

the country, have made their selections immediately contiguous to the line: Marton No. 5, 10,000 acres; Marton No. 3, 10,000 acres; Marton No. 4, 10,000 acres; military settlers' block, 6,000 acres; Waimarino Special Settlement, 7,200 acres; and there is another settlement—Bulls, the acreage of which is not given, but I think it is 8,000 acres. These are in the immediate vicinity of the line, and I think prove most indisputably that the character of the country in the immediate vicinity of the central route is good. I do not desire to give any further evidence; I merely wish to furnish this map as a corroboration of my statement made yesterday.

Mr. JOHN FREEMAN SICELY, sworn and examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are a surveyor?—Yes; an authorised surveyor, land valuer, and agent, residing at Marton.

2. Are you acquainted with the country that the North Island central railway route is proposed to cross?—Yes, from Marton to a little beyond Kerioi.

3. That is about sixty miles north of Rangatira?—Yes.

4. Have you any knowledge of the country that the Ngaire route will traverse?—No, I have not. I have surveyed blocks near there, but I have never been on the actual route itself.

5. Then your evidence will practically be limited to about eighty miles north of Marton?—Yes, eighty or ninety miles north of Marton.

6. Will you tell the Committee what you think of that country as suitable for settlement?—The Paraekaretu Block, containing 46,975 acres, was purchased from the Natives for £9,328 15s. 5d. The present value is up to between £8 and £9 per acre.

7. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Is the increased price the result of the railway or of insufficient original purchase-money?—At that time the price paid was considered fair.

8. *The Chairman.*] The present value must be the result of public works expenditure and the opening up of country for settlement?—Yes, the facilities offered by the construction of the railway line.

9. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Has there been much money spent?—About £2 an acre would represent the value to the owners themselves. Then the Rangatira Block, 7,500 acres: that was obtained for 14s. 3½d. per acre. The Hapopo Block, 12,000 acres, was purchased for 14s. 9d. an acre. That land has since gone up to £7 or £8 an acre.

10. *The Chairman.*] In both these blocks?—Yes. The Otairi No. 1b Block, 12,560 acres, purchased for 6s. 4½d. an acre; Otairi No. 2b Block, 3,938 acres, purchased at 7s. an acre. Some of that land was recently sold for £4 an acre, and resold directly afterwards at £5 10s., owing to the railway. There were 3,000 acres sold at £4 an acre. The Otairi No. 1e Block, of 9,175 acres, was bought for 7s. 2½d. an acre. Part of this land has been resold for between £3 and £4 an acre. The Otairi No. 3 Block, 3,772 acres, bought for 9s. 4½d. an acre, is worth about £8 an acre now.

11. In general terms, state how many years have elapsed since these blocks were purchased from the Natives?—Well, from 1880 up to the present time; they have been purchased for ten or twelve years, and only recently some of them have been improved.

12. Consequent upon the construction of the North Island Trunk Railway?—No; being bush lands, they have all been more or less put down in grass.

13. How far are these lands removed from the present terminus?—The railway-line runs through two or three of them.

14. How far distant are most of them?—About ten miles.

15. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Would you advise all construction of railway to be stopped until after the whole of the Native land was purchased?—I would advise the line being formed to the south boundary of the Awarua Block.

16. *The Chairman.*] That is about twenty-five miles from Hünterville?—Six or seven miles beyond the proposed viaduct. [Plans of the Ohingaiti Township, situate twenty-six miles from Marton, produced.] That land was purchased for about £2 an acre. It was afterwards sold for an average of £140 an acre.

17. During the present year?—Yes.

18. Is there any other information you would like to furnish to the Committee?—Yes. The railway would enormously enhance the value of the Crown lands.

19. In what blocks?—Otamakapua, Waimarino, Maungakaretu, and Mangoira - Ruahine Blocks. The most of this land has been recently taken up by the small farmers' associations. Five or six of them have taken up blocks of land in Otamakapua and Mangoira, the traffic on which will drain into the line by the proposed Otara Bridge. About nine associations have taken up land in the Waimarino Block. The railway would also drain traffic from the Awarua Block. At the present time the Natives have 107,700 sheep and 700 head of stock running there. By extending the line on to Taumararui it would tap a magnificent totara forest, estimated to comprise 30,000 acres, and valued at £25 an acre.

20. The Awarua Block has not yet been acquired from the Natives?—The Natives have just made an offer to sell 100,000 acres, or about one-third of the whole of it to the Government.

21. The block, as shown on the map, is about 205,000 acres?—Yes.

22. And 100,000 acres of which they offer for sale to the Government?—Yes; the land which they offer to the Government comprises the southern portion of the block. The price has yet to be arranged.

23. As the price is not yet fixed it would hardly be wise to extend the railway until after the price has been agreed to?—Only to the boundary of that block.

24. If you extend the railway even to the boundary of the block it must greatly enhance the price ultimately to be paid?—As a matter of fact, the line at the present time is under construction.

25. Not to the boundary?—Yes; under the co-operative system. The line itself is being constructed at the present time.