

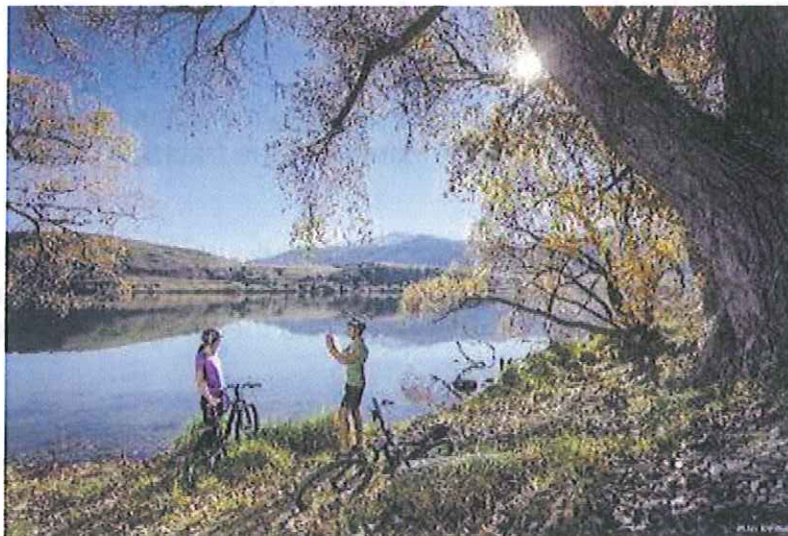
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Wakatipu wanderings

By *John Fridd*
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[Previous](#) || [Next](#)



Riders pause for a photo during an autumn ride on the Lake Hayes Circuit. Photo by Miles Holden.



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The Wakatipu boasts a network of world-class trails suitable for biking, walking and running, the product of more than a decade of work by the Queenstown Trails Trust and spending of \$8.2 million to date.

Mountain bikers John Fridd and Peter Atkinson assess the trails.

Snaking across the flattish Wakatipu Basin, the Queenstown Trails are suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

And the trails are only one of many options for keen mountain bikers - there are also heaps of other tracks and bike parks in the hills around Queenstown and more extreme activities such as serious down-hilling and helibiking available.

On a bike, it's possible to cruise from the Queenstown CBD over to Arrowtown, then down to the Gibbston valley for a bungy jump or a wine.

Or if you're more confident, you can go cross-country on a testing single-track to Jacks Point resort or tackle the hilly trail beside the Kawarau River.

The big plus about riding in the Queenstown area is the reason so many tourists come to the resort - the stunning scenery, which looks even better from a bike. If you don't have a bike, there are plenty of hire options in Queenstown - even electric bikes for those who want a little boost.

Arrow River Bridges

Ride Of all the Queenstown Trails, this 12km adventure is a personal favourite.

It starts by the Arrow River just below Arrowtown's cluster of restaurants and heads downstream, winding beside the picturesque river through willows which shade the trail on a hot day. After 1.7km you reach the first of six bridges over the Arrow, giving you the option of crossing for a slightly hillier ride on the other side.

The trails converge at the second bridge 1.5km downstream and the route breaks out into open country, with a few little ups and downs. About 6km down the track you reach SH6 and the trail crosses beneath the highway bridge.

It then meanders through the countryside before reaching the most spectacular crossing, the Edgar suspension bridge across the Arrow River gorge just above the Kawarau confluence. Just down the trail you'll dive under SH6 via an underpass and then hug the hillside on the way down to the Kawarau bungy site.

The well-built trail crosses the historic suspension bridge, which marks the end of the Arrow River Bridges Trail. This trail is classed as "easy", meaning it's suitable for everyone.

If you've ridden down from Arrowtown, you can have coffee at the bungy site or head down a short track to Gibbston Valley Wines and the Cheesery, which both welcome bikers.

- John Fridd

Countryside Ride

This 12km jaunt links the old Shotover bridge and Arrowtown via quiet back roads, not shared trails (as is the case with others).

