

line in Rangitaua, as far as Ohakune, is divided in ownership. The Crown possesses a considerable area of flat, undulating land of good quality and magnificently timbered. The Waiakaki Block is freehold, and the lower portion is described as good land, with splendid timber upon it. On the higher slopes of Ruapehu the land is not so good, nor the bush so accessible. Some of the original settlers still hold portions of the Rangitaua Block east of the line. This brings us to Ohakune.

22. Before proceeding further I should like to take you back again to between Turangarere and Ohakune.

23. *Mr. Stevens.*] It has been stated in the House that the present route of the railway passes through a howling desert; do you know of any desert through which the route passes?—No; except, as I have already said, that the Murimoto Plain land is very light, and, I consider, of an inferior character; but Mr. Studholme's sheep have grazed over that country.

24. What distance is the desert country from the railway-line?—It is at the parting of the waters of the Wangaehu and the Waikato. The Rangipo desert is about twelve or thirteen miles in a direct line from the nearest point of the railway. The part between the Waikato and the Wangaehu is about twelve miles, but the desert goes some distance down the Wangaehu. This map does not show the limit. [Witness pointed out the positions on a map.]

25. It has been said by persons who are in favour of another route that the line runs partly through "a howling desert." What I wish to ascertain in your evidence is, as nearly as possible, to show what exactly does exist. If there is desert country within twelve or thirteen miles of the line, could it be stated that the line runs through a desert, or that a considerable part of the country through which the line runs is a desert?—I have never clearly understood what is understood to be a "desert."

26. A desert I should define as a class of country which carries no herbage?—If you define it in that way I can say that the line does not pass through any extent of country that can be called a desert. It is a country which will carry sheep at the rate of 4 acres per sheep. The true desert is several miles upon the route towards Tokaanu. The line does not touch the desert at all.

27. With respect to the dairy industry, and the settlement generally between Ohakune and Taihape, I should like some information on those subjects?—That is, you want information as to the country on the west side. I think I only described the country as far as Mangaweka. From Utiku up to Paengaroa the line passes through a considerable extent of Native land.

28. Can you tell the Committee how much Native land there is there?—I could by reference to other papers. But it passes also through some land which has been alienated, and a small portion of Crown land. The land to the southward is all forest country, and portions next the line are being milled, and the milling portions may be extended very considerably. The whole area will prove superior grazing land when cleared and brought into grass. Some of it will be suitable for dairying. To the north-eastward, across the Hautapu, the Crown has already disposed of the settled country about Torere and Pukeokahu. I consider this is some of the best pastoral land in the district. The northern part of Awarua, near Moawhango, south-eastward of Rangipo-Waiau, there is a large extent of Native land said to be carrying at the present time fifty thousand sheep. It is some of the most attractive land I have ever seen, and it is an excellent country for pastoral purposes. Further northward and eastward are Oruamatua and Mangaohane Blocks, to which I ought to add the Owhaiko. These blocks are already occupied as sheep-runs—I believe mostly by the Messrs. Birch and Studholme. I have not a good personal knowledge of these lands: that is to say, I have never been over them. I have viewed them from the surrounding hills, and I believe they serve well for grazing merino and cross-bred sheep. Flocks graze, I understand, far back to the Kaimauawa country. The whole of that country naturally drains into the North Island Main Trunk Line. I find I was in error in stating that the Rangipo-Waiau is owned by the Messrs. Birch. I should have stated it is in the possession of Mr. John Studholme. I think the description I have given takes in nearly all the country. In the south-east of Awarua the Crown owns a very large block of land, on the south-east side of the Rangitikei River. A strip of country, two miles wide, along the river, will, I believe, prove to be good pasture land when cleared of the forest, and the higher slopes of the Ruahine I hope some day to see conserved as a State forest. There are extensive settlements up the Kawatau and Maungawharariki Rivers east as far as the lower slopes of the Ruahine Range. We have now reached Ohakune, and have to describe the country between this latter place and Taumararui, on the Wanganui River. After leaving the first-named point, the land passes through the Raetihi Block. I consider this to be a very superior tract of land, as it carries splendid milling timber. The bulk of it is owned by Natives, but the Crown has acquired the northern portion of the block. The line skirts along the slope of Ruapehu, and the Township of Raetihi, in the Waimarino Block, and is separated from the railway route by Native land. Raetihi is the main township of the district, and is the centre of trade. It is bounded on the south and south-west and north by close settlement. The land is good, and carries stock well, as proved by the class and condition of the sheep, and the rapid expansion that is taking place in dairying. There is a large dairy factory already established at Raetihi, and a creamery has been in existence for some time at Ohakune. In passing I may say that I look for a very wide extension of the dairy industry throughout that country. But it is right to say that the considerable altitude of the country and the severity of the frosts in winter will probably curtail the time during which the industry can be carried on each year.

29. What height would it be?—At a guess I should say about 1,500 ft. I now propose to speak of the country further away from Raetihi; it is all Maori land to the eastward and southward. I consider the whole of that country as far as the Wanganui River to be capable, when cleared and brought into grass, of carrying sheep in a most satisfactory and profitable manner. It will be noticed by looking at the map that from Raetihi to Taumararui the Crown practically owns