

June 2025

Matakanui Gold Limited Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project Recreation Assessment



Matakanui Gold Limited Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project Recreation Assessment

**Prepared for
Matakanui Gold Limited**

**by Rob Greenaway & Associates
www.greenaway.co.nz**

**June 2024
Final**

Cover photo: Thomson Gorge Road looking north-west towards Bendigo

Matakanui Gold Limited Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project

Recreation Assessment

Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	5
2	Introduction.....	6
2.1	Scheme Overview.....	7
2.2	Method.....	8
3	Public access.....	9
4	Department of Conservation.....	12
4.1	Access and promotion.....	12
4.2	Conservation Management Strategy.....	13
5	Recreation activities.....	17
5.1	Traffic count data.....	17
5.2	Strava data – walking and cycling.....	18
5.3	Cycling.....	22
5.4	Vehicle access.....	25
5.5	Hunting.....	26
5.6	Horse riding.....	27
6	Effects, consultation findings and proposed mitigations.....	28
6.1	Consultation findings.....	28
6.2	Rerouting the northern section of Thomson Gorge Road.....	28
6.3	Come In Time Battery access.....	32
6.4	Visual amenity effects from visitor settings.....	32
6.5	New visitor settings.....	32
6.6	Construction and operations processes.....	32
6.6.1	Noise.....	32
6.6.2	Lighting.....	33
6.6.3	Traffic.....	33
6.6.4	Blasting.....	33
6.7	Mine closure and rehabilitation.....	33
7	Summary of effects.....	34
8	Conclusion.....	37
	Appendix 1: Project description.....	38
	Appendix 2: Boffa Miskell Mine rehabilitation plan.....	40
	Appendix 3: DOC Bendigo area visitor brochure.....	42
	Appendix 4: Interview summaries.....	44
	Alexandra Mountain Bike Club.....	44
	Central Otago Deerstarkers (CODS) and Upper Clutha Deerstarkers (UCDS).....	44
	Tourism Central Otago.....	46
	Herenga ā Nuku (Outdoor Access Commission).....	46
	Central Otago 4WD Club.....	47
	Dunstan Adult Riding Group and Riders of Central Otago.....	47
	Chatto Creek Motorcycle Club.....	49
	Cromwell Mountain Bike Club.....	49
	Otago Goldfields Heritage Trust and Goldfields Cavalcade.....	51

Figures

Figure 1: Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project location showing study area	6
Figure 2: Public access areas – road reserves (purple) and conservation areas (green).....	9
Figure 3: Right of way location, Ardour Conservation Area.....	10
Figure 4: Bendigo Station (yellow) and public lands (green and purple)	11
Figure 5: DOC 'Discover the Bendigo Area' brochure map detail	12
Figure 6: Come In Time stamping battery	13
Figure 7: DOC Otago CMS Visitor Management Zones. Map 8.8 detail.....	13
Figure 8: CMS Central Otago Uplands Place. Map 5.4 detail.....	14
Figure 9: CMS Central Otago Drylands / Manuherikia Place. Map 5.6 detail	16
Figure 10: DOC Bendigo Historic Reserve vehicle counter location, showing also walking tracks.....	17
Figure 11: Strava data for all activities Wanaka, Cromwell and Queenstown. 12 months to May 2024	18
Figure 12: Strava data for all activities around the study area. 12 months to May 2024.....	19
Figure 13: Strava data for all cycling around the study area. 12 months to May 2024	20
Figure 14: Strava data for all pedestrian activities around the study area. 12 months to May 2024	20
Figure 15: Strava data for all cycle activities near Bendigo. 12 months to May 2024.....	21
Figure 16: Strava data for all pedestrian activities near Bendigo. 12 months to May 2024	21
Figure 17: Kennett Brothers Classic New Zealand Cycle Trails 2023	22
Figure 18: DOC Hunting areas. Source: DOC maps.....	26
Figure 19: Thomson Gorge Road alternative route	29
Figure 20: Ardour Conservation Area 4WD route. Photo location shown in Figure 19.....	30
Figure 21: View north-west from Ardour Rise. Photo location shown in Figure 19.....	30
Figure 22: Gradient comparisons Thomson Gorge Rd and Ardour Rise	31

Tables

Table 1: Comparison of gradient: Thomson Gorge Road and Ardour Rise	31
Table 2: Scale of impact on recreation values considering magnitude of effect	34
Table 3: Existing value of recreation activities in the study area at the regional level	35
Table 4: Summary scale of effects of Proposal – negative effects	36

1 Executive Summary

This report assesses the effects of the proposed Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project on the recreation values and opportunities in the Rise and Shine and Shepherds Creek catchments, and the recreation setting accessed via Thomson Gorge Road. Thomson Gorge Road is a regionally significant thoroughfare and recreation setting for cycling, four wheel driving (although it can be accessed in suitable two wheel drive vehicles also) and equestrian activities, and it provides access for, primarily, hunters in the neighbouring Bendigo and Ardour Conservation Areas, and beyond. The historic restored Come In Time Battery is accessed via a short walk from the road.

The mining proposal, during its establishment and operation, will result in the loss of access along Thomson Gorge Road, and access to the Come In Time Battery from this road. The measures proposed to mitigate this loss of access are:

- Developing Ardour Rise as an alternative to Thompson Gorge Road to a standard suitable for public access, including appropriate road surfacing and width, design speed, gradient, road reserve, signage, safety features, and future maintenance requirements, and vesting in the Central Otago District Council (CODC).
- Providing a viewing area of the new mine activity from Ardour Rise, with suitable interpretation about the project, in the same style as that currently provided for the Come In Time Battery.
- Maintenance of existing recreation access to the Ardour and Bendigo Conservation Areas.
- Providing alternative walking access to the Come In Time Battery via the Bendigo Historic Reserve.
- Consideration of cycle traffic on Ardour Road in the Construction Traffic Management Plan.
- Management of light, noise and blasting.

Residual effects include the periodic need to close access to the Come In Time Battery when it falls within the blast radius of the proposed Come In Time Pit. Noise, light and landscape effects are otherwise considered minor for all public conservation and recreation areas, including the Bendigo Historic Reserve, which is the most-visited proximate public setting.

During the establishment, construction and operational phases these mitigations will ensure the Project avoids significant effects on recreation opportunities and values.

The mine rehabilitation plan aims to reinstate the recreation opportunities which are currently provided for, with provision of a cycle, walking and equestrian track as near as possible to the current Thomson Gorge Road alignment, linking Thomson Saddle with Ardour Road, including providing a link to the Come In Time Battery.. Ardour Rise will be retained for vehicle access. Vehicle access to a carpark at the Come In Time Battery and in the upper Rise and Shine catchment will provide access to the public track through the valley. This represents a superior outcome to the current suite of recreation values with the separation of motorised and non-motorised activities in a section of the Rise and Shine catchment (3.8 km approximately).

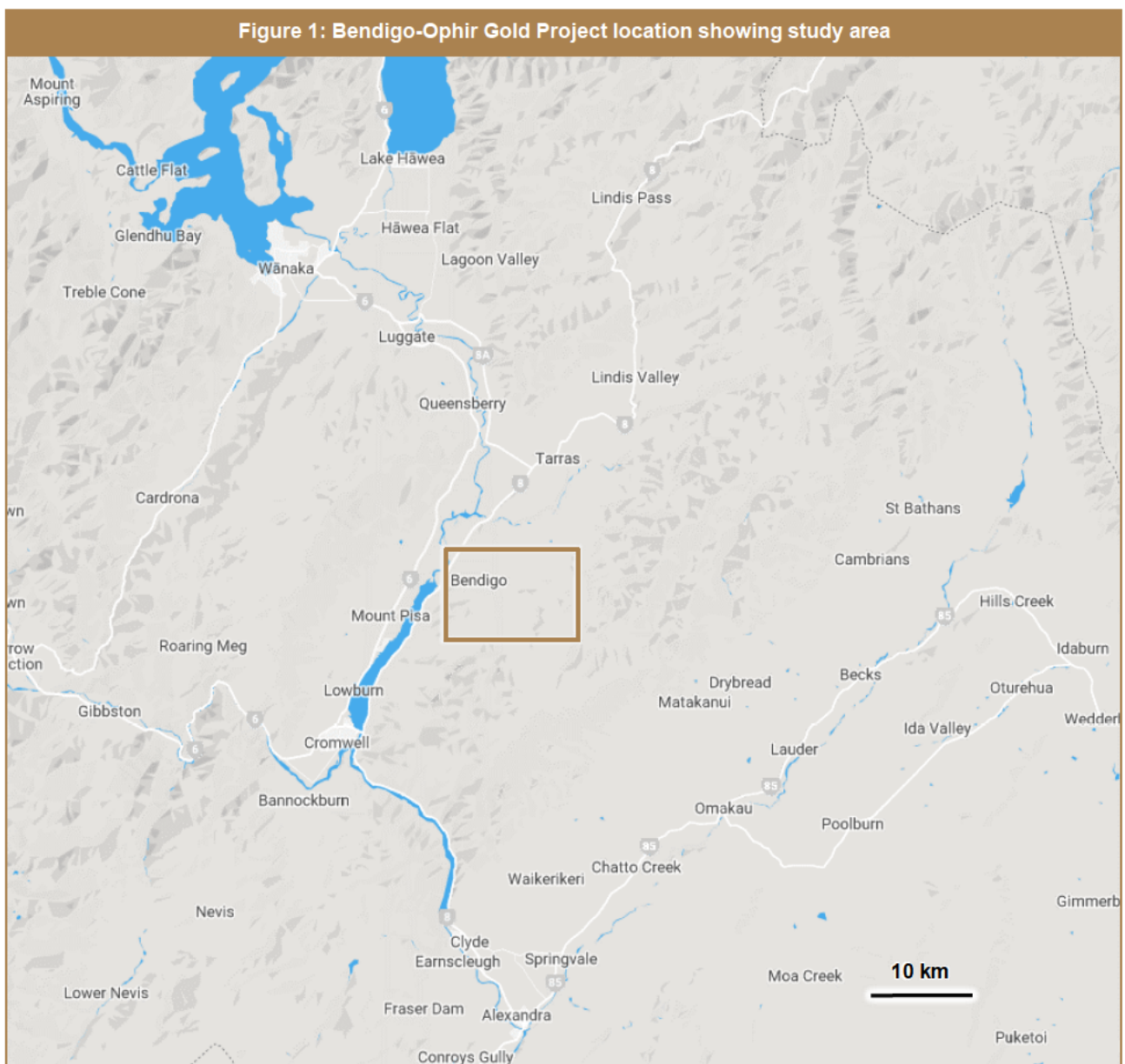
A legal mechanism to secure enduring public access on the various roads and tracks will be required.

2 Introduction

Matakanui Gold Limited ("MGL") is proposing to establish the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project ("BOGP"), a new gold mine, ancillary facilities and environmental mitigation measures on Bendigo and Ardgour Stations in the Dunstan Mountains of Central Otago. The project site is located approximately 20 km north of Cromwell (Figure 1).

The BOGP is located within the footprint of Minerals Exploration Permit 60311, which overlays several pastoral stations that have grazed sheep and cattle in the area for over 100 years. MGL has land access agreements with Bendigo and Ardgour Stations. The BOGP is located adjacent to land administered by the Department of Conservation ("DOC"), including the Bendigo Historic Reserve, the Bendigo Conservation Area and the Ardgour Conservation Area.

BOGP has defined four gold deposits worthy of economic extraction. The most significant is the Rise and Shine ("RAS") discovery which is the most significant gold discovery in New Zealand in the past four decades. The other discoveries at Come in Time ("CIT"), Srex ("SRX") and Srex East ("SRE") are smaller.



Direct disturbance in the pastoral area will be approximately 380 ha. A disturbance contingency has been allowed around the mine and infrastructure for footprint adjustments during detailed design. A further 18 ha (approximately) of disturbance will be needed to establish the Thomson Gorge Road alternative alignment (Ardgour Rise). Maximum potential disturbance in the pastoral area, including contingency and Ardgour Rise, is 568 ha. The defined orebodies are planned to be mined by open pit methods. Underground mining is planned for the deeper parts of the RAS orebody in the later years of development. A project overview is shown in Appendix 1.

This assessment considers the effects of the development and operation of the gold mine on public recreation values – that is recreation on land which provides for public access (not private recreation on private land). The key recreation settings considered are Thomson Gorge Road, Ardgour Conservation Area and the Bendigo Historic Reserve.

2.1 Scheme Overview

A full description of the various activities comprising the establishment, operation and rehabilitation of the BOBP is provided in the Assessment of Environmental Effects by Mitchell Daysh Limited. However, the BOGP includes the following components:

- The establishment of the RAS Open Pit and SRX Open Pit, which are planned to form partial pit lakes at closure;
- The establishment of the CIT Open Pit, which is the smallest of footprints and is planned to be progressively backfilled with waste rock from the RAS Open Pit and profiled to integrate with the surrounding terrain. Rehabilitation will enable nearby native herb fields to be re-established at the completion of mining activities;
- The establishment of the small SRE Open Pit, which will be backfilled with waste rock before being covered with overburden to form the engineered landform for the adjoining SRX Open Pit (**"SRX ELF"**).
- The operation of the process plant will be supported by ancillary facilities such as maintenance workshops, raw material and process chemical storage, fuel depot, laboratory and warehousing. Mine offices, carparking and security services will also be established.
- The construction of the plant in the lower reaches of the Shepherds valley will include the realignment of Shepherds Creek;
- The establishment of water storage dams and tankage for use in the process plant, dust suppression and drinking water supply;
- The establishment of a Tailings Storage Facility (**"TSF"**) in the upper reach of Shepherds Valley (including clean water diversion drains), which will utilise waste rock from mining activities within the project site;
- The establishment of permanent engineered landforms in the Shepherds Valley (**"Shepherds ELF"**) and an unnamed creek west of RAS pit (**"WELF"**);
- The establishment of temporary topsoil, vegetation and brown rock stockpiles around the project site;
- The establishment of supporting infrastructure / activities for the project, such as the upgrade of Ardgour Road and parts of Thomson Gorge Road to provide improved access to the BOGP, internal mine access and haul roads, water pipelines and underground utilities, and electricity supply to the project site from Lindis Crossing via a new 66kV overhead powerline that will follow the existing road reserve corridor;

- A realignment of part of Thomson Gorge Road, via Ardgour Station (Ardgour Rise) to provide public access through to the Manuherikia Valley; and
- The establishment of pest exclusion area(s) for ecological enhancement activities.

Of relevance to this recreation assessment, the operational phase of the project includes:

- Closure of Thomson Gorge Road from near ridgeline west of Thomson Saddle and the creation of an alternative access immediately to the north, called Ardgour Rise;
- Removing access to the eastern end of the Bendigo Historic Reserve via the existing walking access across Bendigo Station from Thomson Gorge Road, including access to the Come In Time Battery, replaced with access via Bendigo Historic Reserve;
- Visual amenity effects on visitors to the Bendigo Historic Reserve and users of the relocated Thomson Gorge Road;
- Provision of viewing areas of the proposed new working area, and interpretation, from the new access road on Ardgour Rise;
- Noise, dust, explosion hazards and lighting effects on publicly accessible areas.

And, at mine closure:

- Rehabilitation of the mine site on closure to enable non-motorised recreational use of – as near as possible – the existing Thomson Gorge Road alignment and retention of Ardgour Rise for vehicle access.

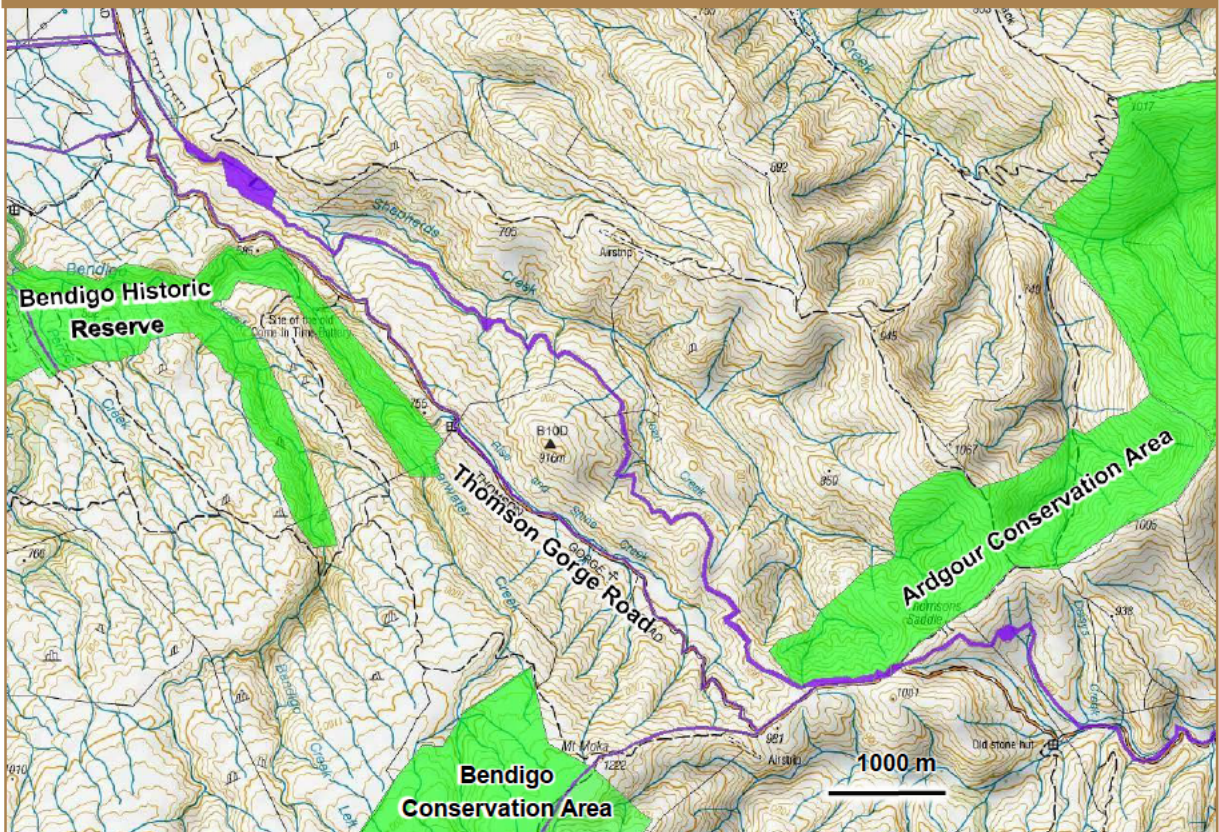
The proposal will also result in the loss of access to an unformed and unused legal road which currently runs between the existing alignment of Thomson Gorge Road and the proposed replacement road on Ardgour Rise. The location of this unformed road within the mining footprint has been addressed separately by MGL and the Central Otago District Council, and does not form part of this assessment.

