

53. Has there not been some discussion by the officers about the range being unsuitable?—Never, to my knowledge; and I think the Commission should call some officer on that point.

54. *The Chairman.*] We are anxious to get more information from them?—I will give you my view of the matter. I was a certificated instructor of musketry when in Her Majesty's service, and therefore an expert in that particular branch of the service. The Polhill Gully range as a range is absolutely useless, but for training it cannot be beaten. The fire is up two gullies, which are perfectly safe. It is not a good range, and no officer would tell you it was. Colonel Butts suggested one at Kaiwarra, but any one who knows the New Zealand Volunteer knows the difficulty there is to get him out to any distance. It is also handy for the Permanent Force, and was invaluable as a grazing-ground for the horses of the Defence and Police Departments, which, prior to leasing from Dr. Johnston, had to be sent to the Hutt or Porirua when turned out for a spell. As one who is an expert, and has the interests of the Volunteers at heart, I consider it a capital purchase.

55. *Mr. Macdonald.*] There is one other point. We have been told that complaints have been made that the range is unsafe?—That never occurred in my time. Some man who owns land there said his cow was killed, and swore the Volunteers shot it. Captain Coleman made inquiries and found it was not so, but that the cow died of a broken neck.

56. You are aware, of course, that there is a road laid off by the Native Land Court?—Yes? by the Native Land Court.

57. Do I understand that the Government closed this road?—Yes.

58. But supposing any one chose to walk on that road; that is the point? There is a public road there, laid off by the Native Land Court. If that road is extremely close to the rifle-range, is not that an element of danger to any one passing?—The road is over hills, and has no outlet except to sections of Native reserve, and would therefore never be formed. As regards safety of ranges, I will give you an instance. You know Stirling, Mr. Macdonald, and you no doubt know where the rifle-range is. Well, the men from the dépôt used to fire there when the park at the back was crammed full of people. If they came too close to the range, and were shot, it was their own fault. The only objection from a Volunteer's point of view to this range is that it is only 600 yards long; but I think if you can train men to pot any one at 600 yards you do very well. It has been said it is unsuitable for the new magazine rifle; but, for the matter of that, there is no range in the whole colony fit for it. You would want a clear distance of four miles. You are not likely to find that, so that the objection on that account is an absurdity.

59. *Mr. Baker.*] I see by Mr. Mackay's approval of 26th August, 1890, that negotiations were commenced nearly a month before his valuation was announced?—Will you look at the 15th August; you will find Captain Russell minuted that.

60. I only want to get at the point where the price was originally fixed?—The price was discussed between Mr. Kirk and myself. I was satisfied with it. Mr. Mackay's opinion was got before the bargain was closed. If you look you will find a long letter from Mr. Mackay about it on the papers. I was aware that at the time these negotiations were first entered into with Mr. Kirk that the land was going piecemeal into the hands of Europeans, and at the end of four years a very much larger sum would have to be paid than there would be if bought from the Natives. I think I am pretty well borne out by transactions in other parts of the colony where the Government had to get land for defence purposes. They always seemed to pay through the nose for it. As much as £140 an acre was paid for it at Ngahauranga. So you see, with a knowledge of all these facts, I have made a very good bargain.

61. I apprehend you will attend again, if required?—Yes but please give me a little longer notice.

SATURDAY, 7TH MAY, 1892.

Mrs. SIMEON examined.

62. *The Chairman.*] Your name?—Agnes Simeon.

63. You are owner of some land in the neighbourhood of this rifle-range in Polhill Gully?—Yes.

64. What land do you own?—Ten acres and three-quarters.

65. Do you know the numbers of the sections?—Yes; 4 and 5.

66. Are you affected in any way by the Government purchasing this land for a rifle-range?—My position is not affected now, but will be when the Government lease is out.

67. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Will you tell us how you are going to be affected?—My land is suitable for building sites, and I intend building.

*The Chairman:* Kindly be a little more explicit. Here is a plan, point out what you mean. [Mrs. Simeon showed the Commissioners how she would be affected, and pointed out her property on the plan.]

68. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Have you ever made an offer to the Government?—Yes, I have made an offer to the Government, but have not had any reply.

69. So we understand. But tell us, Mrs. Simeon: this road on the top, is it ever likely to be made?—Yes, it will be made as soon as the lease is up.

70. Who would make it?—I would, and open up a track. I am entitled to a road.

71. You would not be a party to advise the Government to close that road up, and, so long as you retain Sections 4 and 5, you are not prepared to allow this road to be closed up?—So long as I am in possession I will not allow it.

72. Do you consider it an element of danger to have a range so close to your Sections 4 and 5?—Yes. It is the reason I am here to-day, to protest against the purchase of the range. The road has been compensated for by Wi Tako, Mohi Parai, Te Awhe Parai, Tare Waiahi, Ihaka te Rou, Tamati Wiremu te Whero, and myself. We gave up an acre and a quarter each.