

# OHAKUNE OLD COACH ROAD



GRADE  
3

LENGTH  
15 km

TOTAL DESCENT  
170 m

DURATION  
2-4 hrs

LOCATION  
Ohakune,  
Ruapehu

RIDE  
Be prepared for the  
occasional snow in Winter.

DIRECTION  
While the trail may be ridden  
in either direction, the  
topography will encourage  
most people to ride from  
west (Horopito) towards  
the east back to Ohakune.  
Shuttles from Mountains to  
Sea Official Trail Partners run  
regularly to the start.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE TRAIL  
AND SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE VIA  
OUR SHORT SURVEY.



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## HIGHLIGHTS

Stunning sub alpine native forest

Challenging and original cobbled road built of sett stones in the 1880's

Panoramic views of Mt Ruapehu, and the surrounding rural plans to the south

Two historic railway viaducts including the Hāpuawhenua viaduct, one of New Zealand's oldest and tallest curved viaducts at 45m high and 245m long

Great information panels connecting today with yesterday

One of New Zealand's best day rides following an old byway around the foothills of Mt Ruapehu.

Easily accessible and suitable for riders of most ages and abilities, the trail traverses Tongariro National Park forest and farmland, with many epic lookouts over the volcanic plateau.

Revealed along the way are many surprising and memorable sights – from spooky railway tunnels and grand viaducts, to old bush camps and remnants of the original cobblestone road.

The Ohakune Old Coach Road is great for the whole family and runs between Horopito and Ohakune. Horopito is 170 metres higher altitude than Ohakune, so the track is much more enjoyable starting at Horopito, as most of the way will be downhill.

# OHAKUNE OLD COACH ROAD

## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Ohakune Old Coach Road provided an all-weather road link for horse-drawn coaches carrying passengers and goods between the two railheads of the North Island main trunk line. Progress on the new main trunk line was slow due to the rugged landscape and so the road provided access until the railheads were finally linked in 1908.

The trail mostly follows the original route of a bridle track completed in 1886 and upgraded to a dray road in 1895. Between 1904 and 1906, it was paved with setts (rock pavers), giving it a durable, all-weather surface for heavy horse-drawn traffic. Completed in November 1906, at a point when the distance between the railheads was 39km.

The road was still used until early 1909 but after the opening of State Highway 49 fell into disuse. It remained mostly untouched until the 2005 when a group of locals started the process of reopening for walkers. (Some sections have been lost through deviation of the railway in 1987.) The road can be considered a significant example of roading engineering heritage and the finest rural road constructed in New Zealand up to that time. Great historic significance for the period it was used as the link between the two ends railheads. The end of the road's useful life froze it in time, and other than the natural deterioration it has undergone since its use stopped, it is in remarkably good condition.

The Old Coach Road trail takes in two disused viaducts that were part of the original railway line, that have now been replaced and the track realigned.

The Hāpuawhenua Viaduct was an engineering marvel at the time of construction 1908 and became the poster child of New Zealand Rail.

The viaduct is 45m high, 300m long.

- Consists of 13 concrete piers and four 4-legged steel towers resting on concrete foundation blocks.
- Four steel plate girder tower spans of 11m, five 20m lattice truss spans and thirteen 11m plate girders.
- It is unique in that it is built on a 10-chain radius curve, reflecting the difficult landscape through which it passes.

The valley represented the last major obstacle to cross to complete the railway between Auckland and Wellington. Now refurbished, you can ride or walk across it. It was also the site of the world's first ever commercial Bungy Jumping venture by A J Hackett.

The Taonui Viaduct shares many of the features of the Hāpuawhenua Viaduct: Both designed by Peter Seton Hay, using the same construction methods, and unique curved style. The Taonui viaduct differs only in its smaller size (140m long and 35m high), aspect, and its 1 in 60 gradient.

The viaducts and the Old Coach Road have Category I Historic Places Trust status. Numerous information boards along the track explains the history of the track and the building of the railway.



Mountains to Sea  
Ngā Ara Tūhono

## TRAIL ROUTE

The track starts out by Smash Palace, a huge classic car wreckers/museum. From there you will ride along a rural road section before entering The Tongariro National Park.

The track flows through areas of native grasses, flax, and ferns before traversing a designated rail crossing.

A short climb up brings you to the Taonui Viaduct, a great photo spot. From there you drop down under the viaduct into magnificent native forest before a long steady climb to the highest part of the track as expansive views of the Ohakune basin come into view.

The payoff for that climb is about 3km of flowing downhill riding on a great surface in beautiful forest. This section ends with a series of narrow winding corners with steep drop offs. (Take caution here). At the T junction, the track continues to the right, but make sure you turn left to visit the Hāpuawhenua Viaduct, which is only about 100 metres from the junction.

The Hāpuawhenua Viaduct is a must opportunity for selfies. Check out the view and the fire buckets at the end. (Note: the scoria track underneath the viaduct is not part of the trail).

The track then climbs over a small hill through more native forest delivering you to the entrance of the hand dug rail tunnel that goes through the hill you have just traversed. The tunnel is no longer used, and you can ride the full length of it. It is blocked off at the other end, so you must come back the way you came. (A torch is handy here).

Enjoy the benefits of riding on the original sections of sett stones which test your suspension but provide a great all-weather surface. Stop at the panels detailing the original North Island Main trunk line surveying choices – fascinating planning in an age before satellites and computers. The final section is a long grassy downhill along the side of the hill to Marshall's car park. Follow the markers turning left into Old Station Road. The trail officially finishes at the Old Railway station just past the Te Pepe pump track. (A great place for railway inspired insta shot.)

If you are heading back into town, we recommend that you follow the Mangawhero shared path along the stream and finish your ride with refreshments in town.

### MOUNTAINS TO SEA – ROUTE NOTES

If you are heading west on the Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono route, then reverse the directions of the trail. Once you have arrived in Horopito, follow the signs that will take you a short distance back down the other side of the line, and around the back of the old Horopito School House to a safe crossing point for SH4 and onto the Middle Road section.

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