

31. Why do they cart it—I am speaking of the area within the red lines?—I believe it is carted from the Alford estate. The Mount Somers line is of very little use to that estate, as there is a bad crossing at the river. They could take a load to Ashburton easier than to Anama.

32. Then, as I take it, the produce is carted indifferently to either Methven or this station, or direct to Ashburton?—Yes.

33. Does this line do much business?—Not very much at present. It is a very long day's trip from the greater portion of the district to the station. If the line were taken across the river I have every reason to believe that there would be a very large bush traffic at once.

34. What do you consider to be the reason why the line does not do much business at present? Because it is not extended far enough.

35. And you consider that, by crossing the river it would get more traffic?—I have not the slightest doubt about it.

36. How do you account for produce being carted to Ashburton: they seem to leave a station near by, and take it a long distance?—There is a bad river-crossing to get at the line, and it would be too far to come up to the present traffic bridge and then go down the south side of the river to the station. The whole thing is also in a very unsettled state at present, and there is no one in charge to take delivery at Anama.

37. Where is such produce as is taken to Ashburton stored?—In the sheds.

38. Where do they cross the river?—There are only two small streams; there is no river-bed to cross.

39. Do you know the route of the Canterbury Central line, as proposed?—Yes, approximately. It has only been laid off roughly. The extension we propose would form part of it.

40. Does it propose to run through Methven?—I have never seen it plotted on the map as far as that. There was a rough sketch sent up some years ago, but it only showed the line somewhere to the centre of this district.

41. What is the district indicated in red called?—You might call it the Alford Forest district.

42. Have you any more information to give?—The only thing I should like to say would be that I think the money has been allotted for the extension of the Tinwald-Mount Somers line, and that, should you think the boundaries of these districts as shown in blue and red on the map are fair, they are the only ones that should be considered.

43. Do you know the amount of money available?—There was £11,000 voted last session, £5,000 or £6,000 of which has been spent, and I suppose the balance will lapse. You will remember that before raising the three-million loan it was decided how it should be spent, and £15,000 of that was allotted to this line, so that there is a balance of £9,000 still unexpended.

44. Where did you get those figures?—From the Minister for Public Works, on his late visit to Ashburton.

45. What did the road-bridge over the South Ashburton cost?—I believe that, with the approaches, it cost £5,000, but a railway-bridge could be made for far less than that.

46. Do you think a railway-bridge could be made for less than £5,000?—Yes; Mr. Blair's and Mr. Austin's estimates are both less than that; Mr. Austin's is about £3,000.

Mr. ANDREW MACFARLANE, examined.

47. *The Commissioner.*] Where do you live?—At Alford Forest.

48. What are you engaged in?—Sheep-farming, and a little in the timber line, as well.

49. Is there much timber still in the Alford Forest?—Yes.

50. What character is it?—It is principally birch.

51. Marketable timber?—Yes.

52. Is there much used just now?—Yes, a great deal: in fact, the supply is not equal to the demand.

53. Where is it used?—Principally in the Ashburton and Rakaiia districts, or even as far as the Rangitata.

54. Which way is it taken out?—Principally by dray. A great part goes by rail. Some of it is carted to Somerton and other places.

55. The use of the Alford Forest timber is local?—It does not go to Christchurch, for instance?—It does not, for this reason: that they have so far to cart it to the railway-station that they are not in a position to compete with Oxford.

56. You say the supply is not equal to the demand?—The supply is insufficient, as people will not go in for a large trade when there is no way of getting the timber away so as to pay.

57. The districts requiring timber can get it elsewhere cheaper?—Yes, because it cannot compete with other places which have a railway alongside of them.

58. Is there much bush?—Between four and five thousand acres of good marketable timber, and two thousand acres more suitable for firewood.

59. Has it been affected by fires?—was it not burnt lately?—Partly, on the north side.

60. Is the land under bush good land?—Some of it.

61. When the bush is cleared, is the land of any use?—Yes, but of course it has never been used for agricultural purposes.

62. Of what character is the agricultural land in that district?—It is good land; rather hard to work, but the greater part of it is magnificent land.

63. Shingly?—Part of it is stony, and in parts there is any depth of soil. Some of it has realized £13 per acre at public sale. There would be more grain grown if it were accessible by a railway. It is more stony as you go towards the North Ashburton, but it is only a strip of about a mile. There are about three thousand acres broken up and in turnips ready for cropping on the Alford Estate—Rural Sections Nos. 30524, 30589, and part of 30520. I may state that part of that land has been let for cropping at 18s. 6d. per acre for one crop.

64. What do they grow?—Wheat.