

funds available for different portions of the colony under "The Loan Appropriation Act, 1863," a memorandum was forwarded to the General Government by the Provincial Government of Wellington, pointing out how the mountain range might be penetrated where it thins out at the Manawatu Gorge, and application was made for funds for that purpose. Subsequent efforts were made to penetrate the range at different points nearer Wellington, and exploring parties were sent out with more or less success during the Superintendency of Dr. Featherston. During my Superintendency these explorations terminated in some success, and I would refer to the report by the Assistant Engineer to the Provincial Engineer, which appears in Appendix B, attached to the Superintendent's speech on opening the 27th session of the Provincial Council in 1874. Mr. W. A. Fitzherbert and Mr. John Barton successfully penetrated through the gorge, and received orders to take such observations as might show whether it was necessary to further prosecute the exploration they had succeeded in making from one coast to another. The report referred to shows the results attained. It was most successful, and subsequent efforts were made to lay out the line so explored. Some expenditure has been made upon it, and the whole result is that a practicable line, not only for an important road but also for a railway line, has been, I believe, discovered. I want to point out now that the result of the investigations pursued by the provincial authorities showed to them that the main road through the North Island, beginning from the Port of Wellington, must be a bifurcated line. The great point under consideration always was where the bifurcation should take place, and also whether there must not be more than one. The first point of bifurcation, in my opinion, must be the point leading into this Hutt-Waikanae line. Connected with this is another most important consideration. There is a tract of country about forty miles in extent, from the Manawatu River to the Waikanae River on one side, and up to the Tararua Range, containing 400,000 or 500,000 acres. I am bound to say, and I believe it is due to the interests of the colony at large to state, that the isolated position of the Port of Wellington, now the metropolis of New Zealand, should not be permitted any longer to continue by having this way barred up, when a practicable line of communication can be established through it and between the East and West Coasts. This block of land is in much the same state of nature as it was when I came to the country some thirty-five years ago. The only difference I see now is that the rivers a traveller had formerly to wade through or depend upon the capricious will of a Native to be crossed over in a canoe have ferries instead. That is the only difference I know of now in travelling along that coast. It is simply travelling on nature's pathway along the beach. Efforts have been made, and I believe, most successfully, for the purchase of the whole of that large block of land by the authorities. The transaction has not been brought to a perfect state of completion, but the negotiations have so far proceeded, and payments to such a large extent have been made, that in reality very little is required to bring the transaction to a close. I point that out because, independently of any other consideration, this is to be looked at as a practical question in connection with this proposed line of communication. If any one will look at the map I hold in my hand, he will see that along the Takatarawana Stream, which runs through the piece of country tinted pink, the track for several miles is through a wooded country—country, although I believe ultimately it will become very valuable for locating people upon, is not such as to command immediate settlement or money from settlers. It is, however, the highway to a tract of country capable of holding a large population, and if negotiations were completed thousands of people might be settled there, and the road would pay for going through the portion of land at present not available for sale. I point out also another important thing, that whenever the Masterton line might be completed further on, we have this difficulty to contend against, of a gradient of 1 in 15; and whenever it should be completed, and the Manawatu Gorge penetrated for some three or four miles, the cost for a railway would be enormous as compared with the average cost of lines in other parts of the country. But even supposing that were not so, if any one will look at the map, it will be seen that, if there be any correctness in the statement I have made, the land from the left bank of the Manawatu River to the Waikanae River could not be tapped by the railway over the Rimutaka range, so as to bring the produce and intercourse of the settlers into connection with the Port of Wellington. It would be valueless over the forty miles of country to which I have referred. This can be easily seen by any one who will look at the map. I thought it my duty to say so much, because I have been intimately connected with this question, and to show the grounds that have for a number of years influenced the provincial authorities in endeavouring to get this work done. I have no hesitation in saying so much.

97. Are you personally aware what the price of land has reached in the Fitzherbert District—that is, at the other end of the district?—I cannot say just now what it has reached to, but I would say any price it has reached to is just about as much in comparison with what it would reach, as to what ten acres could be sold for in Wellington some ten or fifteen years ago, and what the same area would fetch at the present time. I have been over the country on foot in every possible direction. It was my duty to do so, and I gained an intimate knowledge of the country. When I see a tract of land forty miles in extent available for settlement, and so near the metropolis, I cannot understand why it is not opened up. I would point out here that if provincial institutions had not been abolished that line would be in progress now, and the same with regard to the large block of land—it would be in possession and several thousand people would be settled upon it. I say in reply to the question put to me by the Chairman, I believe that there is a great deal—I will not say how much—of this land—you will understand I mean a considerable portion—that would realize from £7 to £8 per acre. I am not speaking of the high artificial prices given at times. Considering the price given elsewhere, I say that this land would pay investors well. I have met the chiefs there, and have gone with them over it, and I believe myself to be a tolerable judge of the land. This district could be brought within two or three hours of Wellington, and within such reach that a long day would enable a settler to come to Wellington, transact his business, and return the same evening.

98. *Hon. Mr. Ormond.*] Would you kindly say, Sir William, where the boundary of the purchased land is, going northwards from Belmont?

*The Chairman:* The purchase made from the Natives?

*Hon. Mr. Ormond:* Yes; the Crown land.

*Sir William Fitzherbert:* There was first a purchase—