

## SOUTHBRIDGE BRANCH

<b>Length</b>	41.0 kilometres
<b>Opened</b>	Stage 1 Hornby to Springston April 1875 Stage 2 Springston to Southbridge July 1875
<b>Stops</b>	12 Prebbleton, Ladbroke, Lincoln, Springston, Goulds Road, Ellesmere, Lake Road, Irwell, Doyleston, Leeston, Hills Road, Southbridge
<b>Closed</b>	Stage 1 Lincoln to Southbridge June 1962 Stage 2 Prebbleton to Lincoln December 1967
<b>Passenger services</b>	Stopped April 1951

The remnants of this branch line are mostly on flat, straight sections away from roads, or they have been encroached upon by urban and agricultural development. It affords no splendid scenic vistas, nor does it have remnants worthy of spending hours behind the wheel to find. This is probably one branch line that can be left off the “must-do” list, but the following paragraphs will at least guide the dogged explorer to the few viewing spots remaining.

Built primarily to service the vast wheat growing areas of the mid Canterbury Plains, especially around Lake Ellesmere, the line also served to connect small settlements across the plains. It and the Waiau branch are the only Canterbury region lines described in this publication that ran on a north-south axis, rather than east-west.

Do take care at road intersections between Prebbleton and Lincoln as the Little River Rail Trail, popular with both walkers and cyclists, hugs the rail corridor but is either on the road or on a designated cycle path beside the road for much of the distance from Prebbleton to Lincoln. Details of this rail trail are provided at the end of this chapter.

This description starts at Prebbleton on the southern outskirts of Christchurch. Springs Road more or less transects Prebbleton, and at a large intersection with a roundabout, Stationmasters Way gives a hint as to the location of the Southbridge branch. Stationmasters Way is an access point to a new housing development on and around the site of the Prebbleton railway station and yards, and the developers have used the railway theme to pleasant effect. This development has of course extinguished everything that once occupied the railway yard.

Continue south on Springs Road to the junction with Birchs Road, and turn left. Follow Birchs Road for 2.5 kilometres to the intersection with Robinsons Road, which is the general location of the next station on the line – Ladbroke. There is a small concrete platform in the paddock on the left 400 metres before the intersection. The rail corridor has been on the left of the road and is now used by the Little River Rail Trail.

Further along Birchs Road look for the distinct markings on Tancreds Road on the left, where the rails are embedded in the asphalt. Birchs Road continues to Lincoln, becoming James

Street once in the built-up area. Any vestiges of the line through Lincoln have been swallowed up by urban sprawl, but tucked away in the middle of town at the Liffey Domain there is a footbridge which uses the railway abutments to cross the LI Creek. The line crossed South Belt at a 45-degree angle to run to Lincoln station, which was in what is now a housing development in the area of The Mews and Douglas Street (off South Belt). There is nothing to see anywhere in the area.

Lincoln was the junction of two branch lines – the Southbridge branch and the Little River branch. The latter is now a very popular section of the Little River Rail Trail.

The Southbridge branch proceeded through the Lincoln yards in a straight line heading south, initially parallel to Ellesmere Junction Road. There was a turning triangle between the two lines, at the south end of the station. To pick up the Southbridge branch again, go to the end of South Belt, turn left into West Belt and at the major intersection with Gerald Street turn left. Gerald Street becomes Ellesmere Junction Road. After about three kilometres turn left along Days Road and after less than a kilometre formation can be seen in use as a farm track on both the left and right of the road. Continue on Days Road and turn right to follow Collins Road to its junction with Leeston Road. Turn right at this intersection to view the crossing from Springston station on the right, shortly after the Springston Hotel (on the left). A driveway on the right leads to the working yard of a local agricultural and general engineer. At the far end of his yard is the Springston goods shed, *in situ*, still used as an engineering workshop. The name can still be seen, though not surprisingly it is now very faint. The concrete platform edge is also still in place on one side of the yard. While the owner of property seems to be open to visitors, make sure to ascertain that this is acceptable if you venture along the drive.

Immediately after Springston the line curved very slightly to the left and ran straight due south for nearly six kilometres. Follow it on Leeston Road which runs parallel. Side trips along Mounces Road, East Maddisons Road and Goulds Road will reveal the line on the left and right. There was a stop at Goulds Road with the usual complement of platform, shelter shed, a 19-wagon loop and a 13-wagon backshunt. There is a bit of embankment and a shallow culvert/bridge on the right. At Bethels Road, just before the Selwyn River turn right.