I started at the old Shotover bridge, just upstream from the SH6 bridge, after riding most of the Twin Rivers trail. From the bridge, ride down the bank and under the bridge then follow the trail through weeping willows.

Then comes a steep climb to the top of the river terrace which is out of keeping with the rest of this easy ride. Turn left on to Lower Shotover Rd. If you fancy testing yourself on some hills, turn right on to Slopehill Rd when you reach it.

If not, keep biking and take the next right on to Speargrass Flat Rd. The easy riding takes you down past some interesting galleries and offers great views of Coronet Peak. Just where Slopehill Rd meets Speargrass Flat Rd, watch on the left for the turnoff to the track which winds through Millbrook Estate.

I missed it as, pushed by a tailwind, I was belting down the road. I discovered later the Millbrook Trail - and sprawling Millbrook resort itself - are worth a visit and there's the added option of a coffee stop at the cafe by the green, which features great coffee and service. From Millbrook it's a quick ride to Arrowtown.

- John Fridd

Lake Hayes Circuit Track

This ride can look a bit daunting when first viewed.

However, in practice the well-designed 8km loop is a doddle. I started on the lakefront just off SH6 and tackled the trail anti-clockwise, cruising along in front of some sensational lakefront homes.

At the Arrowtown end of the lake the trail winds through a reserve kept cool by willow trees before climbing gradually up the side of the hill on the Queenstown side of Lake Hayes.

On this trail the views switch from the Southern Alps to the majestic Remarkables as you progress around the lake and on a calm day the reflections on the lake are just that - remarkable.

The climb didn't seem too bad to me and soon I was cruising along above the lake and starting the downhill, which leads to a nature reserve complete with boardwalks to keep walkers and bikers dry (Lake Hayes is known for its birdlife and the wetlands are a good place for bird-spotting).

The track emerges from the willows surrounding the reserve and you're back on the highway lakefront, so you've done a whole circuit.

Expect it to take about 45 minutes for an average rider and between 2 and 3 hours on foot.

- John Fridd

Twin Rivers Ride

This is a more serious 26km ride, as it includes some decent hills. I started the ride from the Gibbston end, turning off the Arrow River trail near the Edgar suspension bridge and Morven Ferry Rd.

The trail initially winds through a deer farm (complete with over-bridge for farm animals and vehicles) before a climb takes riders to a vantage point overlooking the picturesque Kawarau River.

From here, the trail winds along the river like a roller coaster opposite the majestic Remarkables until it reaches the Shotover River and swings north to follow the Shotover for a short time.

Don't be surprised if you have to give way to massive earthmoving machines in this area, as there's a huge housing development taking shape above the trail.

Ride under the SH6 bridge and up to the old highway bridge, now part of the Twin Rivers Trail and off-limits to motorised traffic. After you cross the bridge, you'll see a toilet with a unique feature, a compressed air hose in case your bike's tyres need a top-up.

The trail heads down beside the western bank of the Shotover and on to the delta. Don't be surprised if you hear sudden aircraft noise, you are just below the eastern end of the airport runway.

Heading west up the Kawarau River the wide trail gives you a superb view of this quiet stretch of water, where locals often fish for trout and salmon. It's one of the most attractive river trails in the district.

Then follows a short, steep climb to the Remarkables Park terrace. Where it follows the terrace edge, the trail is of Rolls-Royce quality - wide and smooth.

Descending from the terrace the trail crosses open farmland and eventually passes the local

kindergarten, its presence signalled by a very small bike rack.

A minute later, you're crossing the main road towards Frankton beach and the end of the Twin Rivers Ride.

- John Fridd/Peter Atkinson

Gibbston River Trail

This trail is rated by the Department of Conservation as "unrivalled" in the Wakatipu because of its scenic and historic values.

It incorporates parts of the Gibbston River Trail - built by the local community as a walking track - to make it safer for mountain bikers, although the original river trail remains for expert bikers as well as those on foot.

