

Last corrected: September 2019

# CENTRAL OTAGO

Mt Buster Diggings  
Hogburn Sluicings  
St Bathans Blue Lake  
Rock & Pillar Summit



Quartz Reef Tailings  
Cairnmuir Hill Track  
Bannockburn Diggings



Sutton Salt Lake  
Ida Burn Gorge  
Butchers Dam  
Alexandra Dredge Tailings



# Mt Buster Diggings

Alpine plateau and tussocks

500 metres climb to plateau

Historic diggings

Mt biking and 4WD access

4-5 hours return

4WD and tussock routes

10 kilometres return

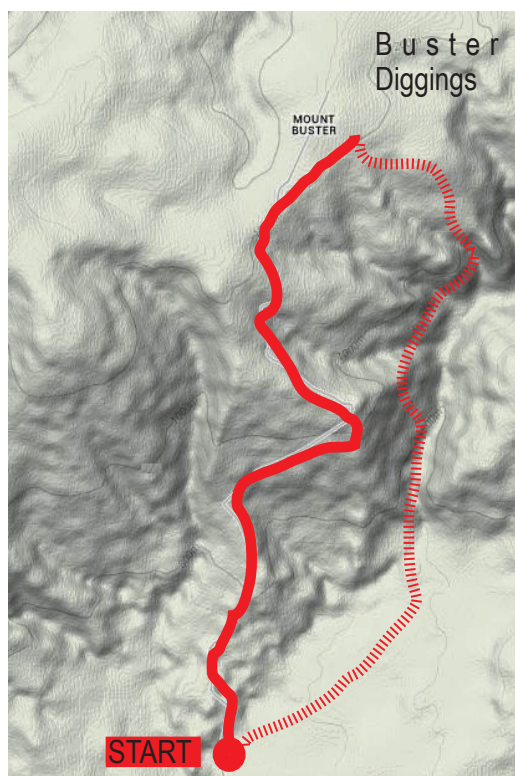
From Naseby take the Dansey Pass Road 1 km to the Mt Buster Road, and follow this about 11 km to the ford and start of 4WD.

The Buster Diggings are up on a plateau at 1200 metres, bleak and beautiful. Strange sculptures left by gold sluicings. A cute hut. Amazing views in a remote place. Access for 4WD is now permanently open.

After the ford the 4WD heads past a locked railway hut (now a private crib) and resolutely starts to climb up the spur, in lazy zig-zags up the face of the mountain and onto the windy tops. Plenty to explore, with gold remnants everywhere.

Old water races wriggle across the plateau and the gold diggers sluicings have left some curious shapes. The 2 bunk hut looks forlorn in the middle of this emptiness. A newish poled track heads down from the hut into the Little Kye Burn back to the carpark, allow 2-3 hours descent.





# Hogburn Sluicings

Hogburn gold sluicings and forest  
Nostalgic Naseby and cemetery  
NZ longest water race and siphon  
Plenty to explore for kids

2 hours circuit

Gravel tracks

4 kilometre circuit

Nasbey is 8 km off the Highway 85, about 12 km from Ranfurly. There is a confusion of loggings roads, bridle ways, mt bike tracks in the pine forest, but the water race is a useful reference point if you get lost.

Naseby reeks with nostalgia, '2000 feet above worry level'. Curling capital of New Zealand, charming historic buildings, and the museum is worth seeing. Up the Hogburn gully there is a pleasant picnic area, and a detailed information board of the various tracks.

The Mount Ida Water Race remains one of the most remarkable efforts of the gold-digging days, and as an example of pick and shovel precision engineering that is impressive. It is now over 120 years old, 123 kilometres long, and the water stills flows chilly and steady.

The One Tree Hill Historical Walk starts 50 metres above the Hogburn sign from the picnic area, and climbs and crosses the Mt Ida Water Race, and winds through the 'badlands' sluicings back to the amateur gold panning area in the Hogburn, 1 hour return.





Better still continue onto the Mining Claim area, where a small amphitheatre of sluicings contains quite a few iron remnants of the gold days, including pipes and a sluice gun.

This track continues briefly and meets a side-track to the Mt Ida Water Race, and you can return along the race vehicle track (past the siphon) to the Hogburn — about 2 hours return.

