

Introduction

Mountain biking is an increasingly popular recreational activity, which provides access to different environments and challenging terrain.

The Department of Conservation and Buller Cycling Club have, in partnership, created an opportunity for MTB use on Denniston Plateau.

Denniston Plateau is a unique environment situated 25 km east of Westport and 600 m above sea level. With a fragile ecosystem and a wealth of human history, it provides an opportunity high in natural, historic and recreational values.

Responsible mountain biking will ensure these areas are cared for, and maintain access for all users.

The MTB tracks are not for use by other recreational vehicles. (There is opportunity for combined MTB and recreational 4WD use on designated 4WD tracks. Refer Department of Conservation pamphlet *4 Wheel Drive Denniston*).

The environment

Denniston Plateau is a unique part of New Zealand. A vast plateau, its remoteness and ruggedness makes it a wild and dramatic landscape. A highly sensitive ecological area, its geological make-up of sandstone over coal gives it a thin and highly acidic soil layer. This, combined with high rainfall, high wind exposure, and low sunshine hours are challenging conditions for survival. The alpine plants that have adapted to live in this harsh environment are slow-growing and fragile. The combination of alpine and pakihī/wetland areas that make up the plateau provide specific habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals.

Stunted shrubs including mānuka and pink pine live among sheltering tussocks, the most common of those being red tussock. Small red sundews are a feature of the wetland areas, their sticky droplets enticing tiny insects.

The plateau is home to the nationally endangered species of carnivorous land snail *Powelliphanta patrickensis*. This giant snail is one of several species of native snail in the area.

Other significant native species include the great-spotted kiwi, which can be heard calling at night. Weka, kea, and fernbirds can be seen during the daytime and with a little care, skinks and geckos scurrying across rocks.

Safety

Know your riding limitations.

Be aware of other users—walkers, four wheel drivers and motor bikes. Main roads are also used by large coal trucks.

Ride only where permitted and stay on the track. Do not make your own shortcuts or tracks. Do not stray into active coal mining areas. (Blasting may occur at any time in active mining areas).

Do not enter any mine tunnels. Keep well clear of any smoke from underground mine fires. (Mine tunnels may collapse and fires emit hazardous gases).

These MTB tracks can be ridden in most weather conditions, but poor conditions create extra challenges that require a higher level of navigation skill and outdoor experience. The plateau is an alpine region and is subject to very different weather from that at sea level. It frequently sits in dense mist making visibility poor. It is also subject to snow in winter while rain storms and high winds can occur at any time of year.

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CROSS FLOODED RIVERS. Rivers in this area rise **EXTREMELY** quickly. Use alternate routes to avoid flooded river crossings.

Before heading out-

- Check weather conditions.
- Ensure you carry a map with you (in a waterproof cover). A compass is also advisable.
- Ensure you carry all necessary tools and spare equipment.
- A cell phone can be helpful in the event of an accident.
- Leave intentions—Denniston is isolated and if you break down it could be a long walk to help.
- Ensure your bike is ready for the trip.
- Ensure you are carrying appropriate food, drink and clothing. A survival blanket is advisable in case of an emergency.



Rehabilitation

More than 100 years of mining has left its mark on the plateau. State-owned coal company, Solid Energy, is in the process of completing a rehabilitation programme in the headwaters of the Rapid Stream catchment. This includes restoring soil cover, replanting and aerial seeding. The areas being rehabilitated include old tracks and sites that were used by the Sullivan Mine. Respect for these rehabilitation areas is essential to ensure the best outcome for the environment. (Do not use any old tracks that are blocked off for rehabilitation).

History

Denniston Plateau has a history rich in mining and pioneering spirit. Wild and remote, it is hard to imagine a town bursting with life ever existed in this stark landscape.

First surveyed for coal in 1860 by Julius Haast and James Burnett, it was only after a second survey in 1873 by William Cooper and R B Denniston, that the first mine on the plateau opened in 1880. Settlements formed as work to support the mine began, on a tramway and an incline to transport the coal off the plateau. The Denniston Incline was completed at the end of 1880 and with a gradient of 1 in 1.34 at its steepest—there was the occasional derailment. As the incline was the only way on and off the hill, there were some, who once up on the plateau never left, for fear of riding the incline again. A foot track was built in 1884, followed by a dray track in 1902 and a fully formed road in 1915.

Burnetts Face, Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale mines were established within the following two years with supporting townships.

With the increased production of coal from the new mines, a better system was needed to get the coal from the mines to the incline. An 'endless rope' system of parallel surface-haulage lines with full coal boxes going in one direction and empties going in the other was designed. This rope road was formed in 1889.

Denniston and Burnetts Face became the two main townships, with Denniston always having the bigger population and more facilities. With a hospital, police station, high school, bowling green and swimming baths the miners were well catered for.



