

the Yards Company were recently about to erect large yards at Tinwald. We called for tenders, and found that we could get the timber larger and better from Alford Forest than from Oxford; but we had to accept almost all of it from Oxford, because the carriage was so much cheaper.

360. Do you not think that the construction of the line as far as it has gone will alter that state of things?—Not as far as it has gone. The line was open then, and, although we accepted one tender from Alford Forest, we had, in the end, to complete it by getting the timber brought down from Oxford. I think it has been given in evidence before you, from others who know better than I do, that a great deal of timber in use in Ashburton has come from the Bluff and other places in the south.

361. Do you know if the Alford Forest is capable of supplying the demand?—Yes, as far as timber suitable for fencing and firewood is concerned. The timber fit for sawing is very limited, although there is some.

362. Do you consider that the supply in Alford Forest will last long?—It would last a considerable time: there are at least five thousand or six thousand acres untouched. A great deal has been destroyed by fire which might have been used, but to what extent that has reduced the quantity I am not able to say.

363. There appears to be eight thousand acres of Government Forest Reserve: is there much timber on that?—Over parts of it, but the fire has run through it, and I am uncertain as to what remains. I think there is a considerable amount still under timber.

364. There is a question of two routes for an extension of the railway—one up the south side of the South Branch of the Ashburton, the other to go towards Bowyer's Stream: have you any idea which of these would be the most useful to the neighbourhood in general, not including only that part of the district?—I think there is no question that the one to Bowyer's Stream and to the Forest would be much the best in every way. First of all, it would open up a very rich agricultural district; secondly, it would give a good supply of timber for fencing and firewood purposes; thirdly, it would give a good supply of stone of various qualities for building purposes; and, lastly, it would open up a supply of coal. Now, of these four I could give you reliable information, of the two latter particularly. Of the coal, the Springfield coal sells freely in Ashburton, but it cannot be got. The supply is so uncertain that you cannot procure it. There is one very valuable pit of the Mount Somers coal, which I have worked for several years myself; it is, in places, exposed for a thickness of 40ft. on a gully. We used to take drays underneath, clear off the soil, and take out several tons at a time. The cost of working it was merely nominal. There used to be a fair local demand for it, but when the railway was opened from Malvern Hills the carriage was so much cheaper to Ashburton by rail, that the pit I refer to was almost shut up. The cost of cartage to Ashburton was greater than that for which the Malvern Hills coal could be delivered, and this practically closed the pit.

365. Where is the pit situated?—That particular one is situated up the Ashburton, about four miles above Hood's hotel, at Mount Somers Township; but there are a number of other seams, apparently of similar quality, under Alford Forest: therefore the Bowyer's Stream extension would open up timber as well as coal.

366. Is there any reliable information of other deposits besides the one you mention?—Yes, there are a number—I know of several myself—varying from 6ft. to 10ft., situated throughout the bush. I may mention that Captain Hutton and my nephew, who is Assistant Colonial Geologist, were up there the other day, and they pointed out to the residents a seam of coal which they believed would be as good as the best Malvern coal.

367. Was it any size?—It was some few feet in thickness, cropping out of the side of the hill.

368. Seeing that there is an objection to the cartage on the ground of expense, do you think that the line, if it were extended to Bowyer's Stream, would be used for carrying coal?—Yes, largely. I think that coal, timber, and stone would all be brought down by it.

369. The extension proposed would only reduce the cartage as at present existing by 3 miles 50 chains?—Still, that would make a considerable difference in the cost of delivery at Ashburton, as it is uphill and across two rivers. With regard to the agricultural land, which I mentioned as one of the reasons for extending the line, I may say that last week I saw some crops of wheat there that were over 6ft. high. The owners estimated the yield as at least sixty bushels an acre. I was with a practical man, and he fully agreed with me that the yield would be equal to that estimate.

370. The crops alone give a very intermittent traffic for the railway: do you think there is any chance of the district being settled with people so that the traffic would be increased?—That is, I think, exactly the class of country that would be settled, as it is good strong land, and all that is required to bring population is convenient means of transit.

371. Have you any idea of the railway requirements farther south—is there any extension that can assist the settlers there?—There is good land south that by-and-by would afford room for a large population. At present there are not a great number of people there. The land is in the hands of large landholders, who hold blocks of four or five thousand acres each.

372. Do you think the extension up towards the Gorge would help them at all?—No, I do not see that it could. I do not think that the extension either up the Gorge or south would be of such general use to the railway or to the outside public as the extension back to Alford Forest would be, because in whatever direction the railway goes it would benefit those living there, but the extension to Alford Forest would, I think, be of advantage to the whole district, by giving them very much cheaper timber, coal, and building stone. With regard to the building stone, I some years ago submitted samples to the Cathedral Commission at the time when they invited samples to be sent in, and the Mount Somers stone was selected out of them all as the best. I was asked to supply it, but the want of railway communication or sufficient means of cheap transit prevented it from being used. It was, however, put on the records as the best out of all the samples sent in, and an offer was sent to me to know if I could supply the stone for the cathedral. I then sent samples to