

The timber is acknowledged to be the most valuable crop the land will ever produce. On an attached sheet I show results of measurements actually taken to ascertain the number of trees per acre, their size, and variety. In its natural state, on Crown and Native lands combined, I reckon there were approximately as follows (*vide* attached tracing): Good milling timber, on flat and easy land, 62,700 acres: good milling timber, on undulating land, 11,600 acres; fair milling timber, on easy ground, 17,500 acres: total, 91,800 acres.

This block extends along the line of the proposed railway for about twenty miles, and no part of it is more than six miles off the line, with almost level access to it. The greater part of this area has been allotted to settlers, but a very large portion of the allotted land has not been occupied at all, or thrown up after a short occupation. Some is Crown land yet unallotted, and the remainder is Native land not yet acquired. The Native land is the Raetihi Block and Pakihi (17,450 acres), of which 13,640 acres contain good milling timber.

What I would suggest is that all sections containing good milling timber which are unallotted or forfeited should be reserved, as well as all Crown land of similar value; also, that all Native land suitable for milling should be reserved as soon as it is obtained. On all these lands the timber should be put up to tender only when the line reaches them; after being cut out they should be disposed of for grazing purposes.

There is plenty of rough land unsuitable for milling, but even more fitted for settlement than the heavy flat bush, that may be opened by pushing on the Raetihi-Ohura Road. This country, though rough, is covered with light, good-burning bush, and is much warmer than the flats. The timber on the coastal districts is being rapidly exhausted. The most important assets to the trunk railway are the Waimarino forests, and, if the bush is allowed to be destroyed in the present manner, by the time the railway reaches them much of the best timber will have disappeared.

I may mention that Mr. Perrin, of the Victorian Forest Department, was much struck by these facts.

Wanganui, 20th August, 1897.

G. T. MURRAY, Road Surveyor.

That is the end of Mr. Murray's report, but the Lands Department states, on exactly whose authority I am unable to say, that the estimate of the quantity of timber on this land is about 180,000 superficial feet per acre. If this estimate of the area of the timber-carrying land and the quantity of timber per acre is correct, then a royalty of 1s. per 100 ft. on this timber would pay for the construction of the whole of the North Island Main Trunk line several times over.

11. I understand it would mean £8,000,000 of money?—Yes, rather more; but, allowing a good margin, this forest alone would pay for the whole of the line from end to end twice over. The amount spent on the railway has been £692,300, and the amount required to complete it is £1,165,000.

12. *Mr. Hogg.*] The amount of the royalty would come to £4,000,000?—It would come to much more, but I am allowing a considerable margin.

13. *Mr. Lethbridge.* But if the settlers are going to fell the timber, by the time the railway reaches there the bush will end in smoke.

14. *The Chairman.*] Do you think, Mr. Blow, it would be possible to let small contracts to the settlers about Waimarino, Raitahi, and other places for the felling of the bush for a certain width, in order that it might be burnt and sown with grass, so as to open up the line, instead of laying down a road, and making a bush clearing on one side, which would make it so much easier for the survey work?—Where there has been no risk of injury to the adjoining forests, that is the course adopted. Of course, the totara stumps must be rooted out.

15. But on the occasion of the small timber being burnt up would it not save a great deal of labour by having the bush burnt in the ordinary way after felling, as if you were going to sow for pasture?—Where there is no risk of injury to the adjoining forest, I think that is the mode ordinarily employed.

16. Except that it has not been employed anywhere between Taihape and Mangaweka?—I cannot speak from actual knowledge of that.

17. I have travelled several times along that route, and have remarked that if the bush is cleared in the year preceding it does, in my opinion, save a great deal of labour, and the work is made so much easier. I understand that there is to be a road where it is practicable?—But the probabilities are that the road would not follow the same route as the railway. It is much easier to make the road separately, as you need not make the same grades and curves as you may be obliged to make on the railway.

18. Take the bush from Karioi through to Waimarino, the road in that case would not run alongside the railway?—I understand: it would be where it is now.

19. Is it necessary to clear the bush for the railway-line?—Certainly.

20. But in steep country you can clear it wider?—Three chains is the usual width unless the country is very rough indeed.

21. I am not asking this for the purpose of suggesting or dictating to your department, but in the interests of the settlers. There is a large number of settlers there who have a great deal of difficulty in making a living until they obtain connection with the railway, and if they could have the small contracts of, say, two miles, for the purpose of felling the bush, so that grass may be sown down right through, it would open the country and throw light into it; and I think it would be found that the work could be carried on so much easier than if it was carried on in the usual formation?—As regards felling bush before the formation-works, so as to admit of its being burnt in the ordinary course, I concur with the suggestion. But to have small contracts going on, so as to allow of the land being cleared and grassed, I am not sure you would be able to keep the scrub down by merely grassing it, and if you did not you would have to commence the work again.

22. If you grassed it properly there would be no scrub?—As regards the interests of the settlers, the department was advised some little time ago that there were some settlers in Karioi applying for this particular work, which was authorised; but on the Engineer going up there he found there were no needy settlers, and no one particularly wanted to take the job.

23. Of course, the same representations were made to me when I was up there, and they were very anxious indeed that they should be employed?—It was probably correct then, but on an officer being sent up specially to look into the matter last month he reported that there were no needy settlers there. It is proposed to put the work in hand shortly, however, whether there are needy settlers or not. If the local settlers do not care for the work, we can send men up there.