

## KINGSTON BRANCH

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**Length:** 114.2 kilometres

**Opened:**

Stage 1: Makarewa-Winton December 1875

Stage 2: Winton-Caroline October 1875

Stage 3: Caroline-Lumsden February 1876

Stage 4: Lumsden-Lowther January 1877

Stage 5: Lowther-Athol January 1878

Stage 6: Athol-Fairlight July 1878

**Stops: 27**

Makarewa

Ryal Bush

Wilson's Crossing

Lochiel

Thomsons

Gap Road

Winton

Lady Barkly

Lime Hills

Ords

Centre Bush

Pukearuhe

Kauana

Benmore

Dipton

Caroline

Josephville

Lumsden

Mararoa Junction

Lowther

Five Rivers

Eyre Creek

Parawa

Athol

Nokomai

Garston

Fairlight

**Closed:**

Stage 1 Mararoa Junction to Fairlight November 1979

Stage 2 Makarewa to Mararoa December 1982

**Passenger services:** Stopped in October 1937 apart from Christmas and Easter specials. Kingston Flyer service operated 1971-1979 as a tourism venture.

The Kingston branch, which was considered to be a secondary main line rather than a branch line, was 140 kilometres long from Invercargill to its terminus at Kingston on the southern shores of Lake Wakatipu, and was initially known as part of the Great Northern Railway. In the heyday of the Kingston branch timetables to and from Invercargill were structured so that those travelling to the gold diggings and tourist attractions on and around the lake could transfer between the train and

the steamers on Lake Wakatipu without undue delay. Most days travellers could schedule their travel so that they arrived at Lumsden at the correct time to transfer to the Kingston Flyer on the Waimea Plains Railway from Gore to reduce their travel time to Kingston. The final 14 kilometres from Fairlight to Kingston has in recent times run steam train excursions as a tourist venture, but the line has been mothballed for the time being.

The Kingston branch has the distinction of being the oldest described in this publication. It is also the longest. The first section was built from Invercargill on wooden rails by the Southland provincial government as far as Makarewa, opening in 1864. By 1866 this was converted to iron rails and extended to Winton. The existing international standard-width gauge too had to be converted once the line was pushed on from Winton using the nationally accepted standard narrow gauge. By July 1878 the line was complete and fully operational, providing as intended a valuable link to the central Otago goldfields.

The “ghost” line being described in this book is 114 kilometres long. The direction of travel is south to north, from Makarewa (12 kilometres west of Invercargill) to Fairlight, the penultimate stop at the northern end of the line. Because of its length the Kingston branch is covered in two sections, either of which can be explored in about half a day.

### **MAKAREWA – LUMSDEN**

The distance as the crow flies between Makarewa and Winton, the first major town on the line after Invercargill, is about 17 kilometres. There were five “stations” in this short distance, indicating the intense need for transportation of people and goods to and from Invercargill, and onwards to the port at Bluff. In all this distance there are only a couple of items of rail interest now to be seen.

A short length of rail and a wide cutting 800 metres from SH6 on North Makarewa Grove Bush Road indicates the site of Makarewa Junction station, which had a triangular platform serving Kingston and the Wairio branch as well as a large freezing works.

Return to SH6 and head north 1.5 kilometres and turn left into Breeze Road, where a level crossing at 800 metres is marked by one of the many straight lines of macrocarpa windbreaks. At the end of Breeze Road and turn right along Ryal Bush-Wallacetown Road, and take a left fork into Ryal Bush School Road. Along this road there is an intact double-sided concrete platform, well covered in grass. A transport/trucking yard occupies what were probably the Ryal Bush yards.

Return to SH6 via Collinson Road and proceed to Winton, which is the largest service town for Central Southland and was one of the first established inland towns. Settlement was based around the supply route to the goldfields, and later sawmilling. As the land was cleared, farming and flax milling became more important. Sawmilling provided employment for many years. The commercial centre of Winton, an area of approximately four blocks, is registered with the NZ Heritage Trust Pouhere Taonga, and there are information plaques on 20 or so buildings.

The Winton railway station was opposite and below the intersection of Brandon Street and SH6, in what is now a pleasant and nicely planted reserve area. The yards were both north and south of the station, as far as Moore Street (south) and Railway Street (north). The station had a covered verandah and also operated as a post office for many years. There was a goods shed on the far side of the tracks, slightly south of the station. The yards were large and comprehensive, for servicing the main line between Invercargill and Kingston as well as the branch line to Hedgehope (Browns). The main pedestrian access to the station was a walking path to and from the Railway Hotel, a grand Edwardian edifice still trading on the main road. Railway Street was used by carts and other vehicles.

