

118. *Mr. Oliphant.*] What makes you specifically remember the fire on the 15th December, 1896, about mid-day? How do you manage, after a period of three years, to remember the occurrence?—By my report.

119. I suppose that report is available?—Yes.

120. It was sent to the department?—Yes.

121. What is the west side of the line?—The side the Wairangi Station is on.

122. You did not notice any fire on the east side next day, did you?—No.

123. The surfacemen were about putting out fires?—Yes, they were close by.

124. Did you see the same surfacemen about the next day?—They were there for some time close to where the fire was.

125. The spark-arrester was in perfect order, you say. How do you know that? I suppose these spark-arresters have certain corrugations inside the funnel?—Yes, a deflector.

126. Do you examine them?—Yes, every day.

127. How many exist between the burning of the coal and the outgoing at the top?—Only the one inside the chimney.

128. And the hood was over the top of the funnel?—Yes.

129. Have you ever seen gum-diggers on the east side?—On both sides on various occasions.

130. But not where the fire originated in the deep swamp?—No, not in the big swamp. I have seen them close where the railway goes.

ARTHUR M'DONALD, sworn.

131. *Mr. Cooper.*] You are a fireman?—Yes, employed on the Waikato line.

132. You were a fireman on the 15th December, 1896?—Yes.

133. On the engine driven by Wildermoth, the last witness?—Yes.

134. On the trip from Auckland to Cambridge?—We ran from Mercer to Cambridge.

135. You know the plantation of wattle on one side of the line and the Government plantation on the other, do you?—I do not know the Government plantation from the other. I know there is a plantation on both sides of the line.

136. When you passed up the line on the 15th December did you notice any fire?—Yes, there was a fire. It was burning on the west side. That was my side.

137. How far from the line?—It was in the swamp alongside the line.

138. It was burning when you reached it?—Yes.

139. Did you notice any men engaged in putting it out?—No.

140. Were your spark-catchers working perfectly?—Yes, all in perfect order.

141. Was the engine working easily?—Yes.

142. Have you noticed gum-diggers digging gum on either or both sides of the line about this place?—Yes, there were a lot of Maoris there at that time. They were all over the place, on both sides.

143. Was it a dry season in 1896?—I do not remember.

144. Have you seen any Maoris lately about this place?—No, not this summer.

145. Did you see any last summer?—No, I could not say.

146. But there were a lot in 1896?—Yes.

147. You cannot say when you saw the last of them?—They keep coming and going.

148. *Mr. Oliphant.*] Did you make a report of the fire on the 15th December?—Yes.

149. It was your duty to send in a report of the fire?—Yes.

150. You saw no fire on the east side?—No.

151. Did you see any fire on the east side next day?—No; we saw the remains of a fire.

152. It had the appearance of having gone out the previous night?—If I recollect rightly, it had all finished burning.

153. But the traces were quite fresh?—It was all out.

154. What time of the day do you think that fire occurred?—I could not say; it was all out when we passed on the down trip next day.

155. Still, the remains of it were there. It must have occurred, then, between the time you went up and when you came down?—Yes.

156. Do you know the exact spot where the big fire commenced? It was about a mile down the line, was it not?—In the report I put in I said it was between the 52- and the 53-mile pegs.

157. Where the big fire commenced was close to the 52-mile peg?—I could not say particularly to a mile.

158. Have you seen gum-diggers about that part?—Yes, on both sides.

159. They do not dig in the swamp, do they?—Yes, I have seen them in the swamp there.

160. This fire you saw the next morning had died out completely?—Yes.

161. You saw it in the swamp?—Yes, it had burned the rushes.

162. Do you think it might have been smouldering?—When you are passing you cannot tell exactly, but it appeared as if the fire had passed through and burned out.

163. *Mr. Poynton.*] Had it extended into the swamp?—Yes, it had burned across the swamp.

164. *Mr. Oliphant.*] Have you seen any fires on the east side of the plantation, belonging to Fairlie and Patterson?—Only in the swamp.

165. You know the wattle plantation?—Yes.

166. You have never seen any of it burnt?—I have not noticed it.

WILLIAM YOUNG, Sen., sworn.

167. *Mr. Poynton.*] What is your occupation, Mr. Young?—Manager of the plantation that was partly destroyed.

168. *Mr. Oliphant.*] When did you take up the duties of manager?—In January, 1888.