

218. You can give us no idea of the probable traffic upon a railway carried up from the Red Post towards Hanmer Plains?—It could not be much, unless the facilities afforded by a railway would open the hot springs at Hanmer Plains as a sanatorium; a number of people go there now, but it is rather awkward of access from the present terminus of the railway; or unless it was carried on to Reefton.

219. It would be necessary, in order to get to the Hanmer Plains, to carry out the railway to Waiau?—Yes.

220. You would have to bridge the River Waiau?—Yes.

221. And the land which the railway would pass is in the hands of private persons?—Yes, for the most part.

222. And the Hanmer Plains also?—Yes; but there are some Government leases there.

223. Can you give us any idea of the disposition of landed proprietors to promote settlement in case they had railway facilities?—I do not know. Some of the land on Hanmer Plains would be fit for agricultural purposes.

224. You know nothing of the coast line?—Nothing whatever personally.

225. Which of the two lines is, in your opinion, preferable—the central line by the Hanmer Plains, or the East Coast line to Cook Strait?—I do not think either would be very desirable, but if one or other were chosen I should prefer the central route.

226. You know the country from the Cannibal Gorge westward?—Yes; I have not passed through the Cannibal Gorge. I was on a commission appointed by the East and West Coast Railway Company to consider whether it was likely to be a good commercial venture to construct a railway in that direction; and, in company with Mr. McIlraith, Mr. Beaumont, and Mr. Thornton, C.E., I proceeded to the West Coast, and ascended the line indicated from Brunner to Reefton, and from Reefton to the Cannibal Gorge.

227. You did not cross the saddle?—No, not the Ada Saddle. Knowing this side of the range we only went as far inland from Reefton as the Maruia Plains.

228. What is the character of the land on the Maruia Plains?—It is nothing but shingle covered with light soil. I speak of the part we went over two or three miles down the valley.

229. What is the character of the country between Maruia Plains and Reefton?—From the Maruia Plains the country rises to the saddle called Rahu. The ascent is pretty sharp on both sides of the saddle, but there is no difficulty in the ascent. I rode the whole way, and, except for swamp and stony parts, we could trot or canter almost the whole way through. There is no practical difficulty in the track which is cut from Reefton to the Cannibal Gorge.

230. Are there any indications of coal or other minerals on that route?—We were informed by the guide that there was coal in the Cannibal Gorge. All down to Inangahua there were indications of coal, almost down to the river bed in one place. Towards Reefton, in the valley of the Inangahua, we visited several coal seams of about 15 feet in thickness. In some places you have to ascend the hill to reach the seams, but there is no practical difficulty in getting at the coal. Going towards Reefton you have to cross the dividing range from Maruia. It is a low saddle (the Rahu), and there is no difficulty in riding.

231. Supposing a line northwards were taken over the Cannibal Gorge and on to the Maruia Plains, what benefit, if any, would accrue to the West Coast?—Very little indeed if it diverged thence to the Buller instead of going on to Reefton.

232. Would any gold or other minerals be found in the Maruia River?—Gold has been found in parts of it. At Derbyshire Creek, which falls into the Maruia at Cannibal Gorge, there is gold being washed for now.

233. The gold fields on the Maruia are not worked to any extent in consequence of the difficulty of getting provisions?—Yes; that is the difficulty. One digger said he could obtain a great quantity of gold on the Maruia, but owing to the great cost of provisions it did not pay him. That is the practical difficulty in the way of working for gold in that part of the country. It is about forty miles from Derbyshire Creek to Reefton, and perhaps forty-five miles to any part of the Maruia where diggings would be available. It would of course only be by means of packing that provisions could be forwarded.

234. Is there any land fit for agriculture in the Maruia Valley, or in that neighbourhood?—There certainly is no good land at the upper part.

235. Is the country so high that the snow lies in the winter?—In the Maruia the snow apparently lies in the winter. The indication of that is the blue grass.

236. Do minerals abound everywhere on the West Coast?—Yes.

237. *Mr. Fulton.*] Can you tell us the extent of the Maruia Plains?—The part of the valley we saw was only about one and a half or two miles broad. It is stated to be about thirty miles in length.

238. What is its character?—The portion I traversed was open pastoral country, with clumps of trees here and there.

239. Is there a station there?—There is a cattle station about half-way down.

240. Did you go to it?—We did not.

241. You cannot give us any further information as to the capabilities of this plain?—It is certainly nothing more than pastoral land.

242. And it belongs to the Crown?—I believe it is a Government reserve set apart for settlement. On the higher ranges there is good birch, and on the lower levels there are all sorts of timber in abundance.

243. What population is there between Reefton and the Gorge?—None whatever, except that about half a dozen miles out of Reefton there are two or three small farms, and of course there is a digging population where the quartz-crushing mills are situated.

244. Is there any probability of settlement?—None in the valley. The soil is good enough, but it is mixed with shingle. When cleared it could be sown down in grasses and occupied for grazing purposes.