount realized.

In conclusion, I beg to return my hearty thanks to Messrs. Mackay and Sayle for the uniform kindness and courtesy shown to me during a long and tedious journey of some 300 miles—in mid-winter—through a rough country, with execrable roads; a journey attended with considerable discomfort and danger.

I am, &c.,

THOMAS CALCUTT,

Railway Lands Assessor.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works.

PLAN
 of *answering Mr Calcutt's report*
of 5th July 1873.


REFERENCE

Blocks Land Sold _____

Available Bush Lands including }
 Valleys, Terraces and Low Hills. }

Open Iana covered with Grass, Fern
and Scrub, including Valleys, Terraces
and Low Hills.

Watershed of the Valleys through which
the proposed Railway will pass.

Extent of known Butler Coal-field ----- 

Shortest but most Costly line of Railway —————

Longest but least costly **IIIIIIIIII**

Line of Railway as proposed - - - - -

Scale

12 Miles to an Inch.