**Cafe:** Black Forest, in Naseby

# St Bathans Blue Lake

Brilliant blue lake

Gold sluicings and info boards

Historic hotel

1-2 hours circuit

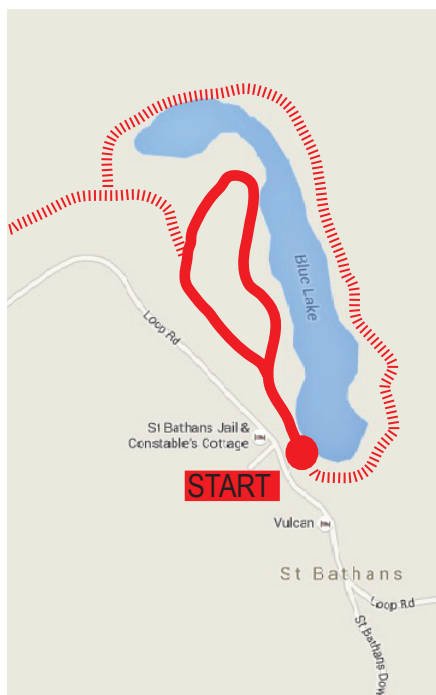
Gravel tracks

2 kilometre circuit, other tracks around lake and linking to camping domain.

St Bathans is off Highway 85 at Becks, 15 km on a sealed road to township. Large carpark and picnic area beside Blue Lake.

St Bathans is in it's own time-warp. This is an easy gravel track overlooking the sparkling blue lake, which is actually a man-made hole dug by the gold-diggers and later filled with water. Great info signs and lots of ruined debris from the hey-day of the 1860's gold rush.

The Vulcan Hotel opposite the Blue Lake is a popular lunch spot and with a shady beer garden.





**Camping:** St Bathans Domain

# Rock & Pillar Summit

Big alpine tramp, 1000 m climb

Open tops and two huts

Alpine wetlands and flowers

Need a fine day

7-9 hours return

Poled tussock trails, 4WD tracks

11 kilometres return

Off Highway 87, about 5 km north of Middlemarch, a short road leads to a carpark near an old stone building.

A huge day, but rewarding views along the mighty Rock and Pillar Range with its alpine wetlands, strange tors, and blistering summer days. Two huts for lunching and resting, and fascinating history panels in Big Hut detailing the crazy ski days of the 1930's. You need good weather. Navigating in the fog up on the Rock and Pillar is difficult without compass, map or Gps on your iphone. Dont even think about it. This daywalk suits very fit trampers.

From the carpark follow the poled track as it sets about the hill, gradually leaving the fencelines behind, and remorselessly climbing to the top plateau of 1300 metres. There's a short sidle across a basin to Top Hut, with the old ruined stone ski hut next door. The history panels are well worth browsing, befoe setting off (no

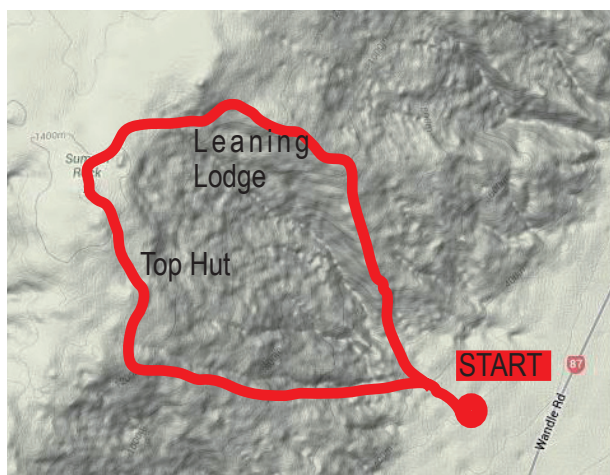




track) up to the summit rock itself, 1450 metres.

Stupendous views. Rock tors dot the landscape like Easter Island statues . Wander north over the plateau until the new Leaning Lodge comes into view, 100 metres lower than the ridge. Follow the 4WD or shortcut down to this new 10-bunk hut.

Downhill take the 4WD track as it zig-zags down the hillside (spot the small refuge hut?) and at the 1050 metre contour, you need to pick up the fenceline as it heads straight back down to the old stone building. The last section is across private farmland.



# Sutton Salt Lake

Inland salty pond

Sliver of skinks

Tussock downlands

Rock tors

1-2 hour circuit

Tussock trails

3 kilometres circuit

From Highway 87, turn down Kidds Road and travel 2 km to the sign-posted carpark.

You cannot equivocate with a place like 'Central'; either it satisfies the soul or it repels you. Here, even the sky has its own peculiarities, with vast cauliflower cumulus building over the Rock and Pillar Range.

