

## CONNS CREEK BRANCH

<b>Length</b>	2.9 kilometres
<b>Opened</b>	Sometime in late 1878 or early 1879
<b>Stops</b>	<b>3</b> Waimangaroa Junction, Waimangaroa, Conns Creek
<b>Closed</b>	Completely in August 1967
<b>Passenger services</b>	Stopped in August 1967

Though this is one of the shortest “ghost” railways described in this publication, in historical and industrial heritage terms it is very significant. There can be no discussion of the Conns Creek line without acknowledging its relationship, via the Denniston Incline, to the Denniston township and the coal mines high on the plateau above.

The Conns Creek branch was the lower level terminus of the Denniston Incline, the dramatic cable way that brought coal down from the mines high above. The Incline also provided illicit passenger transport for those willing to risk the hair-raising ride, or who preferred not to trudge the old bridle path. A well-sealed modern road now provides access to the plateau and the mines which continue to be worked.

There is much material about the area available in the Westport I-Site which is worth visiting before heading north to explore. A visit to Coaltown Museum in Westport is also strongly recommended.

Conns Creek branch line connected the Westport-Ngakawau/Seddonville line to the Incline. It branched off to the right at the overbridge on SH67 at Waimanagaroa, 15 kilometres north of Westport. To trace the branch line, leave SH67 as it veers left to the overbridge, to enter Waimangaroa on the right. Go along McGill Street (which becomes Banbury Street at some point) which roughly follows the same curve as the line, about 100 metres on the left. Though there is too much growth on the roadside for any sightings in this area, a fossick on foot down some of the side paths through the scrub may elicit some glimpses.

At a four-way intersection, turn left into Conns Creek Road. After half a kilometre there is a parking space on the right side of the road, where those choosing to hike the Bridle Path up to Denniston Plateau can leave their vehicles. The Bridle Path was the only means of access to Denniston, either on foot or by horse, before the Incline was built in 1878. An informative signboard warns the hiker to be prepared for sudden weather changes on the three-hour journey to the top, and the two-hour return downhill. The energetic walker will certainly enjoy the stunning views as they climb steadily to 2,000 feet above sea level.

Carry on further along Conns Creek Road into the gorge, and the railway comes into view, on the left. The line and the road occupy the same narrow strip of land between the steep hillsides which progressively close in on each side of the creek, which is also on the left. Another kilometre or so further on, the road and railway line end where the Incline looms into sight, beginning its precipitous journey in an almost straight line to the plateau.

At the upper terminus there has been some restoration work and the railbed and what is left of its shunting lines have mostly been cleared. One shunt is on a rise above the road level, and there is a restored wagon which used to carry coal down the Incline. There are also foundation slabs and bits of structure of railway and Incline workshops and sheds. The terminus contains several relics of the Incline operations.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

There are videos of coal carts operating on the Incline on the web-based video-sharing site Youtube:

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

The Denniston Rose Trail is an interactive self- guided literary trail to the place that inspired the best-selling books *The Denniston Rose* and its sequel *Heart of Coal* by Jenny Pattrick. It is an “app” which can be downloaded via the following website link:

[http://ketewestcoast.peoplesnetworknz.info/site/web\\_links/show/40-denniston-rose-trail-i-tunes-app-for-download](http://ketewestcoast.peoplesnetworknz.info/site/web_links/show/40-denniston-rose-trail-i-tunes-app-for-download)

A short film from the National Film Unit shows the Denniston Incline cable railway in action in 1967, just before it closed down: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/video/7429/the-denniston-incline>

The Denniston Experience: <http://www.denniston.co.nz/>

Denniston Incline:

<https://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/itemdetail.cfm?itemid=47>

Information about the bridle path:

<http://www.buller.co.nz/southisland-newzealand-community-assets/denniston-bridle-path>

Department of Conservation (DOC) walks:

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/tracks-and-walks/west-coast/buller/denniston-walking-tracks/>

Denniston’s Incline: Coal from the Clouds, ed. By Bill Prebble. NZ Rail & Locomotive Society, 2008.