The new section is built to Doc's high standard. It extends from the old Winehouse restaurant at the Bungy down to opposite the Gibbston Valley winery, where it forks. The left trail returns along the cliffs to the Winehouse; the other trail continues east and takes in parts of the old track but avoids the cliff edges.

At Peregrine vineyard it climbs via two hairpins and comes out on the highway side of the vineyard. It then continues east beyond Waitiri Creek winery, then crosses the highway to head east to Gibbston Back Rd.

This loops back on to the highway down Coal Pit Rd, crosses the highway to the Peregrine track, west to cross the highway again at Resta Rd on the left, which turns west about 50m along and joins the Rabbit Ridge Bike Resort trail to Gibbston Winery and Cheesery.

This circuit is mostly "easy" with minor climbs and a big descent.

- Peter Atkinson (Queenstown Pedallers)

Jacks Point Ride

Beginners are advised to steer clear of this 14km ride, which is actually a Doc track.

It's rated "advanced" by the trails trust and "intermediate" by local riding group the Queenstown Pedallers. That's because of the steep, unprotected drop-offs to Lake Wakatipu, blind corners around bluffs and short steep descents/climbs in the most extreme sections.

The ride starts in Jardine Park on Poplar Dr, Kelvin Heights. The trail winds its way around bluffs as you head south above the lake, with wonderful views of Cecil Peak across the water.

The next few kilometres are very scenic, but concentrate on the tight bends and watch for oncoming riders on the narrower sections. You'll need to stop if you want to really take in the panoramic views of lake and mountains.

The trail eventually flattens out before descending almost to lake level. A long, steady climb takes you up to the eastern edge of the Jacks Point course.

At the top sign, ride (or walk) up a short incline and then through grass and shrubs to the crest of a rocky knoll, giving you stunning mountain views to the west and also east over the Jacks Point estate towards the Remarkables.

Coffee is available at the Jacks Point Clubhouse - if you've got the energy to climb the hill again afterwards.

Another point of interest at Jacks Point is the view of up to 10 visitors at a time jumping out of a perfectly good plane at 5000 feet and parapenting down to the landing field on the eastern

boundary of the estate. Another amazing photo opportunity.

Then it's time to retrace your wheel tracks to Kelvin Heights, enjoying more superb views of Queenstown and Bobs Peak ahead, and mountains above.

- Peter Atkinson

Lake Wakatipu Ride

This 15km trail starts from the lakefront in central Queenstown and winds around Queenstown Gardens before following the lake out to Frankton.

It's easy riding and used by many Queenstown commuters, so you could encounter traffic. If you want an early coffee, call at the popular Boatshed Cafe and try the sticky buns.

The trail cruises around the Frankton waterfront to the historic lake outlet bridge, soon to lose SH6 to a super new bridge to be built downstream. Then the old bridge will become part of the Queenstown Trails.

Take the lakeside trail again and pass the impressive Hilton Hotel and the million-dollar "cribs" which offer views across Frankton Arm to the Southern Alps.

A feature of the ride around the peninsula is the chance to see three new sculptures in the pine forest sheltering the golf course at the end of Kelvin Peninsula. The first is a dramatic modern sculpture, one of three donated by a local resident, camouflaged among the pines by its slim vertical shape and colouring.

Soon you'll pass the slipway where the venerable TSS Earnslaw gets her annual survey and you'll be touring the end of the peninsula, occupied by the Queenstown Golf Club.

Further on, at a rocky point, you'll see the next sculpture, a group of three large animals standing on the rocks like sentinels.

At the next clearing is the third sculpture, equally stunning, with its focus on Walter Peak wharf on the west shore of Lake Wakatipu. If you stop for a moment you'll understand what the sculptor had in mind.

Coming out of the final section of forest you'll see ahead a dramatic landscape, with the famous Hole 5 beside the trail, framed by the Remarkables in the distance. Watch out for golf balls. -

John Fridd/Peter Atkinson

● If you're planning to try the trails in the Wakatipu, pick up a Queenstown Trail brochure and also visit: www.queenstowntrail.co.nz [2]

Magazine Summer Times

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