2.2 Method

This assessment is based on:

- Literature and data review, including identifying and describing public access options in the study area,
- Interviews and consultation with representatives of recreational user groups (Appendix 4). This included:
 - Alexandra Mountain Bike Club
 - Cromwell Mountain Bike Club
 - Central Otago Deerstalkers
 - Upper Clutha Deerstalkers
 - Tourism Central Otago (Central Otago District Council)
 - Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa (NZ Outdoor Access Commission)
 - Dunstan Adult Riding Group and Riders of Central Otago
 - Chatto Creek Motorcycle Club
 - Otago Goldfields Heritage Trust and Goldfields Cavalcade
- Review of options for maintaining and improving public access opportunities with MGL.

Figure 2: Public access areas – road reserves (purple) and conservation areas (green)

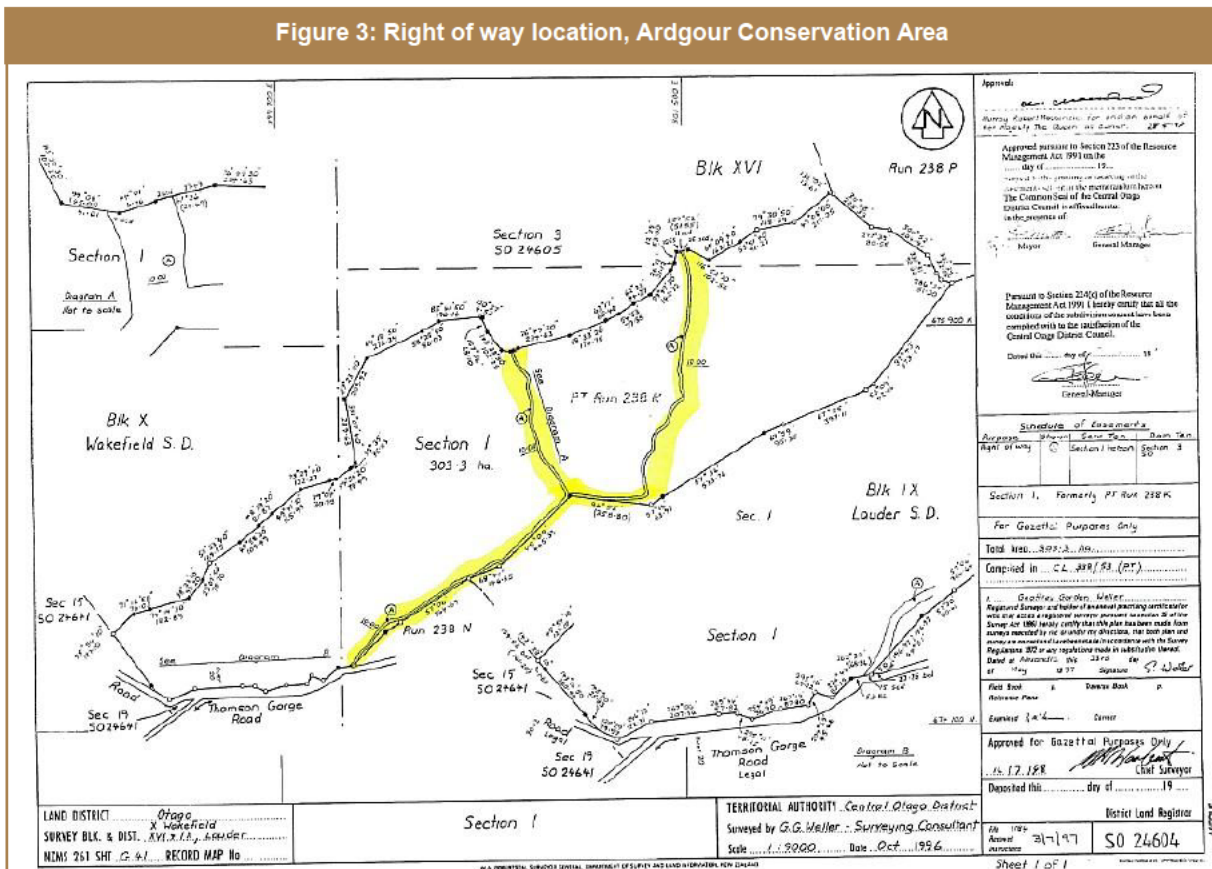


The owners of Ardgour Station have been transferred a right of way over the southern end of the Ardgour Conservation Area, highlighted in Figure 3.¹ This entitles:

The Transferees their respective servants tenants agents workmen licensees and invitees (in common with the Transferor his tenants and any other person lawfully entitled so to do) shall have the full free uninterrupted and unrestricted right liberty and privilege from time to time and at all times by day and by night to go pass and repass with or without horses and domestic animals of and kind and with or without carriages vehicles motor vehicles machinery and implements of any kind...

This is interpreted to allow the landowner to permit passage by the general public over the right of way. However, a concession is expected to be obtained through the Fast Track Act application to ensure this access is provided for all the public without limitation.

Figure 3: Right of way location, Ardgour Conservation Area



A Conservation Covenant applies to Bendigo Station which includes the following allowances:²

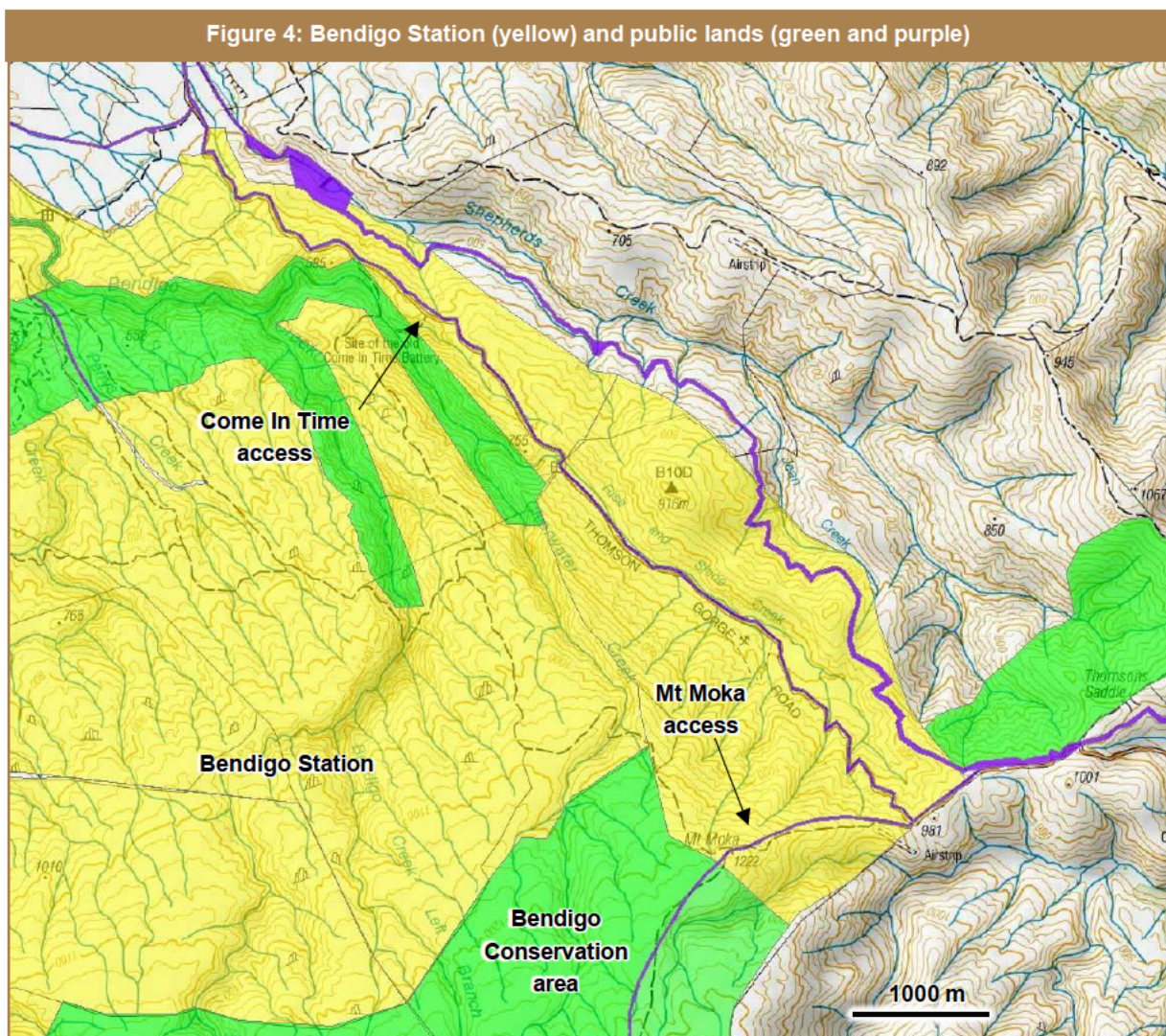
5. The Landholders will permit members of the public access through the land on the existing formed Thomsons Gorge Road and from Thomsons Gorge Road up to Mt Moka and the special lease area more or less along the alignment of the existing track on or about the legal road line....
9. With regard to that part of the land thirdly described in the schedule known as the Rise and Shine Creek area:
 - a. The Landholders will at all times allow the public to have foot access across that part of the land for the purpose of gaining access to historic mining sites located on it.

¹ 21 March 2000 – Transfer right of way – 985299

² Under Section 77 Reserves Act 1977. 18 August 2000, DOC 5009824.9

- b. The Lessees and employees of the Department of Conservation may at any time remove woody vegetation around any historic site located on it.
- c. The Minister may at any time erect interpretation signs on that part of the land but shall first consult the Lessees regarding the wording and position of the signs.
- d. The Landholders will not use that part of the land for forestry and will not construct tracks on it.

This covenant provides for the existing public access from Thomson Gorge Road to the Come In Time Battery, and the – primarily – hunting and 4WD access from Thomson Gorge Road to the Bendigo Conservation Area. Herenga ā Nuku's (Outdoors Access Commission) online outdoor access mapping system shows the access to the Come In Time Battery as a 'walk'. The extent of Bendigo Station near the study area is shown in Figure 4, also indicating the Come In Time and Mt Moka access areas.



4 Department of Conservation

The Department of Conservation (DOC or the Department) administers two conservation areas potentially affected by the proposal: the Ardour Conservation Area and the Bendigo Historic Reserve. This section reviews the Department's promotion of recreation access to these areas, and relevant policy in the *Otago Conservation Management Strategy 2016*.

4.1 Access and promotion

The Department describes the 'Bendigo area' online as a recreation destination made up of "of three separate blocks on the western side of Central Otago's Dunstan Mountains."³ These are the Bendigo scenic and historic reserves (the latter shown as the blue frontcountry area in Figure 7), the Bendigo Conservation Area (south of Thomsons Saddle and outside the study area) and Ardour Conservation Area. Appendix 3 includes DOC's 2020 promotional brochure for the Bendigo area, with a detail from its main map in Figure 5 showing the main recreation attractions administered by the Department. Within the study area, this includes the Come In Time Battery (item 3, Figure 6) and the Ardour Conservation Area. Also shown are the 4WD track from Thomson Gorge Road to the Bendigo Conservation Area (not affected by the proposal).



³ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/otago/places/bendigo-area/?tab-id=50578>

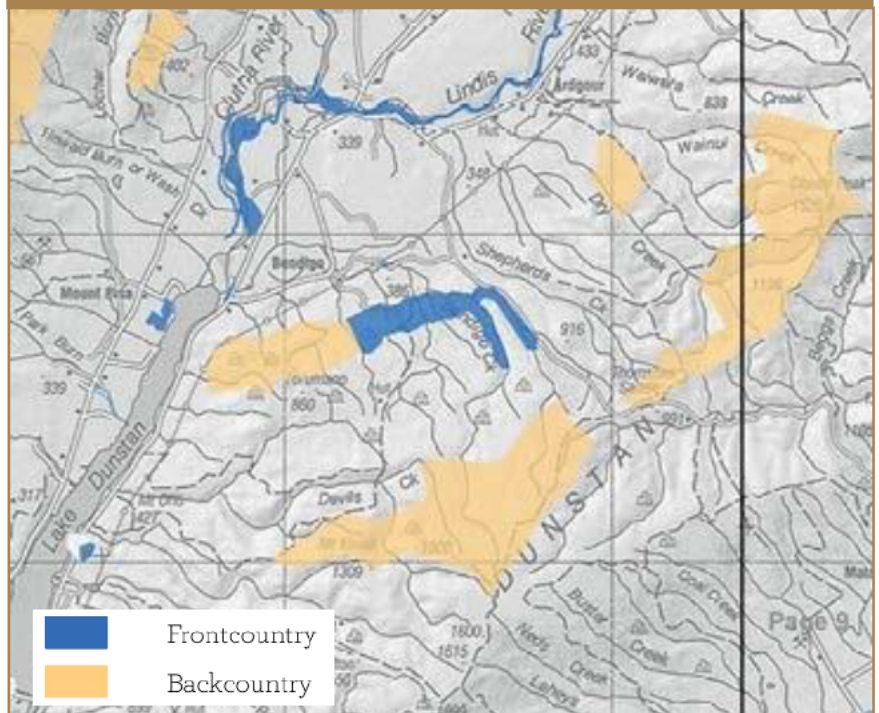
Figure 6: Come In Time stamping battery



4.2 Conservation Management Strategy

The Department of Conservation *Otago Conservation Management Strategy 2016* (incorporating the 2022 partial review) (CMS) defines the Ardgoor Conservation Area as a 'backcountry' setting, and the eastern side of the Bendigo Historic Reserve as 'frontcountry' (Figure 7). Visitor management zones sit on a spectrum between 'urban' at the most developed, and 'wilderness' where there should be no built structures and few interactions with other people.⁴ The visitor management zones help guide the Department in their decision-making about levels of service for recreation, provision for commercial activities (lots in an

Figure 7: DOC Otago CMS Visitor Management Zones. Map 8.8 detail



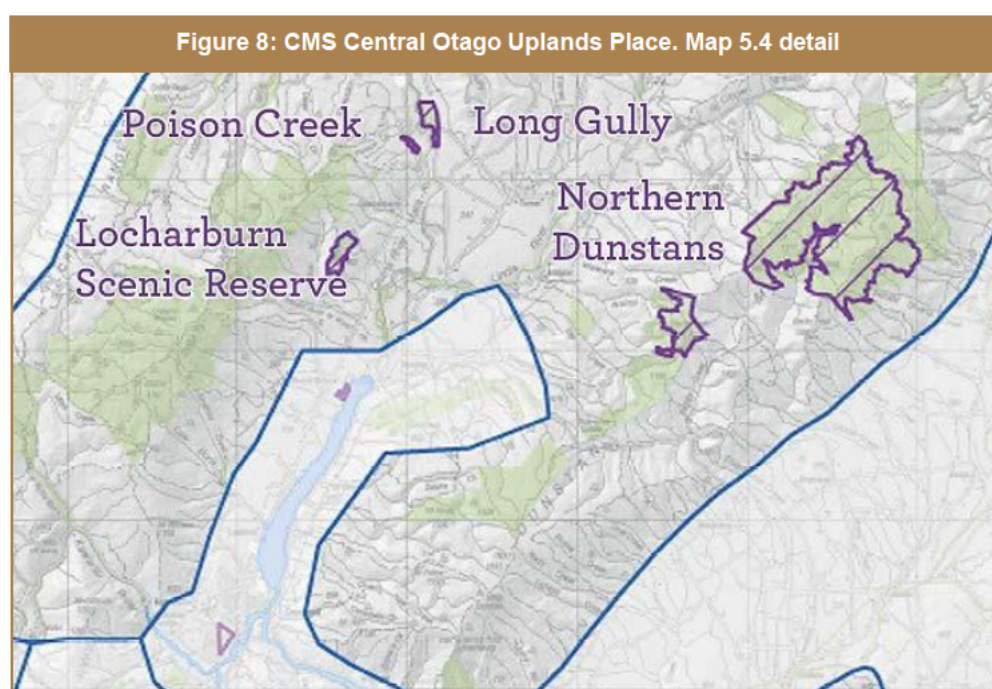
⁴ The visitor management zone spectrum is: Urban » Rural » Frontcountry » Backcountry-accessible and walk-in » Remote » Wilderness. See Appendix 12 of the Otago CMS.

urban setting and none in wilderness) and management of different forms of recreation, amongst other things.

The general description for a backcountry setting is, “Large-scale natural settings generally accessed first through frontcountry.” Access definitions for backcountry include those for ‘accessible’ and ‘walk-in’ settings. Considering the existing 4WD track in the Ardgour Conservation Area and its immediate connection to Thomson Gorge Road, it should be considered ‘accessible’, with the access definition: “Backcountry accessible focuses on unsealed roads, four-wheel drive roads, navigable waters and aircraft landing sites. Motorised ground access generally restricted to roads and designated routes.”⁵

Frontcountry settings are, “Where the majority of visits occur; typically small areas, scattered within or on the periphery of large, relatively natural areas. Includes the vicinity of main ‘scenic’ roads passing through public conservation lands. Often focused on a particular attraction.”⁶ This definition would equally apply to Thomson Gorge Road.

The Ardgour Conservation Area is located in the ‘Central Otago Uplands Place’ management zone (section 2.4) (Figure 8). Purple hatched areas in Figure 8 define ‘Priority Ecosystems’ – all beyond the study area for this assessment. Outcomes for this Place include (pp77-78):



Visitors gain an appreciation of the rich historic heritage of the area by exploring historic sites which bring to life the history of this area.

Representative examples of Otago's historic places, reflecting Ngai Tahu occupation, exploration, gold mining and pastoral farming, are retained and interpreted through integrated Department, Ngai Tahu and community efforts.

More people enjoy the range of summer and winter recreational activities in the Place. In winter, recreational uses such as backcountry skiing, dog sledding, skjoring and hunting occur and natural quiet and solitude prevail. Four-wheel drive and motorbike touring, mountain biking, horse riding and tramping occur within and through defined parts of the public conservation lands and waters during summer.

⁵ CMS Appendix 12

⁶ Ibid

Motorised vehicle activity occurs mostly on legal roads adjoining or through the public conservation land. Any adverse effects are managed in cooperation with district councils and the community, including four-wheel drive and motorbike users, and vehicles keep to formed roads at sustainable activity levels to minimise impacts on sensitive ecosystems and species.

Four-wheel drive and motorbike touring roads, existing biking and walking tracks, along with new cycleway initiatives and bike tracks enable more people to appreciate the values of the Central Otago Uplands Place and create links between public conservation lands and waters. Public conservation lands and waters within this Place have been investigated for the creation of a 'tussock grassland park'.

