

CAPE FOULWIND BRANCH

Length	16.8 kilometres
Opened	Stage 1 Completely 1888 Stage 2 Omau to Tauranga Bay 1914
Stops	7 Westport, Martins, Carters Junction, Bradshaws, Bulls, Tanks, Omau
Closed	Stage 1 Omau to Tauranga Bay abandoned in the 1920s Stage 2 Westport to Omau in 1940s
Passenger services	Stopped 1931

The Cape Foulwind¹ branch, established to transport large rocks and infill from quarries on Cape Foulwind to construct the breakwaters on the Buller River, only just meets the criteria for inclusion in this book – it was owned and operated by the Railways Department for only 10 years, from April 1921 until April 1931, the rest of the time being owned and operated by the Westport Harbour Board or the Marine Department. However, in many other respects it is deserving of inclusion: it is visible from various vantage points, it has an interesting history and it serviced a range of alternative clients (other than the Harbour Board) throughout its life span. The breakwaters made a safe harbour at Westport, from where coal from the mines in the ranges inland could be shipped to a wide range of destinations.

The search for the Cape Foulwind line should start at the former Westport railway workshop near the corner of Adderley Street and Henley Street. This building has Category 2 historic registration with Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and is therefore protected.

From Adderley Street turn onto The Esplanade and drive towards the bridge over the Buller. There is a reserve area between Adderley Street and the river just before the bridge and the unpaved road running across the reserve down to the riverbank is the old railway line. There is nothing left of the old road/rail bridge about 200 metres downstream from the current road bridge, but on the far (south) side there is an embankment which indicates where the old bridge stood.

“The former Westport Railway Workshop has historical significance in Westport and in the development of New Zealand's railways. It is believed to be the oldest building associated with the Westport rail system which dates from 1874. Almost the entire district output of coal was transported by rail to the wharf, and passenger services were also important. As the place where engines and rolling stock were repaired and serviced, the workshop was an essential component of the system. It continued its original function for nearly a century.”¹

After crossing the river follow SH67A. Look to the right where the embankment crossed a paddock. The railway and the road ran parallel and adjacent for nearly three kilometres, and though there are no embankments or culverts to confirm this, there is a faint trace of the line, sometimes in use as a stock track.

At 1.5 kilometres the line crossed Martins Creek on its own bridge, immediately to the right of the current road bridge. The farmer who owned the area had put planks over the railbed in order to provide farm access for machinery, equipment and stock until, in about 2007, without consultation, this interesting piece of rail heritage, which had no protected status, was removed and the timber sold to a contractor and used for construction elsewhere in the South island.

At the left-hand turn of the road at Carters Beach the railway line crossed to a “station” on the left of the highway where there are now houses and trees masking any remnants which may have survived. The line then continued on the left, only a short distance from the road. There were stops at Bradshaws Road and Bulls Road, though nothing remains of them now. Each was a junction for sawmill tramways which ran deep into the forests in the hinterland.

Just before the rise to what is now the most prominent feature of the area – a large Holcim cement plant – there was another stop called Tanks, where engines had to fill up with water for the climb onto the rise.

There are in the middle distance on the left odd placements of large rocks in paddocks. These rocks fell off the open sided wagons en route to Westport from the quarries at Cape Foulwind and Tauranga Bay. There was of course no way such heavy objects could be lifted back on to the wagons, so they have remained where they fell. Do not be fooled, however, by those which have been moved at some later time and used to mark the entrance to a property!

Once on the top of the rise the rail continued to run parallel to the road. The railbed has been converted to a private road – Limestone Road – used only by the trucks ferrying lime and other products from a large quarry just past Cape Foulwind. The original railway line crossed SH67A (Cape Foulwind Road) at a three-way junction at Omau where SH67A turns across the road used by the lime trucks. This is a somewhat tricky intersection as it is easy to find oneself on Limestone Road rather than Lighthouse Road. Keep as close to the Star Tavern as possible, and you should end up in the right place.

The Star Tavern is well worth visiting if it is open, as the owners have gone to some trouble to find an array of historic photos. There has been a pub on the site since the early days of the railway, and there was a not inconsiderable settlement in the immediate vicinity. With large sawmills and quarries, a school and farming, this must have been a busy area of settlement. The road in front of the tavern is the old railway platform. Excursions ran from Westport to Omau for many years so that the citizens of Westport could have a picnic and swim at nearby Gibsons Beach, which was more sheltered than any around Westport itself.

Continue on Lighthouse Road which is initially on the rail formation. This leads to a large car park just below the Cape Foulwind lighthouse. The Department of Conservation (DOC) has established the car park with amenities and interesting interpretation panels to encourage walkers to use the well-developed walkway along the cliff tops to a seal colony 2.9 kilometres away. The walk is well worth doing for the splendid views, which include looking down onto the line of the old railway below the cliffs. If you simply want to see the seals,

drive south to Tauranga Bay and enter the southern end of the walkway from the car park – from there it is only a 10 minute walk to view the seals.

At the lighthouse end carpark there are two gated tracks leading down to the shore on the right and in front. These lead to granite quarries cut into the cliffs around the cape. One can walk down the track on the right, which is the old railway line, and then follow the vestiges of the line on the shelf between the cliffs and the sea. Once on the flat it is less than 10 minutes to an obvious cutting in the cliffs. Shortly afterwards, though, the way is obscured by rampant growth of gorse, brambles and long grasses. There is no obvious sign of the quarries as the cliff faces are covered in abundant regrowth and the landscape is a mass of grass, hardy salt and wind-resistant shrubs, and the inevitable gorse.

The line used to continue round several small bays and then went through a short tunnel through the headland to Tauranga Bay. Access to the tunnel is now only for the most fit and adventurous, and anyone attempting to find the portal should do so with great caution. Local information suggests that seals “guard” the tunnel and they have been encountered inside.

At Tauranga Bay turn right at the T-junction when you reach the beach, to the above mentioned southern carpark. There are interesting interpretation panels with history and wildlife information in the carpark. There is a wooden gate beside a shelter shed and small picnic spot. The gate is across the railway line, which can be traced to the tunnel portal. It is now somewhat disguised by dense flax and other hardy shoreline shrubs, but a gully lining up with the gate is a good indicator of the location. Turn around and note the cutting on the other side of the car park. It is said the line continued through this and along the beach at Tauranga Bay to yet another quarry at the next promontory on the shoreline.

Drive back along Tauranga Bay and hug the shoreline to the end of Seal Colony Road. The turning area at the end marks the quarry area at the furthest extent of the Cape Foulwind line. Nowadays there is a very good café/restaurant on Seal Colony Road, a place to stop and refresh after the rigours of rail exploration.

FURTHER INFORMATION

DOC information about the seal colony and the walkaway:

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-visit/west-coast/buller-area/cape-foulwind-and-tauranga-bay/features/>

Westport Information:

<http://www.buller.co.nz/southisland-newzealand-community-assets/i-site/>

¹ Cape Foulwind was named in 1770 by Captain Cook when his ship *Endeavour* was beset by unfavourable winds