



# St James Cycle Trail

## official trail guide

ST JAMES CONSERVATION AREA



Department of Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai

## St James Cycle Trail — putting the 'mountain' into mountain biking!

Opened in November, 2010, the St James Cycle Trail was the first of the New Zealand Cycle Trail/Nga Haerenga 'Great Rides' to be completed.

The 64-km trail offers challenging mixed-grade riding through stunning scenery of mountain peaks, crystal-clear rivers, high-country lakes, alpine meadows, subalpine beech forest, and expansive grassy river flats. In spring the alpine meadows are in full bloom while summer offers long evenings and the chance to see the famous St James wild horses.

The beginning and end sections of the trail comprise Easy and Intermediate grade riding. The central section comprises difficult and remote Advanced grade riding, with river crossings and bike carrying in places. Riders need to be fit and experienced to do the full trail.

The St James Cycle Trail is a challenging journey through some of New Zealand's most spectacular high country—a true mountain-biking experience you will never forget!

**Trail summary**  
Length: 64 km  
Grade: Advanced  
Total climb: 710 m  
Time: 6–9 hours/1–2 days  
Fitness level: Good  
Skill level: Intermediate

### Further information

New Zealand Cycle Trails: [www.nzcycletrail.com](http://www.nzcycletrail.com)

DOC: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

P: 03 313 0820

(Waimakariri Area Office)

E: [waimakariri@doc.govt.nz](mailto:waimakariri@doc.govt.nz)

Hanmer Springs i-site:

[www.visithanmersprings.co.nz](http://www.visithanmersprings.co.nz)

P: 0800 442 663

E: [info@visithurunui.co.nz](mailto:info@visithurunui.co.nz)

Weather forecasts:

[www.metservice.com](http://www.metservice.com)

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## St James Conservation Area


St James Conservation Area is managed by the Department of Conservation, and covers 78,000 ha of mountains, rivers, lakes and wetlands.

The Clarence and Waiau valleys were key routes for Māori travelling between the east and west coasts. The area was one of the largest operating cattle/sheep stations in the country dating back to 1862. Much of the farming heritage is still visible today, including the herd of wild horses which roam the Waiau valley.

## Getting there

From Christchurch, take SH1, SH7 and SH7A to Hanmer Springs. Offering a range of quality accommodation and cafés, Hanmer Springs is an ideal location from which to base your St James Cycle Trail experience. After your ride, the village's famous thermal pools are a treat for weary legs.

From Hanmer Springs take Clarence Valley Road over Jacks Pass to connect with Tophouse Road (13 km from Hanmer Springs). This road follows the eastern boundary of St James Conservation Area as far as Lake Tennyson. The trail starts and finishes on Tophouse Road.

 *These are back-country gravel roads suitable for 2WD vehicles. Take care as there are narrow sections and blind corners, and dust from other vehicles can severely reduce visibility. Be ready to encounter cyclists and horse-riders at any time.*

## Riding the trail

The best time to ride the St James Cycle Trail is from November to April. The 60-km trail starts at the Maling Pass entrance, and finishes at St James Homestead. Travelling in this direction provides more downhill riding, and the prevailing wind is more favourable.

Off-road parking is available at both ends. Riders may choose to leave their vehicles at the Homestead and cycle 25 km up Tophouse Road to the start of the trail. **Do not leave valuables in your vehicle.**

Camping areas and toilets are provided at the St James Homestead and Lake Tennyson, there is also a day shelter at the Homestead. There are three 4-bunk huts and numerous camping spots along the trail. NB: The historic huts are maintained to preserve their heritage and provide basic shelter with limited facilities.

## Easier half-day option

For young families or riders with insufficient time or experience to attempt the full trail, the Homestead Run will give you a taste of St James.

### Homestead Run—for a taste of St James (15 km)

From the St James Homestead, ride up valley on Section D–E to Peters Pass where a great picnic spot overlooks Waterfall Stream. Follow the trail until it intersects with the Edwards valley 4WD track. Head east (right) down the 4WD track to connect with Tophouse Road, then ride 3 km down valley to the Homestead.

## New Zealand Cycle Trail grades



**Grade 2**—Some gentle climbs, smooth trail. Suitable for beginner riders, the trail is predictable with no surprises. Riders able to ride side by side at times, but possibly large sections of single trail.



**Grade 3**—Narrow trail, there will be some hills to climb, obstacles may be encountered on the trail, and there may be exposure on the edge of the trail. Suitable for riders with intermediate level skills.