Policy relating to vehicle access in the Place includes:

2.4.5 Should allow motorised vehicle and non-motorised bike use only on tracks and roads purposely formed and maintained for vehicle use on public conservation lands and waters identified, and in accordance with any criteria in Table 2.4, and subject to Policies 3.2.1-3.2.12 and 3.3.1-3.3.12 in Part Three.

Table 2.4 of the CMS defines the Ardour Conservation Area as an area where horse and pack-animal access is permitted. It is not included in the list of conservation lands where motorised vehicle access is allowed (pp79-81). Restrictions on 4WD access to the Ardour Conservation Area is reiterated in DOC's advice on access for hunting (see Section 5.5) – that is, walking access only.

Section 3.2 of the CMS refers to the use of vehicles on conservation lands. Relevant policies for areas like the Ardour Conservation Area – where vehicle access is not specified as permitted in the relevant Places section – are listed below. This information is provided as background information only, as the right of way held by the owners of Ardour Station will allow for public access across the Conservation Area without recourse to this assessment:

3.2.1 Should allow motorised vehicles only on the roads (including designated parking areas) identified in:

- a) Part Two-Places; or*
- b) Mount Aspiring National Park Management Plan 2011.*

3.2.2 Consider provision for use of motorised vehicles outside of areas provided for by Policy 3.2.1 only where such use is identified at sites listed in Part Two-Places and subject to Policy 3.2.4.

3.2.3 May allow motorised vehicles on public conservation lands and waters for the construction, operation and/or maintenance of authorised utilities, farming operations, and restoration activities.

3.2.4 Should follow the statutory CMS amendment or review process when considering the use of motorised vehicles on public conservation lands and waters other than in accordance with Policies 3.2.1 and 3.2.3 and apply the following criteria to the activity:

- a) is consistent with the purposes for which the lands and waters concerned are held;*
- b) is consistent with the outcome and policies for the Place where the road or site is located;*
- c) is consistent with the visitor management zones on Map 3 and as described in Appendix 12;*
- d) adverse effects (including cumulative adverse effects) on the road or site and surrounding natural, historic or cultural values are, or can be, avoided, remedied or mitigated;*

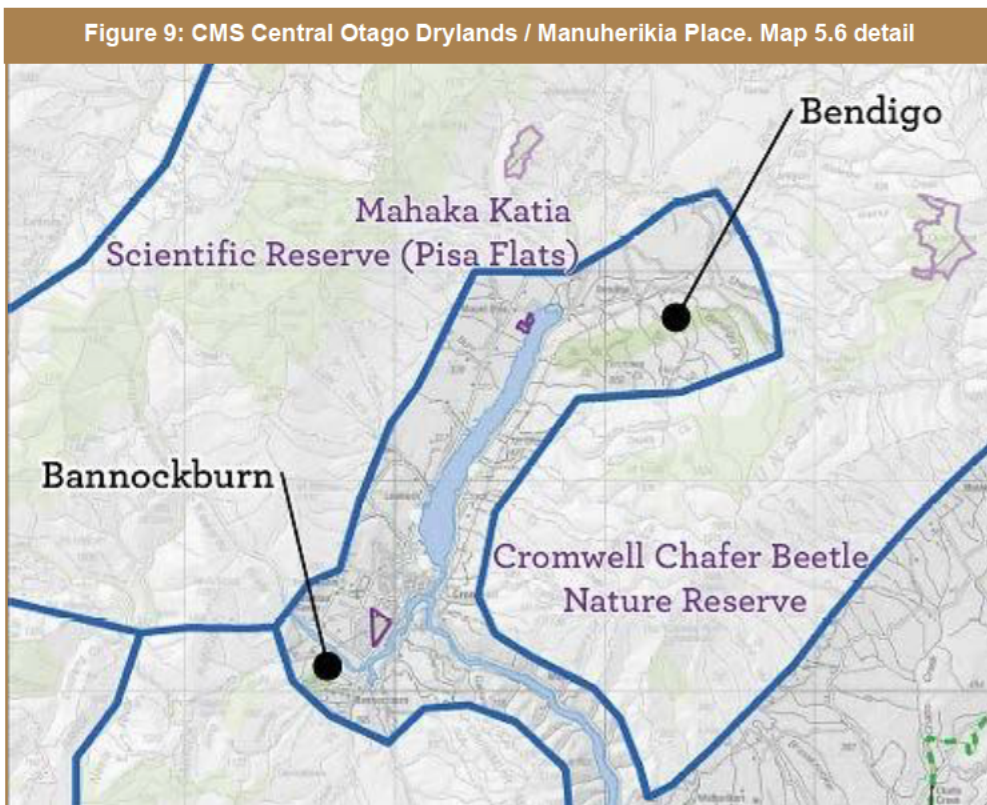
- e) *adverse effects (including cumulative adverse effects) on the safety and enjoyment of other recreational users are, or can be, avoided, remedied or otherwise mitigated (including conflicts between motorised vehicles/mountain bikes and horses);*
- f) *risks of fire and biosecurity are avoided or otherwise carefully managed; and*
- g) *the ongoing management implications of providing motorised vehicle access (e.g. in terms of ongoing maintenance costs) are taken into account.*

The Bendigo Historic Reserve is located in the Central 'Otago Drylands/Manuherikia Place' (section 2.6) (Figure 9). Outcomes for this Place focus largely on ecological values, but include (p91):

The history of the Central Otago Drylands/Manuherikia Place is brought to life. Ngai Tahu and local communities are actively involved in advocating for, protecting and restoring historical features in the landscape, and telling the stories to visitors and their communities....

Recreational access from the drylands and linkages to opportunities in the uplands areas has improved.

Bendigo is additionally identified as a 'Gateway destination', along with, in Otago, Bannockburn, St Bathans and Skippers. These are sites where "the Department will focus effort to ensure history is brought to life" (section 1.5.2). 'Gateway destinations' "introduce New Zealanders to the outdoors and allow them to learn about conservation. These destinations may provide for a diverse range of activities but include many traditional camping and tramping destinations" (p13). Non-motorised bike access is permitted in the Bendigo Historic Reserve, and motorised vehicle access is permitted on 'Bendigo Historic Reserve road' (Table 2.6, p93).



5 Recreation activities

This section reviews the recreational activities undertaken in the study area. The descriptions are based on published and online literature and stakeholder interviews (see Appendix 4 for the latter).

5.1 Traffic count data

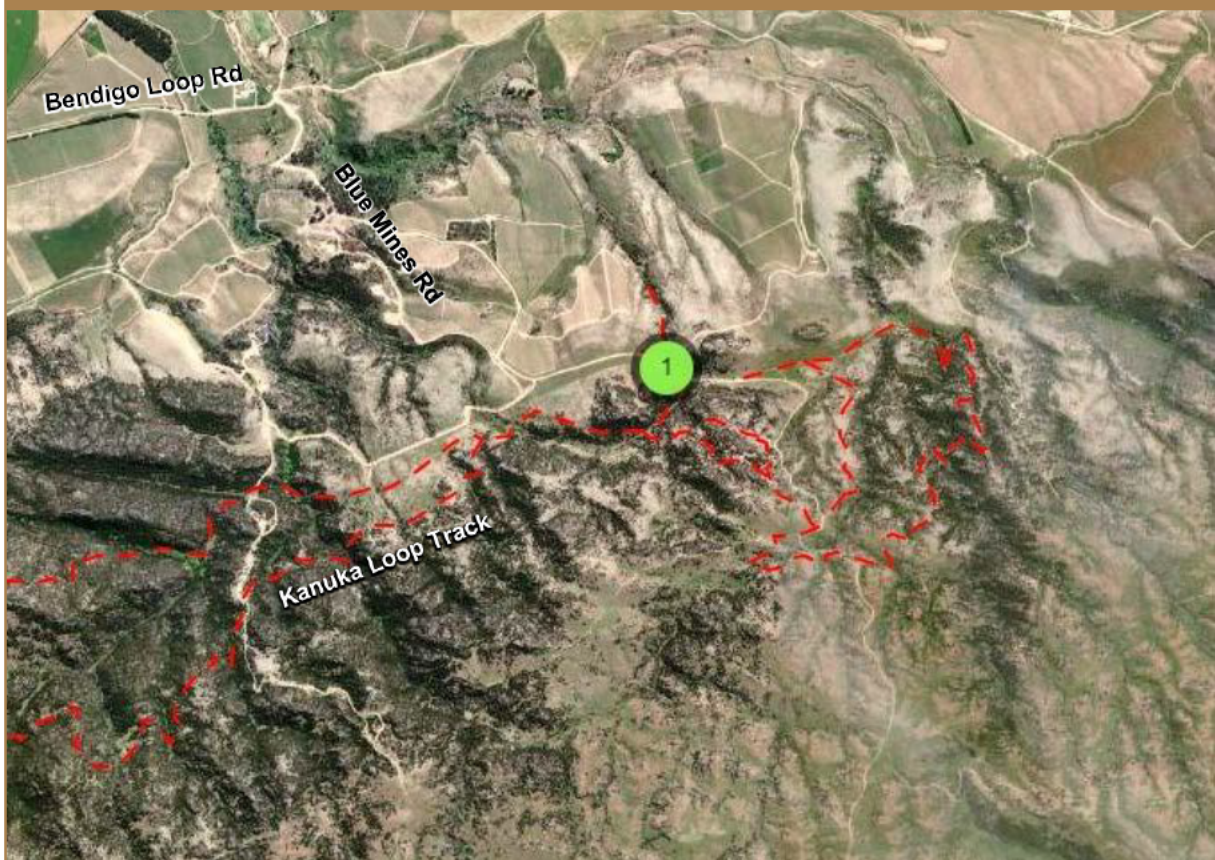
The Department of Conservation has a vehicle counter installed in Bendigo Historic Reserve providing data from 2011/12 to 2021/22 (Figure 10). Uncalibrated data from the counter indicate a range of 5,810 vehicles in 2011/12 to a high of 9,094 in 2020/21.⁷ There is a high level of variability in reported annual counts, and much missing data in many of the years, implying some problems with the counter at times. However, the data from 2019 to 2022 has been quite steady at between 8,546 and 9,094 vehicles over the 12 month periods (financial years). The visitor data come with the rider:

This report uses uncalibrated counter data; i.e. the number of times the counter sensor has been triggered by a person, bicycle or motor-vehicle. Uncalibrated counter data must not be used to indicate the number of visits or the number of unique visitors to a place. Converting counter data into visits and visitors requires calibration of the data, and should be undertaken with guidance from a DOC Technical Advisor.

The Stantec Integrated Transport Assessment reports an average of 30 vehicles per day on Thomson Gorge Road near the end of November 2024.

MGL had a counter installed in August 2024 on Thomson Gorge Road north of the saddle. The counter relies on a radar which differentiates between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, and reports their direction of travel. Unfortunately, the new technology has proven unreliable, and the data collected up

Figure 10: DOC Bendigo Historic Reserve vehicle counter location, showing also walking tracks



⁷ See: <https://counterreports.doc.govt.nz/var/100089444.html>

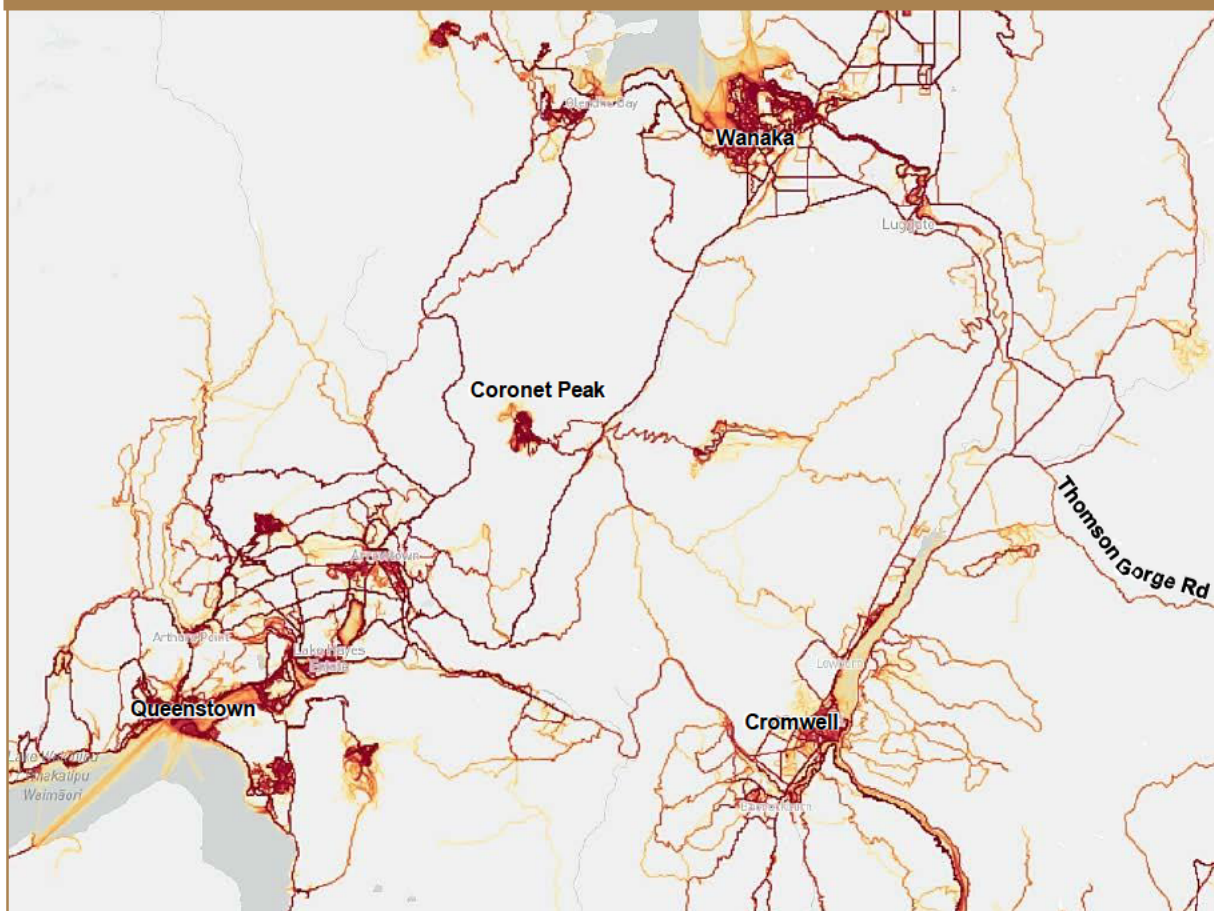
to at least June 2025 has not been accurate (wildly inaccurate in fact) – despite replacement of the radar unit and ongoing review. It is hoped that the counter can be fixed in the second half of 2025.

5.2 Strava data – walking and cycling

Strava⁸ is increasingly becoming a useful tool for identifying the relative levels of interest in various recreation activities by setting. Strava is a social media platform where users record their GPS activity via their smartphones and other devices while recreating. The data are uploaded to a central database, allowing speed and time comparisons with other cyclists, runners, skiers, kayakers and swimmers (for example), and the monitoring of individual activity or training targets. While the service is popular with professional athletes, its membership is dominated by casual recreation participants. Strava indicates that it had 95 million international users in 2022 (80% outside the United States) with nearly an additional two million joining per month.⁹ It is now popular amongst regular cyclists, walkers and runners.

International comparisons between different forms of data gathering show a degree of reliability for Strava data with a range of 1% to 12% of users recorded on-site that are connected to the service; and this is growing. The author of this report has recorded participation levels for cycling in Aotearoa/New Zealand up to 20%. Strava is therefore a little like a tag and release programme. Strava essentially tags several thousand active people in an area and monitors where and how they recreate. Its greatest strength is in showing the relative value of settings for different forms of recreation. However, it must be noted that Strava data are biased to a sector of the population which is more likely to be physically active and reasonably tech-savvy. Some Strava data are also recorded while users are driving from their activity (they forget to turn tracking off), and some users miscode their activities (marine cyclists for

Figure 11: Strava data for all activities Wanaka, Cromwell and Queenstown. 12 months to May 2024

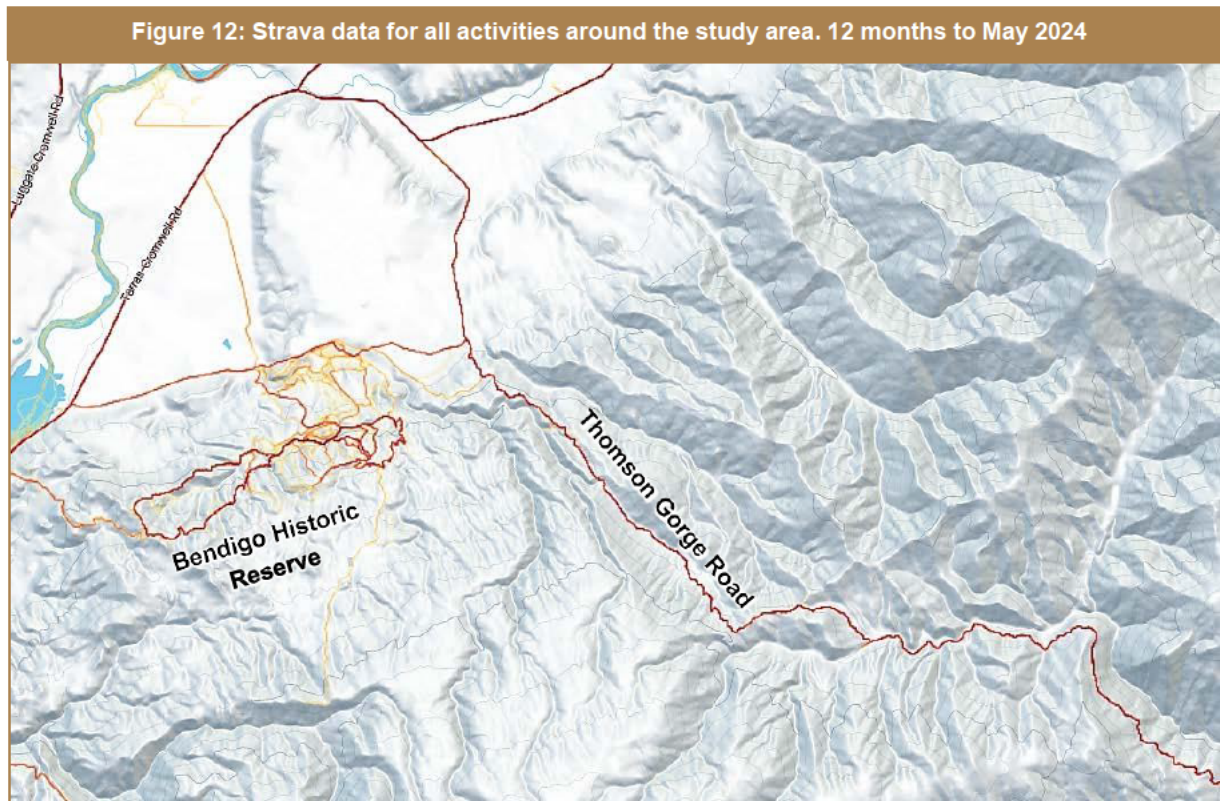


⁸ See: <https://www.strava.com/maps/global-heatmap>

⁹ <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/strava-statistics/>

example). There is also inaccuracy in GPS recording from some devices, with some recorded routes offset. However, Strava represents the most comprehensive data set for recreation patterns internationally. Figure 11 shows Strava heatmap data for all activities recorded over a 12 month period to May 2024 for the Wanaka, Cromwell and Queenstown areas (Thomson Gorge Road also indicated), indicating its comprehensive coverage.

