

The Waimea Plains Branch

The background and early history of this unusual Southland railway line

By Jim Brown

The Waimea Plains Branch Railway was a line with a difference. Firstly, unlike most branch lines that ended up in some obscure country location, the Waimea line actually went from one township to another, both of which already had railway connections. Secondly, it was started as a private enterprise to serve the interests of a very large estate owned by the directors and shareholders of the railway company, and in so doing caused much controversy between the two neighbouring provinces of Otago and Southland. This is the story of the Waimea Plains Branch Railway.

New Zealand, as a new colony and outpost of the British Empire, had by the 1870s settled into an established country with deep-water shipping ports, a growing population and other necessary infrastructure such as railways and local roading. After the initial boom years of the gold rushes, and the Government instituted Public Works era of expanding the railways, the country was fast becoming an exporter of agriculture produce, especially wool and grains. With immigration still continuing and a growing economy, New Zealand was seen by many entrepreneurs and financial investors as a worthwhile country to invest in, especially inland where there were large tracts of the countryside suitable for pastoral farming.

One of these areas was in the south of the South Island in the provincial area of Southland where there was a large tract in northern Southland known as the Waimea Plains which lent itself admirably to pastoral farming. This large expanse of nearly flat country had an ideal climate for rearing sheep and growing crops, and was divided into large blocks known as sheep runs or stations, these being in the hands of owners or lessees.

It was that area of the country that Dunedin based interests saw as worthwhile to invest in. During the mid 1870s, a group of well known Dunedin businessmen set up

a special company with a view to purchasing large blocks of land and then sub-dividing it into smaller areas for individual farmers to buy. These blocks were intended to range in size between 300 and 1000 acres (120-400 hectares).

The Land Purchases

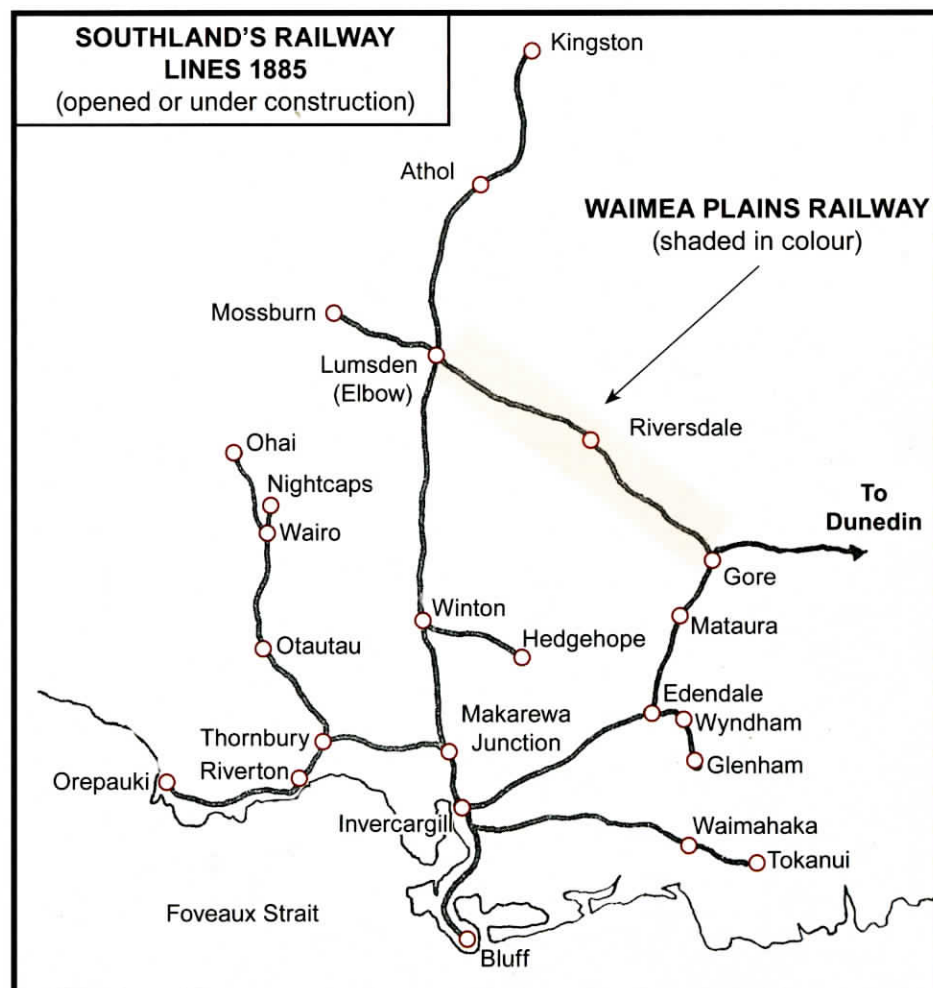
The new organization, known as "New Zealand Agricultural Company Limited", had many wealthy supporters at home and commanded much capital. The names of its colonial backers were a sufficient guarantee of this; names such as Julius Vogel, William Larnach, George Bell, Henry Driver, Thomas Green, R. H. Leary, Horace Bastings

and Patrick McCaughan. Their support was needed as the schemes were very ambitious. The company acquired run after run and finally held a strip of land some 70 miles long (112km) stretching from the Charlton Creek near Gore to Eyre Creek in northern Southland.

The Company ended up owning 170,000 acres (68,000ha) of freehold and 130,000 acres (52,000ha) of leasehold, a total of 309,000 acres (123,600ha). They also took over stock as well totalling 125,000 sheep, 30,000 lambs, 2000 cattle, 50 purebred shorthorns, and 70 horses (mostly hacks).

However, the Company found raising the required capital in the Colony scarce so decided in 1877 to ask of the services of Sir Julius Vogel, the then Agent General for New Zealand in London, to help with selling land to investors in the United Kingdom. Included in the provisional directorate were the names of two Cabinet members of the Government, John Ballance and Robert Stout. This gave the false impression that

RIGHT: Southland's provincial railway system by 1885 featured a remarkably diverse selection of railway lines – both main arterial lines and numerous branch lines serving much of the developing south of the Dominion. The map also clearly illustrates the benefit for the Dunedin interests of the Waimea Plains Railway line linking Gore with Lumsden, thereby drastically reducing the rail distance to the lake port of Kingston. It should be noted that some of the branch lines shown were later extended and some others were built new after this date. **MAP:** Jim Brown collection



the company had official backing, and later Ballance was to claim he had not given authority for his name to be used, but had helped the company in other ways. When Sir George Grey (the then Premier) learned of these men being involved in the floating of the company, he forced Vogel to resign as Agent General and told Ballance and Stout to have nothing further to do with the company.