**Grade 4**—Steep climbs, with unavoidable obstacles on a narrow trail, and there will be poor traction in places. Possibly some walking sections. Suitable for intermediate and advanced riders.

## Code of conduct for shared-use tracks

You may meet walkers, 4WD vehicles and horse-riders on this trail. Please follow the code of conduct for shared-use tracks:

- Respect that other users have different, and valid, reasons for being there.
- Anticipate other users around corners or in blind spots.
- Expect the unexpected; cycle at a speed you can stop safely if a hazard arises.
- Do not startle other users—greet them when approaching.
- The basic give-way rule for shared-use tracks is: 4WD and other motor vehicles give way to walkers, cyclists and horses; cyclists give way to walkers and horses; and walkers give way to horses.
- Common sense and courtesy prevail at all times.

## Plan and prepare

 *Your safety is your responsibility: The trail travels through a remote alpine environment, subject to weather extremes, flooded rivers and avalanches.*

**Tele-communications:** There is *no cell phone coverage beyond Jacks Pass*. Take a satellite phone, mountain radio or PLB (personal locator beacon). Hire outlets are listed on [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz).

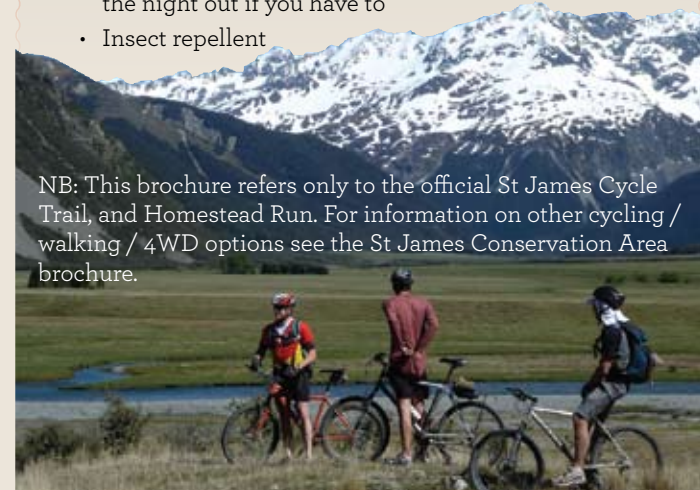
**Rivers:** Treat all rivers with respect; *never* attempt to cross swollen rivers or streams.

**Avalanches:** Maling Pass can be affected by avalanches in spring/early summer when warmer temperatures or rain make the snow unstable. Even if you cannot see snow from the track there may be enough snow on upper slopes to form an avalanche that could reach the track.

**Drinking water:** We recommend you boil, filter or treat your water. Avoid taking water from the lakes as waterfowl are often present in large numbers.

### Before your trip ensure you have:

- Thoroughly prepared your bicycle for the trip
- Obtained current Cycle Trail status from the DOC website or Hanmer Springs i-site
- Checked the latest weather forecast
- Left your intentions with someone
- Essential bicycle spares and tools
- A 406MHz PLB or mountain radio
- Enough warm clothing and extra food to spend the night out if you have to
- Insect repellent



NB: This brochure refers only to the official St James Cycle Trail, and Homestead Run. For information on other cycling / walking / 4WD options see the St James Conservation Area brochure.