Figure 12 shows the Strava heatmap for all activities around the study area, with the darker coloured lines indicating higher use areas. This indicates the main visitor settings of Bendigo Historic Reserve and Thomson Gorge Road.



This information is able to be subdivided by activity type – such as pedestrian (walking, running and trekking) and cycling. Figure 13 shows Strava data for cycling only, and Figure 14 shows pedestrian activities at the Bendigo Historic Reserve and the western end of Thomson Gorge Road. Pedestrian activity is centred on the Historic Reserve, with cycling focused on Thomson Gorge Road and the roads leading to it: Matilda Rise, part of Bendigo Loop Road, and Ardour Road – but with some activity in the Reserve.

Figure 15 and Figure 16 show the same data for the Bendigo area at a greater resolution, showing some cyclists exploring the Come In Time Battery site and pedestrians not straying further east than the formed paths in Bendigo Historic Reserve (that is, not towards the Come In Time Battery).

Figure 13: Strava data for all cycling around the study area. 12 months to May 2024

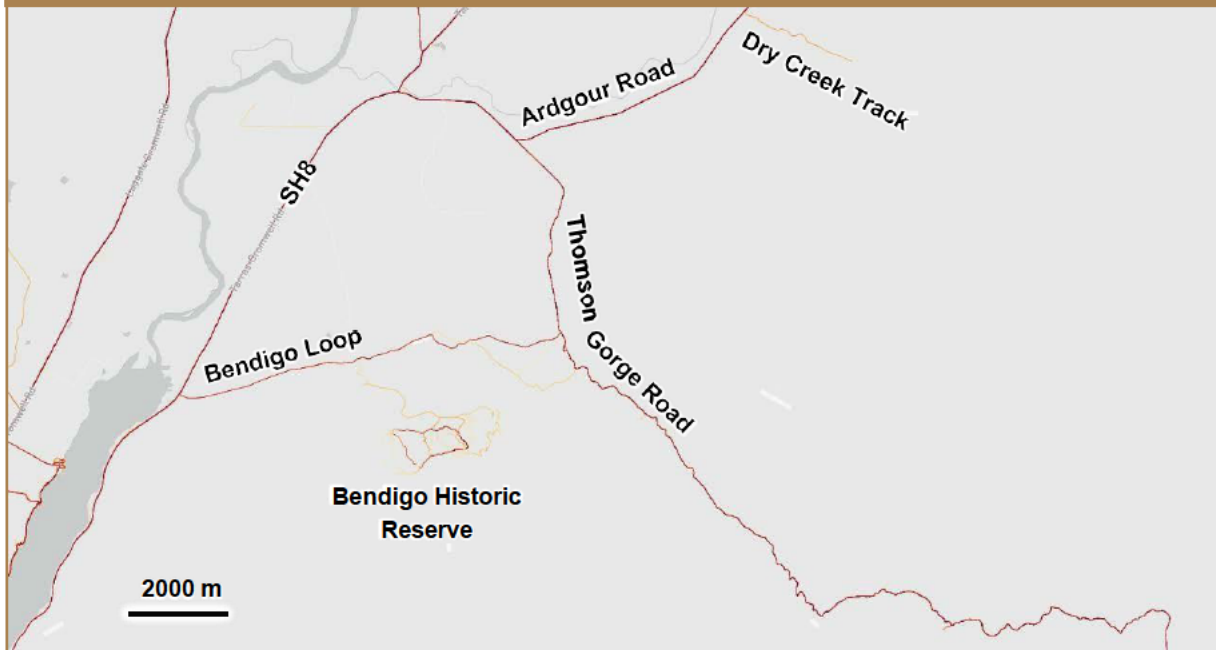


Figure 14: Strava data for all pedestrian activities around the study area. 12 months to May 2024

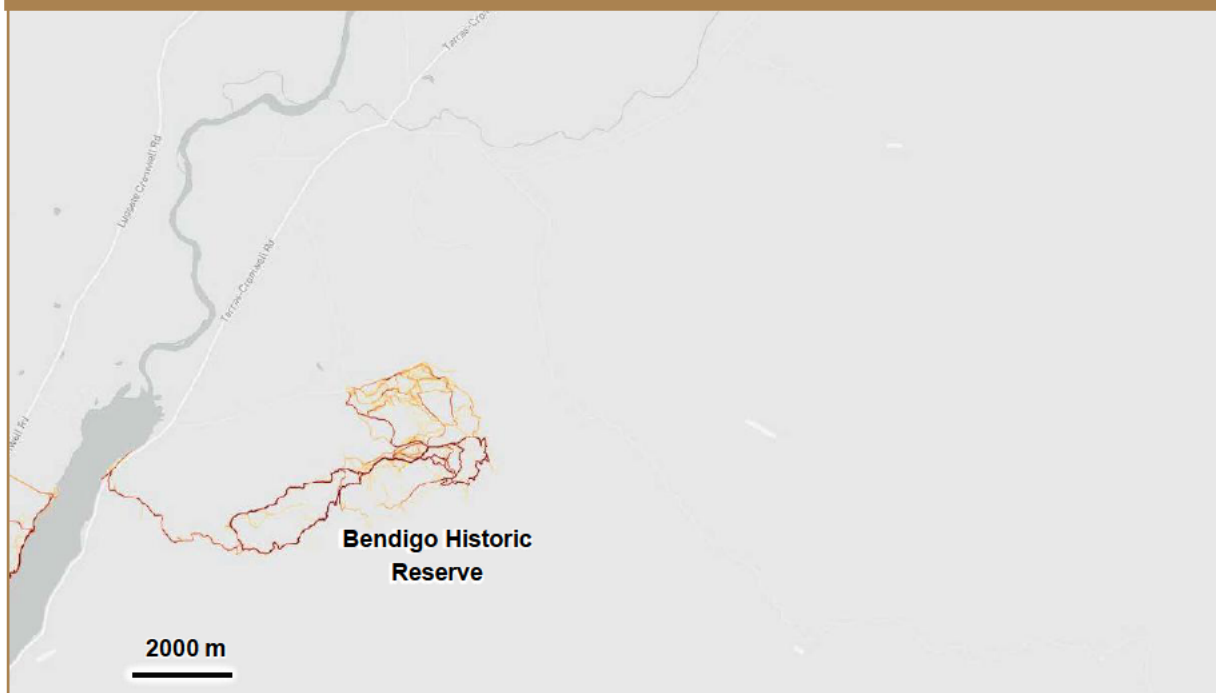


Figure 15: Strava data for all cycle activities near Bendigo. 12 months to May 2024

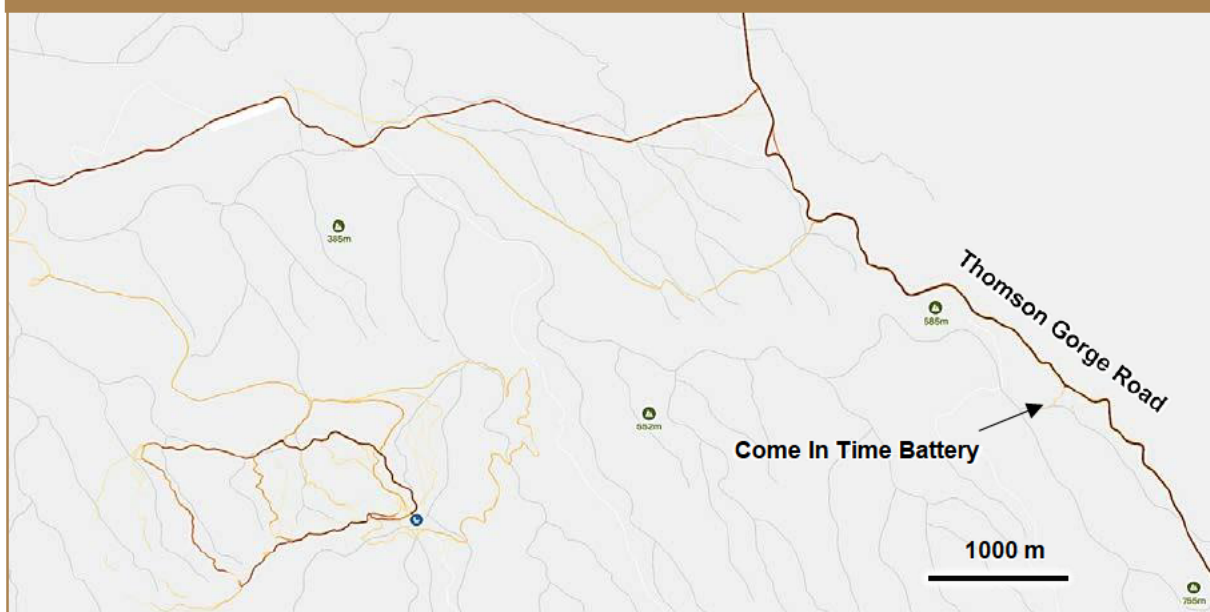
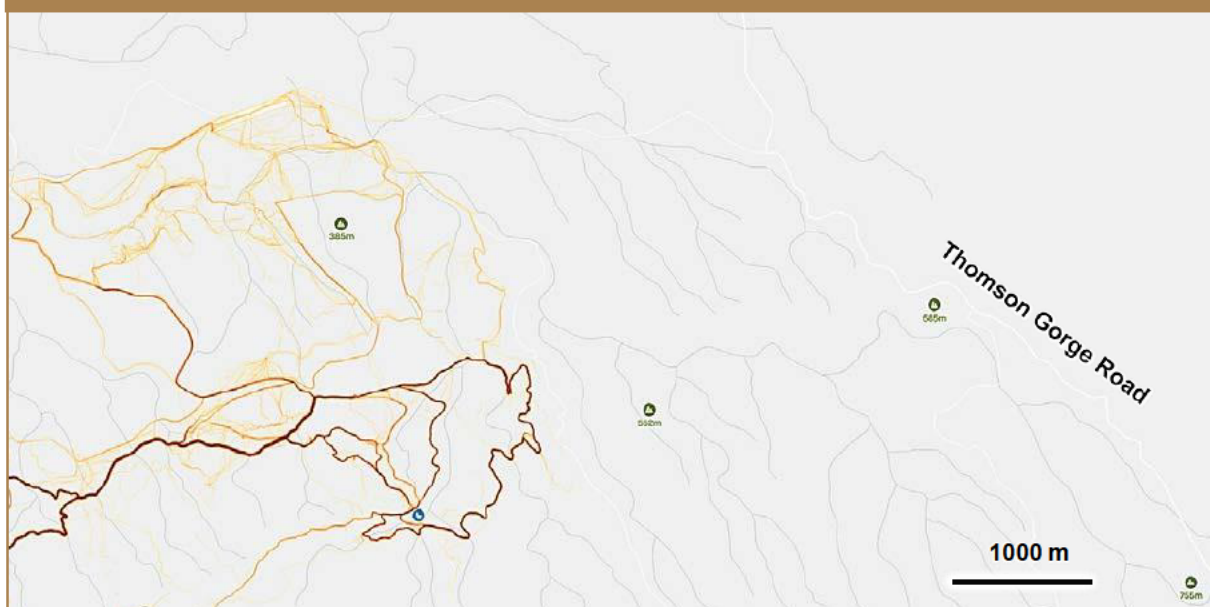


Figure 16: Strava data for all pedestrian activities near Bendigo. 12 months to May 2024

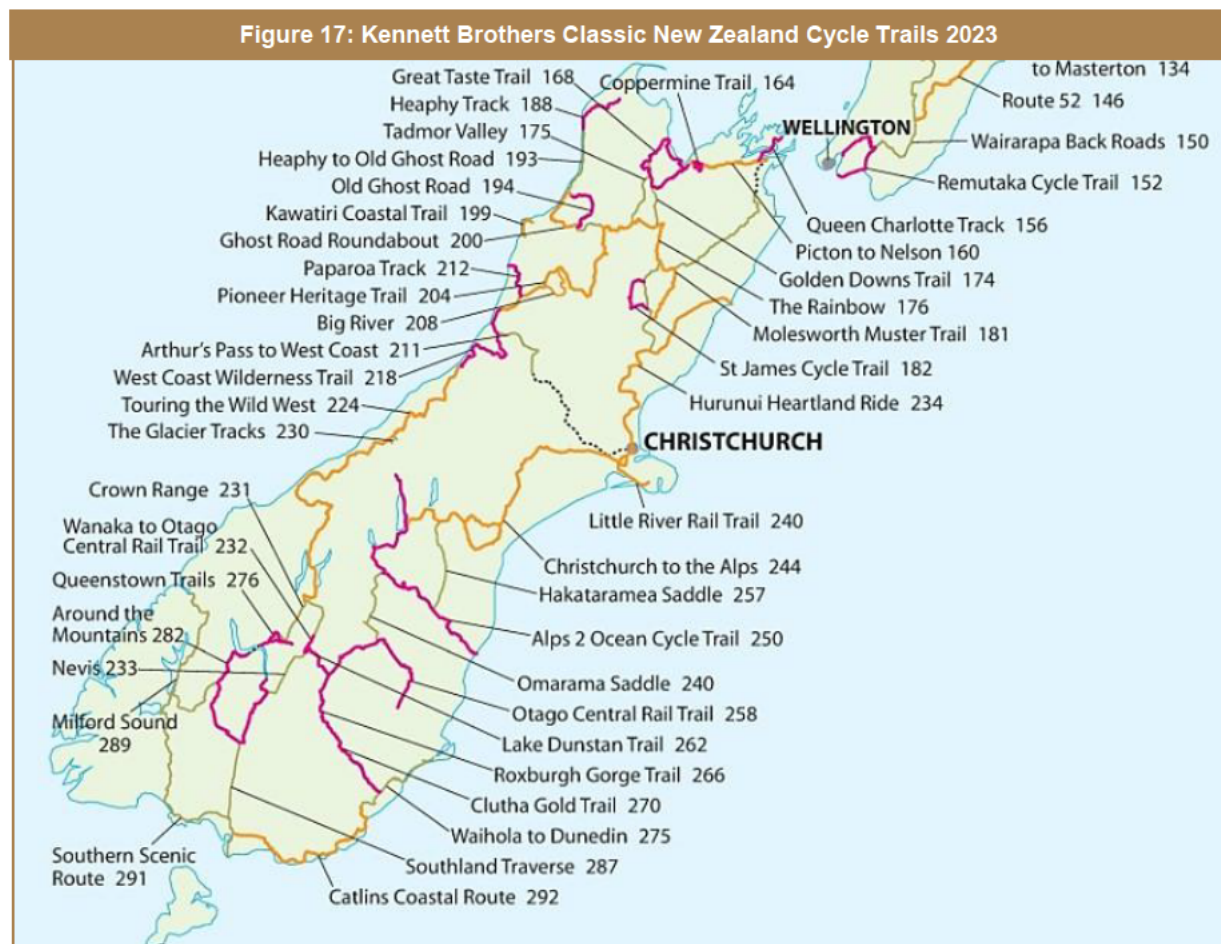


5.3 Cycling

Thomson Gorge Road is a recognised cycle touring route. However, it does not appear on national-level cycle guides. Ngā Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trails¹⁰ defines three tiers of cycle trail, which are best described by the Kennett Brothers (2023):

- Great Rides – the 23 officially named Nga Haerenga Great Rides, like the Otago Central Rail Trail and Lake Dunstan Trail.¹¹
- Heartland Rides – “Mostly quiet backcountry road rides, through scenic landscapes with small towns along the way. Heartland rides pull together the best existing infrastructure in the country as well as some bits of new cycle path/track that avoid busy roads and go to cool places.”
- Connector Rides – “These are the safest and most enjoyable ways of linking Great Rides, Heartland Rides and key towns and cities. Often they are very good rides in their own right.”

Figure 17 shows the South Island trails reviewed by the Kennett Brothers (2023) using those three categories (red = Great Rides, orange = Heartland Rides, green = Connectors). This does not include Thomson Gorge Road. However, in the opinion of the author of this report, and considering the trail descriptions summarised below, and interview data (Appendix 4), the Road would meet the status of ‘Connector’.



¹⁰ See: <https://www.nzcycletrail.com/about/>

¹¹ See: <https://www.nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/23-great-rides/>

Interviewees (Appendix 4) report the value of the setting for its scenic values, easy access and it being a component of several long-distance national bikepacking events and general cycle touring options.

Tourism Central Otago does not identify Thomson Gorge Road amongst its top 'Tracks and Trails'¹². However, Thomson Gorge Road is listed (last) amongst 19 identified mountain bike trails, with the listing heading:¹³

Our four main cycle trails are amongst the best in the country, with over 300km of inter-connected off-road routes. And those bluffs and peaks aren't just a scenic backdrop – we have plenty of testing mountain bike trails too.

Tourism Central Otago's advice regarding Thomson Gorge Road is:¹⁴

A mountain bike adventure through the Dunstan Mountains from the Manuherikia Valley to the gold mines of Bendigo in the Upper Clutha Valley.

Distance: 30 km Grade: 3-4 Intermediate level, steep climbs, variable terrain.

This Central Otago cycle trail is a mountain bike adventure over the Dunstan Mountains from the Manuherikia Valley to the gold mines of Bendigo in the Upper Clutha Valley.

Stop in Omakau and stock up on refreshments and food (Muddy Creek Café pies are awesomely flavoursome and popular) to take with you on your day's adventure!

Starting at Glassford Road near the old gold mining town of Matakanaui, this trail winds its way up through the gorge and over the 900m saddle into the Bendigo area. Take a moment to capture magical views of the often photographed Hawkdun Range as you look back to the east side – they are unforgettable.

