

KAPUNI BRANCH

Length	35.5 kilometres
Opened	Completely July 1926
Stops	10 Matapu, Duthie Road, Palmer Road, Kapuni, Mangawhero Road, Auroa Road, Pihama, Punehu, Waiteika, Opunake
Closed	Stage 1 Kapuni to Opunake July 1976
Passenger services	Stopped October 1955

Kapuni, a small town in rural Taranaki south of the mountain of the same name, is best known as the location of the processing plant of the second largest onshore gas/condensate field in New Zealand. The small township is three kilometres west of the processing station.

The principle reason this line was built was local support for the Reform Party which was in power from 1911. Work on the line was authorised in 1912, and construction began in 1914, slowing down during the war years. The Public Works Department was running trains on it from August 1923 but it only fully opened in July 1926, servicing at least seven dairy factories for many years as well as carrying livestock and general freight. It survived longer than expected to assist with construction of the natural gas plant and then to deliver condensate.

The current branch line from the Marton-New Plymouth line crosses Manaia Road at the northern end of the gas-processing station. The line west to Opunake departed from the far side of the production station, out of sight from the road. It then ran due west in a straight line for almost 15 kilometres before curving slightly north for the final nine kilometres or so into Opunake. For the first 15 kilometres the rail corridor is at least one kilometre north of and parallel to the main east-west road, Skeet Road. The rail explorer can therefore simply follow Skeet Road from Kapuni, turning north at each of the north-south roads – Rowan, Mangawhero, Auroa, Oeo and Patiki – and look for the level crossings, most of which are marked only by sets of gates. The rail corridor can sometimes be seen on its east-west axis through gaps in shelter belts.

Skeet Road terminates at a T-junction with Patiki Road. Turn right to go to Eltham Road and then left along Eltham Road to proceed to Opunake. Follow Watino and Waiteika Roads (on the left) to their level-crossing sites. The straight line of the formation can be seen either side of both roads. Less than a kilometre from the junction of Eltham Road and SH45 on the outskirts of Opunake there is a splendid view of the formation in a cutting on both sides of Eltham Road. This is well worth visiting.

In Opunake the site of the railway yards and station is between Gisborne Terrace and Whitcombe Road. The area is still open space and there is at least one set of gateposts to indicate rail heritage. There are also two railway houses in Gisborne Terrace – one at no. 13 on the corner of Ihaia Road, and the other at no. 49. Both are non-standard, being examples of a series of concrete block railway houses built in Opunake in 1925 when the railway was opened. A much larger house was built for the stationmaster in the same concrete block style, but this has now gone. There was a 60x30ft goods shed and a 55ft turntable, as well as the usual stockyards and loading banks, but all these have disappeared.

The Opunake station was removed in 2010 and can now be found at the Taranaki Pioneer Village in Stratford, where it has been refurbished and is used by the “Pioneer Express” which circuits the village on a 24-inch gauge railway.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Taranaki Pioneer Village:

<http://www.pioneervillage.co.nz/index.html>