

# INTRODUCTION



## On track on the Little River Rail Trail

We welcome you on your adventure along the Little River Rail Trail!

The Rail Trail is a great way to actively explore Christchurch and enjoy the beautiful countryside on the way to Little River. The Trail takes you from city streets on dedicated urban cycleways in Christchurch, Prebbleton and Lincoln, through to quiet country roads and graded off-road tracks.

Take time to explore the centre of Christchurch. After leaving the city, the route winds its way out into the countryside along the historic Little River Branch railway line and takes you through interesting towns. Along the way, there are interpretation panels and preserved railway stations and other historic features.

You will be treated to scenery and wildlife not easily seen from a motor vehicle as you walk, bike or run the track. Although the trail itself is almost entirely flat, you will be surrounded on both sides by hills and mountains that offer inspiring views and tell the story of the Banks Peninsula's volcanic past. The trail passes by Te Waihora (Lake Ellesmere) and Te Roto o Wairewa (Lake Forsyth), both fantastic for viewing birds.

The 65 km-long Rail Trail route can be ridden in its entirety or done in short sections.

For those who want to turn the trip into a multi-day adventure, there are many accommodation options.

## BE PREPARED

Before you leave, make sure that your helmet and bike are in good condition and ensure you have a backup plan for mechanical problems as the trail is not near a bike service centre.

## ON-ROAD and OFF-ROAD CYCLING

While much of the Rail Trail is off-road, some portions are on city streets and quiet rural roads. Road rules apply. Use hand signals to communicate your intentions and be considerate of other road users.

## RESPECT WEATHER CONDITIONS

The trail can be subject to strong wind and it is advisable to carry several layers. It is useful to carry sunblock, insect repellent, a sunhat, snacks and water.

## FOOD, DRINKS AND FACILITIES

There are no towns between Lincoln and Little River but a detour is available to a cafe on the highway in Motukārara. There are toilet facilities in Christchurch, Prebbleton, Lincoln, Neills Road, Motukārara, Kaituna, Catons Bay and Little River.

**Emergency Services: 111**

## ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

- DO I NEED A MOUNTAIN BIKE? While the ride can be comfortably completed on a hybrid or city bike, the off-road sections will be more enjoyable with wider tyres or a mountain bike.
- HOW LONG WILL THE RIDE TAKE? If you choose to ride to Little River just one way at an easy pace, you can expect it to take anywhere between five to seven hours.
- IS THE TRAIL SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN? Yes. In the case of very young children, you might consider only riding one or two sections in a day such as from Motukārara Station to Birdlings Flat or Birdlings Flat to Little River. A fun activity sheet that challenges kids to locate native birds and railroad features along the way is available on our website.
- WHAT IS THE BEST TIME OF YEAR TO RIDE? The trail is open year-round. Check out the weather forecast so you can choose a suitable day.
- WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED? There is no cost to ride the trail.
- HOW DO I ARRANGE TO BE TRANSPORTED ONE WAY? The Akaroa French Connection bus service will also transfer bikes when organised in advance. Click [HERE](#) [Home | Akaroa French Connection](#) to view their website, or phone 0800 800 575 to arrange. The service runs daily between Christchurch and Akaroa, and the cost is \$20 per bike above the normal booking cost. The bus arrives in Little River on the way back to Christchurch at approximately 4:45pm. Note that bikes will be transported in a storage compartment in the bus itself and not in a separate bike trailer or bike racks.
- HOW FIT DO I NEED TO BE? Anyone who is moderately fit will enjoy this beautiful ride as it is flat and the pace is self-selected. The ride is also appealing to those with a high level of fitness whether they choose to make it a one way or return ride.
- ARE THERE TOILETS LOCATED ALONG THE TRAIL? There are toilet facilities in Christchurch, Prebbleton, Lincoln, Neills Road, Motukārara, Kaituna, Catons Bay and Little River.
- WHAT ABOUT HORSES AND DOGS? As much of the trail passes through farmland and important wildlife areas, horses are forbidden. Dogs are not permitted on the Motukārara to Little River section. On other parts of the trail, dogs are permitted but must remain on a lead due to livestock and birds nearby.
- CAN I SWIM IN THE LAKES? No, they are not suitable for swimming due to water quality and currents.
- CAN I CAMP ALONG THE TRAIL? Freedom camping is not permitted. There are camping grounds available.



