

Some Branch Line Reminiscences—5

WAIMEA PLAINS LINE IS CLOSED

With Some Historical Background

THE 37-mile Waimea Plains branch railway line between Gore and Lumsden in Southland, New Zealand, was closed to regular traffic from and including Thursday 1 April 1971, but the 10-mile section between Lumsden and Balfour has been retained to carry bulk wheat consignments as arranged between the Railways Department and silo operators.

The Minister of Railways, Hon. J. B. Gordon, said last year that farmers in the district themselves agreed at a public meeting in 1968 that, if 27,000 tons per annum was not obtained, the line could be closed. A subsequent change in this agreement was made after consultation with Mr. Talboys, the Member of Parliament for the district, and the figure was set at 72,000 tons for the three years ending in April 1971.

Mr. Gordon said in September 1970 it was now obvious that this figure could not be obtained, and the Railway Retention Committee agreed that this was the situation. The Committee, he said, had conducted determined efforts over the past three years to obtain tonnage for the line.

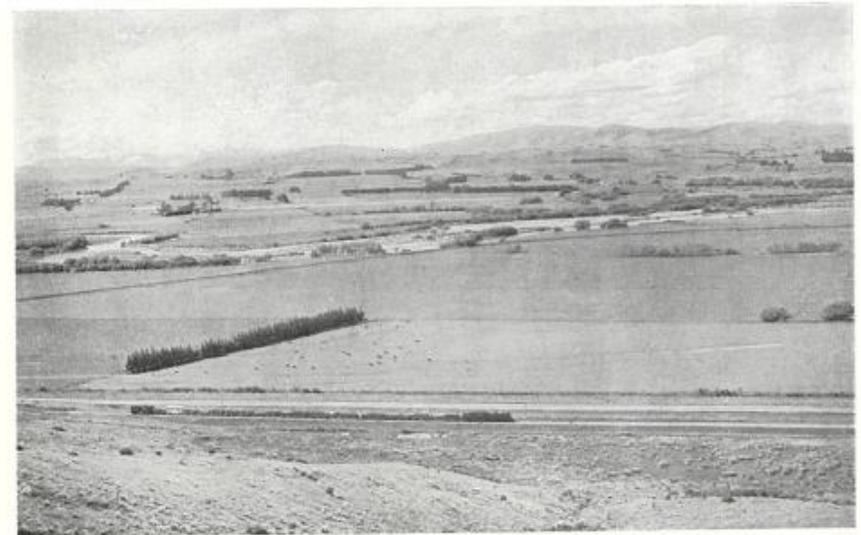
The Minister added that it had been decided the track at the Gore end of the line would not be lifted before 1 May, 1971. This would give at least seven months for all parties interested in the siting of proposed new freezing works to decide wheth-

er the site should be on this section of the line.

The railway between Gore and Lumsden was originally built by the Waimea Plains Railway Company and opened for traffic on 31 July, 1880. The object was to shorten the distance for the conveyance of goods between Dunedin and the lake district. The railway was purchased by the Government and taken over by the Railways Department from 15 November, 1886. Regular passenger service on the line was discontinued from 17 September, 1945, when a road service took over. Latterly the line was served by a goods train three days a week.

Some Historical Background

THE railway across the Waimea Plains between Gore and Lumsden had its origins in the desire of Dunedin businessmen for a shorter rail route from their city to the Lake Wakatipu district. On 20 June,



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

A Lumsden-Gore goods train skirts the eastern extremity of the Waimea Plains, east of Otamita, about seven miles from Gore. The Mataura River flows from left to right across this picture.

1878, when the railway from Invercargill to Kingston was almost completed, the Waimea Plains Railway Company Limited advertised its prospectus in the *Wakatipu Mail*. The proposed capital of the Company was to be £150,000 made up in 15,000 shares of £10 each.

