

Report: Otago Central Rail Trail visit by Western Community Board members Dalton and Schollum

**Background:**

The Western Community Board has been actively involved with the initiative to turn the current Kaikohe to Okaihau rail corridor into a walking / cycling track for over a year now. This support has been to allocate funding to the project. To date this funding secured the successful community meeting with Robin Thomas, Coastal Otago Area Manager, Department of Conservation and over 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May allowed the Board's Chairperson, Tracy Dalton and Board Member John Schollum to travel to central Otago to visit the Otago Central Rail Trail and speak to many of those involved with that Trail. Overall, the purpose of the visit was to:

1. Canvas the role of
  - The Otago Central Rail Trail Trust.
  - Department of Conservation.
  - Adjacent land owners.
  - Business associated with the Trail.
2. Priorities for the Kaikohe community.

A map of the Otago Central Rail Trail is **attached**. Copies of material sourced during the trip will be available at the Board's meeting. Places on the Otago Central Rail Trail visited and people met:

Alexandra

Met with Mike Tubbs, Central Otago Area Manager, Department of Conservation.

Received from him

1. 'Otago Central Rail Trail – From Steam Trains to Pedal Power, the story of the Otago Central Rail trail'
2. 'Otago Central Rail Trail' brochure
3. 'Otago Central Rail Trail' "passport" (used for fundraising for the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust)

Clyde

Met with Neville Grubb, CEO of Trail Journeys.

St Bathans

Tracy and I spent a short time here. This is an old historic gold mining community that is enjoying an increase in visitors due to its proximity to the rail trail and Ranfurly.

Wedderburn

Met with

Graeme Duncan, Stuart and Lorraine Duncan. Farmers and owner / operators of 'The Lodge, Wedderburn'.

Eric Leathley, proprietor of the Wedderburn Tavern.

Ranfurly

Met with John Gibson, Trustee with the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust, and Farmer. (John Gibson and Graeme Duncan spoke of the Ranfurly Lions initiative to hold an annual Otago Central Rail Trail Duathlon. This event now provides Lions at least \$20,000 funding per year, with \$140,000 being provided to the local community since the inaugural race in 2000.)

Visited Maniototo Information Centre, set up in the former railway station between the rail trail and the state highway through town.

#### Naseby

Robin Thomas took Tracy and I to have a quick look at Naseby. This area was known for its gold mining. The community now has a permanent population around 100 but swells to approximately 3,000 during holiday periods. There is a growing industry around visitors and the 'Maniototo Curling International'.

#### Hyde

Met with

Robin Thomas, Coastal Otago Area Manager, Department of Conservation, and Ngaire Sutherland, Proprietor to the Otago Central Hotel at Hyde.

#### Middlemarch

Met with

Kate Wilson, Trustee with the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust, Dunedin District Councillor, and Council representative on the Strath Taieri Community Board

Dave and Donna Thomson, Proprietors with Cycle Surgery (who provided two bikes so that Tracy and I could cycle part of the trail).

#### **Observations:**

1. There was wide agreement that the establishment early on of the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust helped enormously. The Trust has become the conduit for significant funding for the Trail. Several people stressed that the makeup of this group also worked for the benefit of the trail.
2. The Department of Conservation is seen as both the good guys (for conservation) and the bad guys by a number of business or would be business operators. However they play a very important role in being the conduit to deal with matters associated with the Trail. (ie maintenance, collecting funding from the sale of Rail Trail passports, supervising commercial access to the Trail, etc.) The Department provides a person part time to oversee the trail and to assist the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust. Personally, both Tracy and I found the Department very easy to talk to and very supportive of the endeavour. Robin Thomas also offered his ongoing assistance to Kaikohe for our rail trail.
3. Business opportunities continue to grow. For instance, Ranfurly is now the base for a growing number of companies providing accommodation and food for travellers on the trail.
4. The Trail is under increasing commercial development.
5. The Trail is in an area with little rainfall.
6. It is important to get the (or parts thereof) Trail at least open. Development will follow.
7. The area has a sparse population and with the closure of the rail line and uplifting the rails, many communities went into decline, serious decline. A number of businesses like local hotels / taverns have re-established / reinvented themselves and the various communities have an air of prosperity / 'can do' about them.

#### **Priorities for the Kaikohe community / Western Community Board:**

1. Set up a working party to oversee the continuation of the Kaikohe to Okaihau Rail Trail, together with the terms of reference and identifying potential members.
2. Set aside further funding so that a part time assistant can be employed (for five weeks at this stage) to keep abreast of developments and assist the working party getting underway.
3. Suggest the Western Community Board set aside a further \$2,500 for this purpose.

Report prepared by John Schollum, with assistance from the Chair, Tracy Dalton.  
**Map of the Otago Central Rail Trail:**