(For more detailed maps visit our website - [littlerivertrail.kiwi.nz](http://littlerivertrail.kiwi.nz))

## CHRSTCHURCH CATHEDRAL SQUARE TO MARSHS ROAD

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 15.4KM SEALED

**FITNESS LEVEL:** LOW

**TECHNICAL SKILL:** EASY

**TRAIL TYPE:** MOSTLY OFF-ROAD TRAIL, SOME SIDE-ROAD CROSSINGS, SOME ON CITY MAJOR CYCLEWAYS AND 1.6KM ON RURAL ROADS

**INCLINE:** FLAT

**GRADE:** 1

The Rail Trail begins at Cathedral Square located in the heart of Christchurch passing by the Arts Centre, Canterbury Museum, Boat Sheds and hospital and then through Hagley Park. Enjoy a few minutes riding in the park before arriving at a well-controlled intersection where you will cross Moorehouse Ave onto



Grove Rd. After this, the trail leads through quiet suburban streets to another controlled crossing of Brougham St and turns west onto an approximately 100m long painted cycle path which leads to a separated cycle path. This path provides a safe cycling environment next to the motorway underpass at the end of the motorway. From there you will join a separated cycle path to Springs Road after which there is 1km of on-road cycling to Marshs Road, then a further 800m on Marshs Road until you join the smooth and separated bike path from Marshs Road to Prebbleton.

## CHRISTCHURCH

Take some time to explore the city before starting the Little River Rail Trail. Be sure to take a Christchurch visitor map and a bike lock with you as you ride around town.

## POTENTIAL HAZARDS

On intercity off-road cycle paths, make sure to ride on the left hand side of the path and be careful when passing pedestrians. Obey all traffic laws and look out for bike specific traffic signals.

## MARSHS ROAD TO PREBBLETON

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 4KM SEALED

**FITNESS LEVEL:** LOW

**TECHNICAL SKILL:** EASY

**TRAIL TYPE:** SEPARATED BIKE PATH

**INCLINE:** FLAT

**GRADE:** 1

From Marshs Road the trail then goes along the separated bike path on the old railway corridor into Prebbleton.

## SHANDS ROAD (HORNBY) TO PREBBLETON

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 0.6KM ON SEALED ROAD, 3.3KM ON SEALED TRACK

**FITNESS LEVEL:** EASY

**TECHNICAL SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** 50KPH BESIDE ON-ROAD CYCLEWAY

**GRADE:** 1

**This section begins at a small carpark on Shands Road 400m south of the Shands Road–Halswell Junction Road intersection in the Christchurch suburb of Hornby.** Connecting Hornby to the nearby residential village of Prebbleton in the Selwyn District, the asphalted off-road trail runs alongside Shands Road, turns into Marshs Road and then goes along the old railway corridor into Prebbleton.

Enjoy a break in Prebbleton and head towards the roundabout and watch for the churchyard on your right, which boasts the largest macrocarpa tree in the South Island. Historic buildings in the village include the Prebbleton Community Cottage (1890) and the All Saints Anglican Church (1907) which happens to be the third church built on this site.

**Note: There are road crossings without crosswalks on Sir James Wattie Drive and Marshs Road.**

## PREBBLETON TO LINCOLN

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 7.7KM SEALED

**FITNESS LEVEL:** EASY

**SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** 7.7KM ON SEALED TRACK

**GRADE:** 1

This section joins the village of Prebbleton to Lincoln Township. It is mostly on a 7km off-road sealed route alongside Birchs Road, adjacent to the original railway line, through pleasant rural surroundings. Rd

You will then ride on the road through the Prebbleton Village for 0.95km and then turn left into Birchs Road. Take Birchs Road for 0.8km until you re-join the sealed off-road cycle trail on the left at the intersection with Trices Road.

