

Get on the Otago Rail Trail

The Otago Central Rail Trail is fast becoming one of the most popular tourist attractions in the South Island

on your Bike

The Rail Trail takes you on a cycling adventure of a lifetime through some of New Zealand's most impressive scenery. Suitable for all ages and all fitness levels the Rail Trail is an experience you will never forget. And it's free!



PHOTO: Tourism Central Otago

The Otago Central Rail Trail lies deep in the heart of Central Otago. This is the only region in New Zealand with a continental climate. Whereas green is the predominant colour of the New Zealand landscape, here browns, golds and reds rule. Overhead, Central Otago is big sky country. Even cloud formations are different. Looking like stacks of oversized pancakes, lenticular (lens-like) clouds tower over mountain ranges skirted by the Otago Central Rail Trail.

While the area is home to a rich and varied history, the Rail Trail is a more recent phenomenon but nevertheless it has been a spectacular success.

Born out of the closure of the rural railways in the 1970's and 80's, the rail corridor between Clyde and Middlemarch was purchased by the Department of Conservation in 1993 as a recreational reserve. The Otago Central Rail Trail Charitable Trust raised the funds necessary to make the project a reality and between 1994 and 2000 the Otago Central Railway was transformed into the Otago Central Rail Trail. All 68 bridges were re-decked and equipped with handrails and the surface made more suitable for cyclists and walkers.

The Rail Trail was officially opened in February 2000 and just a few years later it is now a major tourist attraction and contributor to the local economy. A nationwide internet-based public survey by AA Travel rated the Otago Central Rail Trail 16th on the list of 101 Must-Do's in New Zealand.

Prime Minister John Key identified the Rail Trail as an example of what can be achieved through small, local infrastructure projects and the success of the Otago Rail Trail has been a major inspiration for the National Cycleway project.

But enough about the history; here's what you need to know. The Rail Trail runs for 150km from Clyde to Middlemarch and common consensus seems to suggest that riding for 4-5 hours a day is enough for most. So give yourself at least four days to ride the full length of the trail.

The Rail Trail is a year round public recreation reserve and there is no charge to use the trail although donations are appreciated. Currently you don't need to book to ride the trail but it is vital to book accommodation well in advance particularly during the peak season of March and April.

But any time of the year is a good time to tackle the trail. Wintertime visitors tell us snow-capped mountains and bike tyres crunching through ice is a truly unforgettable experience. Similarly, the seasonal colour changes of spring and autumn bring their own spectacle and uniqueness to the Rail Trail experience. Summer is the peak season but whatever the time of year be prepared for extreme weather changes. In summer it can be up to 40 degrees Celsius and within a few hours drop to the mid teens. The key is to be prepared.

Take clothing for all seasons. And plenty of drinking water and don't forget the toilet paper! The Rail Trail has plenty of options for places to stop and eat with the historic Wedderburn Tavern, built in 1885 and the Commercial Hotel in Omakau particularly popular with rail trailers.

There are also some boutique vineyards along the route that are well worth checking out while if history is your thing, the area and the rail trail are steeped in wonderful stories from the past.

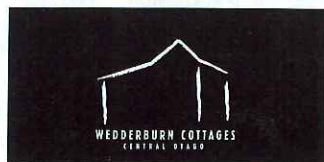
To find out more visit www.otagoentrailtrail.co.nz



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