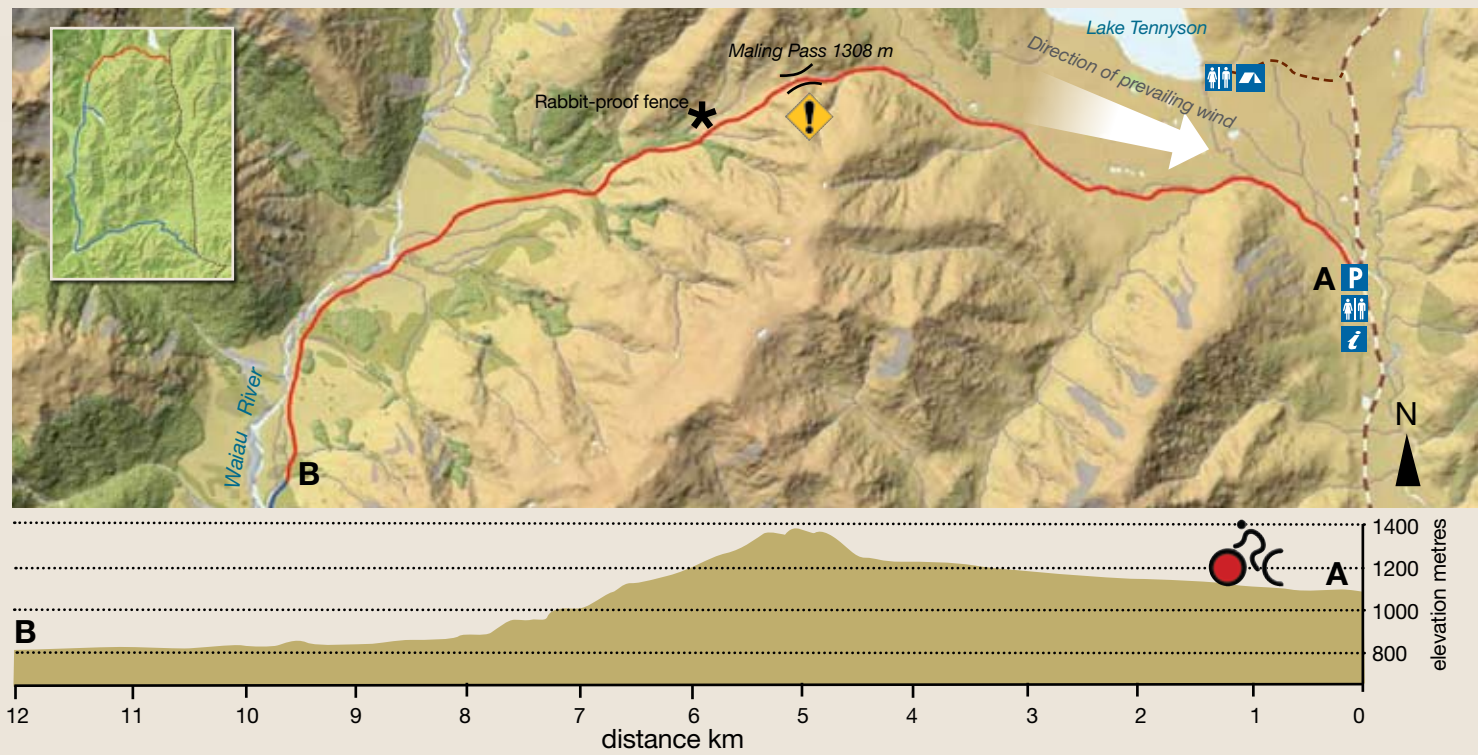
**Section A–B: Maling car park to Waiau 4WD road end**  
12 km, Grade 3, 1–1 hour 30 min, climb +250 metres



Starting at the Maling car park, the trail follows the 4WD track. Gentle at first, the trail soon steadily climbs towards Maling Pass (6.5 km), the high point of the trail (1,308 m). From the pass, the trail descends steeply through alpine meadows and mountain beech forest into the Waiau valley, crossing streams along the way. Once on the valley floor (10 km), the trail levels out and follows the true-left of the river to the road end.

**!** *Maling Pass is the most sensible place to turn back if you have doubts about your ability to complete the entire trail safely. After this point the trail descends very steeply—control your speed when negotiating the numerous drainage ditches that cross the track.*

**\*** *Rabbit-proof fence: Visible to the right of the trail as you descend from Maling Pass—completed in 1889, the fence extended 125 km from the Main Divide to the Pacific Coast.*