As you follow Thomsons Creek all the way to the top of the saddle, you'll find reminders of its gold mining past. Just off the main track, you will discover a simple stone hut. Built in 1908, this simple dwelling was a shelter for drovers and travellers on their arduous journey to and from the goldfields and makes a pleasant place to stop for a bite to eat.

At the saddle crossing, there is just a short traverse over the Dunstan Range crest before a vast open space to the west. You will be rewarded with stunning views over the Upper Clutha Valley towards Lakes Wanaka and Hawea, and the Southern Alps.

From this high point, wind down through the Rise and Shine Valley until you join up with State Highway 8 at the Lindis River bridge. Again, you travel through an area rich in history, the gold mining area of Bendigo which was once home to many. Few reminders remain to evoke the spirit of the past but the Come In Time gold stamper, signposted from the trail is well worth a visit. If you have a torch even better, and take a short walk down past the tunnel entrance to the restored stamper battery and be amazed. This magnificent structure remains as a reminder of the scale of the works carried out here.

The bike track is approx. 30km and is a 140km round trip from Alexandra. This is a good surface 4WD track, can be greasy if wet, and yes there are a few small streams to cross and two steep climbs and two fast descents, but it's well worth it. Please leave all gates open or shut as you find them on this intermediate grade route.

¹² See: <https://centralotagonz.com/tracks-and-trails/>. The listed top trails are the four Great Rides: Otago Central, Roxburgh Gorge, Clutha Gold and Lake Dunstan, and four mountain bike areas: Naseby Forest, Boot Hill Alexandra, Flat Top Hill Alexandra and Bannockburn Sluicings.

¹³ <https://centralotagonz.com/tracks-and-trails/mountain-bike-trails/?distance=0&distance=150&page=1>

¹⁴ <https://centralotagonz.com/tracks-and-trails/mountain-bike-trails/listing/thomsons-gorge>

Ngā Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trails defines the trail grades used in this description.¹⁵ They range from Grade 1 (easiest) to Grade 5 (expert). The description above refers to both Grades 3 and 4. A Grade 3 (intermediate) trail is (in reference to on-road trails only):

Suitable for regular experienced cyclists with a good level of fitness and over 12 years old; children should be accompanied by an adult.

For on-road trails/sections on gravel roads, bikes with knobby tyres are recommended. Road racing tyres are generally not suitable.

On-road trails/sections may have moderate traffic levels (up to 1000 vehicles a day), and include hill climbs and gravel sections. Note: all Heartland Rides are grade 3 or above.

And for Grade 4 (advanced) on-road trails, the same description is used, apart from in reference to a higher vehicular traffic count:

Suitable for fit, experienced cyclists with good off-road and/or on-road skills, a high level of fitness and over 12 years of age; children should be accompanied by an adult.

For on-road trails/sections on gravel roads, bikes with knobby tyres are recommended. Road racing tyres are generally not suitable.

On-road trails have moderate vehicular traffic (2000+ vehicles per day), plus significant hill climbs and possibly gravel sections.

There are multiple descriptions online of cycling on Thomson Gorge Road on personal blogs and forums, with multiple spelling versions.¹⁶ A good description is posted on the Cycle Tour NZ website, albeit mislocating the Come In Time Battery:¹⁷

...the first sign of the Thomson Track appears as a hand painted notice warning of the number of gates to be opened and closed.

The track is well formed and about 37 km long initially winding up through hills and over streams and small valleys. The first section affords great views back toward the flat plain and the Raggedy Range in the distance.

While the surface is good you may be pushing a good part of the way as the road climbs steeply at first and then becomes a little easier as the incline lessens. The Stamper Battery is located near the top of the range. On the day I visited the site, there were a number of geckos sunning themselves on the rocks. They scattered as I approached. These are small and harmless lizards but they give you a start when you are not ready for them.

The view from the top over the valley towards Lake Dunstan is impressive, as is the view toward the great Pisa Range in the far distance toward Wānaka. The descent is gradual enough. If you want to visit the ruined gold town of Bendigo, take the left hand side track directly at the bottom of the hill (there will be a restored miner's hut a hundred metres or so to your right in a walled paddock). This detour will add some ten or so kilometres to your journey overall but is worth it if you have an interest in historic ruins.

You can turn right as you come off the track onto Highway 8 and stop at Tarras (15 km from turn-off) where there is a store and camping at the local school. There is a hostel a few kilometres out of the township. Or you can head left on Highway 8 to Cromwell (25 km from

¹⁵ <https://www.nzcycletrail.com/need-to-know/trail-grades/>

¹⁶ For example: <https://cycletour.org.nz/rides/south/omakau-to-lindis-crossing/>; <https://www.bikingpheasant.com/thomson-gorge-to-ride-lake-dunstan-trail-finally/>; <https://www.adventureridingnz.co.nz/gps-tracks-rides/south-island-tracks/thomson-gorge-road/>; https://www.aucktramping.org.nz/images/attachments/Trip_Report_-_Old_Dunstan_Road_Cycle.pdf; <https://goodrotations.co/blogs/journal/thomson-omarama-melina>

¹⁷ <https://cycletour.org.nz/rides/south/omakau-to-lindis-crossing/>

turn-off approx, all facilities). Or you can push on to Wānaka a further (50 km approx all facilities). If you take a day's supplies, you can camp discreetly on the track itself.

5.4 Vehicle access

Thomson Gorge Road is a well-established recreational driving and four wheel drive route; for example appearing in Sibly & Wilson's 1996 *4WD South Island - 77 Off Road Adventures* as 'Rise and Shine Road' and described as suitable for a solo 'lightweight [4WD] vehicle such as a Suzuki, Lada Niva or Daihatsu'.¹⁸ Interviewees (Appendix 4) describe it as an excellent and accessible four wheel drive route, and is a regular feature of club trips.

There are multiple on-line references on blogs, forums and promotional websites describing 4WD opportunities or experiences on the Road.¹⁹ Two-wheel drive experiences are also described, and the author of this report has previously driven the road in the two wheel drive – although a four wheel drive is the recommended option. The road advisory signs do not state access for four wheel drives only, but note that self-recovery is necessary (Figure 18).

Typical descriptions include:²⁰

Bit tricky to find the start - head North on SH8, take a right just before (where the bridge starts) the Lindis Crossing onto Ardgour Road and follow the road for 2.5km, then turn right onto Thomson's Gorge Road (it's signposted). Stunning drive, an extra track up to the [Bendigo] conservation area is a little tricky (rocks, dirt, no water) but not too bad. We didn't go through the gate into the area but ate lunch at the top (1200m altitude). Gorgeous landscape with a few streams to cross (could be deep in winter) - makes a great beginner track. Make sure you bring a mate to open and close all those gates!

And from a 2WD experience in 2016:²¹

Last time Pauline kept a record of the gates and she had opened, and closed, 15 gates, this time it was closer to 20. This is in addition to the many which we had found already open. The road was wide enough to pass easily in most places and where it was narrow there were long views ahead to see oncoming traffic, even on the sections cut into the hillside along the gorge. There is one section along a narrow crest which we were warned could be subject to high winds but in dry calm conditions there should be no major problems with a car provided the road continues to be well maintained. We enjoyed the journey with its magnificent views and it is a road we may take again, most likely in the opposite direction which also matches the information sheet but only if we are sure it has been maintained - this time it was severely damaged by recent heavy rain which we did not know.

Figure 18: Advisory, Thomson Gorge Rd north



¹⁸ Sibly, K. & Wilson, M. (1996) *4WD South Island - 77 Off Road Adventures*. Shoal Bay Press

¹⁹ For example: <https://tikitouringnz.blogspot.com/2015/08/thomson-gorge-track-dunstan-mountains.html>; <https://leeburty.com/leeburty/2012/11/04/thomson-gorge-road>; <https://www.wikiloc.com/offroading-trails/thomsons-gorge-road-32842679>; <https://www.4x4exploreradventures.co.nz/product-page/central-otago-gold-trails>; <http://www.historicclyde.co.nz/off-roading/#prettyPhoto>; <https://overlandnavigator.co.nz/track/thomson-gorge-road-513rw1>

²⁰ <https://www.wikiloc.com/offroading-trails/thomsons-gorge-road-32842679>

²¹ <http://www.uniquelynz.com/nz16-p11.htm>

In summary - unless you have done the road before or have extensive backroad experience and a recent update from someone who has crossed we no longer recommend it without a 4x4 with good ground clearance. There is virtually no other traffic to help, no mobile coverage and we would expect to pay for any help or damage. Traffic is almost non-existent, this time we met one lady on a trials bike the entire way, last time one 4x4. I will seriously consider a rope and hand-winch and some blocks if we ever do it again.

5.5 Hunting

Hunting for large game is permitted on the Ardour Conservation Area (also described by DOC as 'North Dunstan') with a permit that can be obtained online. Hunting small game – such as rabbits and hares – requires a restricted hunting area permit issued by the local DOC office, which will restrict the number and timing of hunting activity based on local conditions. No hunting is permitted in the Bendigo Historic Reserve (Figure 19). DOC describes the hunting opportunity online:²²

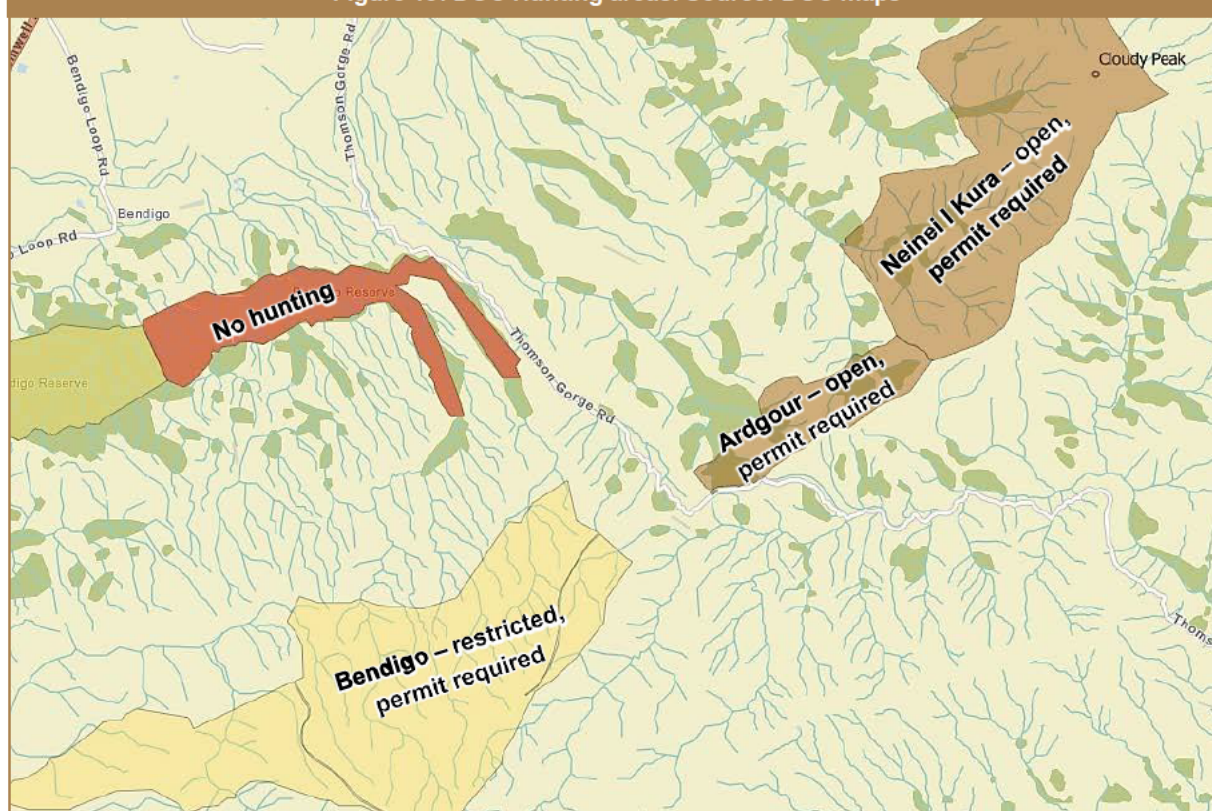
Animals present are goats, pigs, rabbits and hares although hunting opportunities are very limited.

General information: *This 303 ha block lies to the western side of the Dunstan Mountains ridgeline in the Thomsons Saddle area. The vegetation is mostly depleted tussock grasslands and matagouri shrublands of varying density and height.*

If you wish to hunt small game (rabbits and hares) in this block you must get a restricted permit from the DOC office.

Access: *The hunting block adjoins the summit of Thomson Gorge Road, accessed either from State Highway 8 at Lindis Crossing (23 km north of Cromwell), or from Matakanui near State Highway 85 at Omakau.*

Figure 19: DOC Hunting areas. Source: DOC maps



²² <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/hunting/where-to-hunt/otago/central-otago-and-the-remarkables-hunting/where-to-hunt/north-dunstan/>

No 4WD allowed: Access to Ardgour Conservation area by Thomson Gorge Road is by foot only. 4WD vehicles are not permitted.

Dogs: Dogs are allowed in this block with a hunting permit. If accessing the block over private land, you must have landholder permission to take your dog.

Interviewees indicate the value of the hunting opportunity for beginners, considering its relatively easy access and open terrain.

5.6 Horse riding

There is little information online regarding the use of Thomson Gorge Road for equestrian activities, although interviewees (Appendix 4) indicate that it is a popular local route. Use is highest between April and October, avoiding summer heat and fire risks, and peak use for other road users. The road has also been used as part of the annual Goldfields Cavalcade, which is primarily a wagon and horse event relying on multiple routes via which participants meet at a common destination, which varies yearly.²³

²³ See: <https://cavalcade.co.nz/>

6 Effects, consultation findings and proposed mitigations

Appendix 1 details the operational phase of the project. Appendix 2 describes the proposed site status post rehabilitation at mine closure. A full description of both these stages is provided in the Assessment of Environmental Effects by Mitchell Daysh. Of relevance to this recreation assessment, the operational phase of the project includes:

- Closure of Thomson Gorge Road from near ridgeline west of Thomson Saddle and the creation of an alternative access immediately to the north, called Ardgour Rise;
- Removing access to the eastern end of the Bendigo Historic Reserve via the existing walking access across Bendigo Station from Thomson Gorge Road, including access to the Come In Time Battery, replaced with access via Bendigo Historic Reserve;
- Visual amenity effects on visitors to the Bendigo Historic Reserve and users of the relocated Thomson Gorge Road;
- Provision of viewing areas of the proposed new working area, and interpretation, from the new access road on Ardgour Rise;
- Noise, explosion hazards and lighting effects on publicly accessible areas.

And, at mine closure:

- Rehabilitation of the mine site on closure to enable non-motorised recreational use of – as near as possible – the existing Thomson Gorge Road alignment and retention of Ardgour Rise for vehicle access.

As stated, the closure of the unformed and unused legal road running parallel to the northern end of Thomson Gorge Road (see Figure 20) is being addressed via a separate process and does not form part of this recreation assessment.

Each of these activities is addressed in the following sub-sections.

6.1 Consultation findings

Interviewees' feedback is summarised in Appendix 4. The key issues was that of ensuring that the replacement option for Thomson Gorge Road was of a similar gradient and grade (unsealed), provided a similar scenic experience and challenge, and enabled access to the DOC hunting areas at Ardgour and Bendigo. With acceptable alternative access in place, all interviewees indicated that the effects of the proposal would be adequately addressed.

Interviewees were asked if a viewing area of the operative mine from Ardgour Rise would be of interest. All agreed that it would, although one noted that seeing an industrial site was not an attraction for the area, but that, still, a viewing option would be worthwhile.

6.2 Rerouting the northern section of Thomson Gorge Road

It is proposed to relocate approximately 12km of Thomson Gorge Road from its current route in the valley north-west of Thomsons Saddle to an alignment on the ridge crest further north, shown in Figure 20, and named Ardgour Rise. This will include the use of private land to the south-west of the Ardgour Conservation Area and an approximately 720m section bisecting the Conservation Area on an existing 4WD track (shown in Figure 21). Public access across the Ardgour Conservation Area will be enabled by the existing right of way held by the owners of Ardgour Station (see Section 3), obviating the need for a review of 4WD access provisions as required by section 3.2.4 of the Otago CMS, as summarised in Section 4.2. Access to the Bendigo and Ardgour reserves for hunting will remain.

The proposed alternative would largely be on existing 4WD farm tracks and on a 4WD route on the Conservation Area, with some works required to match necessary public road standards. Figure 20 also shows the length of Thomson Gorge Road to be closed and the photo location for Figure 21. The 4WD route to the Mt Moka area will remain accessible.