Also *The Times* of London found out that the land offered for sale in New Zealand was rabbit infested – a fact not mentioned in any advertisements. Although there were rabbits around, the wording of ‘infested’ was in all probability a bit of an exaggeration. However, this did not do the company any favours and put would-be purchasers off investing in the Agriculture Company. One of the drawbacks the Company had in trying to sell off farms was the lack of suitable roads and transport across the estate, so with this in mind, the idea of a private railway traversing their land came into being.

Otago And Southland At Odds

The idea of a railway across the Waimea Plains was not a new one, as this had been looked at when decisions were being considered as an alternative route for the line to Kingston. When the route for the railway to Kingston was being considered there had been agitation for the line to run from Gore, instead of Winton. But Southland interests did not approve and saw it as a blatant attempt by Dunedin to divert the ‘lakes district’ trade away from Invercargill. Their fears were, to a certain

degree, to prove groundless as the Winton-Kingston line was completed before the Waimea Branch was. But the people of Invercargill were not taking the chance of having their shrewd countrymen in Dunedin stealing the march on them.

Again, there was further consternation when on January 23rd 1877 the *Southland News* reported on the proposed line to be built across the Waimea Plains from Gore to Elbow (Lumsden) by a private company mainly financed by Dunedin interests. What’s more, when it was rather cheekily announced “that this railway would form part of the main trunk system of railways that the colony was pledged” it caused further antagonism between Invercargill and Dunedin – something that was to be on going.

The Planning Begins

On Saturday 24th January 1878, the Hon. W. J. M. Larnach, Minister for Public Works and Mr. J. Carruthers, his Engineer in Chief, left Invercargill on a special train. At Edendale they caught the normal afternoon train which took them on to Gore. They then went by road to Mr. G. M. Bell’s property of Waimea Sheep Station where they stayed the night as guests. George Bell for many years had been a strong supporter of building a railway up the Waimea. Next morning while *en-route* across the Waimea Plains they inspected where the proposed line would go. Upon arriving at Elbow they caught the free-train to Athol for the opening ceremonies of the railway that had reached thus far on the route for Kingston.

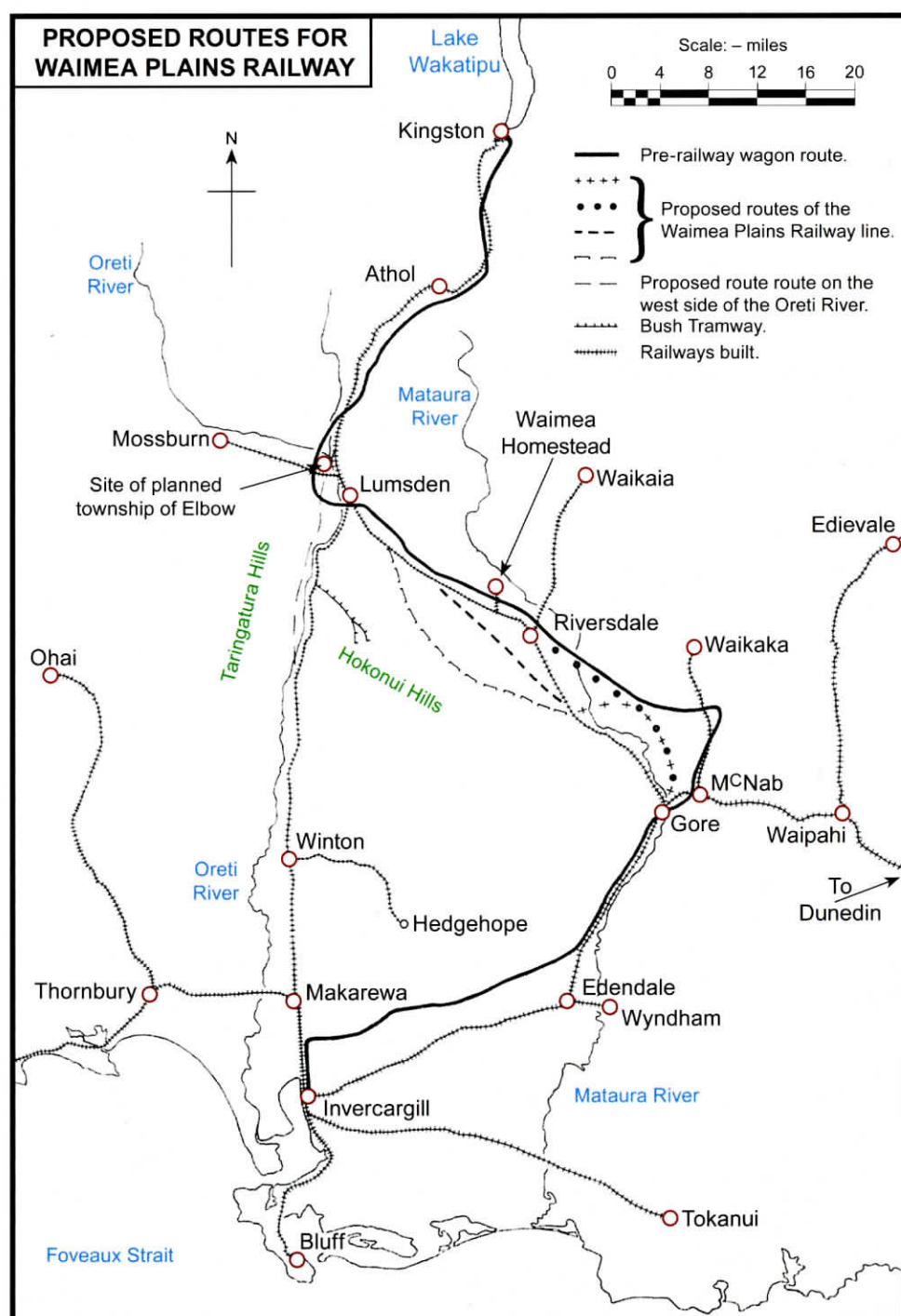
A few days later Mr. Carruthers ordered

OPPOSITE: A digitised reproduction of an early Waimea Plains Agriculture Company land development map, showing the numerous areas of land totalling nearly 500 square miles in Northern Southland, that was made available for farming by the company. An early example of what most current day New Zealanders regard as a “contemporary” business practice – property developers!

