

Mr. JAMES MCKERROW examined.

224. *The Chairman.*] What position do you occupy in the Government service?—Assistant Surveyor-General.

225. Have you any maps?—I have brought a tracing of the map of the Thames country.

226. Do you know anything of this country personally?—Yes. I have been down the Waitoa River as far as the lower end of the block known as Te Taupiri, and have been down on the Piako as far as the junction of the Waitoa and Piako Rivers.

227. How did you happen to go there?—I was down on departmental business.

228. Did you go by instructions of the Government?—Yes.

229. What was the instruction you got to go there?—My duties require me to visit the country in advance of the standard surveyors, so as to be able to direct them where to go in selection of stations and so forth, and I do so without any special instructions.

230. By whose direction were you sent to that particular district?—The Minister of Lands.

231. What were your instructions?—I could inform you, but I do not know whether you should ask that question exactly. But as there is nothing requiring to be hid, I can inform you. The business I was upon in this particular part of the country had no immediate direction from the department. It was confidential so far as the portion was concerned from the Minister of Lands. The nature of it was simply to inform him as to the nature of the country, its natural capabilities, and relative values.

232. Was there anything said about Mr. Whitaker's claim?—No; he was never mentioned to me at all, but I knew at the same time that had something to do with it.

233. Would you tell us what you saw here?—I saw all the country to which you refer as Drummond Hay's block, known also as Piako Block and Maukoro Block. I was reporting on it. From the point of a spur near its extreme north end I got a complete view of the great swamp which stretches right away to the Hauraki Gulf, between the Piako River on the one side and the base of the hills on the other. I was also down at Terapipipi's, on the Mangawara Stream, and stayed there all night; also round by Major George's, and down the Waitoa River, as already mentioned.

234. Do you think it would be suitable for settlement?—I do not think so. It is land very much like what is known as the Henley Estate in Otago. With a comprehensive system of drainage it might be valuable at some time.

235. Is there any dry land adjoining it?—None but the hills, which are miserably poor. Just along the river there is a fringe of good land, but its extent is small.

236. Can you tell us what Mr. Whitaker's claim is like?—It consists of a series of spurs, running down from an elevation of about 1,000 feet to the Piako River. These spurs consist principally of clay; it is very inferior soil. It has been apparently the site of an old kauri forest. There are gum diggings on it, and I picked up some pieces of kauri gum. It is very inferior land. The vegetation upon it consists of fern, stunted manuka scrub, a little tutu, with bush in the gullies; there are no natural grasses.

237. Then what about the low land?—There is a margin of a few chains along the Piako River of very fertile land, but it is very limited in extent.

238. Do you know the 700 acres of Maukoro Reserve which the Natives claim?—Yes.

239. What is the nature of that?—It consists of that narrow margin of fertile ground along the river; the spurs are very poor. There is also fringing the river, or running parallel to it, at a distance of a few chains, a considerable amount of kahikatea growing out of the stream.

240. *Sir G. Grey.*] Is that of value there?—No.

241. *The Chairman.*] Did you see many Natives located there when you were on that land?—I think I saw five.

242. Did they seem to desire to get this land in exchange for the Te Punga Block?—I had no conversation with them on the subject. I rather tried to be unknown. I was informed by the guide who was with me, that it would be rather dangerous if I was known to be a Government surveyor.

243. Who was the gentleman with you?—Mr. Crawford, the hotelkeeper. He could talk Maori. That was in June. Tarapipipi has apparently abandoned that settlement [points to map], and has shifted down here to near where the Mangawara issues from the Piako Bush.

244. Then he is outside of Whitaker's boundary altogether?—Yes.

245. He has abandoned Whitaker's Block, and is now located on the Mangawara?—He has abandoned his settlement on the Piako River, and is now settled on the Mangawara, which is six miles from the Piako. He has got a dray track right down to the Piako River, and I was told receives his goods and ships his produce here [points to map].

246. Could you tell us anything about the nature of the Punga Block?—There is a margin of several chains of dry land along the Piako on one side and the Waitoa on the other. The intermediate land is swampy, but apparently could be easily drained. There is a considerable fall.

247. Is the soil good on the banks of the river?—Yes, very fair; a sort of sandy soil.

248. Would it be available for settlement?—I think so. There is only a very small extent of ground immediately available, but the rest would require a large capital in order to drain it.

249. Can you tell me about the value of the Punga land?—Taking it all right over, I should say 12s. 6d. an acre. If you were to allow persons to select along the river, I should say £1. I value 2,500 acres at £1 an acre?

250. What is the value of the land down towards the Gulf?—It is worth nothing at all, in one sense, until you expend several pounds per acre. It is only of value to capitalists. It would ruin a poor man. Up here, at Te Punga, there is a considerable fall, but when you get near the sea you have not the same outfall. Since you desire me to state a price, I would say 12s. 6d. for land up to Te Punga, and 7s. 6d. down here.

251. What would you value Drummond Hay's (Whitaker's) claim at?—7s. 6d. Some of it I would not have at a gift. I would not go and settle on it. I would not advise any friend of mine to