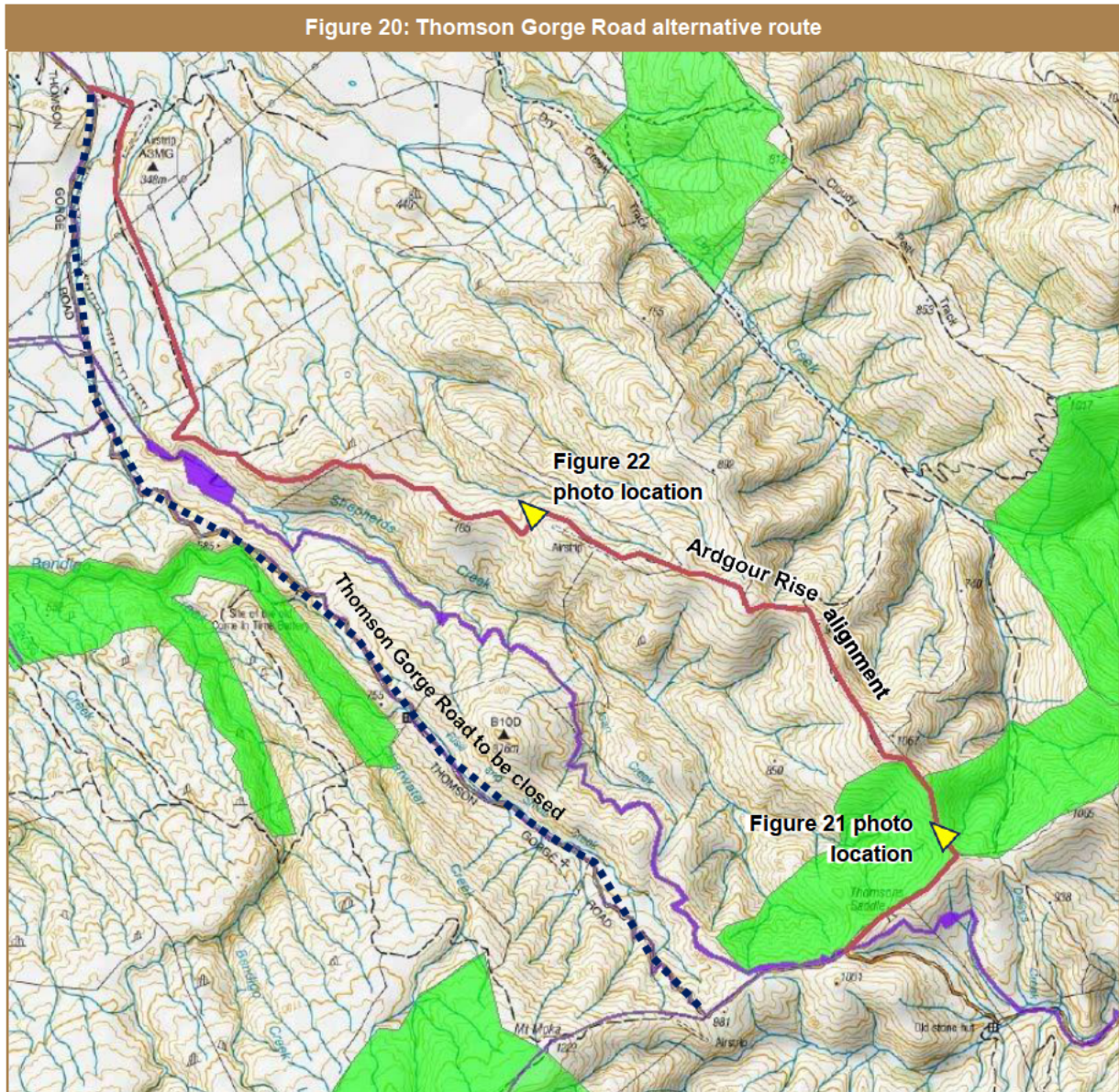


Figure 21: Ardgour Conservation Area 4WD route. Photo location shown in Figure 20

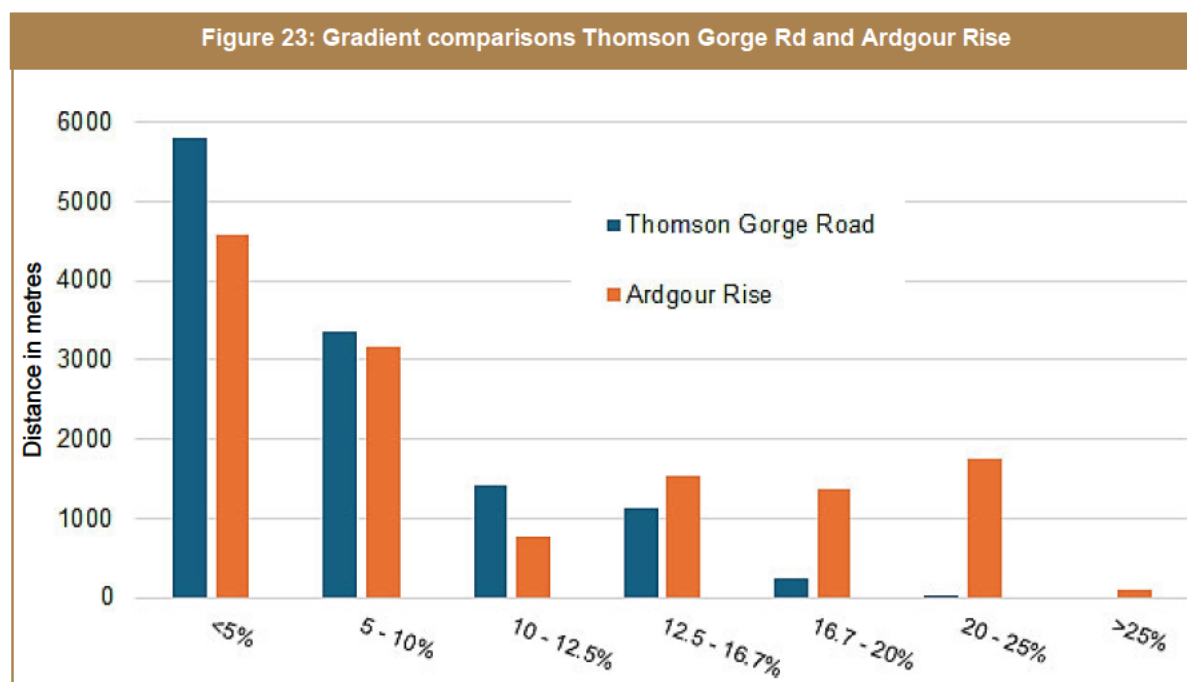


Figure 22: View north-west from Ardgour Rise. Photo location shown in Figure 20



Appendix 5 shows the preliminary proposed road design for Ardgour Rise as a longitudinal section. The maximum gradient is 25.9% compared with no exceedance of 20% on the existing Thomson Gorge Road. Table 1 shows a comparison of the distances and gradients of the two routes. While this suggests the potential for an inferior experience for, especially, cyclists on the Rise, as discussed below, final formation of the road prior to vesting with the CODC must be to the CODC's satisfaction.

Gradient	Thomson Gorge Road		Ardgour Rise	
	Distance (m)	Percent	Distance (m)	Percent
<5%	5808	49	4584	34
5 to 10%	3360	28	3155	24
10 to 12.5%	1409	12	775	6
12.5 to 16.7%	1128	9	1546	12
16.7 to 20%	242	2	1380	10
20 to 25%	20	0	1764	13
>25%	0	0	112	1
Totals	11,967 m	100%	13,316 m	100%



The Stantec *Integrated Transport Assessment* notes, in relation to the alternative roading (Sec 4.5):

As [Ardgour Rise] will be provided to enable closure of the Thomson Gorge Road through the Project site, it will need to be of sufficient standard to enable public access and vesting to CODC. Details of the design will be worked through with CODC to ensure that the route achieves acceptable design features for its low use function (broadly comparable to Thomson Gorge Road).

It is expected that the design process leading to a road suitable for public access and vesting will consider road surfacing and width, design speed, gradient, road reserve, signage, safety features, and future maintenance requirements.

It is taken from this recommendation that the new road formation on Ardgour Rise will facilitate the same level of recreational access as currently exists on Thomson Gorge Road.

Access to the Come In Time Battery will not form part of the Ardgour Rise experience. Access to the old stone hut on the eastern side of Thomson Saddle will be unaffected.

6.3 Come In Time Battery access

The proposal requires the closure of access to the Come In Time Battery via Thomson Gorge Road and its replacement with access via the Bendigo Historic Reserve. This will result in the creation of an approximately 4 km (one way) track from the nearest carpark in the Historic Reserve (an approximately two hour return trip by foot, or less than one hour by bike), compared with the current five minute walk from Thomson Gorge Road. This will result in a different experience, but not necessarily an inferior one, considering the new experience of traversing the reserve landscape. The battery will appear as a component of a visit to the Historic Reserve rather than an adjunct to the Thomson Gorge Road experience.

6.4 Visual amenity effects from visitor settings

Visual amenity effects on conservation and recreation areas are described in the Boffa Miskell *Landscape, Natural Character and Visual Effects Assessment*. This reports the potential for very low to low levels of adverse visual effects on views from:

- Neinei I Kura Conservation Area
- Bendigo Conservation Area
- Bendigo Scenic Reserve

And low to low moderate effects on views from:

- Ardgour/North Dunstan hunting block
- Pisa Conservation Area and surrounds

Such limited scales of effect are not anticipated to effect recreation amenity.

Boffa Miskell's landscape assessment for the construction of Ardgour Rise (*Thomson Gorge Road Replacement – Bendigo Ophir Mine*) indicates the potential for only minor adverse effects on landscape values from public viewpoints on the road's completion.

6.5 New visitor settings

Considering the feedback from the Otago Goldfields Trust and Tourism Central Otago, it is recommended that a viewing area of the operating goldmine be established off Ardgour Rise. This should include carparking space and interpretive material, similar to (and replacing) the current interpretation and signage associated with the Come In Time Battery. This mitigates, to a small degree, the loss of the Battery visit experience currently available off Thomson Gorge Road, and provides a promotional opportunity for the likes of the Otago Goldfields Trust and Tourism Central Otago.

6.6 Construction and operations processes

Consideration of construction and operations processes include effects on public recreation resulting from noise, blasting, lighting and traffic.

6.6.1 Noise

Noise effects are reviewed by Marshall Day in the *Assessment of Noise and Vibration Effects*. This finds that noise effects are largely confined to the Shepherds Creek valley, with limited potential for further noise exposure in public settings. Four wheel drivers and cyclists using the re-aligned Thomson Gorge

Road will experience noise levels in the order of 50 dB LAeq along this road for the brief periods where there is direct line of sight to mining activity. For most of the time, mining noise levels are likely to be lower than the self-noise generated by both the vehicles and cyclists which, in addition to the relatively short exposure to the noise, means that noise effects will be negligible for these recreational users.

6.6.2 Lighting

The *Exterior Lighting Report* by Cosgroves notes that although 'Dark Sky Reserve Lighting' requirements are not mandatory for the project area, the relevant standards provide a reference for mitigating potential effects of exterior lighting. The Dark Sky requirements are proposed to be implemented during detailed design, modelling, and subsequent installation on site, as far as is reasonably practical.

6.6.3 Traffic

The Stantec *Integrated Transport Assessment* describes the potential for substantial increases in traffic on Ardgour Road during the site establishment and construction phase, and more moderate levels of activity (staff access) during the operational phase, albeit still relatively high compared with the status quo. Ardgour Road will remain the access for recreational traffic, including cyclists, entering and exiting the new Ardgour Rise. Stantec recommends the implementation of a Construction Traffic Management Plan, and this assessment adds that this Plan consider recreational use of Ardgour Road.

The development of Ardgour Rise will result in additional traffic through the Ardgour Conservation Area. This is likely to have some minor effects on small game hunting near the redeveloped road section in the Conservation Area.

6.6.4 Blasting

Periodic closure of access to the Come In Time Battery will be required when it is within the 500 m blast radius of the Come In Time Pit. Signs at the new trail head within the Bendigo Historic Reserve will be required to indicate such closures, with safety markers near the Battery itself, assuming some walkers will ignore the previous warning signs.

6.7 Mine closure and rehabilitation

Appendix 2 details the proposed recreation components of the mine closure and rehabilitation plan. This includes:

- Access for walking, cycling and horses (with access to the Come In Time Battery) re-established along – as near as possible – approximately 3.8 km of the original Thomson Gorge Road alignment, providing views of the modern mining remains (pits) and access to the Come In Time Battery.
- Vehicles access retained between Thomson Saddle and Ardgour Road via Ardgour Rise.
- Vehicle access available to the Come In Time Battery via a dead-end road from Ardgour Rise to a nearby carpark along part of the existing Thomson Gorge Road alignment.
- The separation of motorised and non-motorised activity within much of the Rise and Shine catchment, offering a superior experience for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- Interpretation of remaining mine features, in the same manner as is currently provided for the Come In Time Battery.
- Carparking provision in the upper Rise and Shine catchment providing access to the public walking, cycle and equestrian track through the valley.

- Retention of the route through the Bendigo Historic Reserve with the retired mine landscape via the Come In Time Battery. This will form part of a wider complex of walking and cycling trails. For the latter, especially, this will be part of a significant cycling destination.

A legal mechanism to secure enduring public access on the various roads and tracks will be required. This represents a reinstatement of the existing suite of recreation opportunities, with the benefit of the separation of motorised and non- motorised activities in much of the Rise and Shine catchment; of benefit to walkers, yclists and horse riders.

7 Summary of effects

This section identifies and assesses the potential effects on recreation amenity caused by the development and operation of the Proposal. This is based on:

- Identification of all potential effects on recreation amenity;
- Identification of the scale and relevance of each effect, and reference to parallel technical reports which provide further detail (landscape);
- Summary of the effects which have the potential to change recreation amenity; and
- Discussion of the scale of those effects and their potential for management, considering particularly the mitigation proposals in Section 6 and the consultation summaries presented in Appendix 4.

Effects on recreation values are assessed according to the matrix in Table 2. This considers the magnitude of the effect and the value of the setting for recreation.²⁴

Table 2: Scale of impact on recreation values considering magnitude of effect					
		Recreation value			
		Very High	High	Moderate	Low
Magnitude of effect	High or severe	Significant	Significant	Moderate	Minor
	Moderate or medium	Significant	Moderate	Minor	Minor
	Low or minor	Moderate	Moderate	Minor	Minor
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

A 'significant' adverse effect is likely to displace²⁵ many or most users from a setting for prolonged periods, but not necessarily for all activities which occur there; although it is likely that amenity for all activities will be degraded.

A 'moderate' adverse effect will periodically displace some activities and users, but amenity will not be degraded for all activities.

A 'minor' adverse effect will displace a small number of users for short periods, but amenity will almost always be preserved for the majority of activities and users. The scale of effect may be reduced if the area affected is confined and there are ample suitable alternative opportunities for relevant activities.

All assessments are tempered by the significance of the recreation activity.

²⁴ There is no recreation industry standard for this type of assessment, and it has been developed by the author of this report based on, for example the 'Criteria for describing level of effects' (Table 10) in Roper-Lindsay et al (2018).

²⁵ Force people to recreate in other settings or not at all.

Table 3 summarises the recreation activities undertaken as identified via literature review and interviews. Almost all activities are identified as no more than 'regionally significant'.

Table 3: Existing value of recreation activities in the study area at the regional level			
Very High	High	Moderate	Low
▪ Bendigo Historic Reserve – all visitors	▪ Cycling – Thomson Gorge Rd ▪ Equestrian – Thomson Gorge Rd ▪ 4WD – Thomson Gorge Rd ▪ Come-In-Time Battery visits	▪ Hunting in Ardgour and Bendigo Conservation Areas	Nil

Table 4 summarises the type and scale of effect on each activity considering the mitigation measures proposed, as well as the mine rehabilitation proposal. In summary, these are, during construction operation of the mine (including construction of Ardgour Rise):

- Developing Ardgour Rise as an alternative to Thompson Gorge Road to a standard suitable for public access considering road surfacing and width, design speed, gradient, road reserve, signage, safety features, and future maintenance requirements.
- Providing a viewing area of the new mine activity from Ardgour Rise, with suitable interpretation about the project, in the same style as that currently provided for the Come In Time Battery.
- Maintenance of existing recreation access to the Ardgour and Bendigo Conservation Areas.
- Providing alternative walking access to the Come In Time Battery via the Bendigo Historic Reserve.
- Consideration of cycle traffic on Ardgour Road in the Construction Traffic Management Plan.
- Management of light, noise and blasting.

And on mine rehabilitation:

- Reinstatement of walking, cycle and horse access in the Rise and Shine catchment.
- Retention of Ardgour Rise.
- Retention of access to the Come In Time Battery from within the Bendigo Historic Reserve.
- Vehicle access to the Come In Time Battery from along partial reinstatement of the northern end of Thomson Gorge Road and the provision of a carpark.
- Carparking provision in the upper Rise and Shine catchment.

Table 4: Summary scale of effects of Proposal – negative effects

Significant	Moderate	Minor	Nil	Positive
Nil	Nil	▪ Bendigo Historic Reserve: visual amenity effects, operations. ▪ Cycling, 4WD, equestrian: rerouting of Thomson Gorge Road – minor effects resulting from inability to access Come In Time Battery as part of experience during mine operation. ▪ Come In Time Battery: periodic closure due to proximate blasting, and alternative access via Bendigo Historic Reserve during mine operation. ▪ Hunting: potential loss of some very small hunting opportunity in the Ardgour Conservation Area near the new alignment of Ardgour Rise.		▪ Mine rehabilitation: all activities – replacement walking, cycling and equestrian access in the Rise and Shine catchments, in addition to retention of Ardgour Rise. ▪ Interpretation of modern goldmining activities during the operational phase (as expressed by Otago Goldfields Trust)

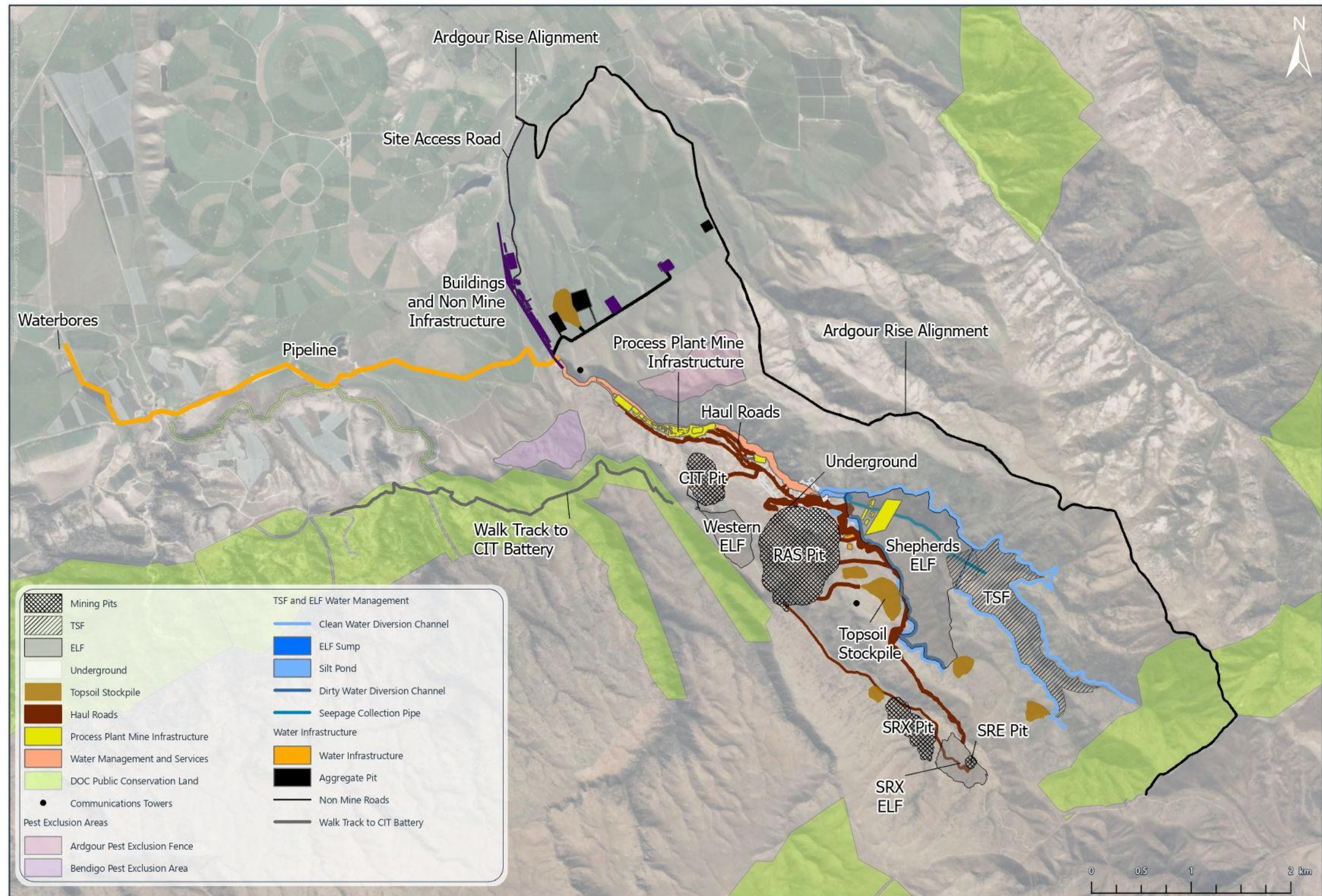
8 Conclusion

Although the Project represents a substantial change to the landforms in the Rise and Shine and Shepherds Creek catchments, its effects on recreation can be adequately addressed. The primary mitigation of developing Ardgour Rise to a standard suitable to provide for the existing recreational use of Thomson Gorge Road removes almost all recreational use of the effected catchments. The provision of alternative access to the historic Come In Time Battery will require a higher level of commitment from visitors, but the site remains accessible and part of a new recreation experience.