After taking a walk around the historic precinct continue north on SH6 for nearly four kilometres to the next station on Lady Barkly Road. The line is out of sight on the right. The “Lady Barkly” was a steam locomotive used on a wooden railway that ran briefly between Invercargill and Makarewa in the 1860s. It is said that her engine was converted to drive a sawmill and “around 1874 it appears to have been in use by a sawmill north of Winton, employed cutting sleepers for the Winton to Kingston Branch”.<sup>1</sup>

Proceeding north note the lime quarries in the hills around. There are many limestone quarries and limeworks throughout Southland, with a cluster between Winton and Dipton. Many of them still provide crushed or burnt lime for agricultural purposes, and there are a significant number of industrial heritage remnants visible on the landscape, such as lime kilns, burner chimneys, sheds and cableways. An example of industrial heritage remnants of the limeworks can be seen less than 400 metres along Limehills-Browns Road, where there are three kilns on the hillside to the right.

“The Limehills Lime Burning Works stand upon a Government reserve of seventy acres, and have a complete plant for the treatment of the stone, including a furnace kiln, which burns coal. There is a forty-foot face of lime extending over about twenty acres, and the works turn out from 100 to 150 tons weekly. A railway siding connects the works with the Government siding at Limehills. About eight persons are employed at the works. Messrs J. G. Ward and Co. are agents at Invercargill.”

Cyclopedia of New Zealand Otago and Southland 1905 (p 1004):

[\[http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc04Cycl-t1-body1-d7-d71.html#n1034\]](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc04Cycl-t1-body1-d7-d71.html#n1034)

Between Lady Barkly Road and the next small settlement at Centre Bush, a distance of less than five kilometres, there were two more stations, Lime Hills., and Ords. Less than one kilometre north of the settlement of Centre Bush the Centre Bush goods shed remains standing in a paddock, albeit in a poor state of repair. Grass-covered mounds nearby are loading banks. Continue to Centre Bush-Otapiri Road and from about 100 metres along look south to see the name on the shed.

Soon after Centre Bush road and rail part company for nearly 12.5 kilometres. There is little to be seen other than an occasional level crossing to the right on the east-west roads and some slightly raised embankment. Line and road are almost 1.5 kilometres apart so confirmation of sightings is difficult. The stations of Pukearuhe, Kauana, and Benmore are all next to impossible to locate.

Road and rail converge at about the entrance to Golden Terraces Farm. For the next four kilometres the line is beside the road and is easy to trace. Immediately after passing Magee Road look to the right for a splendid set of abutments, comprising two piers set in a stream bed and an interesting stone wall around the abutments on the banks, presumably providing flood protection.

Entering Dipton, the rail corridor again is obvious at the foot of a small bluff as it makes its way into the yards area which is now a reserve with a children’s playground where the station was. Departing Dipton the corridor is again obvious in a line of toetoes which continue for nearly half a kilometre. Immediately after Spirit Burn Bridge there is a rail bridge pier in the long growth in the stream on the right. Road and rail run side by side for over four kilometres from Spirit Burn Bridge, and while there are no grand abutments or other rail artefacts to be made out along this distance, the line remains more or less visible, its way sometimes marked by weed growth along the edge of the road, by shallow cuttings when the road rises gently, or embankments when the road falls slightly.

After four kilometres the rail corridor crossed SH6, at which point the embankment on the right ends, just where farm tracks run left and right of the road. There was a stop called Caroline somewhere in this area, though it could have been closer to Caroline Valley Road 2.5 kilometres

further north. The road rises and falls slightly and the rail corridor can be made out alongside or below the road as it wends its way gently on the left towards Ram Hill which is looming ahead. About 1.7 kilometres from Caroline Valley Road the railway veered left to make its way almost on the bank of the Oreti River around the base of Ram Hill.

Drive over Ram Hill, admiring the view across the Waimea Plains from the summit. The view stretches from Mossburn to the west, Lumsden to the north and across to the Waimea Plains and Mandeville to the east, while the Oreti River can be seen meandering from its headwaters in the Eyre Mountains to its outlet at Invercargill.