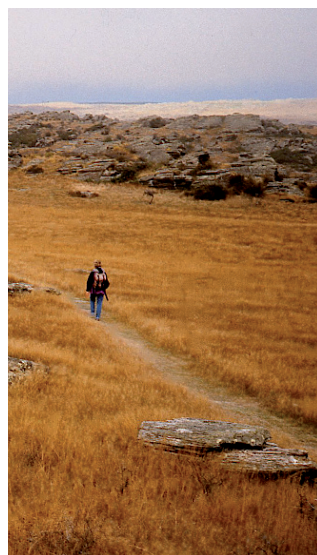
The salt lake is peculiar, as far away from the sea as you can get, yet rainwater runs over these arid rocks and brings out tiny traces of salt that over years have accumulated and encouraged the odd situation of salt-tolerant coastline plants fringing the lake.

The track is circular, threading through a tussock plain and schist rock outcrops that every now and again hold a shiver of light where a skink had been basking. The occasional falcon flicks high above, and if the lake has water in it (sometimes





it dries up) there will always be a pair of paradise ducks. The lake soothes this desperately dry land, and if it is hot, you will probably want to quench your thirst...



# Ida Burn Gorge

Historic railway line and tunnels

Great mt biking

Tussock open lands

Rock tors

3-4 hours return

Old railway line

12 kilometres return

From Highway 85 at Lauder a signpost and a short road lead to a picnic area, passing a toilet on the way.

Old railway lines make excellent walking tracks, and the Central Otago Rail Trail is one of the best. Once the railway closed the line was developed for mountain bikers and it is doubtful that you will want to walk the whole of it, but this is one of the best bits. Lauder's claim to fame is that it has the (officially) coldest recorded temperature in New Zealand —  $-25^{\circ}$  Celsius.

The start of the rail trail is well-signposted, just past the gun club, and it is about 1 km to the Manuherikia River bridge. This is a fine iron bridge is 110 metres long, with an information panel detailing its history. A further 3 km to the Ida Burn gorge and the first tunnel.





A torch is useful, as the tunnel has a kink in it where both ends are hidden, and you literally cannot see your hand in front of your face. You have to use it as a guide against the wall. The second tunnel is 1 km further on, and straighter, and then it is a short distance to the Auripo viaduct, at 37 metres, the highest on the entire rail trail — quietly spectacular.

Where the gorge ends there are views over the flat, soothing land. The lenticular rocks seem to mimic the saucer-like clouds, and this is a good meditative location in which to admire a land that has no equal in New Zealand.



# Butchers Dam

Wild lands and wild thymes

Rock tors and crisp skies

Historic dam and hut

Beautiful lake

2-3 hours circuit

Gravel tracks and tussock trails

3 kilometre circuit

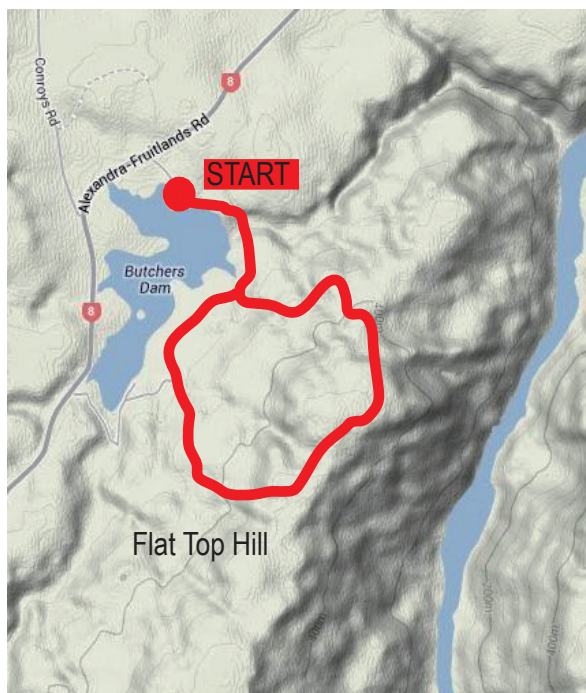
Off Highway 8, 5 kilometres south of Alexandra. Large carpark and information signs.

This track gives you quick, easy access to a typical Central Otago landscape. There is a superb 1 hour circuit track with excellent information panels on the geology, flora and fauna and gold history of this fascinating area. All around you there are expansive landscapes of rock and tussock.

From the carpark, cross the attractive dam (now well fenced) with it's permanent rainbow lurking below it. Beyond the stone hut, the main track quickly divides and a circuit can be followed through old gold workings.

It is surprising how much human history there is in such a compact area. Botanically, Flat Top Hill is interesting (which is why DoC owns it). There are 180 native vascular plants and several rarities, including a native forget-me-not. If you are lucky, you might see and hear the endemic New Zealand falcon, and Harrier hawks are often scouring the tussocks for prey.