The mine rehabilitation plan will result in a superior experience for cyclists, walkers and horse riders along 3.8 km of – as near as possible – the existing Thomson Gorge Road alignment with separation from motorised vehicles. Ardgour Rise will be retained.

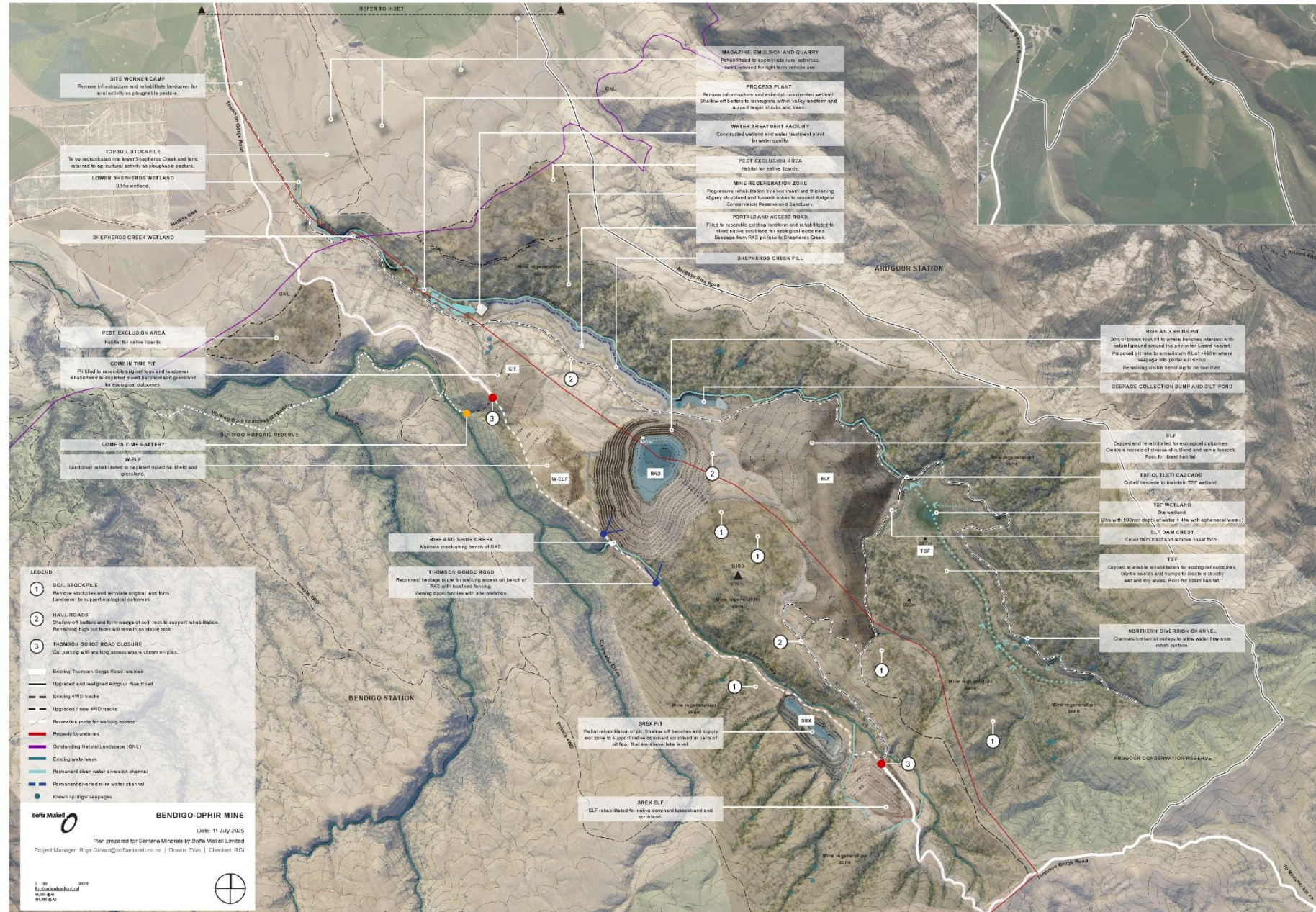
These and the other recommended mitigations will ensure the Project avoids significant effects on recreation opportunities and values during its construction and operation, and that on mine closure the setting will retain an appropriate suite of recreation opportunities.

Appendix 1: Project description



Appendix 2: Mine rehabilitation plan for recreation

LANDSCAPE CLOSURE PLAN



Appendix 3: DOC Bendigo area visitor brochure

Welcome

The Bendigo region has two reserves and four separate conservation areas on the western side of Central Otago's Dunstan Mountains.

The Bendigo scenic and historic reserves

These adjoining reserves are a chance to explore a range of relics from Bendigo's hard rock quartz-mining days of the 19th century, including stamper battery sites, mining shafts and adits. They also feature a uniquely terraced band of kānuka and unequalled views of the Upper Clutha basin.

The main entrance is off SH8 via Loop Road. Follow the road up the hill to the Welshtown car park. Alternative access is available from the Rocky Point picnic area by Lake Dunstan, and via Thomson Gorge Road (4WD only). This 4WD road should not be attempted in winter or poor weather.



Quartz Reef Point tailings. Photo: © Stef Cotteret

Further information

DOC Alexandra office

43 Dunstan Road
Alexandra 9320

PHONE: 03 440 2040

EMAIL: alexandra@doc.govt.nz

www.doc.govt.nz

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468

Report any safety hazards
or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111

Cover photo: Logantown.
Photo: © Stef Cotteret

Published by:
Department of Conservation
Tititea / Mount Aspiring
National Park Visitor Centre
Ardmore Street
PO Box 93
Wanaka 9343

Editing and design:
Te Rōpū Ratonga Auaha,
Te Papa Atawhai
DOC Creative Services
June 2020

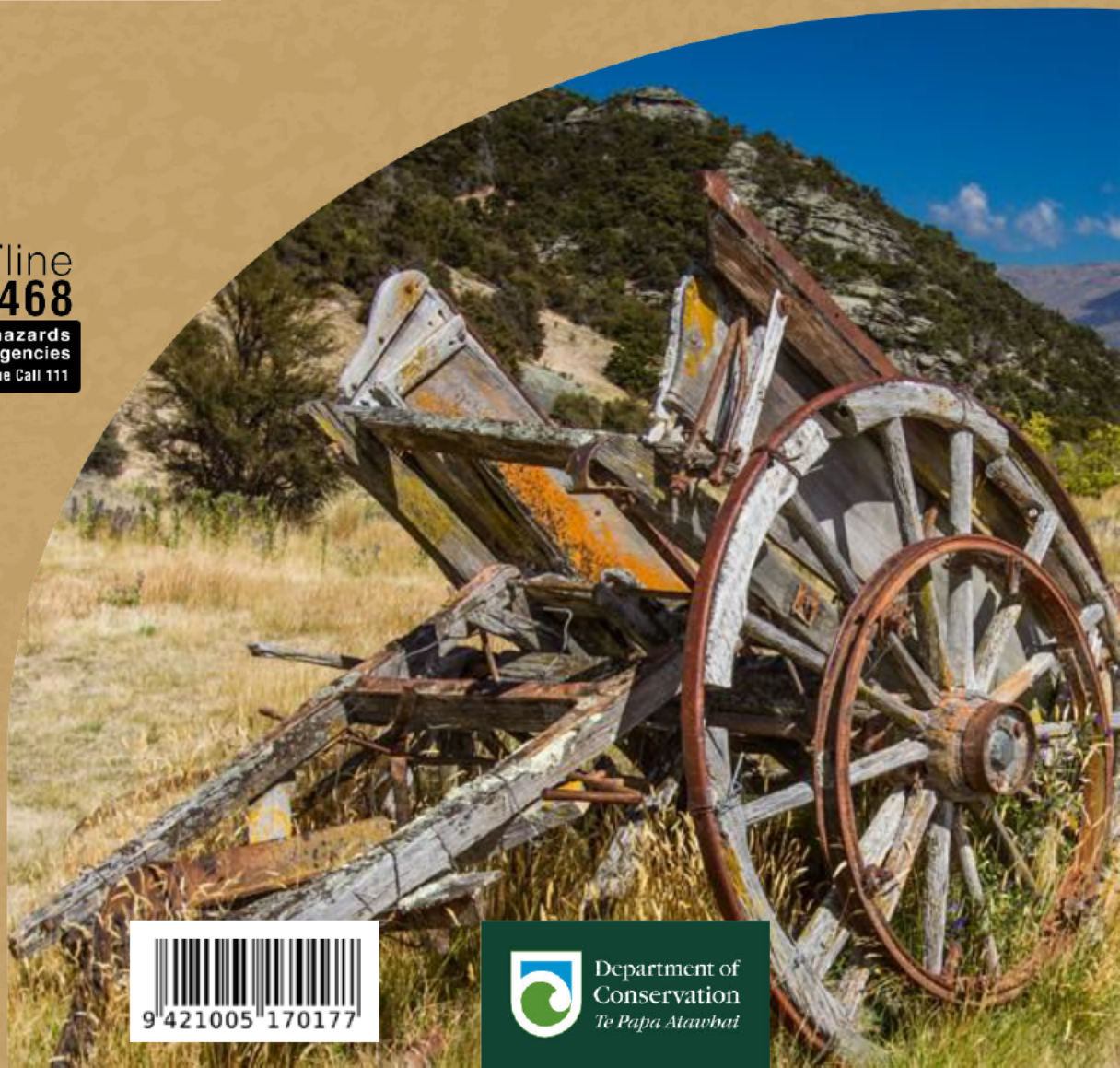
This publication is produced
using paper sourced from
well-managed, renewable
and legally logged forests.

R167952

New Zealand Government

OTAGO

Discover the Bendigo area



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Bendigo, Ardgour and Neinei i Kura Conservation areas

These three conservation areas straddle the ridgeline of the Dunstan Mountains on either side of Thomsons Saddle, offering panoramic views west to the Southern Alps/ Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, and east to the Otago hinterland. Alpine tussocklands dominate the tops, with olearia (tree daisy) and matagouri shrublands present at lower altitudes and around the creeks. Cloudy Peak (1,526 m) is the highest point and is often shrouded in cloud. The harsher conditions near the summit give the area a montane character and there are large expanses of dracophyllum shrublands, raoulia cushion fields and pebble pavements.

Vehicle access to the Bendigo and Ardgour Conservation Areas is available from the top of Thomson Gorge Road (4WD only – do not attempt in winter or poor weather). There is also walking access to the Bendigo Conservation Area off SH8, 5 km south of Bendigo Loop Road.

Neinei i Kura Conservation Area is accessible on foot through the Dry Creek Conservation Area.

Dry Creek Conservation Area

This short section of Dry Creek features alluvial gravels surrounded by olearia and matagouri shrublands. Access from the Ardgour Road car park, off SH8 near Tarras.



Solway Hotel and bakery on far left.

History

Māori

There are no records of Māori history or artefacts from Bendigo. Thomsons Saddle was a route for Māori travelling from coastal Otago to Wanaka and the mountain passes that led to West Coast settlements.

Farming

This area was part of the huge Morven Hills Station taken up by the McLean family in 1858. In 1910 it was broken into smaller stations, including Bendigo and Ardgour. Successive runholders battled the elements and rabbits; today, Bendigo is famed for high-quality fine wool and its vineyards.

Gold mining

Gold, found here in 1862, brought an immediate influx of miners and prospectors clambering over the hills. The accessible alluvial gold petered out in 1865, but once gold-bearing quartz reefs were discovered, underground mines sprang up. By 1875, the Bendigo reef was said to be the richest and best defined in Otago.

Mining continued until 1943, when the government mining subsidy was withdrawn. Renewed interest since then has triggered activity in the 1980s and again early this century.

The historic reserve preserves the gold-mining relics of the area's hard-rock quartz mining history – a fascinating legacy that is visible today. There are mine shafts, tunnels, stone huts, stamper batteries, heavy machinery, water races, dams and pipelines.

This is a historic reserve

All the material in the reserve is protected by law. Artefacts on this site have been security tagged with invisible marking. It is illegal to remove any object, and offenders will be prosecuted.



There are old, deep mining shafts throughout the area. Take extreme care, and supervise children closely.

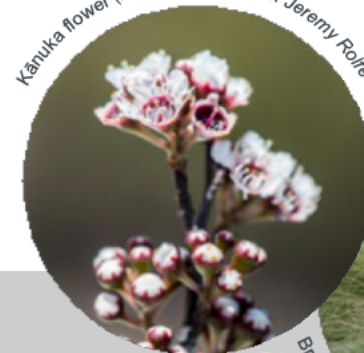
Flora

The high Dunstan Mountains contain diverse grasslands dominated by blue tussock (*Poa colensoi*), hard tussock (*Festuca novae-zelandiae*), snow tussock (*Chionochloa rigida*), and cushion vegetation communities at higher altitudes.

Lower in the Bendigo Scenic Reserve, the stand of kānuka (*Kunzea* sp.) is one of the few significant remnants of its type in Central Otago. This is regenerated kānuka, as the original stands were used by miners for building and firewood. Ground-cover vegetation in the reserve is sparse after more than 100 years of burning, mining and rabbit infestation. It grows short tussock, scabweed (*Raoulia australis*) and introduced weeds – mainly briar rose (*Rosa rubiginosa*).

Irrigation has made land-use possible in the region's dry climate. The conservation area is now bounded on its lower edge by internationally respected vineyards.

Kānuka flower (*Kunzea* sp.). Photo: Jeremy Rolfe



Broad-leaved snow tussock (*Chionochloa flavescentis*). Photo: P. Morrison



Walking and tramping tracks

Track grades



Walking track

Gentle walking from a few minutes to a day. Track is mostly well formed, but some sections may be steep, rough or muddy.



Tramping track

Mostly unformed but with directional markers, poles or cairns. Tramping/hiking boots required. Backcountry skills and experience, including navigation and survival skills, required.



Grade 3 mountain biking (intermediate)

Track may be narrow and/or have poor traction and have steep slopes and/or avoidable obstacles. There may be exposure at the track's outer edge.



Grade 4 mountain biking (advanced)

Track may be narrow and/or have poor traction and have a mixture of long, steep climbs, and obstacles that are difficult to avoid or jump over. It is generally exposed at the track's outer edge. Most riders will find some sections easier to walk.

1 Dry Creek Track 4–6 hr, 17 km return



From the Ardour Road car park, follow the marked track to the Dry Creek Conservation Area and continue along a dry creek bed through shrublands to the Neinei i kura Conservation Area.

2 Cloudy Peak Track 9–10 hr, 30 km return



From the Ardour Road car park, follow the Dry Creek Track for 1 hour. The signposted Cloudy Peak Track crosses the creek bed then climbs to the Neinei i kura Conservation Area. From here an unmarked 4WD track leads to the Cloudy Peak summit, with views of the Upper Clutha plains and peaks towards St Bathans and Lindis Pass.



3 Come-in-Time Battery
10 min, 500 m return



From Thomson Gorge Road, this short walk goes down to the mine entrances and battery that were part of the Come-in-Time claim, a virtually complete example of heavy gold-mining equipment.

4 Aurora Track
1 hr 30 min, 4.5 km loop



From the Welshtown car park, the Aurora Track winds down through kānuka shrubland and across Aurora Creek to Logantown. There are remains of old stone huts along the way. Return via the Ridge Dray Track or up the road.



5 Kānuka Loop Track
5 hr, 10 km loop



Park at Logantown, then walk 200 m back down to the start of the track. This follows the shorter Matilda Battery Track before branching off to the right at the crest of Spec Gully. After traversing open country and a stile, the track winds clockwise through the Bendigo Scenic Reserve. The typical Lower Dunstan Mountains landscape includes regenerated kānuka shrublands and impressive rocky crags, with great views over Lake Dunstan and the Upper Clutha valley.

6 Mount Koinga Track
1 hr, 2 km return



Park at Rocky Point and carefully cross SH8 to the head of the trail. The track goes up a spur under the slopes of Mount Koinga to the boundary of Bendigo Scenic Reserve.

7 Devils Creek Track
4–6 hr, 13 km return



This steep climb on an old 4WD track leads you up from SH8 to the boundary of Bendigo Conservation Area. There are good views of Lake Dunstan and the Pisa Range from the tops.

8 Quartz Reef Point Walk
30 min, 2 km return



From the car park, cross the road and follow the marker poles to the right through private property. The gate into the historic reserve is at the top of the rise, and the track leads to a platform with views of the tailings. These pristine remains are the result of ground sluicing: channelling water to the head of a claim and flooding the work face. Large stones and rocks were removed and stacked in a herringbone pattern, and the washed material was then directed or shovelled to a sluice channel to separate the gold from the gravel.

Other activities

The map shows where vehicle access is possible.



Hunting is by permit only – contact DOC's Alexandra office.



No unauthorised drones on public conservation land. Drones can:

- interfere with helicopters for search and rescue, fire and operational needs
- cause noise, disturbing native birds and visitors.

Your safety is your responsibility

The Central Otago climate can swing to either extreme in the course of a day. In winter the ranges are blanketed in snow, in contrast to the dry, hot summers.

Make sure you choose a track that suits your fitness and experience. Read the DOC publication 'Planning a trip in the backcountry' before you start:

www.doc.govt.nz/planning-a-backcountry-trip

This pamphlet is a guide only and should not be used for navigation purposes. You should carry NZTopo50 maps CB13 and CB14 for the longer tracks in this region.