IMAGE: Courtesy of Gore Historical Museum collection

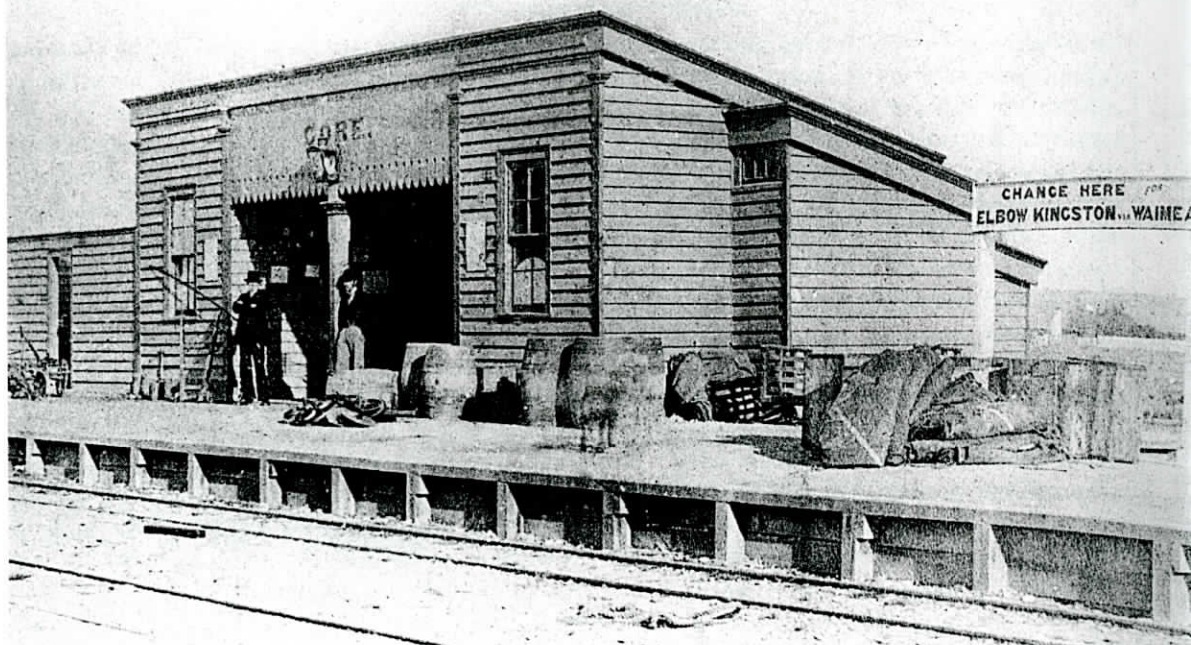
RIGHT: This map illustrates the number of routes that were initially considered for what became the private Waimea Plains Railway Company line. Some of the options illustrated here were little more than “dotted lines” on a map, while the final right-of-way was selected after the proposed route was formally surveyed, this being the more direct line taken on the west side of the Mataura River.

ORIGINAL MAP: P. F. Dyer, from the book *All Aboard* by R. J. Meyer (second edition) NZR&LS 1980. (modified by NZ Railfan 2015)



RIGHT: The original Gore railway station of 1875. A basic lean-to structure, it was to be replaced by another, more substantial lean-to structure, about 1885. The platform sign on the right informed passengers of the 1880s to change trains here to continue, via the Waimea Plains Railway, onto Elbow (renamed Lumsden in 1893) and Kingston. Our research has indicated that over the years there have been four different railway stations built at Gore.

PHOTO: J. A. Dangerfield collection, courtesy W. J. Cowan



John Aitken of Invercargill to make a quick trip to survey the proposed line from Gore to Elbow.

The first obstacle the Company was to face was the battle of the routes. By then, many in the Gore area and the lower Waimea were aware of the proposed rail line to be built across the plains, so it was only natural all would like the line to go near or through their properties.

One of the more prominent run holders, Patrick McCaughan, wanted the line to start from East Gore and run through Knapdale and Otama, across the Maitara River to Mandeville, and then via the sheep station of Wantwood and proceed to Josephville, south of Elbow. Public meetings were held in Chatton to the north of Gore where it was advocated the line should be located on the east side of the Maitara River where there was a greater farming area.

Naturally, with so many having vested interests involved, the siting of the railway caused many arguments and stormy meetings. All in all there were four whole or part routes put forward for the line. In the end the route taken was the most direct one which followed along the south side of the Maitara River and up the middle of the plains to Elbow.

Forming The New Company

Meantime, on Friday the 7th June 1878, twenty-two prominent Dunedin men listened to the proposals and explanations on what this new railway from Gore to Elbow would mean and once all were satisfied they voted to form a company with all those present making themselves available as provisional directors. This new organisation, known as the *Waimea Plains Railway Company Limited*, had some important names at the meeting which included the Hon. Matthew Holms

M.L.C., Hon. W. J. M. Larnach, and Mr. H. Bastings M.H.R. Also there was Messers H. Driver and R. Oliver who were also active in politics.

This new company was formed under the District Railways Act of 1877 which allowed private companies to finance and build their own railways. Many in Southland thought that this private enterprise was the first to be formed under the Act, but in reality was the second such organization to do so, the first being the Rakaia and Ashburton Forks Railway Company, who built a line from Rakaia to Methven in mid-Canterbury.

The provisional directors were to all intents and purposes a copy of the same people who ran the New Zealand Agricultural Company.

They wasted no time, for within five days they had appointed permanent directors and had agreed on the Articles of Association and had decided to order rails, two locomotives and call for tenders for the supply of sleepers.

The new company was registered on 21st June 1878 and the Prospectus was advertised in the newspapers from the 28th. The Prospectus showed that the Company had a capital of £150,000 made up of 15,000 shares valued at £10 each. The Prospectus also stated that the proprietors of the land through which the line would pass had agreed to give the land free of cost, and it gave a glowing account of future, handsome dividends. Six thousand shares had already been subscribed for and it was proposed to close the share list on 8th of July 1878.

The Letting Of The Contracts

From the beginning of July 1878 advertising appeared in local newspapers calling for tenders for the supply of sleepers, signed by Horace Bastings, Secretary for the Company. The tender called for 74,000 sleepers in black pine or totara to be

delivered, half at Gore and half at Elbow, in lots of 10,000. Tenders closed on the 13th July and delivery of sleepers was extended out to the 1st April 1879.

During November and December 1878 the Company was advertising and inviting tenders for two separate contracts for the construction of the line, including plate-laying, with a closing date of 11th of January 1879. The contracts showed that construction was to be started at both ends of the Waimea Plains Branch Railway. Both contracts went to a John Whittaker for the sum of £36,625-13s-8d. with the Company providing rails and sleepers. John Whittaker, who had much experience in railway construction, was under the jurisdiction of the Company's Consulting Engineer, Mr. H. P. Higginson, along with Mr. A. R. W. Fulton, the Resident Engineer.

To comply with the Land Transfer Act there were advertisements in newspapers during January 1879 calling for tenders to survey the formation and lands to be taken for the railway amounting to between one and two chains in width. When tenders closed at noon February 1st 1879, there were seven; the lowest of £219 going to Mr. Higginson, the Company's Consulting Engineer.