Stay on this smooth separated cycleway for 6km until you reach Lincoln. After 4.3km you might spot the Ladbrooks Railway Station, old fence posts and large wooden gate and hawthorn hedges (5km) which mark where the branch line ran from 1875 until 1967.

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Make sure to check out all that Lincoln Township has to offer by continuing down James Street at the fork and making a right onto Gerald Street which will guide you past several cafes, bars and shops.

## LINCOLN TO NEILLS ROAD

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 5.8KM ON SEALED ROAD, 1.6KM ON SEALED TRACK, 1.9KM ON SHINGLE TRACK

**FITNESS LEVEL:** LOW

**SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** SHORT DISTANCES ON ROADS WITH 100/50 KPH SPEED LIMITS AND ON AN OFF-ROAD CYCLEWAY

**GRADE:** 1

The trail leaves Lincoln along Edward Street which changes names to Lincoln Tai Tapu Road . The trail shares the footpath along Edward Street to Liffey Springs. (Note: If you have time to explore villages off the Rail Trail, continue straight for 4km to the village of Tai Tapu).

Enter the Liffey Springs area and stay on the cycle/footpath as it follows the river after the spring. Cross the river on either the cycle bridge or the concrete bridge and enter the wetlands developed by Selwyn District Council. Continue following the river downstream and enter the cycle path between the river and a field. This track goes to Moirs Lane, an undeveloped public road. Follow Moirs Lane away from the river until its end at Ellesmere Road. Almost directly opposite is the entry to a dedicated cycle path that goes off through the field. At the end of the dedicated cycle path through the fields, go straight onto Collins Road East. Follow that road for about 200m and turn right into River Road which follows the Halswell River. While there is a low volume of traffic on River Road, it is best to ride single file. Follow River Road until it becomes Geddes Road – there are Rail Trail signs that guide you to an off-road cycle path which follows the river downstream.

## NEILLS ROAD TO MOTUKĀRARA

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 6KM SHINGLE TRACK

**FITNESS LEVEL:** EASY / LOW

**SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** OFF-ROAD TRAIL WITH SIDE-ROAD CROSSINGS

**GRADE:** 1

This section of the trail is mostly off-road and a highly scenic area of riding. The route is adjacent to the Halswell River but deviates away onto farmland for approximately 1.7km along the Ahuriri Reserve to reduce the impact of disturbance on the visiting bird life. The bird life is a key attraction of this unique wetland area as well as views of Te Ahu Pātiki/Mount Herbert in the distance.

Continue on the path until it crosses a bridge and ends at a fork in the road. At the fork, follow the Rail Trail signs and stay left onto Park Road.

The route continues on Park Road as it jogs right across Duck Pond Road and continues straight across Fiddlers Road. Just 200m after crossing Fiddlers Road, look for the old railway station to your left where the trail goes off-road again.

## MOTUKĀRARA TO KAITUNA QUARRY

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 7.9KM SHINGLE TRACK

**FITNESS LEVEL:** LOW

**SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** OFF-ROAD TRAIL WITH SIDE-ROAD CROSSINGS

**GRADE:** 1

Whether starting, ending or continuing your ride make sure you check out the wagons, Motukārara Station and interpretation panels.

The trail starts out on an off-road path built on top of the old railway line with farmland on both sides. The coarse gravel makes this section of trail most suitable for mountain bikes. While riding around the edge of the lake, take advantage of areas to pause and observe the spectacular local bird life.

Kaituna Quarry is a large rocky outcrop and can be spotted from some distance away. The off-road car park at Kaituna Quarry provides a pick-up point for those not continuing further and a chance to explore the buildings and other remnants of the quarry's origins. Interpretation panels provide information on Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere and its significance.