"Josephville and Caroline are not townships, but only railway stations of the skillion description, and are only interesting to the Victorian traveller as being called after an Australian millionaire and his wife, who own large tracts of land in the district, enjoying the interest in a Melbourne suburb."

Southland Times, 1 April 1881, p. 3

A Tour in New Zealand (By the Agricultural Reporter of the Melbourne Leader

<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>

Once on the level again on the other side of Ram Hill, turn left along Josephville-Glenure Road North. At the entrance to a farm property the area on the right denotes the location of Josephville station. The Australian millionaire Joseph Clarke and his wife Caroline owned large properties in Southland though they lived in Melbourne.<sup>2</sup> The Josephville station and yards are no longer visible. However, proceed with caution on the track running to the left around the foot of Ram Hill perilously close to the river. The track is on the permanent way. The railway line had to cross Ram Stream, which carries a significant flow of water into the Oreti River, but there is no sign of railway abutments. Slightly further the track ends in a quarry, which is unfenced and has no barriers to entry. Proceed only if there is no work taking place in the quarry. On the far side of the quarry the line can be seen snaking its way across the paddocks on a raised embankment, obviously well used by both the farmer and his stock. It is strongly recommended not to proceed onto the embankment by car, but after taking a look across the landscape, return via the quarry to SH6.

From Josephville it is eight kilometres to Lumsden. Road and rail run parallel, with the rail about one kilometre to the left of the road. The road eventually curves left and adjoins the line at Pluto Road West at the southern end of the wedge of railway reserve in Lumsden, now a neatly mown grass area. The Waimea Plains branch line also enters Lumsden in the same area, on the right of SH6, and clearly the reserve is part of the Lumsden station yards. The station building is 400 metres ahead, well preserved and now serving as the town's information centre. An earlier station building was destroyed in a fire, and the station from Dunback in North Otago was used to replace part of it.

### **LUMSDEN – FAIRLIGHT**

Today the section of track from Fairlight to Kingston is "mothballed" while various entrepreneurial operators struggle to reinstate a steam train service to celebrate and commemorate the days of the Kingston Flyer. For the purposes of this publication the Kingston branch exploration only goes as far north as Fairlight.

From Lumsden the line ran north to cross the Five Rivers Plain, so called because five "rivers" drain across it from the Eyre Mountains, converging just before entering the Oreti River at The Elbow.

Start at the station in Lumsden, noting the restored water tower at the north end of the current yard/parking area. Follow SH94 to the junction with SH6. A portion of a truss bridge has been erected over a ditch to the left of a war memorial on the right-hand side of SH94, marking the route the line took out of the station yards. Turn right from SH94 onto SH6, and look for glimpses of

embankment on the right while driving northwards. The line veers away from the road and rises slightly to make its way around the lower slopes of the Lumsden Hills. As the road curves right, the rail corridor crosses the road, heading across the paddocks along the banks of the Oreti River on the left. The embankment/cutting is very clear on both sides of the road, particularly the cutting around the slope on the left-hand side.

The road runs down to the junction of SH6 and SH94 where one can turn left to cross the Oreti River into Fiordland. It is worth driving towards the bridge to observe the Kingston branch formation on the right-hand side of the road in a fairly deep cutting.

Continue north on SH6. For a couple of kilometres the rail formation is well hidden from the road, snaking its way along an escarpment set back from the river. Follow SH6 north along the foothills of the Lintley Range on the right where road and rail converge just over four kilometres from Mararoa Junction. A cutting in the trees on the left can be discerned and there are occasional glimpses of the line via changes in the height of vegetation between the road and the Acton Stream, slightly further out to the left. There is an obvious crossing point 20 metres along Ellis Road, and the line continues thereafter to be visible amongst the trees and undergrowth. As it crosses open paddocks the embankment becomes reasonably clear and continues to be so for several kilometres. If there are any abutments at streams, they are no longer obvious.

At the intersection of SH6 and Lowther Road turn left then immediately left again along Lowther Siding Road which was the site of Lowther station, the second of eight stops between Lumsden and Fairlight. The station or structures in the yards, such as a loading bank or a platform are now invisible. For many years, though, Lowther was a busy settlement, with several streets, a busy hotel or two, and some service businesses catering for the needs of the local farms, as well as for the travellers to and from Lake Wakatipu and beyond, and miners making their way to the goldfields further north. When the railway reached Lowther a stationmaster was appointed. Lowther also had a blacksmith, a courthouse, a resident constable and a well-stocked store. All signs of this settlement have now vanished, and the rail embankment is the only remnant to tell the passer-by that at one time there was a lot going on at this place.