Turning The First Sod

It was a grand day in Gore on Monday 27th January 1879 when the first sod of the Waimea Plains Railway was ceremonially turned by the Colonial Treasurer, the Hon. John Ballance. The first barrow load of soil was shovelled up alongside the starting survey peg for the new line. In his speech, Mr. Ballance congratulated the Company on its enterprise which he said (in error) *...had placed it in the position of being the first private company in New Zealand to commence a line under the 1877 Act.*

Judging from comment in the Invercargill newspapers, the turning of the first sod at Gore appears to have aroused a good deal of interest and enthusiasm. But naturally, it was in Gore that enthusiasm was the greatest. The event, we are told, was marked by a sort of high holiday with most of the townspeople turning out to do honour to the occasion as one of vast importance. There was a large contingent from Dunedin for the ceremony, and a special train was laid on from Invercargill, though many of Invercargill's leading citizens were unable to attend because of the short notice. The train left Invercargill at 12:45pm and reached Gore shortly after 3:00pm.

A reporter who attended the function had the following to say: *It was the usual sort of ceremony, with nothing to distinguish from dozens of similar ceremonies. It was followed by luncheon at the Railway Hotel, where the Company, after the manner of those days, did themselves very well indeed.*

The spread was really excellent, the variety of foods and wines being equal to the most fastidious taste. The chair was occupied by Mr. G. M. Bell, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Company promoting the line. The contractor is Mr. John Whittaker.

Description Of The Railway

The line commenced at the northern end of the Gore railway station and headed out across flat countryside before skirting around the Hokonui Hills in a series of embankments and cuttings. Out to the right and not far away was the Maitara River. The line then ran out onto flat country as it headed towards Mandeville. Just to the north of Mandeville, at the 10 and 12 mile pegs were the largest bridges on the

line. The first was over the Otamita Stream (pronounced O-ta-meet) with nine spans each of 20 feet (6.1m) totalling 180 feet (54.9m). The next was over the Waimea Stream with ten 20 foot spans making it 207 feet (63.1m) long. Both were of the same construction – plain wood beams on top of wooden piers.

From thereon the gradients and curves were very favourable with practically very little in the way of earthworks. The line did climb at two places – the first for 52 chains (1,047m) at the eighth mile and the second for 106 chains (2,132.4m) at the twenty-second mile. The curves on the line were also extremely easy, the ruling curve being 12 chains (241.4m) radius for a length of six chains (120.7m) only.

There were upwards of 20 culverts varying from two to 10ft (0.6-3m) in width, constructed of masonry and concrete and others in soft ground constructed of timber. The permanent way consisted of 52lb rail laid on sleepers, seven feet by seven inches by five (2,130mm x 178mm x 127mm). The ballast amounted to 1760 cubic yards per mile (836m³ per km). All embankments were of 12 feet (3.66m) in width at the formation level.

From Gore at 233 feet (71m) above sea level the line rose gradually to 620 feet (188.9m) at Elbow, the gradient being against westbound trains. The railway shortened the distance between Dunedin and Lake Wakatipu by 52 miles (83km) and optimists suggested it would be possible to travel from Dunedin to Kingston in less than 9 hours. The contract length of line as built was 36 miles 41 chain (58.76 km).

The estimated completed cost was put at about £108,000 which represented a cost

of £2,960 per mile, which at that time when compared with other lines was thought it could be one of the cheapest, if not the cheapest constructed in New Zealand.

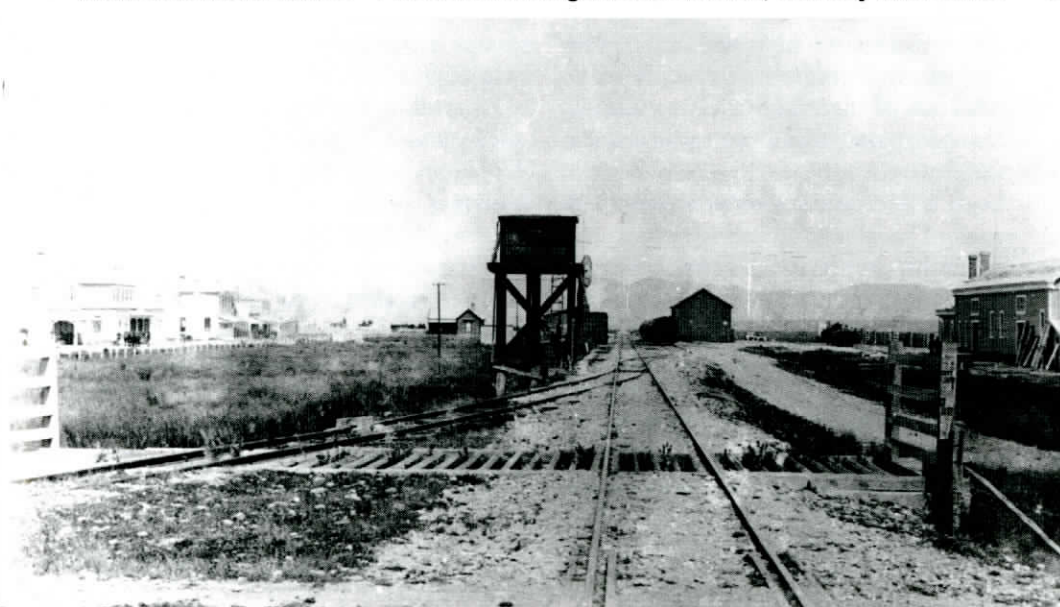
Shipping The Rails

When the Waimea Railway Company ordered the rails in early June 1878 they telegraphed a steel rolling mill in south Wales to supply all the 52lb rails needed for the line – these in 24 foot (7.32m) lengths along with fish plates, bolts and all the necessary sleeper spikes. This amounted to approximately 4,100 tons (4,165.8 tonnes). The company's shipping agents, the New Zealand Shipping Company, chartered an American built full-rigged ship the *Oregon* of 1,431 tons (1,454 tonnes) to bring all the rails and equipment out to New Zealand. The *Oregon* berthed at Newport, Wales to take on the shipment and once fully loaded left for New Zealand on January 14th 1879 under the command of Captain Work.