It was announced that the Company was formed for the purpose of constructing, under the provisions of the District Railways Act, a line of railway from Gore to the Elbow, as Lumsden was known at that time. The advertisement continued:

The provisional directors deem it scarcely necessary to point out the great advantages that will accrue to Dunedin by the construction of the proposed line by reducing the distance between that city and the Lakes District by about 32 miles besides opening up 500,000 acres of the finest agricultural land in the colony. Included in that are the celebrated Waimea Plains, Wantwood and Switzer's districts and a large tract extending from the Five Rivers Plains towards Lake Te Anau and will bring Kingston to within eight and one half hours from Dunedin. The promoters have no hesitation in predicting that the Waimea Plains Railway will be one of the best paying lines in the Colony and will yield a handsome return for the capital invested. It is confidently anticipated that the profits upon the working of the line will pay a handsome dividend to the shareholders, but in

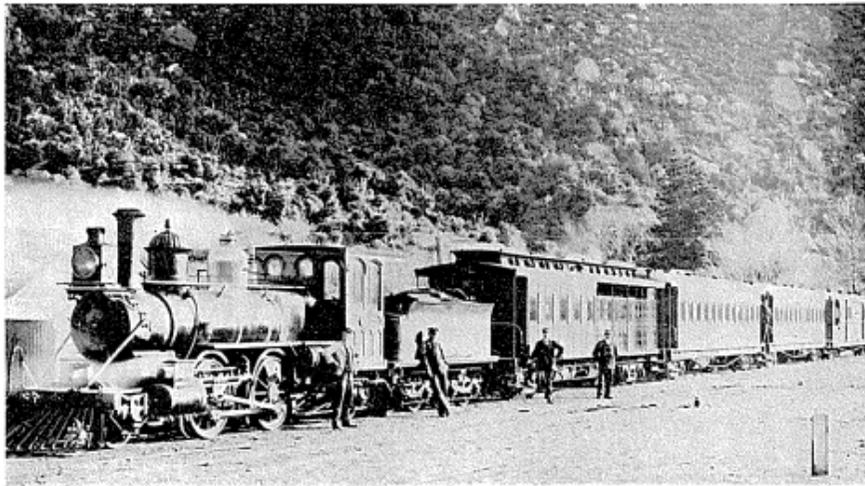
any event they have a guarantee of seven percent provided by the District Railways Act. The proprietors of the land which the line will pass through have agreed to give the land free of cost and steps are being taken to comply with the Act. The provisional Directors propose ordering the rails forthwith and commencing construction as soon as legal formalities have been arranged.

(signed) H. Bastings,

Secretary,
Waimea Plains Railway Company Limited,
New Zealand Insurance Building,
Dunedin.

In the same issue Messrs McArdell and Co. of Queenstown stated that they would accept applications for shares in the Company, and that prospectuses and forms of applications were to hand. The share list would close on 1 July, 1878.

The first sod of this railway was turned by the Hon. J. Ballance, Colonial Treasurer, on 27 January, 1879. It was to be built under the provisions of the District Railways Act, 1877. A contract for earthworks and formation was let to John Whittaker for £36,000. Equipment such as 52lb. per yard rails, and sleepers, were supplied by the Company. Mr. H. P. Higginson was engineer, and Mr. A. R. W. Fulton was



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

In the heyday of the old Rogers "K" class 2-4-2 locomotives on the passenger train service between Kingston and Gore, popularly known as the "Kingston Flyer". This early 20th century scene is at Kingston.

resident engineer in charge of the works. Both gentlemen were later to be associated with the Wellington and Manawatu Railway enterprise. Two "F" class 0-6-0T locomotives hauled materials as the line progressed towards Lumsden from Gore.

The Waimea Plains railway was completed on 24 May, 1880. An inaugural train left Gore at 10.35 a.m. loaded with visitors and local residents. The last rail was laid some two miles from Riversdale soon after lunch and the train arrived at Lumsden at 2.15 p.m. The return journey to Gore began at 4.00 p.m.