About 400 metres beyond Lowther, look for a cairn on the right-hand side of SH6. The Encyclopedia of New Zealand says the following about this cairn: "When Ngāi Tahu crossed Cook Strait to settle in the South Island they found a related tribe, Ngāti Māmoē, already living there. As Ngāi Tahu moved slowly south, there were battles between the two tribes, but also intermarriage and peaceful assimilation. The last major battle was fought in the early 18th century at Waitaramēa, in the Five Rivers area of inland Southland. This monument marks the site."

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/1623/waitaramēa-memorial>

From Lowther, for the next 15-20 kilometres, road and rail are separated, with the railway line curving along a route to the west of the plains while the road makes its way in a straight line at the foothills of the Mataura Range on the east. The rail formation is often more than a kilometre from the road and it is therefore impossible to ascertain whether there are extant abutments or other remnants at any of the creeks crossing Five Rivers Plains.

However at Five Rivers opposite the school there is an unnamed, unsealed road on which was the location of the Five Rivers stop, also known as Dome (peaks in the nearby ranges are called East Dome and West Dome). Look for a loading platform on the right side of this track, and a large set of abutments are also extant. The café on the intersection of SH6 and Mossburn Five Rivers Road is worth visiting.

**[Five Rivers Plain.** All five “rivers” are officially called “streams”, viz. Acton Stream, Oswald Stream, Dilston Stream, Cromel Stream and Irthing Stream. The names were provided by the early surveyor J.T. Thomson, after rivers in his home area of Northumberland, England. The Five Rivers Plains rise gently and almost imperceptibly to an elevation of about 300 metres above sea level, with the highest point being at Eyre Creek, where there is a “summit” of 332 metres.]

Five Rivers was another busy settlement which had a final heyday in the 1970s when the Kingston Flyer was reinstated as a tourist attraction after representations by local residents. For nearly 10 years the Five Rivers station “became the major point where passengers both de-trained and entrained in the station yard from both tourist coaches and private vehicles. During this period more passengers arrived at Five Rivers station en route to Fiordland than arrived at Invercargill’s main trunk line station over the same period. It became necessary to extend facilities for the large numbers of people requiring water and toilet amenities as well as picnic and rest areas”.<sup>3</sup>

“It became a common sight to see all the tourist buses travelling empty between Kingston and Five Rivers as the passengers enjoyed the thrill of riding the Flyer to Five Rivers where they would rejoin their coach. And likewise it was common to see a long line of private cars driving parallel to the train with only a driver as the rest of the family enjoyed the trip on the Flyer”.<sup>4</sup>

“What a fantastic sight it was to see this gleaming black locomotive with all those shining brass fittings, its huge driving wheels pounding round and the funnel belching out clouds of smoke and steam on a brisk, frosty morning as it wound its way through the many willow glades out into the straights. The service was cancelled in 1979, by which time 64,000 passengers had passed through Five Rivers station”.<sup>5</sup>

Continue from Five Rivers on SH6 for just over 10 kilometres, passing a layby on the right at the top Jollies Hill Pass. Jollies Hill is the site of a hotel known as the “Jolly Wagoner” which served the constant flow of coaches and wagons heading to the goldfields in the 1860s and thereafter.

There is a cairn in the layby on the Pass erected by local residents in memory of four pioneers who died en route and were buried in the slopes behind the layby. Erected in 1934, the inscription includes the poignant phrase “Somebody’s Loved Ones”.

Somewhere along the line after Five Rivers there was a stop called Eyre Creek, which is very confusing as one crosses Eyre Creek 10-15 kilometres further north. The station/stop at Eyre Creek was, however, the “summit” of the line, at 1,089 feet, or all of 332 metres above sea level. There are no side roads along which one can venture between Five Rivers and the next stop at Parawa, and it is not until nearing Parawa that road and railway line are once again in proximity. The only indication that one is in Parawa is the road on the left, called Parawa Station Road.

Note Nokomai Road on the right at Parawa – this leads to the Nokomai River valley, behind the Slate Range. One of New Zealand’s earliest Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs – Choie Sew Hoy – and his sons set up a gold dredge in this valley, which extracted gold from the river flats successfully from 1893 for 50 years. Presumably they used the railway to bring in machinery and equipment and perhaps to transport the gold extracted to safekeeping in Invercargill or Dunedin.