Beyond the main trail, there is a longer poled circuit which leads up into a strange landscape of rock tors that have an almost human-like quality; faces sometimes seems to peep out, or eyes seem to stare. These are the ghosts of shepherds and gold-diggers who moved through here — their hopes soon turned to stone in Otago's blighting weather.



# Alexandra Dredge Tailings

Huge dredge tailings

Circuit trail and info panels

Historic remnants

Take water and camera

2 hours circuit

Gravel and vehicle track

4 kilometre circuit

From Alexandra cross the Clutha bridge to Earnscleugh Road, then Marshall Road to the carpark.

A desert within a desert. Hot, dry, grey humps of dredge tailings are not everyone's cup of tea, but this landscape is unique, and surprisingly beautiful. Go in the late afternoon or evening when the Otago light bathes the tailings in surreal shadows.

Not always well marked, the track explores the strange humped landscape, with lookouts and old machinery and dredge ponds along the way. Mini mountains of rubble everywhere you look, dotted with occasional trees that have managed to lodge on the shifting gravels. A strange hour or two.



**Cafe:** Courthouse Cafe, in Alexandra



# Quartz Reef Tailings

Historic gold-mining site

Weird herring-bone tailings

Views over Lake Dunstan

Easy short stop

1 hour return

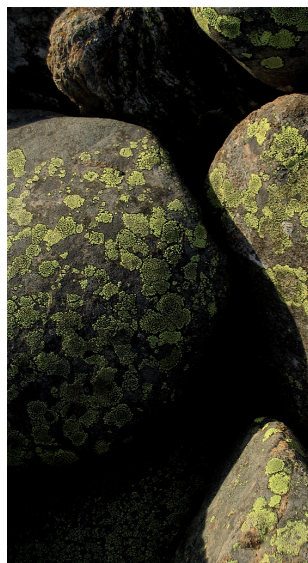
Gravel track

2 kilometres return

From Cromwell head to Tarras on Highway 8 some 4 km to small carpark. Easy to miss.

The Quartz Reef tailings (also known as the Northburn tailings) were created by necessity into a giant work of art. Neatly stacking rocks to stop them collapsing into the gold working, the 1860's diggers area have created striking patterns, all the more remarkable when you realise the well-organised discipline required to make the system work, and that every rock was shifted by hand. A little gem.





**Cafe:** Cider House, in Cromwell

# Cairnmuir Hill Track

Big landscape and wild country

Historic musterers stone hut

Great views of Lake Dunstan

600 metre climb, carry water

4-5 hours return (hut)

4WD track

12 kilometres return (hut)

From Cromwell go to Bannockburn bridge, then immediately onto Cairnmuir Road to the carpark.

A great climb following an historic gold miners track from Cromwell to Clyde. Suits fit and keen walkers, but the rewards are tremendous views and a classic musterers hut.

From the carpark start the slog up the road, as it climbs a massive spur into the Cairnmuir Mountains. 500 metres to a small saddle. Keep to the main ridge track at the junction, then there's another knob to climb over at 795 metres, and another hill up to a road junction.

Take the obvious track down to the basin and the beautiful historic hut, a surprisingly large musterers or boundary hut built about the 1860's. This is the only water source on the track.

If you want to have a crack at Cairnmuir Hill itself, keep going up the 4WD with some 300 metres of climbing, sidling Mt Jackson to the final summit. Add another two hours return.





**Cafe:** Grain and Seed, in Cromwell



# Bannockburn Diggings

Badlands gold sluicings

Tunnels, shafts, paved water races

Sun-dried brick huts

Interesting circuit

2-3 hours circuit

Old road

5 kilometres return

From Cromwell take the Bannockburn Road 5 km across the Kawarau, and turn into Fenton Road 2 km to the carpark. Gold workings are on private land and closed between August to October for lambing.

The Bannockburn sluicings are a tortured landscape, the river terraces quite literally eaten out into canyons and cliffs by the desperation of the gold miners. After the initial flurry of activity from 1862-1865, a little community established itself and settled in to win the deeper gold that lay under the old river terraces.

At first they tunnelled, trying to intercept the gold bearing layers, and hauling out the pay dirt in trucks on rails. By the 1870's sluicing was in full swing, but because of the large operations involved Bannockburn was a company field, and men worked for wages. By 1900 the diggings were in decline, and what is left now is a stark and strangely beautiful landscape.





The track initially goes up through canyons and crumbling cliffs of the sluice claims, the pillars that remain are often at the corners of claims. After a lookout over the diggings the track climbs up and crosses the water race, passes the dam and reaches Stewart Town, a ruined village of sun-dried brick buildings and old orchard trees, that have become so ingrown and twisted they look like matagouri. The track returns back via some of the impressive paved tail races.