Sailing down the Bristol Channel the *Oregon* headed south into the Atlantic Ocean, crossed the Equator on February 14th, and a month later rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Sailing across the southern ocean and rounding the south of Stewart Island the ship arrived at the Otago Heads on the evening of Sunday 20th April, a voyage of 97 days. Due to the very deep draft the *Oregon* had, 21ft 6in (6.553m) forward and 21ft 11in (6.680m) aft on the keel, the ship had to anchor off until perfect tide and weather conditions prevailed as the *Oregon* was up until that time the deepest draft vessel to enter the Otago Harbour. The Harbour Master, Mr. Thomson, made sure all was in place before giving the go-ahead to bring the *Oregon* up the channel past the heads. On Tuesday 22nd April, with the senior Pilot (Mr Kelly) on board and the Paddle Tug, *P. S. Koputai* towing, the *Oregon* was brought into port on the top of the tide at 4:20pm. The ship did not dock at Port Chalmers, but instead anchored in the stream just to the north in an area just off the Powder-ground, Carey's Bay.

When the ship arrived at the Heads. Mr. Higginson, the engineer to the Waimea Plains Railway Company approached Captain Work to see if he would take the ship on to the Port of Bluff. The Captain thought better of this, and said he would prefer entering the Otago Harbour. It must be noted that at this time the Port of Bluff did not have a tug, plus the entry channel into the port was very narrow due to a treacherous reef known as the "Mid-Channel Rock". To have attempted to bring a heavily-laden ship of the *Oregon's* size into that port would have

BELOW: The only significant intermediate station on the Waimea Plains Railway was at Riversdale. This station was of importance as it was from there that the Waimea Plains Railway Company based its operations and maintained financial offices. In this undated view (c.mid-1880s) we can identify the first (company) railway station, adjacent goods shed, a windmill to replenish the water vat, and the beginning of what became a prosperous inland commercial centre. **PHOTO:** J. A. Dangerfield collection, courtesy W. J. Cowan



RIGHT: At Elbow (Lumsden after 1885), the other end of the railway, an even more basic structure was used as the first station building. Little specific detail is known about this vintage early 1880s picture. However, of note are the early C and D class carriages in the consist and the flat-top wagons carrying what appear to be heavy (possibly bridge) framing timber.

PHOTO: Courtesy E. J. McClare collection



been hazardous to say the least.

With the ship safely in port then came the task of trans-shipping all the rails and equipment from the *Oregon* to the port of Bluff. This was undertaken by privately owned coastal sailing boats which came alongside the *Oregon* and took on full loads, before proceeding down the coast to the port of Bluff, where the rails and track equipment were loaded directly into rail wagons. These were then dispatched to either Elbow or Gore for unloading.

As an example of how this operation went, we will follow the voyage of two coastal sailing boats. The first a 58 ton (58.93 tonnes) schooner called the *Crest of the Wave* commanded by Captain McLean. This vessel arrived into the port of Otago on 14th May 1879 from Oamaru with a cargo of grain. Once unloaded the schooner then went alongside the *Oregon* and took on a load of 460 rails amounting to 85 tons (86.36 tonnes). Late on the afternoon of the 22nd the *Crest of the Wave* and another boat, a brigantine called the *Florinda*, commanded by Captain Brophy, set sail for Bluff. The *Florinda* was also carrying a load of rails, this time 740 with a weight of 137.5 tons (139.71 tonnes).

The two vessels essentially followed each other down the coast arriving at the port of Bluff round 10am on Sunday the 25th May. In this manner the laborious task of unloading the *Oregon* took place, but due to the lack of available coastal boats the discharging of the cargo was slow with only 200 tons (203.21 tonnes) out by 7th of May. By the 10th of June the ship still had 600 rails to be unloaded. Finally some two months after arriving at the port of Otago the *Oregon* left in ballast for Nanaimo British Columbia to pick up coal.

The Company's Two Locomotives

At the same time as the Waimea Plains Railway Company was ordering the rails they also made an order for two locomotives from the Avonside Engine Company of Bristol. These were to be of the 2-4-0 wheel arrangement, tank engines weighing 15.5 tons (15.75 tonnes) and with 10.5inch (266.7mm) cylinders. The Directors knew that the same engines imported by the Government were being used in the Wellington area and could see that this type of locomotive would be ideal for working the Waimea line.

However, in the meantime, on the 17th September 1878, the New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Company had on its own initiative made an order for six 0-6-0 locomotives from Neilson & Company of Glasgow. These were to be saddle tank engines of 19.2 tons (19.51 tonnes) and also with 10.5inch cylinders. The first three engines of this order came on the Albion Company's ship *Westland*, which arrived at the Port of Otago on 20th April 1879.

The second shipment of three locos is thought to have been brought by the Albion Company's ship the *Otago* which arrived on 18th of June. One of the senior directors of the Waimea Plains Railway Company was Henry Driver, who was also the Dunedin agent for the New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Company, hence he was in a position to know and influence his fellow directors on the shipment coming to New Zealand, the end result was that the Waimea Plains Railway decided to purchase two of the Neilson imports, works numbers 2411 and 2414.

In the *Otago Daily Times* of 27th August there was an extensive report on the Waimea Plains Railway and the following was their

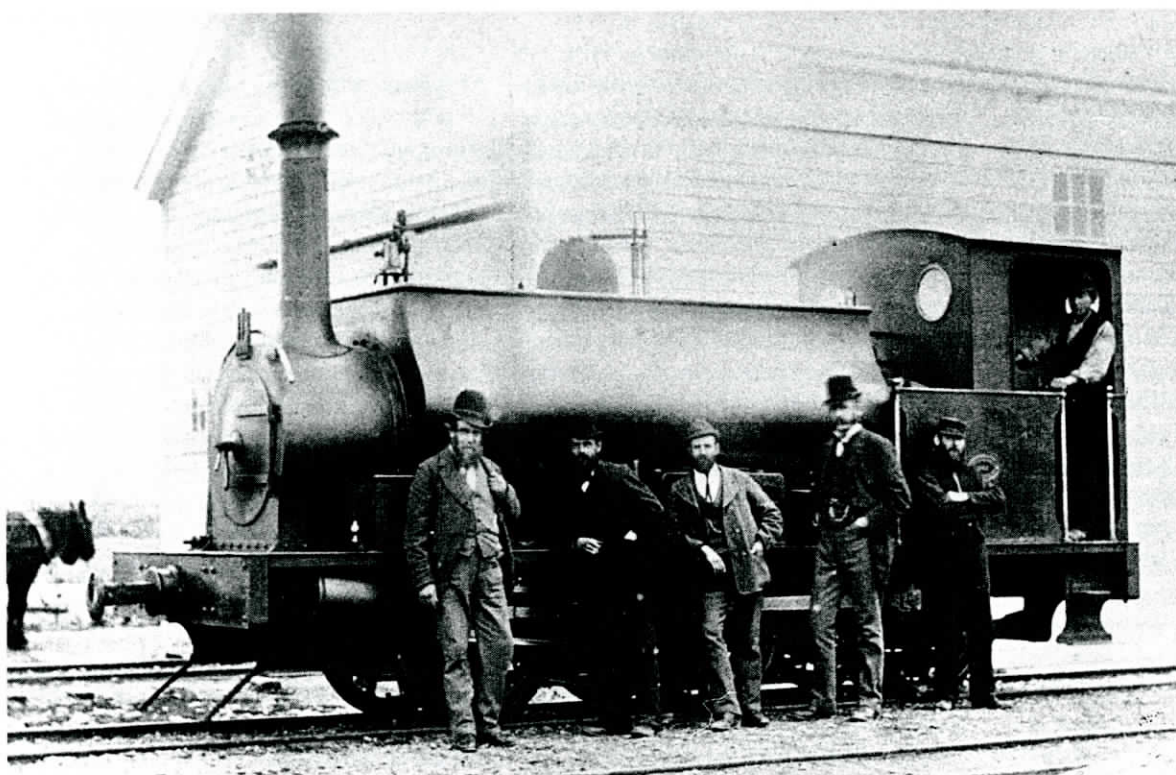
view on the locomotive purchases: *...These locomotives are the most economical to be procured, when the work they are capable of performing is considered in relation to their cost. They will, on this line, be capable of taking a load, independent of their own weight, of 124 tons (126 tonnes), or 15 loaded wagons up the ruling gradient, and can travel at the speed of 35 miles per hour, (53kph) with out detriment to themselves....*