The name of the Company was indicative of the easy country through which it was built. The line rises gradually from Gore, 235ft above sea level, to Riversdale at 414ft, Balfour at 540ft, and Lumsden at 629ft.

The steepest grade is that of 1 in 100 for a short distance against trains running from Gore to Lumsden. The only structure of note was a 207-ft bridge over the Waimea Stream near Mandeville. Earthworks were light, and there were few curves.

An excursion train left Dunedin at 6.45 a.m. on 31 July 1880 for the Waimea Plains line and Lake Wakatipu. Hauled by

two locomotives, its six large American bogie cars carried about 150 passengers, most of whom had been invited to the formal opening of the Waimea Line. Breakfast was served in the goods shed at Clinton, and a small crowd at Gore watched the train's arrival at 12.15 p.m.

The formal opening of the line began after the train ran on to the Company's line. Mr. Horace Bastings, the Company's secretary, officiated in place of the Hon. W. J. M. Larnach, C.M.G., the chairman, who missed the train at Dunedin by two minutes. Mr Bastings climbed aboard the gaily-decorated "R" class locomotive and declared the £108,000 railway open. Three cheers were given for the railway, three more for Mr. Bastings, and to the accompaniment of popping champagne corks, the train began to move towards Elbow, as Lumsden was then known.

One of the American cars had been fitted out as a dining car, and lunch was served on the way to Kingston, reached by the train at 4.00 p.m.

At Kingston the excursionists boarded the paddle-steamer *Mountaineer* for the voyage up Lake Wakatipu to Queenstown, where they stayed the night.

The following day, Sunday, was spent cruising to the head of the lake in the same steamer, which was also used on the Monday morning, August 2, to return the party to Kingston.

On the return journey to Elbow, the train covered the 38-mile line from Kingston in 1½ hours, including stoppages. It eventually reached Dunedin at 10.05 p.m., 11hr. 50 min. after the excursionists left the Queenstown jetty.

Before this official inauguration, occasional trains had already been run over the Waimea Plains line. But even before it was opened there was talk of reducing the daily service between Winton and Kingston, on the Government line, to three times a week. This, no doubt, arose from the investigations of the 1880 Royal Commission, appointed because of the current depression to recommend ways of reducing railway expenditure. It was also to recommend whether or not Government should buy the Waimea branch.

The *Wakatip Mail* suggested that, should the service from Invercargill be reduced, the Waimea Plains Railway might run a train on the three blank days if the Government could be persuaded to connect them with Kingston. If this could be arranged, then Kingston would have a daily service, to Dunedin one day and Invercargill the next. A few days later the threatened reduction became reality and the local paper announced that, from 1 July, 1880, a thrice-weekly service would operate between Elbow and Kingston. The train would run Monday, Wednesday, and Friday only.

TRAIN SERVICES

THE April 1880 timetable provided for a morning train from Elbow to Invercargill, returning in the late afternoon, and for a morning train from Invercargill through Elbow to Kingston, returning between 1.00 and 6.40 p.m. It was apparently this latter service that was restricted to three days a week from 1 July.

The N.Z.R. timetable in September 1880, however, showed a complete rearrangement of the service. Now the early morning train from Invercargill went only as far as Winton, whence it returned almost immediately. Another train now left Kingston at 8.30 a.m., and Elbow at 10.30 a.m., to reach Invercargill at 1.50 p.m. This one then

returned at 3.05 p.m. to reach Elbow at 6.25 and Kingston at 8.30 p.m.

This arrangement made it possible for the Waimea Plains Railway Company's train leaving Elbow at 10.25 a.m. to connect with the train from Kingston, and to connect at Gore with the 10.30 a.m. Invercargill-Dunedin passenger train. Similarly, passengers reaching Gore at 3.49 p.m. on the 9.30 a.m. train from Dunedin could catch the Company's return train to Elbow and connect there in turn with the train to Kingston.

