

No. 25.

Mr. FIELD to the Hon. W. GISBORNE.

SIR,—

Wanganui, 2nd January, 1871.

In accordance with my promise, I have now the honor to forward you a copy of the map of the country between Wanganui and Taupo (showing roads and Native tracks), which I have prepared from prismatic bearings to known points and from the best known authorities, and which may be relied on as being accurate, certainly within far less than a mile, as regards the position of any place shown between the Town of Wanganui and Ruapehu, Taupo Lake. The mountains and adjacent country are laid down from Hochstetter, corrected by the Auckland trig. survey; the Wanganui River, from Mr. Brewer's survey; the Upper Turakina and Rangitikei country, from Mr. Swainson's map; and all the country along the Mangawhero and Ranana routes, from my own bearings, which last are taken to Turakina, Ruapehu, Hauterangatahi, and Mount Mitchell, (a Government trig. station overlooking the Mangawhero, just outside the Wanganui block,) for the former; and to the three first and Kokotinga for the latter. I completed the series of bearings for the former and took those for the latter when I went up with Mr. Booth, just before Christmas.

You will see, from the map, how direct a line of communication to Taupo, and to the valuable country which lies between the mountains and the Upper Wanganui, is afforded by the Mangawhero Valley; and the lowness of the level throughout may be judged of by the apparently indisputable fact that "Heao," a hill on the east side of the Mangawhero, a little below our first crossing, is visible from Tapuaeharuru, at the north-east extremity of Taupo Lake. I had heard that it was so, and when I went up with Mr. Booth, I took the opportunity of inquiring as to the fact from an elderly Native (Wiremu Tamihana Tarake) who was staying at Mr. McGregor's station, and was born, and has spent the best part of his life, within three miles of Heao, and who was lately at Tapuaeharuru with the force in pursuit of Te Kooti. He assured us that he saw it distinctly, and as the hill, though by no means so high as some others near it, is—from its peculiar form, and the position of two enormous rata trees on its very extremity—almost unmistakable, and as, from Tapuaeharuru, it would show right over the low saddle at the sources of the Wangaehu and Waikato, I have not the smallest doubt he was correct. The fact is, that, by following the Mangawhero, we pass easily through the line of high hills (varying from 1,500 feet to 1,800 feet high) about twenty miles inland, and continue to rise gradually till, on reaching the point at which we cross over to the Wangaehu basin and the detached plains lying along it, there is scarcely anything left to ascend. The rise, in fact, from the Ranginunia gully to the saddle at its head, over which the road would pass, scarcely, if at all, exceeds 1,000 feet, and from thence the line can be kept nearly level to Pihana. When I went along this part of the line with Mr. Booth, I purposely let him and the Natives go first, because, though the ground in question will be far easier to deal with than some other places which we have passed, I wished him to form some idea of the difficulty attending the first selection of even a practical pack-road through an utterly unknown region, and how far I was correct in saying, in my report of 13th November, 1869, that it would be almost impossible to select the proper line for the permanent road till a track had been formed which would serve as a basis from which to examine the ground, and by which food could be taken up. At present, a few hours travelling with a pack-horse, and about sixteen or seventeen hours' journey along the cut line, takes us to a point five miles beyond where I got to at first with twenty-eight days hard toil. This last spot is shown by the small red cross just at the south of the Matahitira Plain, which, from the length of time we had been travelling, and the impossibility of getting cross bearings to check our position, leaving us to over estimate the distance we had gone, and the similarity of the Whaokura hill to the Murimotu one, both in its appearance and position relatively to the plain, added to the fact that the existence of any plain this side Rangiwahia was unknown, my companion mistook for the last.

The bursting of the gun on which we were dependent for food, obliged us to return without actually descending to the plain, and this kept us in ignorance both of the mistake and of the fearful chasm in which the Wangaehu runs, and which makes these lower plains impracticable as a road line, even at Pihana. This chasm is nearly 150 feet deep, and the ford so deep and bad that it is necessary to keep on the western side of the river right up to the "Tomakanga," where the Ranana track emerges on the plain. It was mainly to cover this unexpected addition to the length of the line, that I, in the papers that I had the honor to forward to you in July, added £150 to the original estimate. Now that I have been right through, I find the extra cost will not be so much, as, by using the Parapara and Ranginunia flats instead of the ridge, we not only get a far better level, but save part of the cost of the ridge route originally allowed for: we should also be following the permanent line. Indeed, in many respects, the alteration is a great improvement, as we not only make a straighter course, but we effect a junction with the Ranana line many miles nearer here than we should otherwise have done. In fact, if we had crossed at Matahitira, and then run up along the plain on the east side of the Wangaehu, as I had intended, we must sooner or later have taken another line up the west side, to afford direct communication with the plains and country to the west of the mountains. The map will show how unlikely it is that any better route could be got by diverging to the eastward and striking for the head of the Turakina, as the Natives suggest. The Matatera Natives, with whom the project, I believe, originates, were employed on the present line, which has been formed nearly to their tribal boundary, and has enabled them to let or sell nearly all their land in that locality; and it would no doubt be a very good thing for them to get the Wangaehu and Mangawhero Valleys opened also. I do not, however, for one moment believe that a better line can be got in that direction, if indeed there be a practicable one—(when Mr. Hogg thought of attempting to reach Kaimanawa by that route, in October, 1869, these very people would not guarantee that his party of more than a dozen good men could make a track passable for pack-horses along it);—and, at any rate, even if it should be shorter to the actual plains, it must be many miles longer to Taupo, and, like the Ranana route, must pass, nearly throughout, over a country in which it is useless to look for gravel. This necessary article is only to be found in the valleys of the main rivers which flow down from the mountains. There is not a speck of it in the lateral valleys, which take their rise in hills consisting entirely of white clay, varied with a blue cement. So far as my expe-