This same article also mentions that the two locomotives were erected and on the ground (in Dunedin) ready to commence ballasting operations at each end of the Waimea line.

Construction Of The Line

On the 16th January 1879 the principle contractor, John Whittaker, signed the contracts for the building of the Waimea rail line. John Whittaker had a sub-contractor, a Mr Bennett, who was to look after the contract from the Elbow end. The contract to build the bridges over the Otamita and Waimea streams was let to a Mr. A. Bain (tendered price unknown). There was great optimism by many that all would be completed in 12 months, especially as work was going to take place from both ends of the new line. However, as events were to prove, it took longer. Slowly over the next few months the workforce built up and progress was being made. Initially they were nearly all Chinese with few European workers. However, by May 1879 the numbers had grown with about 300 people being employed, some of these were women and young boys. About one-third of the number were Mongolian.

On 15th August plate-laying was commenced at the Gore end of the contract, this would take the line out for the first mile



LEFT: This view is the only known photograph of either Neilson & company's NO 2411 or 2414 working for the Waimea Railway Company, at what is thought to be Lumsden. Although the loco's identity is unclear – it does not appear to have a road number – the 1878 0-6-0ST is believed to be the one that eventually became F 23. The two tank locos joined the NZR fleet in 1886, initially numbered F 112 and F 114, before coming F 23 and F 24 in the system-wide renumbering of 1890.

PHOTO: E. J. McClare collection

and a-half where there was a ballast pit. The contractor, Mr. Whittaker, said the engine would then be put to work and an additional 30 men employed on ballasting. He also mentioned his intention to start plate-laying at Elbow very soon. With both locomotives now in the Company's hands, one was allocated to the Gore end of the work and the other was at Elbow thus they were able to assist with ballasting and taking supplies to the railheads.

By November there had been eight miles of track laid from the Gore end with four miles from Elbow, the rate of progress being an average of 70 chains per week. With this sort of progress many were predicting the line to be open within five months. Unfortunately, problems arose between the contractor and the company over financial matters. These came about because of the difficulties the company had in raising finance, but were settled by the end of February 1880.

The Company had issued mortgage debentures to the value of £75,000 payable 30 years after the date of issue in July 1879 at 6 percent interest. These were to have been sold in London, but the Company was unable to sell any. The day was saved by the New Zealand Government which, under the authority of the Public Works Act 1879, guaranteed debentures to the tune of £40,000 by way of mortgage at an interest rate of 7 percent for a period of two years.

Finally, on Monday 24th May 1880, at a point a few miles north of Riversdale, the last rail was laid by Mr. Fulton and the contractor Mr. Whittaker. In a short speech to mark the occasion Mr. Fulton said that *...those present had witnessed the important ceremony of laying the last rail of the main trunk railway*

from Amberley to Kingston. Amberley at that time was the most northerly point the railways went above Christchurch.

However, Mr. Fulton's words soon brought forth an angry and justifiable reaction from Southland and Invercargill interests when the *Southland Times* of 26th May editorially derided Mr. Fulton's grandiose claims. Its second editorial concluded *...We do not grudge Dunedin her shortened journey to the lakes and mountains that are the common heritage and joy of New Zealanders. But we do depreciate the petty little note of triumph that is raised because she is supposed to have jockeyed us out of a traffic that by nature belongs to us, and that, if she has no objection, we shall take the liberty of keeping...*

The Opening Of The Railway

The grand opening of the Waimea Plains Railway took place on Saturday the 31st July 1880 with Mr. Horace Bastings organizing the day's events. A special train of seven carriages and two engines left Dunedin at 6:40am with 200 guests and excursionists bound for Gore. The opening ceremony was to have been performed by Mr. Larnach, the former Minister of Public Works. But he missed the special train by some minutes, the more candid reporting of the day saying that he "had slept in".

On the way down there was a 20 minute stop at Clinton for breakfast which was served in the goods shed. Upon arriving at Gore, a single Fairlie type locomotive, R 30, was brought from Invercargill. Profusely decorated in evergreens, this locomotive was attached to the northern end of the consist which then moved out onto the Waimea line. In the absence of Mr. Larnach, the Company

Secretary, Horace Bastings, mounted the engine in a shower of rain and after a few official words formally declared the railway open. There were three cheers for the railway and then three more for Mr. Bastings.

Lunch was then served in one of the carriages that had been set up as a dining car. The train consisted of six of the new American cars which had been imported the year before for the Christchurch-Dunedin express service. The train then set off for Elbow, the first passenger train to be drawn over the new line.

At that time not many people were living on the Waimea Plains and the only townships on the line between Gore and Lumsden were Mandeville and Riversdale. Neither township had been provided with a station at the time of the opening of the line, but of course, one was planned for each. Another station in planning was St. Patrick's, although at the time the township itself was only a plan on paper.

However, it was confidently expected that the railway would bring a considerable population to what was rightly regarded as one of the finest agricultural districts in New Zealand. So the opening ceremony was marked by *...a sort of high holiday at Gore, the residents of each place turned out almost en-masse to do honour to the occasion.*

Elbow was reached at 2pm and Kingston at 4pm. The excursionists then boarded the *P.S. Mountaineer* for the trip to Queenstown and the formal dinner held that evening in Eichardt's Hotel. With 200 guests in attendance the Company took every opportunity during toasts to extol the virtues of the Waimea Plains for settlement in the hope of boosting future land sales for the New Zealand Agricultural Company.

