

### NGATAPA BRANCH

<b>Length</b>	18.5 kilometres
<b>Opened</b>	Completely December 1915
<b>Stops</b>	3 Patutahi, Repongaere, Ngatapa
<b>Closed</b>	Completely April 1931
<b>Passenger services</b>	Stopped April 1931

This secondary branch line was short in every respect – it was only 12.5 kilometres long from the junction of the Gisborne-Moutohora branch at Makaraka, and it operated for only 16 years, from 1915 until 1931. Not surprisingly, there is little evidence today that there ever was a railway in the area, and unless one is interested in other historical events in the Ngatapa area (primarily concerning the activities of an early and the renowned Maori leader and prophet, Te Kooti) there may not be much reason for undertaking an exploration.

This short line was built for much the same reason as the adjacent Moutohora branch which was to extract rock and metals from a quarry. According to Wikipedia, almost all of the traffic on the line was road metal. It had been intended that this should be the route of the main line between Gisborne south to Wairoa. When this intention was declared economically impossible by a Royal Commission in 1930, the fate of the branch was sealed and it closed shortly thereafter.

Make your way to Makaraka on the southern outskirts of Gisborne. Turn right onto SH2 (signposted to Opotiki-Whakatane). The Moutohora branch line is to the right of SH2 heading north to Matawai and Moutohora, and the line to Ngatapa branched off it to head westwards across SH2. The crossing was between Newstead Lane, on the right of SH2, and Bell Road on the left, but there is nothing of it to see these days.

Continue on SH2 for just over a kilometre and turn left along Bloomfield Road. After 1.6 kilometres power poles left and right identify the rail corridor. The line continued straight to the rail bridge across the Waipaoa River, on the right of Bloomfield Road. Continue ahead on Bloomfield Road for another 1.6 kilometres to join SH2 to Wairoa-Napier, turning right at the highway.

Cross the Waipaoa River. The rail bridge was 1.5 kilometres upstream and though there are apparently still piers on the river banks these are not accessible, but may be seen from the road bridge if conditions are just right. Take the third exit at the roundabout after the bridge, along Wharekopae Road, and follow it past Patutahi village on the right which it bypasses. There was a station at Patutahi and it was probably close to the intersection with Patutahi Road, though there is absolutely nothing on the landscape to indicate that there was ever a railway line anywhere nearby.

And so it continues for the next 11 kilometres, almost to the small settlement of Ngatapa. All the way there is nothing to see of railway formation, until just before Ngatapa, depending on the season and growth in paddocks on the right, you may be fortunate and spot a set of abutments about 200 metres to the right crossing the Waikakariki Stream. It can only be assumed that the railway actually ran between the stream and the road throughout, as there are no obstacles to construction other than a few small streams to cross. Venture along Campbell Road and from there look for rail embankment. Campbell Road marks the southern end of the Ngatapa yards. The goods shed can be seen from the “main” road. As it is in surprisingly good condition for such an old building it must still have some utility.

Work to extend beyond Ngatapa continued for about eight kilometres, but as the extension was never finished no description is provided here of embankments and cuttings which may be seen from Totangi Road. Continuing west on Wharekopae Road leads to the Eastwoodhill Arboretum, the National Arboretum of New Zealand, encompassing 135 hectares of exotic and native trees, shrubs and climber plantings. Another 20 kilometres or so along the same road is the scenic picnic area of Rere Falls and Rere Rock Slide which is a great place for a swim in the hot summer months.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

A comprehensive biography of Te Kooti is available at:

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t45/te-kooti-arikirangi-te-turuki>

Eastwoodhill Arboretum:

<http://www.eastwoodhill.org.nz/about-eastwoodhill/>

Information about Rere Falls and Rock Slide:

<http://www.tourism.net.nz/nz-places/rere-falls-new-zealand.html>