Just before Hadstock Farm, in a paddock on the left, there is a concrete structure, which is a loading bank signifying the location of the next stop. Ellesmere was slightly larger than Goulds, with a 41x40ft goods shed and a couple of sidings as well as the platform, shelter shed and a 21-wagon loop. The line came towards Goulds Road from the right in a straight line, curving left at Bethels Road into the station yard. It then followed a straight line to cross the Selwyn River, less than 200 metres away before curving again to once again straighten to continue south. There was a road bridge immediately alongside the rail bridge. There is no access to the bridge site from Bethels Road, so return to Leeston Road and continue south.

Slightly more than 500 metres from the river turn right along Old Bridge Road. As the road drops down to river level look to the left – there is a concrete abutment in the gorse.

Continue south on Leeston Road to Selwyn Lake Road (1.2 kilometres away) and turn right to locate Lake Road stop, which is marked by a storage building with an interesting roofline. There is a cover over loading bays on the far side of this structure, which suggests grain or other products were loaded into rail wagons, perhaps on a private siding. The building may have been used/owned by a farmers' co-operative or other agency, as "Farmers" can still be seen on the side of the building.

Continue on Selwyn Lake Road to take the first turn left along Lake Road South, to view the next crossing, 1.36 kilometres from the intersection. The formation is marked on both sides of the road by power poles which give a good sense of the straight passage of the rail corridor.

Continue ahead to return to Leeston Road, and after 800 metres turn right into Brookside and Irwell Road. This leads to the site of Irwell station, of which there are remnants amongst the grass in the paddock on the right as the road takes a slight right-hand bend. Depending on farming activity and the time of year it may be possible to see a loading bank and perhaps a platform edge. On the other side of the road there is an informal farm bridge made of sleepers and spikes over a drainage ditch, and the formation can be seen continuing south.

Return to Leeston Road to continue to Doyleston. On entering Doyleston turn right along Petticoat Lane to find Railway Terrace nearly a kilometre from the turn-off. There are several easily sighted remnants of the line on the far side of Railway Terrace: a loading bank, the platform and a couple of other concrete structures that may have been the base of other rail installations. There is also a shed at one end of the yard, but this seems too shiny and oddly shaped to be the original goods shed, unless it has been significantly rebuilt.

At the far end of Railway Terrace there are faint traces of railway track in the asphalt across Drain Road, on the right. Return along Drain Road to head to Leeston. Just past the intersection of Volckman Road, veer left onto Station Street. The line crossed Leeston Road and ran on the left of Station Street, which is now densely populated by industrial buildings. There is nothing to identify the exact location of the station itself, but at the far end of Station Street there is a shed on the property belonging to Leeston Seeds which has the look of a railway goods shed about it. Leeston station was a little bigger than others, with a four-ton outdoors crane, a 31-wagon loop, a 21-wagon loop to a 50x41ft goods shed, another 31-wagon backshunt to the cattle yards, and a 14-wagon backshunt to a private siding.

From Station Street turn left into Leeston and Lake Road, and just over a kilometre later turn right and follow Beethams Road to the intersection with Hills Road (after two kilometres), where there was a stop, comprising only a platform. The line crossed Beethams Road and ran alongside Hills Road (unsealed) to the crossing of the upper reaches of Harts Creek. There are no particular remnants of the railway crossing in this small landscape feature, so continue on Hills Road to Southbridge-Leeston Road for the final couple of kilometres to the terminus. Turn left into Cowans Road from Southbridge-Leeston Road and about 1.16 kilometres along, in the shadow of a shelter belt on the left, the formation can be made out. Farming has removed all vestiges on the right.

Continue on Cowans Road and turn right onto Sedgemere Road. The line converged on Sedgemere Road from the right, crossing it just before the road curves left slightly. There is a hump in the road at the crossing, and Sedgemere Road becomes Taumutu Road. Continue on Taumutu Road to Cryer Road, and turn left, noting the old house on the corner which has the look of a stationmaster's house about it. A hundred metres along Cryer Street the line crossed through what is now an engineering plant on the left to enter the station and yards area on the right. The station area is occupied by a transport company (accessed via Wilson Street) and its associated storage and engineering works and it is unknown whether any railway remnants are tucked away on the site.

As a terminus Southbridge was equipped with all the necessary railways appurtenances, including a 70x41ft goods shed, a 55ft turntable, four-ton crane, stockyards, loading banks, and a water vat and a coal shed adjacent to the engine shed. The station had a verandah and an external toilet (urinal) for the men. It also had 33 and 34-wagon loops, as well as 12 and 15-wagon backshunts. In addition there was a 12-wagon backshunt to a National Mortgage & Agriculture Co. siding.

#### **FUTHER INFORMATION**

Little River Trail:

<http://www.littleriverrailtrail.co.nz/fastpage/fpengine.php/templateid/1>