

245. There is very little agriculture carried on in the whole district?—Hardly any. There is here and there a small farm.

246. *The Chairman.*] And where do they obtain vegetables?—The small gardens produce vegetables abundantly. The soil is good, but mixed with stones.

247. All the ordinary food is imported?—Yes.

248. Where does it chiefly come from?—Nearly all ordinary merchandise comes from Melbourne. Some of the flour finds its way from Canterbury by sailing vessels; the meat, of course, comes from Canterbury.

CHRISTCHURCH, FRIDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 1882.

The Commission met at 10 o'clock.

Mr. CHARLES Y. O'CONNOR, Inspecting Engineer, Middle Island, examined.

249. *The Chairman.*] Have you had time to prepare the returns which we asked you to furnish?—I produce tabulated statements showing the length, probable cost, distance already constructed, and the distance to be constructed, of the lines from Christchurch to Picton and from Christchurch to Nelson; also showing the length of these lines which go through agricultural, pastoral, or barren country, and also the length of the lines which go through Crown lands and private lands. With regard to the statistical information asked for as to the population along the different routes, and the consequent revenue which would be produced from the railways, I am collecting such information, and hope to be able to furnish the Commission with it shortly.

250. Have you been over the country through the Maruia Valley?—Yes; I have been over the Ada Saddle, through the Cannibal Gorge, and down the Maruia and the Matakītaki to Hampden, and thence to the Tophouse and Nelson. I have therefore been over the whole of what is known as the Maruia route.

251. Has it ever been explored as a possible line of railway?—Yes, the most of it has been surveyed in a sort of a way—a flying survey has been made.

252. *Mr. Fulton.*] Will you be good enough to report whether the divergence *via* Maruia would be advisable, taking into consideration the question of connecting the East and West Coasts by any other route?—Yes, I shall be very happy to do so.

The Commission met again at half-past 2 o'clock.

Mr. WILLIAM ATKINSON examined.

253. *The Chairman.*] In what district do you reside?—I reside at present at Rangiora.

254. Are you acquainted with the country?—I am acquainted with a good deal of it. I have passed through it.

255. To what distance from Rangiora?—I have been in the Wairau a good many years. About six years ago I came to Rangiora.

256. You know the country between Wairau and Hanmer Plains?—Yes, I have travelled it.

257. What is the general character of the land between Jollie's Pass and Waikari?—Some of the land is good, and some of a very middling description.

258. Is there a good deal of agricultural land?—Yes.

259. Would it grow wheat?—Yes.

260. You know that there are two projected lines of railway to the north—one of them going through the centre of the Island and the other by the East Coast?—Yes.

261. Do you know anything of the character of the country along these lines?—Along the inland route the land is anything but fertile after you pass the Hanmer Plains going northward. There is no land after you pass the Birchhill Station, Wairau Valley, that I would consider available for agriculture.

262. There is no country on either side that is fit for settlement?—No.

263. Then a line from Hanmer Plains to the Tophouse would open no country of any value?—I consider it would open no valuable land for agricultural purposes.

264. What do you know of the East Coast line—the line between the Red Post and Kaikoura?—The land between these two places is good. There is some very good land on Mr. Tinline's estate and at Mendip.

265. Do you know the general direction of the East Coast railway line?—No.

266. It runs from the railway (Waipara) station to Cheviot Hills, and then along the coast northward?—I have not been along that way. I came by the inland track. I have not travelled by the sea beach. I have gone along the sea beach to Blenheim.

267. It is a very rough country?—Yes; there is no land on this side of Flaxbourne worth mentioning for railway purposes. At Low Downs there are some flats.

268. Is the land good about that point?—It is fair land. It is good grazing land. I have seen very good barley grown in the Flaxbourne District. It is very good wheat land.

269. There are no settlers, excepting runholders, in that district?—None at all.

270. The whole of the land is in the hands of runholders?—Yes.

271. Do you know anything of the country towards the Cannibal Gorge?—It is fifteen years since I saw the country there. There were no tracks or openings then. It appeared to me to be very rough country with nothing but bush. There was no available land for cultivation. There is a good deal of talk about the quantity of timber and coal, but I should be sorry to spend money on a railway on that account.

272. Which would be the better way of getting the railway through to the north—by the Central line or the East Coast line?—I could not say; the distance I have gone has been from the lower part of the Clarence River to Kaikoura, and the land is of indifferent quality.