

483. You do not know of an instance?—No.
484. *Mr. Oliphant.*] You went over the ground with Mr. Macdonald?—Yes, over part of it. Mr. Macdonald and Mr. Young were riding, and I was on foot. I went part of the way.
485. Could you trace that fire as extending from the railway to the plantation?—No, I did not.
486. Did you go far enough along to see it cross the swamp?—No, I only went part of the way into the plantation.
487. You are aware that the fire commenced about the 52-mile post?—Yes.
488. On the day you came up did you see any trace of fire?—I was not there that day. It was some days afterwards that I arrived.
489. And you saw evidence of the fire?—Yes.
490. And it extended in the direction of the plantation?—Yes.
491. Have you ever seen a fire arise after a train went past? Witnesses have said that it frequently occurs that a fire is seen after the train goes past. Have you ever noticed that?—I am riding about pretty well every day, and I could not state any particular case of that kind that I have seen.
492. How long have you been an Inspector of Permanent-way?—Seven years.
493. And in the whole course of that time you have not seen a fire that you could attribute to sparks from engines?—No, I have not.
494. On the occasion of this fire did you see the Government plantation on fire?—I did not see any of the fires; they were extinguished before I arrived on the ground.
495. There would be considerable talk among the people as to the fires: was there no suggestion as to how the fire originated in the Government plantation?—Are you speaking of the fire at Young's?
496. Yes, and at the Government plantation?—The Government plantation was burnt, but I could not say when it was.
497. What was the cause of the Government plantation fire?—I could not say.
498. It is alongside the line?—Yes, the plantation adjoins the railway. Of course, after a fire starts it burns against the wind and with the wind, and one really cannot tell where it started.
499. Have you no cause to assign for these frequent fires?—I could not say how they happen. I could not say whether it is from engine-sparks, or from lighted matches thrown out of carriages, or from cigars thrown out. I know there were a lot of Maoris on the ground at the time. They sometimes want to burn off the ground, and they are cunning enough to do it after a train passes.
500. But they would not burn the Government plantation?—No, of course not.
501. You think it might have been caused by people smoking on the train?—Well, I could not say that.
502. And, as an Inspector of Permanent-way, you have no theory, even after some years' experience, as to how the two fires occurred?—I could not say. I was not there, and, of course, I came after the fire was out.
503. The remains of the fire showed that it had started near the line?—I cannot prove that. It might burn against the wind or with the wind, and you could not say that it started on the railway boundary.

JOHN JAMES CURBY HACKETT, sworn.

504. *Mr. Cooper.*] What are you, Mr. Hackett?—A porter at the Auckland Station.
505. What were you in December, 1896?—I was a platelayer in Mr. Farrell's gang.
506. Do you recollect the fire on the 15th December?—Yes.
507. Did you see the fire on that day?—I saw it in the middle of the swamp that evening, and next morning there was no sign of it.
508. About what time in the evening?—About half-past 5 or a little more.
509. Where was it then?—In the middle of the swamp.
510. How far from the railway-line?—A good distance off. I could not say exactly.
511. That fire burned for some time, I think?—Yes.
512. Were you there next morning?—Yes, I went over the length the next morning.
513. Was the fire out then?—Yes.
514. You are sure?—Yes, there was no sign of any fire.
515. Did you see the fire in the afternoon of the 16th?—Yes; I saw it strike up about mid-day.
516. Where?—Over in the forest.
517. You assisted to put it out?—Yes.
518. Did you see the fire on the other side of the line on the 15th?—No.
519. Do you know anything about the Maoris being about that place?—There were a few Maoris camped along the line. They had been hooking gum out of the swamp where the fire occurred.
520. You know that they had been hooking gum out of the swamp where the fire occurred?—Yes.
521. Up to how near the day of the fire had you seen those Maoris there?—I saw them there the day before, and I think I saw them afterwards.
522. Do you know what Maoris they were?—I knew a few of them.
523. Where did they go to afterwards?—I do not know.
524. Have you known the Maoris, in digging for gum along the line, to set fire to any place?—I have seen fires on the hills.
525. Near to the line?—Yes.