

OTAGO CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How and when was the Otago Central Rail Trail established?

The Rail Trail is the first to be established in New Zealand. On closure of the Otago Central Railway line, the line was vested in the Department of Conservation who, with the help of a newly established Rail Trail Trust converted the old railway line to a track suitable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The trail runs through country not seen from the road, so it introduces the traveller to areas surrounding the old Goldfields of Otago and the historic nature of this unique area of New Zealand. With 150 kms of track and no difficult hill climbs, the track is able to be traversed by most people.

How do I get to the Otago Central Rail Trail?

The trail is accessible by car from Dunedin, starting at either Middlemarch (SH87) or Clyde (SH85). The Taieri Gorge Railway from Dunedin will transport bikes free by prior arrangement. The trail can also be accessed from the various small settlements at many points along its route.

What is the distance between towns on the Rail Trail?

- Middlemarch to Hyde 27 km
- Hyde to Daisybank 11 km
- Daisybank to Waipiata 13 km
- Waipiata to Ranfurly 8 km
- Ranfurly to Wedderburn 14 km
- Wedderburn to Otarehua 11 km
- Otarehua to Lauder 23 km
- Lauder to Omakau 9 km
- Omakau to Chatto Creek 10 km
- Chatto Creek to Alexandra 17 km
- Alexandra to Clyde 8 km

All towns except Daisybank have accommodation.

How fit do I need to be to travel the Trail?

A reasonable level of fitness is required but if you can ride a bike you can bike the Trail. Both children and elderly adults have ridden the trail, which is undulating but with no really steep hills. By pacing yourself, you will have an enjoyable experience.

Should I book in advance?

Because the Trail is becoming increasingly popular, it is recommended that you book in advance, especially during the summer months and other holiday periods (Christmas, New Year, Easter and Labour Weekend). Accommodation is available at most small towns on the route but cannot be guaranteed during the above times without a booking. You should make sure you know what policies accommodation providers have in place for bookings and cancellations.

What are the most important requirements for travelling on the Trail?

It is essential that you carry water. Temperatures in a Central Otago summer can be extreme and currently, there is not much shade along the route. Riding during early morning or late afternoon will avoid the extremes of temperature. The following items are recommended as part of your kit for the Trail:

Sufficient water and food (snacks) for the distance you are to travel each day.

Sunscreen, sunhat and sunglasses

Lightweight waterproof raincoat.

First Aid kit, which contains any personal medication.

Toilet paper (this is not provided in the toilets), small trowel or spade.

Torch (some of the tunnels are very dark).

Clothing suitable for walking, cycling or horse riding – loose fitting, breathable fabrics are preferable. Clothing which provides protection from wind and cold is also recommended.

Central Otago summer nights can be very cold, and winter temperatures can be extreme.

First Aid kit

Comfortable loose clothes suitable for cycling and walking (e.g. shorts, track suit, or light trousers)

Comfortable, strong footwear.

Full puncture repair kit if cycling, or, equipment to maintain horses health if riding.

Camera and Cellphone (see Safety for Cyclists).

Can the Rail Trail be negotiated at any time?

The Trail is negotiable at any time of year. However, particularly in winter, weather forecasts should be checked, both locally and for Otago, and warm clothing, (preferably wool) is needed. leave a little later and plan to be off the Trail no later than 4 pm.

Are there limits to Age Groups for the Trail?

The Rail Trail is a great family experience but children should be good riders (no trainer wheels). Many elderly people have biked and walked the Trail in both summer and winter. Some parts of the Trail still have rougher surfaces, and the gradient has some steeper sections but no difficult hill climbs.

What will I encounter on the Rail Trail?

The Trail is a motorised vehicle free area, and is similar to walking or cycling on a gravel road. Surfaces may be uneven in places and there can be loose material along the Trail. The Trail provides an opportunity to view scenery not seen from highways and to experience the tranquility and remoteness of the area. The history surrounding the line's construction is also evident in the bridges, viaducts and tunnels along the way. DOC information kiosks at strategic intervals along the Trail provide information about specific features.

Where should I start from?

This is a matter of personal preference and timetabling. As the Trail can be accessed from many places, this allows you to decide how long you will spend on the Trail. The gradient is not particularly steep, the highest point is at Wedderburn, so a starting place is entirely the user's choice. Wind conditions can make a difference, with a Nor'Wester suiting a start from Clyde and a Sou'Wester a start from Middlemarch.

How long does it take to cycle the entire Rail Trail?