After the evening meal Mr. Bastings again took the opportunity to make a speech on behalf of the Company. He said: *...that it was generally expected that the line would be completed in 12 months but for various reasons it took six months longer. One of the difficulties was the difficulty in arranging finance....* He also said *...that it was well known that during the past 18 months there had been such a crisis in monetary matters in the Colony that the banks had been compelled to put the screw on.* This had not deterred the directors of the Company however, whom Mr Bastings praised *...for their indomitable energy in carrying on the construction of the line in face of the financial crisis and difficulties through which the Colony had passed. Since the banking institutions of New Zealand would not advance the money the directors had gone outside the Colony for it. On the whole there was no need for the almost universal cry of horror raised in these bad times, that the country was on the road to ruin, was going to the devil and so forth.* Mr. Bastings ended his speech on this hopeful note, "Success to the railway" was toasted in Champagne and the Waimea Plains Railway was declared open for traffic.

The next morning, Sunday, was spent in a trip to the head of Lake Wakatipu, and on the Monday the party took the special train back to Dunedin. It was reported that the train made an average speed of 31mph down the 37 mile Waimea Plains line, of course the gradient was in favour of the train. The completed trip of 173 miles (278.5km) from Kingston to Dunedin occupied a time of 11 hours 50 minutes.

Despite the high excitement and expectations by many on the opening of the new railway, the people of Invercargill looked upon it from a somewhat different view. The residents of Invercargill had

enjoyed two years of trade with the Lakes District since the opening of the Kingston Line and weren't in any mood to see it taken away. This was made clear by the comments of a reporter from an Invercargill newspaper who attended the ceremony. Towards the end of a long winded ramble the following comments: *...is this town to be deprived of the trade with Queenstown and the surrounding gold producing country she has hitherto enjoyed? It behoves our merchants to see that she is not, but they should, and doubtless will, bear in mind that Dunedin can more easily bid for that trade now than before because, as was pointed out in an Otago paper the other day, the goods traffic rate is very low after the first 75 miles. Invercargill is 88 miles from Kingston and Dunedin via the Waimea Plains 175 miles; consequently Invercargill has the distance in her favour, all that is needed to keep trade in its present channel is that our local merchants should be up and doing.*

Operations On The Line

With the line now open for traffic and business, the Waimea Plains Railway Company could not have struck a more inopportune time to start the new venture. The financial depression, which started round mid-1879, had by the late 1880s made itself felt across the whole Colony. It was reasonably clear that the Company right from the start was under-capitalised and in financial difficulties. The line had been conceived in the era of railway mania and much prosperity.

People now had no money to invest in shares, let alone to pay balances outstanding on shares they had already taken up.

Once the line was open, a temporary timetable was advertised, effective from 3rd August 1880 providing for one train each way daily except on Sunday. The 'IN' mixed

left Elbow at 10:25am taking 2 hours and 15 minutes on the run to Gore. The 'OUT' mixed left Gore at 3:50pm with a run time of 2 hours and 20 minutes for Elbow. The schedule allowed an average speed of 15.8 miles per hour (25.4kph).

Apart from a paid secretary at Head Office in Dunedin, the line was staffed by a travelling station master and porter, a foreman and four gangs of surfacemen, and an engine driver and a guard.

The Company itself owned no rolling stock except the two locomotives and a guard's van. A hire charge of one penny per wagon per mile was charged to the Government for each loaded wagon passing on or over the line.

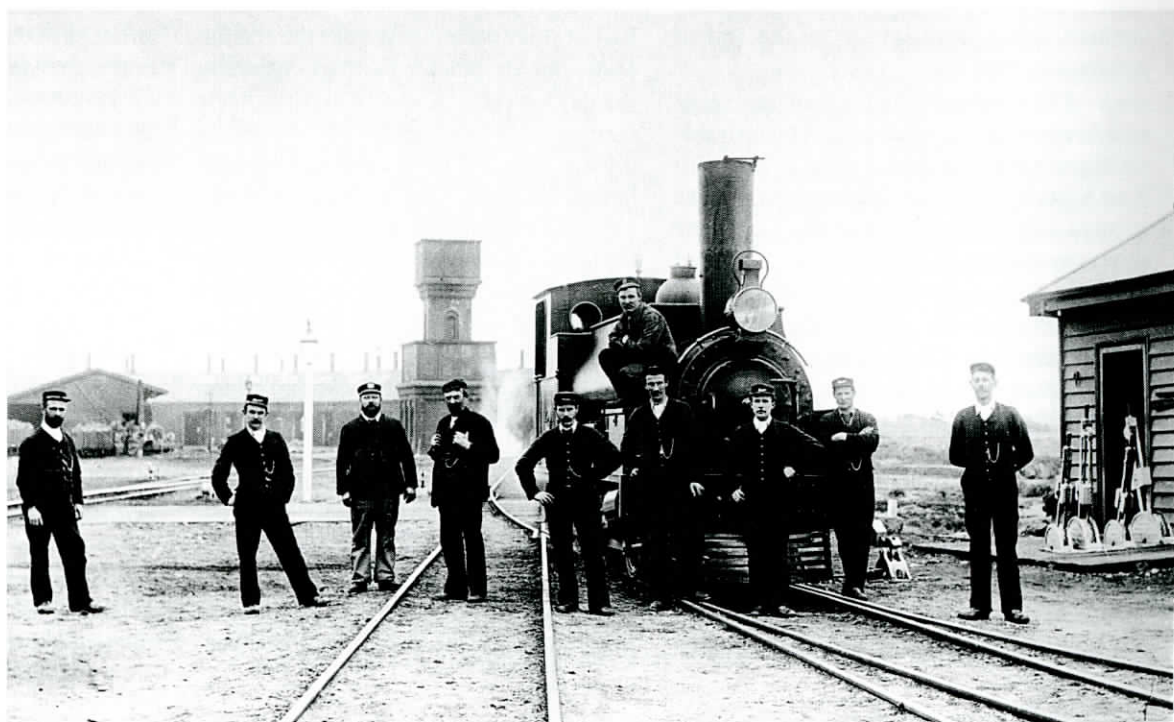
In the early days the stations on the Waimea Line did not have nameboards and there were no station masters, the guard on the train helping to supervise what was needed at each station as they went along. Passengers were picked up and let down anywhere along the line and fares paid once upon the train.

It is interesting to note that when the Company was sold in 1886, the railway boasted one station building and a stationmaster's house at Riversdale, plus goods sheds at Mandeville, Riversdale, and an engine shed at Lumsden (Elbow). There were sidings at eight other locations along the line.