Follow the Outdoor Safety Code

- Plan your trip.
- Tell someone your plans.
- Be aware of the weather.
- Know your limits.
- Take sufficient supplies.

For more information, visit: www.adventuresmart.co.nz

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others



leave no trace
NEW ZEALAND



Appendix 4: Interview summaries

Interviews were carried out by Samantha Strong.

Alexandra Mountain Bike Club

President Andrew Dowling

March 14th, 2025

The Alexandra Mountain Bike Club supports the proposed alternative route for Thomson Gorge Road, provided that the key values of the current route – natural beauty, accessibility, challenge, and well-being benefits—remain unchanged. The area is well-used by club members. Andrew specifically highlighted the areas use by the ladies' riding group and bikepacking community, who appreciate the high-country experience and moderate challenge the route offers.

The club's current use is mainly November through to April, and they do not experience any conflicts with other users or access issues. The club supports the proposed alternative route as the elevation and topography are similar to the existing TGR, ensuring that the riding experience remains comparable. The club supports provisions for road maintenance to ensure accessibility throughout the year and would also welcome infrastructure upgrades like a toilet at the Old Stone Hut and fewer gates. Additionally, the club is open to the idea of a future loop road once the mine ceases operations. Finally, the addition of a viewpoint overlooking the open-cast mine is fully supported as Andrew concluded that it could enhance the experience for riders.

Key Points from the Interview:

- The Alexandra Mountain Bike Club supports the proposed alternative road, provided that the values of the current Thomson Gorge Road and access remain unchanged.
- Key values for mountain bikers in this area include natural beauty, accessibility, challenge, and well-being benefits.
- The route is popular among club members, including groups like the ladies' riding group and bikepacking enthusiasts.
- The proposed road follows a similar elevation and topography, ensuring a comparable experience.
- The club would support infrastructure upgrades, including road maintenance provisions to ensure year-round access.
- The idea of a future loop road, once the mine closes, is also supported.
- There have been no reported access or conflict issues between mountain bikers and other user groups.
- A viewpoint overlooking the open-cast mine could be an interesting addition for riders.

Central Otago Deerstalkers (CODS) and Upper Clutha Deerstalkers (UCDS)

Reid Gare, President CODS, March 6th, 2025

Mark Elliott-President and National Rep UCDS, March 12th, 2025

Presidents Reid Gare (CODS) and Mark Elliott (UCDS) discussed their experience hunting within the area, and emphasised the importance of respecting farmers' property and the overall unconstrained access they currently have to the DOC estate. The current access is adequate and both deerstalker associations have no issues with road quality, access points, or the overall condition of the road. The

proposed alternative road would allow for easier access to some of the areas on the north-east side of the range (near Thomsons Saddle), allowing for easier access to the DOC blocks adjacent to the proposed new road, where currently hunters are having to park and walk in.

Regarding access to hunting areas, Reid highlighted concerns about landowners restricting access due to ownership changes in other areas in Central Otago, and wanted to ensure that if the new proposed road was to move ahead, that the access would remain the same and unchanged, even though the route would be altered. Mark also agreed, adding that the UCDS does some work with DOC and private landowners for pest management, therefore ensuring that they can still have access to these blocks is imperative.

The importance of maintaining access to Thomson's Gorge Road for recreational hunting is key. Reid emphasised that current access is crucial for deerstalkers and highlights the road's significance due to its accessibility, proximity to town, and diverse hunting opportunities. Mark seconded this, adding that many of the club members appreciate that they can have a backcountry experience so close to town, which also provides a spectrum of game. They both stressed that an alternative route would be acceptable as long as it does not diminish these qualities or restrict access.

Reid also added that this area is a crucial learner area for new hunters, both young and old. This area holds value for hunting as it is a nice stepping stone for learners to get a 'backcountry' experience without having to travel far, or have the skill set to be in a remote wilderness area.

Regarding potential infrastructure changes, they indicated that deerstalkers would not oppose a viewpoint over an opencast mine, provided it does not impact hunting access. Additional pullout areas where hunters could unload quad bikes, and a reduction in gates would be appreciated. Overall, hunting can still take place within this area regardless of the mine. The primary concern remains ensuring year-round access to the three DOC hunting blocks in the area accessed from the road.

Key Themes

a) Thomson's Gorge Road as a Key Access Route

1. The road is a publicly accessible backcountry route used by various recreational groups, including four-wheel-drive clubs, hunters, and general users.
2. There is concern that access must remain unchanged and unrestricted year-round, as it provides critical connectivity, especially when alternative routes are unavailable due to weather or accidents.
3. The road is not well-maintained; it's described as a rough bulldozer track with areas where vehicles struggle to pass.

b) Recreation and Hunting Values

1. The area is important for hunting, particularly for the Central Otago, Upper Clutha, and Southern Lakes Deerstalkers Association.
2. The region is valued for its proximity to town, ease of access, and diversity of wildlife.
3. There is an emphasis on teaching young hunters about ethical hunting, survival skills, and conservation.

c) Tourism and Land Access Issues

1. Concerns about private landowners restricting access to areas that have traditionally been open for recreation.
2. Some tourism operators and private lodges are limiting access for recreational users and hunters within the area, so this specific location is key to ensure the public have access to DOC estates for hunting.

Tourism Central Otago

Anthony Longman – Destination Lead, Tourism Central Otago, Central Otago District Council

Wed, 5 Mar 2025

Anthony Longman, Destination Lead for Central Otago District Council, highlighted the importance of understanding the council's perspective on the area as a part of a tourism network and nature-based destination for the region. He emphasised that his response was not an official Council opinion on the application or the mine, but was clarifying the site's function as a visitor destination, as well as how the Thomsons Gorge Road creates a valuable access route for visitors and locals to the area to access the many destination specific attributes and sites (e.g., the wineries, historical mining sites, backcountry etc).

A key focus was on recreational use in the Thomson Gorge area, where mountain biking, hunting, tramping, and four-wheel driving are identified by Council as significant activities in the area. He mentioned that the area is not heavily promoted by Council due to its challenging nature and potential public safety risk if users enter who are not prepared for the varying terrain and road conditions. He referenced events like the Spring Challenge Women's Adventure Race and the Gold Rush multi-sport event that have used the area in the past.

Access is good as noted by the Council. Most visitors, including four-wheel drivers and mountain bikers, visit the area for its natural attributes and appreciate the rugged nature of the roads. They do not seek changes, except for possibly fewer gates. To Anthony's knowledge, there have not been any complaints due to restricted access by landowners, and user groups have been accessing the area with minimal issues. Anthony stressed the importance of the area for both locals and tourists, and that road could act as an alternative route during road closures (which was evident in the most recent closure of the road between Clyde and Cromwell).

Overall, from a destination perspective, tourism and recreation are interconnected and the site hosts a spectrum of tourism attractions and recreational activities. Anthony did not see the change in the location of Thomson Gorge Road to be significant, as long access remained similar, and individuals could still access the historical sites and local wineries, and recreational activities were minimally affected, and current user groups retained free access.

Herenga ā Nuku (Outdoor Access Commission)

Amie Pont – Regional Field Advisor

11 March 2025

The Outdoor Access Commission's primary concern regarding the gold mine project is the potential permanent closure of Thomson Gorge Road and the implications this would have for long-term public access to the area. The Commission's overarching goal is to maintain and enhance access to outdoor spaces for recreational users, ensuring that infrastructure changes do not lead to a net loss of public access opportunities.

A key issue raised was that while temporary closures during mining operations may be necessary, permanently stopping the road and failing to reopen the original Thomson Gorge Road post-mining would severely impact public access to both recreational and historical sites. The road currently serves as a critical link for outdoor enthusiasts, including cyclists, four-wheel drivers, and hikers, as well as those accessing the Bendigo Historic Reserve and Ardour Conservation Area. If the road is not reinstated (regardless of the new proposed route) there is a risk that public access could be permanently diminished, effectively restricting opportunities for recreation in the area.

The Commission also emphasised that any new access routes or realignments must provide an equivalent or improved level of public access. The proposed alternative road alignment along the ridge crest, while a potential solution, raised concerns about whether it would be suitable for all users, particularly given the area's rugged terrain and the potential impact on the surrounding conservation land. There was also discussion about the importance of ensuring that any newly created access is legally protected through mechanisms such as easements, so that future land use changes do not further restrict recreational opportunities.

Additionally, the Commission highlighted the broader principle that infrastructure projects, including mining operations, should aim to enhance access rather than reduce it. The potential introduction of new shared-use trails and interpretive walks was seen as a positive opportunity to support public recreation, but only if they effectively replace lost access routes.

Amie also noted that the potential loss of direct access to the Come-in-Time battery via Thomson Gorge Road may pose issues. She was concerned about the challenges posed by legal frameworks, particularly regarding walking access easements on private land. Potential solutions, such as a land swap to establish a more practical access route, could be explored. Overall, the Commission would love to see a loop track created as part of the mine closure plan (long term plan) where when mine operations cease, and the original Thomson Gorge Road reopens creating a loop of public access around the new and old tracks. This would extend public access, provide access to historical sites, and create more opportunities for recreation. The need for sustainable infrastructure, legal clarity on public access rights, and continued stakeholder engagement was underscored to ensure that outdoor recreation remains a priority throughout the project.

Central Otago 4WD Club

Joshua Benck

Feb 26th 2025

Joshua Benck from the Central Otago 4WD Club described the club's experience with Thomsons Gorge Road as being positive, and easily accessible scenic drive for club members to enjoy. The club has 100 paid members, with other 4WD enthusiasts also being able to access the road for recreation.

The club currently uses the road on average twice a year for scenic drives, with 20 to 25 vehicles per trip. They have not noticed significant changes in access over the past six years but have experienced difficulties accessing the Bendigo Conservation Area due to lack of road maintenance by DOC. While hunters have expressed concerns about difficult access, the four-wheel-drive community finds any challenging terrain appealing. The area provides for a track that most club members are comfortable to access, great lunch and stop-over spots to enjoy the landscape, some historical areas to explore mid-drive, and an overall great 4WD close to Cromwell.

Regarding the proposed road realignment, the club does not oppose the change as long as the new road maintains similar characteristics, including elevation, topography, and scenic value. They support the parallel road, with the added bonus of a viewpoint to see into the mine. The club emphasised the importance of clear communication about road changes and future access, specifically for planning purposes for the club. The club also expressed interest in keeping any additional tracks open for public use.

Dunstan Adult Riding Group and Riders of Central Otago

Gabrielle Berkett

Gabrielle represents the Dunstan Adult Riding Group (47 paid members) and is also part of Riders of Central Otago, an informal group with an estimated 30+ riders. These groups frequently use Thomson Gorge Road for trail riding.

The appeal comes from its rugged terrain, natural character, and accessibility. Currently, the equestrian groups are content with the road's current use levels by other groups, its condition and accessibility, and therefore would not want something vastly different if a new route was proposed. Key concerns include ensuring the new track remains similar in landscape and topography, elevation gain, with additional natural mounting points and improved gate systems as an added bonus for users. While aware of the proposed mine and new access route, the riders' only concern is maintaining a safe route for the horses, creating and maintaining a safe distance between the new proposed track and all mining operations to prevent startling. Use is highest between April and October, avoiding the summer heat and fire risks. While interactions with other users, such as cyclists, are generally cooperative, awareness of horse behaviour is crucial for safety. Riders appreciate the area's scenic and historical value, stressing the need for responsible mining practices that preserve recreational access and the track's natural integrity. Overall, the general feedback is supportive of the new track, provided it retains the key values and characteristics of the original Thomson Gorge Road.

Key Themes

Awareness of the mine proposal

- Gabrielle understands that the current Thomson Gorge Road will be used by the mine, with a new public access route proposed as a replacement.
- The new road aims to mimic the existing route, maintaining its topography, landscape, and accessibility.

Impact on horse riders

- Concerns were raised about the distance between the new track and the mining operation—ensuring horses are not startled by machinery.
- The new road would be set back at a considerable distance, with an optional viewpoint for visitors, but not directly adjacent to the mine.

Road design considerations

- Riders expressed the need for better gate systems to improve accessibility.
- Preference for natural mounting points (e.g., rocks or banks) for ease of remounting.
- Important that the new route maintains the natural character and is not overly altered (i.e., is gravelled).

Seasonality and use

- The area is most frequently used between April and October, as summer is too hot, and there are fire risks due to horses' metal shoes.
- Riders prefer cooler months and tend to avoid high-traffic seasons when there are more cyclists and other users.

Access and user conflict

- No major issues with landowner access.
- Occasional conflicts with cyclists, particularly regarding awareness of horse behaviour and ensuring safety when passing.
- Generally, cooperative interactions between different recreational users.

Historical and recreational values

- Riders appreciate scenic vistas, historical significance, and natural landscapes of the area.

- Acknowledgment that mining operations must be managed properly to avoid environmental damage.
- Importance of maintaining access for recreational use in a way that preserves the existing character of the track.

Chatto Creek Motorcycle Club

By email

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Friday, 14 February 2025 at 1:07 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Engagement Opportunity-Feedback on the Bendigo Gold Mine consent application

Hi Sam

Yes your enquiry was passed onto members [of the Chatto Creek Motorcycle Club] last week.

In a nutshell.. clubbies are not particularly worried about the proposed new Thomson Gorge Track route... as long as the off road character of the track as it is now isn't degraded.

Jokingly some wondered if it would mean fewer gates to open - a well-known feature of that trail.

Hunters I have spoken to are interested in the possibility of improved access to the DOC hunting area. It was also noted this might encourage unwanted attention from those that can't be bothered getting out of a vehicle - spotlighting from the track. It's an issue district wide from time to time carried out by a minority that ruin things for the honest majority

Probably an issue for police and DOC to deal with.

Hope this is helpful

Cheers [REDACTED]

Cromwell Mountain Bike Club

[REDACTED]

Monday Feb 10th, 2025

Thomson Gorge Road is a well-used and valued route for the Cromwell mountain biking community and wider cycling community. The route is a key connection for bike packers. The Great Southern Route has also contributed to this, as it connects riders to Te Araroa Track, providing access to scenic landscapes, conservation areas, and longer cycling routes like the Dunstan and Cape Reinga trails.

Currently, the Cromwell Mountain Bike Club accesses the historic reserve and has put in an application to build trails into the scenic reserve. Use has grown over time, with cyclists, four-wheel drivers, trampers, and horse riders regularly sharing the space. While the rugged terrain and natural features contribute to its appeal, maintaining accessibility is important for the club, particularly ensuring a suitable gradient for cyclists if an alternative route is introduced. The club currently rates the Thomson Gorge Road as a grade 3 across both cycling and mountain biking rating systems.

Conflicts between users are minimal during peak season times, though occasional issues arise with fast-moving vehicles at night. Thomson Gorge Road is also being used for some key cycling events, most recently the Great Southern Brevet. This is an important feature for the club, as they would like to continue to be involved in such great events and host in the region. Overall, the club's interest is maintaining a viable route that mimics that of the current Thomson Gorge Road, or increases accessibility for more cyclists to use it (decreased gradient), while also maintaining the current road's character and challenges (e.g., creek crossings, ruggedness). There is also a keen interest in the

inclusion of a viewing platform for the new operating mine if it proceeds, as it could add an additional tourism element to the route while maintaining the area's adventure appeal.

1. General overview of use

- Activity Type: Mountain biking, with club members using the historic reserve extensively. Some riders also use Thomson Gorge Road as part of longer cycling routes.
- Frequency & Seasonality: Regular use by club members, with consistent riding throughout the year.
- Number of Users: Increasing over time, with more cyclists using the route.
- Changes Over Time: The route has become more established, and usage has grown, particularly with connections to longer cycling trails (e.g., Great Southern Route, Cape Reinga cycle route).
- Other Users Observed: Mountain bikers, four-wheel drivers, trampers, and horse riders. Occasional late-night vehicle activity, especially from younger drivers.

2. Problems with existing access

- General Access: Currently functional, but ensuring continued accessibility is important.
- Road Quality: The rough terrain, river crossings, and gates contribute to the adventure appeal, but any changes should maintain usability for cyclists.
- Conflicts with Other Users: Generally minimal, though occasional friction exists (e.g., fast-driving vehicles at night, occasional grumpy users from all groups).
- Neighbouring Landowners: No significant issues; local vineyards and farms appear indifferent to cyclists using the road.

3. Other areas accessed via Thomson Gorge Road

- Connected Routes: Many riders use the road as part of longer trips, including linking to the Dunstan route.
- Conservation and historic sites: Some cyclists travel further into conservation areas and historic locations, such as Come-in-Time Battery.

4. Values of the setting

- Scenic Landscape: The remote, rugged environment is a major draw.
- Ecology and conservation: Features like manuka forests contribute to ecological significance.
- Adventure and challenge: The rough nature of the route adds to the experience.
- Standalone destination vs. Part of a tour: While some cyclists use it as a standalone challenge, others incorporate it into longer journeys across the region.

5. Potential for an alternative route

- Maintaining accessibility is crucial—if a parallel route is developed, the gradient must remain suitable for cyclists.
- A well-designed alternative could enhance accessibility but may reduce the adventurous nature of the current route.
- If the new road becomes too formalized, it could lead to increased traffic and a different user experience.

6. Interest in viewing the new operating mine

- General Sentiment: There is interest in the mine as a visitor attraction.
- The primary appeal of the area is its natural and remote setting - an open-cast mine does not align directly with the experience cyclists may seek, but will be a key attraction on this specific route.

Otago Goldfields Heritage Trust and Goldfields Cavalcade

March 6th, 2025

██████████, representing the Goldfields Trust and the Cavalcade, expressed support for the establishment of the proposed mine at Bendigo. While acknowledging that Santana Mines is a premier sponsor of the Trust, he clarified that his support is not influenced by this relationship. He emphasised the region's deep historical connection to gold mining, noting that the project continues this legacy and presents an opportunity to once again place Central Otago on the map for gold.

Davis noted that while the Goldfields Trust does not specifically or exclusively use the application area, it values the presence of surrounding historic mining sites. The Trust would like to ensure that these locations, such as the Come in Time Battery, remain publicly accessible and that the historical character of the wider area is preserved and respected.

From the perspective of the Cavalcade, Davis noted that continued access through the Bendigo area, particularly via a realigned and maintained Thomson Gorge Road, is key to ensuring the ongoing success of the trek. He confirmed that as long as some level of access remains, the Cavalcade can continue to operate through the area.

Davis also highlighted the potential for the mine to enhance recreational use. He has previously facilitated multiple adventure races in the Bendigo Conservation Area and believes the addition of a working mine could add an exciting new dimension to future events.

Overall, both the Goldfields Trust and the Cavalcade are in support of the project and the proposed road realignment, viewing the mine as a valuable asset for Central Otago.