Exactly 2.6 kilometres beyond Parawa Station Road on SH6 the line can be clearly seen, coming from Parawa station at a sharp angle on the left. It crosses SH6 and continues in an equally straight line across the paddocks on the right, making its way to the next station at Athol. While the trains made a beeline for Athol, the road took a longer route to the left, but their junction in the small settlement four kilometres from the SH6 crossing point is clear to see.

Approaching Athol, look for Paddy's Alley Road (apparently named after an Irish gold digger) on the right. Turn into it, and 300 metres later at the junction with Price Road (left) is where the railway line crossed to run along Price Street to the Athol station. The station was a 5<sup>th</sup> class one and served as a post office for some of its history. These days Athol is best known as a centre for hunting and fishing. It is said that the brown trout fishing in the nearby Mataura River is the best in the world.

Price Street eventually runs onto SH6, and the railway line continued diagonally across the paddock on the left of the highway. Road and rail are more or less parallel for the next 10 kilometres, as far as Garston. There are no abutments or any other remnants at the Mataura River bridge, nor the Mataura Overflow Bridge, both of which are crossed shortly after Athol. The line was on the left, where it stayed for three kilometres, obvious at times as a raised embankment now covered for most of the distance by gorse, broom and other scrubby undergrowth. Just before McMillan Road the line crossed to the right side of SH6.

Just after McMillan Road it is hard to miss the most resplendent remnant on the line – not only is the loading platform for Nokomai station still *in situ* and visible from the road, but also its station name board.

For the next 3.5 kilometres to Garston (apparently named after a suburb of Liverpool, England) the embankment remains visible on the right side of the road, though sometimes it can only be discerned by differences in vegetation across paddocks, unless it is in use as a stock track. The local community has set up The Garston Railway Heritage Project as an extension of the Garston Historic Information Kiosk project at the entrance of the Village Green. There was a goods shed and stock yards for sheep and cattle. Gold-mining equipment was also transported from Garston into the Nevis Valley.<sup>6</sup>

At the north end of Garston the railway line ran straight across SH6 to launch itself across the Mataura River. To follow the line, veer left onto Hume Road before finally leaving Garston. Hume Road runs parallel to the line for 3.5 metres from the river crossing, and appears to be a public road. Though unsealed it can be driven along, providing views of the embankment on the right as it makes its way also steadily to its next crossing of the river, where it runs straight into Fairlight station immediately on the far bank.

Hume Road stops at the river, so to get to Fairlight return to SH6 at Garston. Seven kilometres from Garston, Fairlight station will be seen on the left. A Heritage Trail interpretation panel on the station building advises that Fairlight is “now the southern terminus for the Kingston Flyer, this site was originally a staging site called “The Ten Mile” for horses and travellers – long before becoming the stopping point for the rail traffic... “.The small building was originally the station building at Otautau<sup>7</sup> and was transported to Fairlight in 1996.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For a biography of Choie Sew Hoy:

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s14/sew-hoy-charles>

Kingston Flyer:

<http://www.kingstonflyer.co.nz/>

and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston\\_Flyer\\_%28train%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston_Flyer_%28train%29)

and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston\\_Flyer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston_Flyer)

SS Earnslaw cruises on Lake Wakatipu:

<https://www.realjourneys.co.nz/en/experiences/cruises/tss-earnslaw-vintage-steamship-cruises/>  
and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TSS\\_Earnslaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TSS_Earnslaw)

Northern Southland Heritage Trail, which covers the locale of the Kingston and Mossburn lines. A hard copy can be obtained at the Lumsden I-site:

<http://www.southlandnz.com/Portals/1/Documents/Brochures/Northern%20Southland%20Heritage%20Trail%20brochure.pdf>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://the-lothians.blogspot.co.nz/2013/06/the-saga-of-southlands-wooden-railway.html>

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the Clarke family, refer to Australian Dictionary of Biography  
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/clarke-joseph-3342>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.40

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.40

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,

<sup>6</sup> The Northern Southland Heritage Trail brochure can be obtained from the Lumsden Information Centre and is also available online:

<http://www.southlandnz.com/Portals/1/Documents/Brochures/Northern%20Southland%20Heritage%20Trail%20brochure.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Otatau is a stop on the Wairio branch, which is not included in this publication.