But even this arrangement apparently did not prove acceptable because the December 1880 timetable showed a restoration of the Elbow-Invercargill morning train and its corresponding late-afternoon return service, also the morning train from Invercargill to Elbow, extended to Kingston on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with a corresponding afternoon return service.

The afternoon train from Gore to Elbow now ran on to Kingston on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, to return from Kingston at 8.20 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in time to make the morning run from Elbow to Gore. This gave Dunedin-Kingston passengers a thrice-weekly service (from 8.00 a.m. to 6.15 p.m. southbound, and from 8.20 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. northbound).

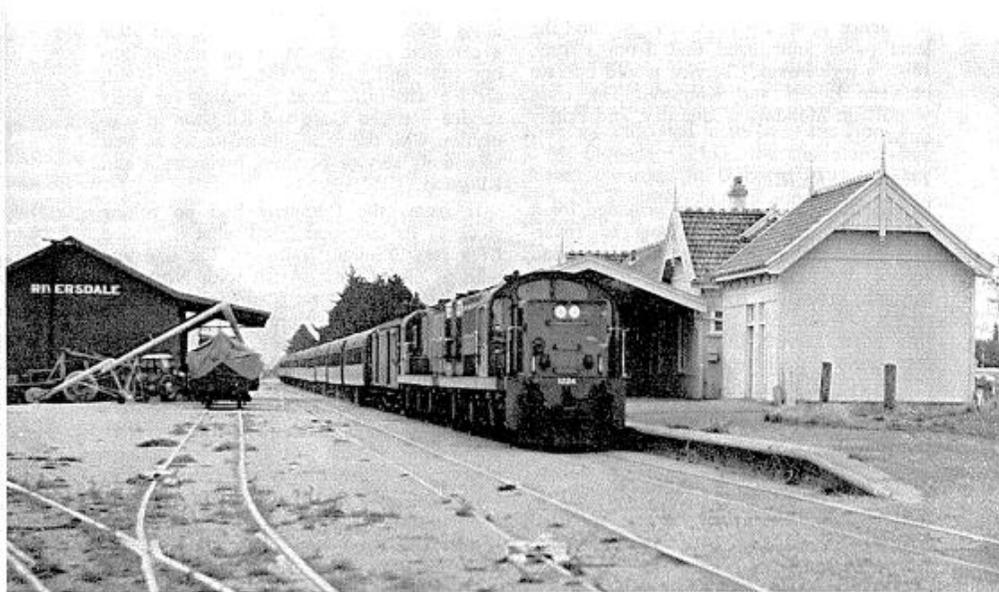
The arrangements continued basically along these lines for some years, but after a complete interruption of the service during 1884 and part of 1885, a more lavish service was introduced providing for daily service between Gore and Kingston in connection with the main-line expresses as well as a daily service between Invercargill and Kingston.

It seems the Company had no rolling stock of its own and hired what it needed from New Zealand Railways. The line was worked under arrangement with New Zealand Railways and rates and fares for passengers and goods were divided between the parties proportionately. A penny a mile was also paid to the Minister of Public Works for each loaded New Zealand Railways wagon that passed over the Company's line. This was a form of rental for Railways' freight stock. The Company was also required to run a train three times a week each way over the line between Kingston and Elbow. For this service the Government paid £9 a week. Passenger fares were



Photographs: R. J. Meyer

On 20 March 1971 a novel and never-to-be repeated excursion was run from Dunedin to Invercargill and thence to Lumsden, then returning to Gore via the Waimea Plains and back to Dunedin. The train, headed by "Dj"s 1228 and 1224, is seen above at Waipahi in the morning, and below passing Riversdale in the afternoon.



the same as those on New Zealand Railways.