The ability, fitness and personal preferences of the user play a part. If sightseeing along the way is planned this must be factored in. On average, 3 days is sufficient to cycle the Trail with few stops for sightseeing away from the Trail. A reasonable day's cycling ranges from 40 – 60km (25 – 27 miles). Five to seven days allows for more sightseeing along the way.

Where is Pukerangi?

Really in the wop wops, but that is where the train stops daily, year round. Do check the schedule with [Taieri Gorge Railway](#) as there is a different summer and winter time table. In summer, 1 October - 31 March, the train also goes right to [Middlemarch](#) on Fridays and Sundays.

How can I organise a Rail Trail trip without any equipment or transport?

There are a number of complete packages available as well as fully serviced, guided trips. Some accommodation providers along the Trail offer packages, and Information Centres will provide information about packages and guided trips.

Can I transport baggage other than carrying it on the bike?

[Catch-A-Bus provide a baggage forwarding service anywhere along the Trail.](#)

Where can I park my car?

It is recommended that you make use of secure parking offered by accommodation providers. Some will also park vehicles for a small fee if you are not a guest.

Can I camp on the Rail Trail?

Camping is not encouraged given the wide range of accommodation providers in towns along the Trail. There are two informal campsites with basic facilities, one at the Waipiata Bridge and one near Tiroiti, for overnight stay only. Open fires are not permitted. During summer in particular, a Total Fire Ban will probably be in place. Users should check with DOC or the Central Otago District Council before starting their journey.

Are dogs allowed on the Rail Trail?

The Trail is a public reserve and dogs are not allowed, except for the section of the Trail between Alexandra and Clyde, but only if on a lead. The restriction recognises rural landowners concerns about dogs on the Trail.

What facilities are on the Rail Trail?

Environmental toilets are located between towns but you must provide your own toilet paper. Car parks are available at, or near former station sites in the towns. There are a number of small railway sheds along the Trail and many shade plantings have been made. Drinking water is only available at a few places, and during summer, the supply may be limited due to drought. Bottled water may be purchased at the various towns. Please bring a rubbish bag with you as rubbish bins are not provided, and follow the adage 'leave only footprints or, in this case, tire marks'.

What will the weather be like?

Spring (September-November): Coastal areas – 12 - 24°C, Central Otago 15 - 25°C (sunscreen recommended).

Summer (December – February): Coastal areas – 15 - 25°C, Central Otago 20 – 30+°C (sunscreen recommended).

Autumn (March – May): Coastal areas – 10 - 20°C, Central Otago 10 - 26°C (sunscreen recommended).

Winter (June - August): Coastal areas 4 - 10°C, Central Otago – temperatures may range from - 10°C to 10°C, warm, weatherproof clothing recommended.

Is the Rail Trail For Me?

If you want peace and tranquility, few people (on a 150km Trail it is not crowded), a chance to discover magnificent rural landscapes, a sense of history and an easy outdoor activity, then the Rail Trail is for you. The popularity of the Trail has grown rapidly, both in New Zealand and internationally. Particularly during summer months and holiday periods, booking accommodation ahead of time is advisable.

A Code of Conduct has been developed for the Trail.

- Motorised vehicles and motor cycles are not permitted on the Trail.
- Move to the left when you meet other users.
- Leave gates as you find them. Do not disturb stock along the Trail, especially during Lambing time (September – October).
- Dogs are permitted on the **Alexandra to Clyde section only**, and must be controlled on a lead at all times.
- Open fires, and firearms, are not permitted on the Trail.
- Take all your rubbish away with you.
- Always use toilets where available. Otherwise, bury your waste away from the Trail avoiding waterways.
- Give way to horses on bridges. Wait until the horse has crossed safely before proceeding.
- Horses must be led across bridges.
- Cyclists please take care when approaching and passing horses, particularly from behind.
- Do not wander from the Trail. Land surrounding the Trail is privately owned.

Safety for Cyclists.

As with every outdoor activity, there is always the possibility of an accident occurring. While the Rail Trail is a very safe environment, much of it is very isolated, with a low population, and this factor must be considered when planning your journey. While cellphone coverage has been upgraded, there will be blank spots on the Trail. It may take some time to cycle to an area where there is coverage (possibly 30 minutes). There are doctors at Ranfurly, Alexandra and Clyde and hospitals at Ranfurly and Clyde. A St Johns Ambulance Service operates from Alexandra and Ranfurly. Police are stationed at Middlemarch, Ranfurly, Omakau, Alexandra and Clyde. Make sure you carry a First Aid kit. Access to main highways is easy from most parts of the Trail.