More information

Department of Conservation
Buller *Kawatiri* Area Office
PO Box 357
72 Russell Street, Westport
Ph 03 788 8008 Fax 03 788 8009

Or visit the Department's web site: www.doc.govt.nz

Buller Cycling Club

For more detailed MTB track information visit the Buller Cycling Club website: www.cyclebuller.co.nz

Friends of the Hill

For more information about the history of Denniston visit the Friends of the Hill website: www.denniston.co.nz

For enquiries about the Denniston museum email: hillfriends@hotmail.com

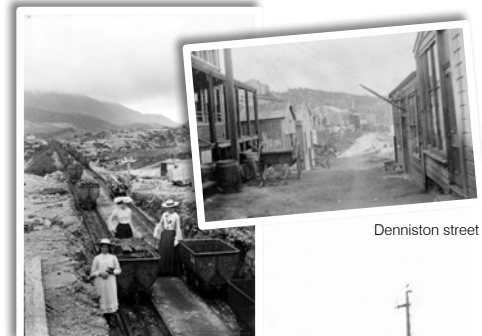
Published by
Department of Conservation
West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy
Private Bag 701
Hokitika
2008
Crown copyright
New Zealand Government



The combined population of the plateau approached 1500 at its peak in 1911. The depression of the 1930s had an impact on mining, followed by government changes in the 1940s. A decline in production and improved access, transport and aerial ropeways resulted in the abandonment of the townships and the use of the incline by the 1960s.

Historic sites

When riding through the area, the remains of the incline, the rope road and the townships are evident. A museum now resides in the old school building. The historic sites provide a glimpse of times gone by. Some of the areas have relics remaining while others are sites where we are left to imagine what might have been. Care is needed to ensure these links to the past are preserved for future generations. Relics must not be removed or disturbed.



Denniston street

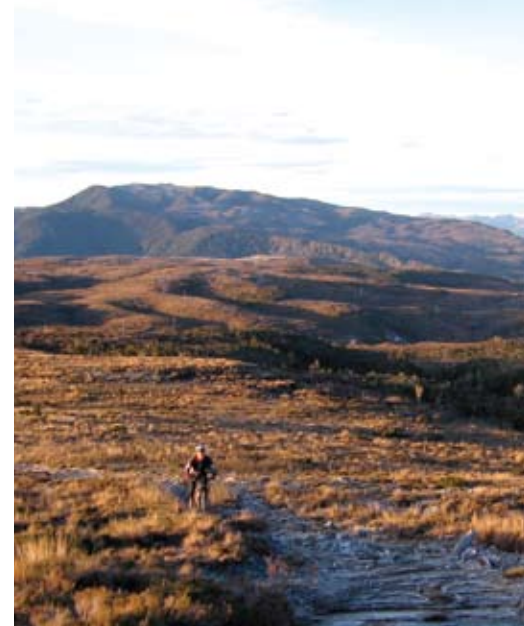
Denniston Incline



Denniston Plateau

Mountain-bike tracks

WEST COAST/TAI POUTINI



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Track information

Track surfaces vary from gravel roads to rocky tracks and some short walking sections. All circuits have sections of track that range from Grade 2 (easy) up to Grade 3 (intermediate).

For a full description of track grades see: www.mountainbike.co.nz

Waypoint markers are denoted on the map e.g. 1-0

Some of the more technical/hazardous sections of track are marked on the ground by these signs: ☹️ e.g. Miners Track circuit has 4 marked technical sections

Tracks can be ridden in any direction. Where there is a predominant direction this is noted on the map by direction arrow.

River crossings are denoted on the map. In normal flow most of these crossings are rideable. **In flood conditions they should be avoided.**

Times are for a round trip starting and finishing at the museum.

Times are for an average intermediate-grade rider.

Times are for the predominant travel direction and do not include rest stops—so allow additional time for sightseeing.

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468
Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies
For fire and search and rescue call 111

Photography courtesy of Solid Energy New Zealand Ltd



Grade 2 Easy
Mostly flat with some gentle climbs on smooth track with easily avoidable obstacles such as rocks and potholes.



Grade 3 Intermediate
Steep slopes and/or avoidable obstacles possibly on narrow track and/or with poor traction. There may be exposure at the track's outside edge.



1-0
Quarry circuit—3 km, 20 minutes
This track is a quick and gentle introduction to the type of terrain found elsewhere at Denniston. You should be comfortable riding this track if you want to enjoy riding the others.



2-1
Ropers Hotel circuit
5 km, 30 minutes. 1 x ☹️
Between 2.1 and 2.2 is walking only—no mountain-bike riding



3-1
Miners Track circuit
7 km, 45 minutes. 4 x ☹️



4-1
Drill Track circuit
8 km, 1 hour. 8 x ☹️



5-1
Pig Route circuit
5 km, 45 minutes. 6 x ☹️



6-1
Sullivans circuit
9 km, 1 hour. 3 x ☹️



7-1
Whareatea circuit
11 km, 1 hour. 4 x ☹️

Mt Rochfort road
17 km, 1 hour 30 minutes up (climbing 500 m vertical) and 45 minutes down

To Mt William—Mackley River—Buller Gorge
27 km, 4–8 hours via Cedar Creek Road
This route is unmarked and because of the river crossings **must not be attempted during, or immediately after, rain.** Refer Topomap sheet L29 and route description 'the Denniston Short Cut' in Classic NZ Mountain Bike Rides by the Kennetts. This route passes through private farm land at the Inangahua end. MTB riders must contact the Department of Conservation (Westport office) or the Buller Cycling Club website to check the current access requirements (www.cyclebuller.co.nz).

Other routes—these may not be marked on the ground.



For more detailed track information, including easier-grade rides not shown on this pamphlet, see: www.cyclebuller.co.nz

Your MTB and the environment

It is essential to minimise the environmental impact of mountain bikes and 4WD vehicles.

We ask every rider to behave responsibly and respect the fragility of the natural environment and the needs and rights of others.

If you abuse it you may lose it