Early in 1882 a traveller made these comments about a visit to the district:

We left Dunedin at 6.15 a.m. for Kingston via the Waimea Railway arriving at 5.0 p.m. Our luggage was transferred to the steamer "Mountain-creeper" lying at the wharf some two hundred yards from the station. A two and one-half hour run brought us to Queenstown with 200 passengers on board. On Wednesday we left by steamer for Kingston to arrive at Noon. The train left for Invercargill at 1.15 p.m. and arrived there at 8.0 p.m. We left Invercargill on Thursday at 10.15 a.m. and arrived at Dunedin at 8.0 p.m. fatigued with a day's rattle in the train.

From 25 October, 1880, until 31 March, 1881, the Waimea Plains Railway Company earned £6,274 12s 9d. The Company received £1,825 1s 11d, and the Government £4,499 10s 10d for working the line. However, this arrangement soon became an unhappy one.

On 31 December, 1885, the Company terminated its agreement and from the following day stopped running a service that connected with New Zealand Railways services.

At the Company's annual general meeting in March, 1884, it was said that expenditure had exceeded income by about £600 or £700. The Company then asked Government to pay the guarantee of five to seven percent allowed in the District Railways Act of 1877. However, Government was not interested. Consequently, the Company refused to run trains on the line and pressed Government to buy it out. Finally, it was decided to levy a rate of 3s 4d in the pound on Waimea Plains settlers. An attempt to enforce this payment under the District Railways Act was unsuccessful because the settlers appealed to the Supreme Court which ruled the rate invalid.

A Government paper—D.5a of 1885— included the following statement concerning the proposed purchase of the line:

A resolution was passed in the House of Representatives on October 30, 1884, giving authority for the best arrangements that can be made with a view to acquisition of the line by the Colony. The arrangements were made subject to the ratification of Parliament.

The Waimea Plains Railway was formed in June 1878 to construct a railway from the township of Gore to Lumsden. The consent of ratepayers and property owners to the construction of this line was obtained in November 1878. The Governor's approval of and assent to its construction was gazetted on December 27, 1878. The line was completed and opened for traffic in August 1880.

The certified cost of the railway was £108,713.

The actual cost of the railway was £110,000. The estimated cost of the railway was £101,000.

The Waimea Plains Railway Company comprised 75 shareholders who had subscribed a capital of £59,350 of which £35,610 was called up. The Company alleges that its financial difficulties were caused by defective legislation. People were induced to subscribe to the undertaking in the belief that a minimum of seven percent per annum was secured to them by law and that under the District Railways Act of 1877 the Company would be in a position to raise money by the issue of debentures. Owing to the defective legislation, the Company suffered serious inconvenience and loss because the debentures were found to be unsalable.

At the beginning of 1886 the Company offered to sell to Government at a price that would cover the investment of shareholders, but without interest. This offer was valid for one month. However, it seems it was not taken up because on July 30, 1886, the Colony bought the Waimea Plains Railway for £110,000. Of this £35,000 went to the Company, while £75,000 was paid to the Insurance Association to cover what the Company owed it.

In October 1887 the Company entered into voluntary liquidation and shareholders lost £1 18s per share. One contemporary comment was that this was not very encouraging for those who tried to open up the country.

Some time after the Government purchase of the line, towards the end of the century, the passenger service between Kingston and Gore became known as the "Kingston Flyer" and many tales immortalised the speed of the trains which often consisted of a Yankee "K" class locomotive with three or four cars and a van.

These small 2-4-2 type locomotives were the first American-built engines used in New Zealand. Initially, they were imported to haul the first Christchurch-Dunedin express train in 1878. However, the weight of the trains soon became too heavy for these locomotives, and they were transferred to passenger duties on other lines. They built up quite a tradition for fast running over the Waimea Plains between Gore and Lumsden and between Lumsden and Kingston. British-built 2-6-2 class "V" locomotives, with the same size driving wheels (49in.) as the "K", were also used on trains between Gore and Kingston. The "V"s were rated to haul 110 tons over the 1 in 62 ruling grade on the Kingston line, compared with 90 tons for the "K" locomotive on passenger trains.