With the downturn in the economy, the Government was forced to cut services so that from 1st July 1880 the daily trains to Kingston were reduced to a Monday, Wednesday, Friday frequency north of Elbow. The Lake Wakatipu Mail suggested that the Waimea Plains Railway might be induced by the Government to run on the alternate days between Elbow and Kingston thus providing an alternate communication

RIGHT: The other Waimea Plains Railway Company locomotive became F 24 on NZR's 1890 register. It is seen here in Invercargill fitted with a trial funnel. There is an interesting entry in one of the notebooks compiled by Juliet Scoble from old NZR and PWD correspondence registers (held by Archives New Zealand); a notation reads: *F 24 13/11/1897, shunting engine, Invercargill, fitted with a spark arrester designed by Mr. Black at Thomas, Quinn & Coy, which was fitted in September.*

PHOTO: E. J. McClare collection



between the Lakes District and Invercargill and Dunedin respectively.

The idea was adopted and came into effect on 20th of December 1880. Invercargill people were immediately up in arms over this new arrangement and saw it as a deliberate attempt to give Dunedin an unfair advantage in respect of the trade with the Lakes District. In a very short time the whole of Invercargill was "up and doing" because of the decision of the railway authorities to reduce the services on the Invercargill-Kingston line.

The editor of the *Southland Times* grew quite 'hot under the collar'. He wrote: *...one of the grossest attempts to 'sit' upon Invercargill has just been made by Dunedin, and we regret to say through the instrumentality of the Minister of Public Works. The design of the Waimea Plains Railway has never been a secret, and we had long ago made up our minds to bearing all the damage which this line could inflict on trade of Southland with the Lake...*

...The whole thing is a transparent job – against the interests of the railways and only in favour of Dunedin and the Private Waimea Line. We are glad to know that Queenstown is alive to the matter and last night a meeting was held there to remonstrate with the Government, a proof that the Lake District considers its interests are bound up with Invercargill.

Naturally Dunedin took an entirely different view of the whole business, and the newspapers from both Invercargill and Dunedin began slanging one another with a heartiness which has seldom been seen since those more degenerative times. The Dunedin Chamber of Commerce tried to pour oil on the troubled waters with an assurance that there was no desire in Dunedin to injure the people of Invercargill and Southland. They looked upon Southland as part of Otago, and did not wish to see ill feeling arise between Dunedin and Invercargill.

The strong protests made by Invercargill resulted in some redress, but, nevertheless, to Invercargill the advantage seemed to remain with Dunedin.

During December 1880 there had been an agreement with the Government on the interchange of traffic via the Waimea Plains Railway from Gore to Elbow and onto Kingston, the scale of charges to be the same as that which applied to the Government lines.

Financial Difficulties

From October 1880 to 31st March 1881 the Company received a turnover of £6,274-12s-9d and once the apportioned amount was paid to the Government there was £1,825-1s-11d left. Out of that latter amount

came wages, loan charges, maintenance costs, and provisions for loan repayments. That left only a net profit of £964. During the next 12 months, till end March 1882, they made £808 followed by the third year of only £40.

On 17th April 1883 the Memorandum of Arrangements between the Government and the Waimea Plains Railway for traffic interchange was extended for a further term, notwithstanding the Company's finances were still in a bad way. At that stage, the Company approached the Minister of Public Works and asked for the 7% levy to be imposed on the value of the land served by the Railway under the provisions of the District Railways Act 1878. This was granted and a levy of 3 shillings and 4 pence in the pound was imposed on all lands in the Waimea Plains District. This was strongly opposed by all residents and in particular the New Zealand Agricultural Company which had interests over a large part of the district. It was resolved not to pay the levy and the Railway Company took legal proceedings for recovery – the proceedings were to last into 1886.

Meanwhile, the Railway Company decided the only way to set matters right was to heavily increase tariff charges for goods being carried on the line. However, that was met by condemnation from farmers and settlers and a petition was presented to Parliament in August 1883 containing 288 signatures stating they wanted the State to take over the line and incorporate it into the Government railway.

The situation was to further deepen when from the 1st January 1884 the company stopped the running of trains from Elbow to Kingston. This service left Kingston at 7:50am on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, reaching Elbow at 9:50am and Gore at 12:25pm. The return service went on the alternate days of Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, left Gore at 2:45pm to be at Elbow by 5:00pm, and finally Kingston at 7:10pm.

Later in 1884, the situation was partly resolved when a further Memorandum of Arrangements for the interchange of traffic was agreed upon. That allowed for all fares, goods rates, and charges to be fixed by the company in respect of its services between Gore and Elbow. The effect of that was that passengers travelling to and from Kingston had to leave the train at the interchange or junction stations to re-book. The Government then ran a daily service between Kingston and Elbow so as to connect with the Waimea Plains services.

When the attempts to enforce the levy of 3s/4d met with such opposition, the proposal was contested in the Dunedin Supreme Court where the finding went in favour of the

railway company. However, when taken to the Court of Appeal, their decision reversed the lower court's ruling. In an effort to put things right, an Act to authorize the levying and recovery of certain rates by the Waimea Plains Railway Company was passed by Parliament in 1885. Some provisions of this Act allowed for rates to be back-dated to 1883. It is not known whether the Company made use of that provision and whether any back rates were collected.

By January 1886 the Waimea Plains Railway Company offered to sell out to the Government at a price that would ensure the return to all shareholders of the capital they had subscribed but without interest. The negotiations had actually started the previous November and went on for sometime. Finally, the Government's conditions of purchase were accepted by the company in June 1886, the date of purchase being back-dated to 31st March 1886. The purchase price was £110,000 comprising £35,000 of shareholders investments and the balance in mortgage debentures with the Government Insurance Association as mortgagors.

On 23rd November 1887, the order was issued for winding up the Waimea Plains Railway Company (Limited). The company had gone into voluntary liquidation, and the loss to individual shareholders was £1-18s per share. Not a very encouraging result to those who had tried to open up the country. It was obvious right from the start that the line was built for the main purpose of making the New Zealand Agricultural Company's estates easier to sell. Both the Land Company and the Railway Company had political overtones with some prominent Members of Parliament involved.

With the sale of the Waimea Branch Railway, the long term use and services it could provide were secure. However, the purchase by the Government was seen in many other parts of New Zealand as at best being favouritism where public money was being spent to bail out a private company at the expense of other provinces, and at worst, was political cronyism.

Finally, the retrenchment policies of the 1880s that the Government thought it had to enforce may have been necessary, but they certainly were not popular. For one thing, it meant holding up of railway construction and other public works throughout the Colony and naturally enough every district thought it was getting the worst possible deal. Complaints were loud and long and the public were looking around for a scapegoat.

The story of the Waimea Plains Branch Railway is to be continued in the September 2015 issue of *New Zealand Railfan*.