

You stated, Mr. Chairman, that you only wanted me to deal with the general character of the country. The surveyors will give you more expert evidence than I can give. We found every inch of the country, so far as we could see, fit for settlers, who would occupy larger or smaller areas as the case might be. Some of the river valleys were, in my opinion, more suitable for dairy operations than any country I have seen in New Zealand. It had been stated before I went to see the country that we would find nothing but spurs covered with black birch. With the exception of the ridges at the Tangarakau River, I saw no birch ridges whatever; and my own opinion is that, after leaving the pumice, there is not an acre of bad land from the point where we left the pumice at Ohura to Stratford. On several occasions, whilst passing over the route, I climbed up to the top of the flag station, or trig. station as it is called, and took a general survey of the country, and, so far as I could ascertain, the country within the reach of the human eye was very much the same in character as that we had travelled over. I may say that my evidence is not that of an expert, except as one who has had a good deal of experience in judging of the quality of bush and other land in the North Island; and it was for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not the country was suitable for settlement that I travelled over and inspected it. I am satisfied that there is no country in New Zealand, not even on the base of Mount Egmont, more suitable, as a whole, for small settlers, especially those engaged in dairy work in the North Island. So far as engineering difficulties are concerned, Mr. Hursthouse, C.E., and Mr. Munro Wilson, C.E., will speak of any engineering difficulties. I do not know anything about them at all, except so far as a layman can judge, and I must say that I could not see where the engineering difficulties came in. There are no large rivers to bridge, and, so far as I could ascertain, there could only be one or two short cuttings. Out of the distance we travelled from the point of divergence at Ongarue to Stratford, with the exception of the seven or eight miles of pumice at the commencement, which I have already described, I do not think there is a single acre of bad country. Of course my printed reports go more fully into the matter, but I think I have given the Committee a clear understanding as to why I went, and that I am thoroughly satisfied the country is fit for immediate and profitable settlement.

6. Having travelled over both routes, Mr. Lawry, and looking to the extent of work already executed on the central route, to which of these two routes would you give the preference for the construction of a trunk line in the interests of the colony, putting aside all local considerations?—I would give the preference to the Stratford route, because it goes through good country, and the other one goes through bad, with the exception of the southern end of the central route, that is as far as Turangarere. There has been a large sum spent in railway construction on this section, and rightly too, as it opens up good land. If you would allow me, I would like to assign very briefly the reasons why I am opposed to the construction of the railway through bad country, and I would take our own railway in Auckland—the railway between Auckland and Te Awamutu, at the southern end of our settlement on the confiscated boundary-line; with the exception of a bit of volcanic country, extending southward about twelve or fourteen miles from the city, and a little bit of good country about Pukekohe, our railway runs through a country that is of no use whatever from a settlement point of view; consequently between Drury and Ngaruawahia there is but little settlement-traffic to the railway, except that which comes from small settlements, of which Pukekohe is the centre; and were it not for the traffic from the Huntly Coal-mines, my own impression is that the railway would not pay much more than working-expenses. Considering that matter fully, I have come to the conclusion that it is folly, at present, at any rate, to make a railway through a country where it could not foster, or create and foster, settlement upon the land. I may say that I realise that it is out of the question to make either route for the present. Unless we go in for another era of borrowing we cannot have either one of them. I do think it is necessary that this inquiry should be made, and that the evidence we have should be placed on record, so as to be available when the country determines to go in for future borrowing for railway construction.

7. Such being your general view of the position, Mr. Lawry, and looking to the character of the land between Hunterville and Turangarere, do you see any objection to a further expenditure of money in extending the railway beyond Hunterville?—No, Sir. If you have the money, the portion of railway to be constructed would be about thirty miles, in round numbers, from the point where the present contract ends.

8. An expenditure on that length, I gather from your remarks, would be justifiable?—Oh, yes! I would very strongly support it.

9. That is, whether it is to form a portion of the main trunk route or not?—Yes, that is so. It hits the main road to Napier, and I presume it is a very good road to Napier, because I saw heavy wool wagons which take loads of wool, &c., to Napier. In any case, whether we decide in favour of the Stratford route or the central route, I am firmly convinced that the railway should, when funds are available, be constructed to Turangarere.

10. Then, until the colony is prepared to push through a main trunk line of railway, there would be no material advantage in extending the line southwards from Upper Mokau?—Well, no, I think not, unless we are prepared to go on with it.

11. That is, the country in that locality is too poor for settlement?—Yes, Sir.

12. *Mr. Blake.*] I understand, from your evidence, that between Turangarere and Ohakune the land is of fair quality?—No, Sir, it is pumice right across the Murimutu Plains, and only becomes good land when we reach a point about four miles south of Ohakune, and that bit of good land about Ohakune would be, as I have already described, in my opinion, best served by the road made to Pipiriki on the Wanganui River, where the steamer trades between Wanganui and that place.

13. *Mr. Carncross.*] The land from Ongarue to Mangaotuku is Native land, of which the Government have not yet acquired any portion?—A very large portion of it is in the hands of