

acres, and there remain now in the hands of the Natives only 8,347 acres. The bulk of these lands are subject to certain leases to Europeans. The leases over the Murimotu Block expire on the 20th August, 1903, and those over the Rangipo-Waiiau Block on 31st May, 1902.

9. Have you been over that country?—Yes; a very great deal of it.

10. What sort of country is it?—The Murimotu Block comprises light, comparatively poor land on the plains, south of Ruapehu, and is suitable only for grazing sheep. The Rangipo-Waiiau runs up into what is called the desert country eastward of Mount Ruapehu, and in that quarter the land is undoubtedly very inferior; but to the eastward and south-eastward it merges into open grazing land, suitable for sheep.

11. Then, you consider that the best of this land is simply adapted for sheep-farming?—Generally so, except the south-east portion of the Rangipo Block.

12. Is it open land generally, or is much of it bush?—It is mostly open country. It is used now in large runs for grazing purposes by Messrs. Studholme and another gentleman from Wanganui.

13. Has any of it been ploughed or cropped?—There has been some ploughing and cropping on a small scale at Waiouru, near the south-eastern boundary of the Murimotu Block.

14. *The Chairman.*] You know the country from Mangaonoho up to Paengaroa?—I do.

15. About what area of land has been settled on either side of the railway line for a distance, say, of fifteen miles on either side?—I cannot answer that without reference to the map and taking the area out. But I am prepared to furnish the information.

16. Of what quality is the land generally there?—It is, I consider, excellent land for sheep-grazing, and, to a certain extent, it is dairying country also. May I amplify my answer by saying that I am aware that on the east side of the Rangitikei River, along the line you mention, embracing the Otamakapua Block, it is closely settled with numerous and prosperous homesteads—it is a very superior class of grazing country. On the western side of the line, taking in Otairi, Makohine, and the south-west part of Awarua Block, the country is more hilly and broken, but it also is good grazing land. It is also in the main occupied by settlers, except to the south of Utiku, which still remains in the hands of the Natives.

17. Speaking roughly, what is the average area of the holdings along that tract of country you mention, approximately—I mean the average area of each holding?—At a guess, I should think about 300 acres. The land was subdivided into small holdings under the farm-homestead system, and in places it was opened for selection in areas of about 300 acres.

18. Now, starting from Paengaroa up to Okahune, taking the country for the same distance—fifteen miles on either side of the line—what is the character of that section of country?—After leaving Paengaroa the line passes through the Ngaurukehu Block, which is nearly all owned by the Natives. Including Ruanui to the westward the land, in my opinion, is excellent grazing country, and is to a great extent open, and already stocked and occupied.

19. In what areas is the land suitable for holdings?—The average I should prefer would be about 400 acres. To the eastward of Ngaurukehu is the Motukawa Block, of which portion near Paengaroa belongs to the Crown; the great bulk of the balance is Native land. The land contiguous to the railway-line, which passes on to Turangarere, is good pastoral country. Further to the eastward the land is not so good, but still it is very suitable, and is already utilised for growing healthy and profitable sheep. The line then enters the Raketapauma Block. Contiguous to the line the land is hilly and high, but to the westward, across the Ruanui and Rangiwaiia Block, it is all superior land, suitable for subdivision for close settlement. On the east, past Turangarere, the Crown owns a portion of the Motakawa Block. This is nearly all bush of a very suitable character for sawmilling; and the land is fairly good. Further to the northward is the Rangipo-Waiiau Block, already described. As I stated it is mostly open grazing land, carrying splendid flocks of sheep. The line then passes through the Murimotu Block, already mentioned, to the Karioi Station—the proposed railway-station is called Waione. All that land is of very light character, and is only suitable for sheep, allowing, I should say, 2 to 4 acres to the sheep. I am speaking subject to correction. After leaving the Waione Station the line enters the great forest at the south and the south-west base of Ruapehu. The land to the eastward is Crown lands. The Rangawaea Block is generally valuable on account of the excellent timber growing upon it. The portion next the line will doubtless be subdivided into small holdings later on.

20. Of about what area?—I should prefer about 600 acres. The higher slopes of the mountain are set aside as State forests. South-west of the line the Rangiwaiia Block extends many miles, is all owned by the Natives, and is comparatively open country, improving southward very much as compared with Murimotu, the southern part being good grazing land. Further to the south is the Crown portion of Rangiwaiia Block, which I consider excellent pasturage land, the portion next the Turakina River being equal to some of the best in the lower country; that on the Wangaei River is not so good. Further south again is the Mangakaretu Block, which is well known for its proved capabilities as a grazing country. These latter remarks apply to the contiguous blocks, Pungataua and Otumauma. Passing on to the Rangitaua Block, south of the line, the whole area has been subdivided, and is partly occupied by settlers. The country is flat and undulating, and in parts hilly, and portion of the land carries excellent milling timber. The settlers have cleared away portions of the original forest, and the Crown is reserving all the forfeited sections for future milling purposes.

21. What areas was the land cut up into?—It was cut up into areas of about 200 acres. Further on to the south of Rangataua are the Otiranui, Ohotu, and various other blocks, extending right through to the Wanganui River. I consider that the whole of that area, which is now forest land, is suitable in parts for milling, and also splendidly adapted for grazing purposes. I have not yet described the land to the northward of the line. The land to the northward of the