

and giving easy and quick transit, with its attendant comforts, the northern Wairoa district, having a large area of good land and mild climate and abundant rainfall, will become the premier dairy county of New Zealand. The present railway of Dargaville and Main Trunk should be linked up by a direct connecting-line. From the western route at a point near Kirikopuni to Dargaville a practically level line could be obtained of a not greater distance than twelve miles. There are natural valleys in a nearly direct route that could be followed.

2A. *Mr. Evans.*] How much produce is being exported at the present time?—I am not in a position to give the quantities. I know, however, that there are large quantities of butter, and that the land is of good quality, and that fat stock of excellent quality is raised.

3. You do not grow potatoes or maize?—Quantities of maize are grown on the flat land, and for that purpose this Wairoa land is the best in New Zealand.

4. Why do you import oats?—The reason is that labour is so troublesome to get, and also that the cost of freight has retarded the full development of the land.

5. You will always have to pay for labour?—Yes; but we cannot export from here, because of the cost of freight to outside.

6. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] You have had a large experience in other parts of the Dominion, have you not?—Yes, I have been a sheep-farmer in the Gisborne district for fifteen years, and also in Hawke's Bay for a great number of years prior to that. I have been a farmer since I knew what a beast was. I have also had a considerable experience in Queensland.

7. You can speak of the qualities of this district as compared with Gisborne or Hawke's Bay?—Yes. Acre for acre, it is as good as Gisborne. The flat lands along the river-banks are equal to the best of the Gisborne district.

8. Taking the country generally?—Acre for acre, it will produce equal with any other province in New Zealand. We also get top prices for our wool and fat stock when we get them through in a satisfactory condition, which is very seldom.

9. You heard Mr. Harding's statement that 1,000,000 acres would carry two sheep to the acre?—I am not prepared to corroborate that, because I have not seen sufficient of the country.

10. From the knowledge which you have of the portion of the country which you know, would you corroborate that statement?—Yes.

11. *Mr. Becroft.*] What reasonable time is taken in breaking in bush land for the plough?—It would depend somewhat on the nature of the bush.

12. Take light bush?—I was in the Gisborne district a few days ago, and I saw under cultivation land which was under heavy forest fifteen years ago.

13. It would take, say, fifteen years to bring bush land into ploughable condition?—That would be so in the ordinary course of events. It could be done, of course, in one year if the labour was put on.

14. Is it not the cost of bringing the land into cultivation rather than the cost of labour that has retarded the agricultural industry in this district?—Yes, it is the difficulty of getting rid of the stumps. It will take a considerable time before bush land can be brought in for agriculture.

15. In the meantime it will be a profitable business to carry sheep and stock?—Yes.

16. Have you much maize country?—All the flats adjacent to the river are splendid for the cultivation of maize.

17. If the railway carries maize to Auckland at the rate of 10s. per ton, would that induce farmers to go in for maize-growing?—I am not prepared to say it would become the same profitable industry that dairying is.

DARGAVILLE, MONDAY, 24TH APRIL, 1911.

ELLIS REES ELLIS examined. (No. 28.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Where do you reside?—At Dargaville. I have been for many years a settler in the district, but at present hold a temporary appointment as a gum-ranger under the Government.

2. Do you wish to make a statement to the Commission?—I am not a member of the Railway League, but am speaking entirely from my own knowledge. The first need of the north is a Main Trunk line, giving the settlers access to the world's markets, and to insure the best results it is necessary first to construct the railway so as to traverse the best land. The second consideration is the most suitable route for connecting future branch lines; thirdly, to provide a quick returning revenue at the least possible cost. The other considerations are the number of settlers that can be placed on the proposed route, and whether the land belongs to the State or whether it is held for speculative purposes. Speaking on the first question, I may say that I have a fair knowledge of the proposed eastern and western routes, and have no hesitation in saying that the land on the western route is far superior to that on the eastern. On the eastern route Maungatapere is good land; Ruatangata is gum land; Whatitiri is good land; from Poroti to Parakao is land of mixed quality, with a large percentage of poor fern and tea-tree land. I have a litho. plan here describing some Crown lands on the eastern route—two sections on the Whangarei-Mangakahia Road, on the eastern route, are valued at 12s. 6d. per acre, and described as heavy clay soil of inferior quality on fern land, and covered with manuka and rushes. You will notice by the description on the plan that the land adjoining the Kirikopuni Road is valued at £1 8s. per acre. This land is in the direction of the western route. The suggested connection from McCarroll's Gap to Whangarei would traverse very inferior land, and have no prospect of