



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.

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 39 km. The road remained unused from 1909 until 2005 when a group of locals started the process of reopening for walkers, and cyclists in 2010. (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.

ROUTE NOTES

- The trail follows an archaeologically significant old, cobbled road, a mountain bike with good suspension is most suitable.
- Grade 3 trail requiring a reasonable level of fitness and some off-road riding experience.
- Trail may be ridden in both directions, although from Horopito to Ohakune is an overall drop of 170m. Another popular trip is to ride the return trip from Ohakune to the Hāpuawhenua viaduct.



Mountains to Sea
Ngā Ara Tūhono

OHAKUNE OLD
COACH ROAD
15KM



TRAIL ROUTE

Constructed in the 1880s this cobblestone road was well used by horse-drawn traffic until superseded by the adjacent railway in 1908. Overgrown and largely forgotten, the road was 'rediscovered' by locals in 2002. Revived, it is now one of the most popular day rides in the area all year round and is replete with stories and information along its length.

Begin your adventure at the carpark and sign hub next to the North Island Main Trunk Line. Before you head off, consider taking some time visit the legendary car wreckers, Horopito Motors? More famously known as Smash Palace for its role in a cult 1981 movie of the same makes from great motor history reminiscing with photo opportunities galore.

Head down the hill and over the double fords, and along a gravel road that cuts through thriving rural horticulture and farmland. We live in a bountiful area.

The trail changes dramatically once you transition through the cycle gate and into Tongariro National Park. From the signposted start, the trail cuts through a pretty meadow and into the Tongariro National Park. The forest is lush and full of wonderful native flora including giant rimu, totara, feathery toetoe and various ferns, and the single-track crosses streams and bush full of birdsong along route.

After passing a stand of striking mountain tī kōuka (cabbage trees) and the ruins of Haeremarae Bridge, the trail crosses over the modern-day railway. A short ascent before you drop down and underneath the Taonui Viaduct.

This viaduct, and the Hāpuawhenua Viaduct further along the trail, are the only two remaining curved viaducts in the southern hemisphere. The twin viaducts were completed in 1907–8 despite terrible weather and the challenges of working with oversized Meccano using ridiculously dangerous ladders rather than scaffolding. Although half the size of Hāpuawhenua Viaduct, and in a state of poor repair, Taonui Viaduct is still an impressive sight.

Round the corner and along, take time to rest your legs at the Bush Camp picnic spot, nestled deep in the forest. Spare a thought for the pioneering road builders and their supper of cabbage soup and grog as you tuck into your muesli bar and peddle off on your fancy bike. (What on



earth would they make of us riding their road if they could see us today?)

It's a steady climb to the highest part of the trail as expansive views of the Ohakune basin come into view. The payoff for that climb is 3kms of flowing downhill riding on a great surface along the remnants of the old, cobbled road through the bush, complete with interesting signs sharing stories and insights along the way. 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 you will glimpse both the new and the old Hāpuawhenua Viaduct. The 414m-long new viaduct, opened in 1987 replaced the 284m-long old viaduct. Bridging steep gullies on the railway route, this is a must-see for any visitor to the Ruapehu region. It's a big moment when the viaduct comes into view and you arrive at its edge. Enjoy the return ride across the viaduct marvelling at how it was constructed (no fancy scaffolding or abseiling harnesses back in the early 1900's). Straddling the Hāpuawhenua stream which holds cultural significance for local iwi, this viaduct also at one time hosted the first AJ Hackett Commercial Bungy site (1988 – to 1993). Started as a way to raise cash for their local business, it soon grew into a local must to activity. *This is a return journey, do not use the scoria track underneath.*

Heading towards Ohakune (and Marshalls Rd) the trail continues through the bush past huge rimu trees. Don't miss the signpost signalling the must-do detour through the 200m-long Hāpuawhenua Tunnel, closed off at the end after the railway line was re-routed in 1987. 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.

After a short uphill, the trail down a long grassy hill to the grand Dilemma Lookout (read the story as to its name) and continue onto the old cobblestone road which winds down and around the foothills providing beautiful views of the hilly Waimarino Plain. The trail pops out at Dodges Bridge (and the Marshall Rd carpark where there is more information on the trails foundation and history) before sidling alongside the road past the Rongokaupo wetland and the Ātihau farms.

Follow Marshalls Road then left into Old Station Road past Te Pepe Pump Track to reach the official trailhead at Ohakune Railway Station—a great opportunity for another photo stop! (And a fitting place to stop for a coffee, or head to one of the local bars for a refreshing beverage)

If you're heading back into Ohakune, consider taking the Mangawhero Stream trail parallel to the road (entrance just before the road bridge).

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

Riders heading to the Last Spike will soon head left up Matapuna Road on the soon to be built Erua link trail heading North towards the planned Pōkākā ecosanctuary.

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

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS & STORIES:
HELP SPREAD THE WORD



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