## BE ADVISED

Wind can be a factor along this section because it is quite exposed. Lake flies are most prevalent from spring through until January/February and tend to be worse after a cold night followed by a warm sunny day. A useful tip is to pop a Covid mask or neck gaiter/buff around your neck and be ready to pull it up if required! Wear glasses or sunglasses (or even goggles!) to help keep them out of your eyes.

## **KAITUNA QUARRY TO BIRDLINGS FLAT**

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 5.4KM SHINGLE TRACK

**FITNESS LEVEL:** LOW

**SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** OFF-ROAD TRAIL WITH SIDE-ROAD CROSSINGS

**GRADE:** 1

This section of the trail begins at the Kaituna Quarry, which is also known as the as the Ataahua Reserve. The trail offers fantastic bird watching. Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere is considered to have the most diverse bird population in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

After the trail moves away from the lake's edge, riders can take a detour to Birdlings Flat, where they will be offered a breathtaking view of the ocean and the chance to stroll along the beach of the Kaitorete Spit, which is rich in gemstones.

## **BIRDLINGS FLAT TO LITTLE RIVER**

**TRAIL SURFACE:** 0.6KM SEALED ROAD, 9.1KM ON SHINGLE TRACK

**FITNESS LEVEL:** LOW

**SKILL:** EASY

**TRAFFIC:** OFF-ROAD TRAIL

**GRADE:** 1

This section offers an easy ride alongside another beautiful lake called Te Roto o Wairewa/Lake Forsyth. Much of the trail is perched on top of the original railway formation, an embankment lined with stone that is a rarity in railway design. The trail follows the curving shoreline and offers a fantastic view of the steep cliffs that create the shore on the opposite side—a reminder of Banks Peninsula's volcanic past. Before the trail departs from the lake, you will find Catons Bay which provides picnic tables and a toilet.

Soon you will reach the outskirts of Little River itself. You will arrive at the Little River Railway Station, a preserved piece of rail history. Park your bike and take advantage of the facilities then relax under the trees or the veranda at the station – you have arrived!

## **PLANTS, BIRDS AND OTHER LIVING THINGS**

### **LANDSCAPE**

The Rail Trail takes you through a changing landscape past the volcanic hills of Banks Peninsula, lakes and wetlands.

Long ago, dense forest covered these hills and the calls of native birds and moa could be heard while a multitude of insects and lizards including tuatara, foraged beneath the canopy. Harrier hawks and kārearea/falcons soared about the tops, along with giant eagles. Vast populations of fish, penguins, fur seals, pelicans and dolphins thrived in the waters lapping the peninsula which also provided seasonal passage to migrating whales.

### **TE WAIHORA (Lake Ellesmere) and TE ROTO O WAIREWA (Lake Forsyth)**

Te Waihora is New Zealand's fifth largest lake (20,000ha) and a major wildlife area. Te Waihora supports a large population of fish and has the most diverse bird population of any location in New Zealand. Te Roto o Wairewa is a large (627ha), shallow, coastal lake. Both lakes are culturally and ecologically significant.

## LAKE FLIES OR MIDGES (*Chironomus zealandicus*)

Lake flies are most prevalent from spring through until January/February and tend to be worse after a cold night followed by a warm sunny day. A useful tip is to pop a Covid mask or neck gaiter/buff around your neck and be ready to pull it up if required! Wear glasses or sunglasses (or even goggles!) to help keep them out of your eyes. For more information see 'Mighty midge' by Dr Alison Evans.

## FLORA –The Plant Species

There are many native plants alongside the Rail Trail, particularly in the wetland areas. Patches of brilliant orange or yellow on rocks along the trail are lichens. They are by far the most ancient life forms you will see along the trail, having survived for millions of years. Rare plants found along the trail include a native orchid (*Spiranthes sinensis*) and the giant umbrella sedge (*Cyperus stultatus*).