**Section B–C: Waiau 4WD road end to Saddle Spur Bridge**



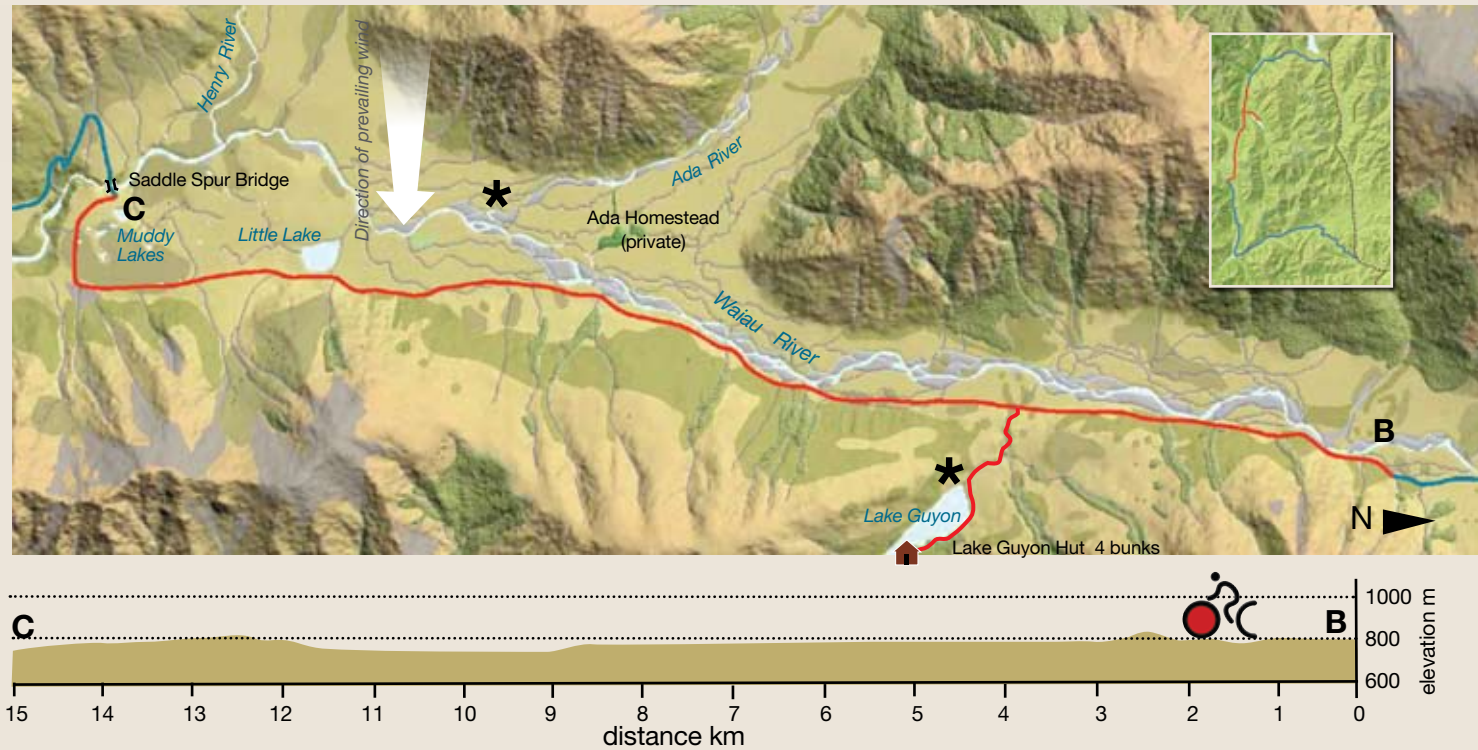
15.5 km, Grade 3, 1 hr 30 min–2 hr 30 min, climb +20 m  
(Add 4 km if you go to visit Lake Guyon Hut)

The first third of this section is a purpose-built Easy grade cycle track. From the road end, the trail traverses the hillside on the true left of the Waiau River, before emerging onto the wide river terraces at the junction with the Lake Guyon Track (4.5 km). The trail now follows old stock and farm tracks that meander down valley over the grassy river flats, passing by Little Lake and Muddy Lakes before arriving at the spectacular Saddle Spur Bridge.

*Note: Once past the junction, be sure to follow the blue trail markers—there are numerous other tracks that can lead you astray.*

**\*** *Lake Guyon: Also part of the cycle trail is a short detour to this picturesque lake and is well worth the effort (1 km/10 min one way). Cool off with a swim or continue on to the hut (2.5 km/20 min).*

**\*** *The famous St James wild horses can often be seen grazing the river flats.*



### Section C–D: Saddle Spur Bridge to Scotties Hut

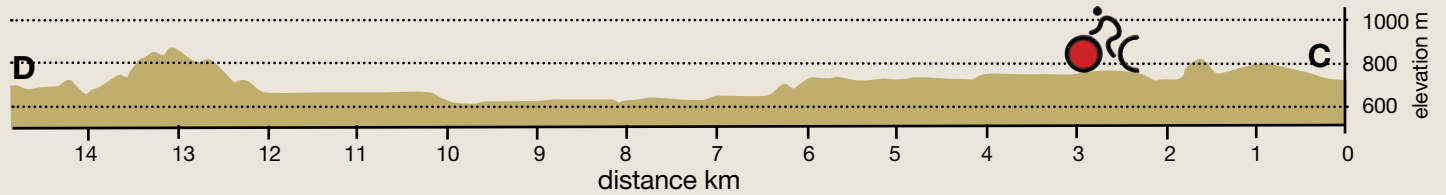
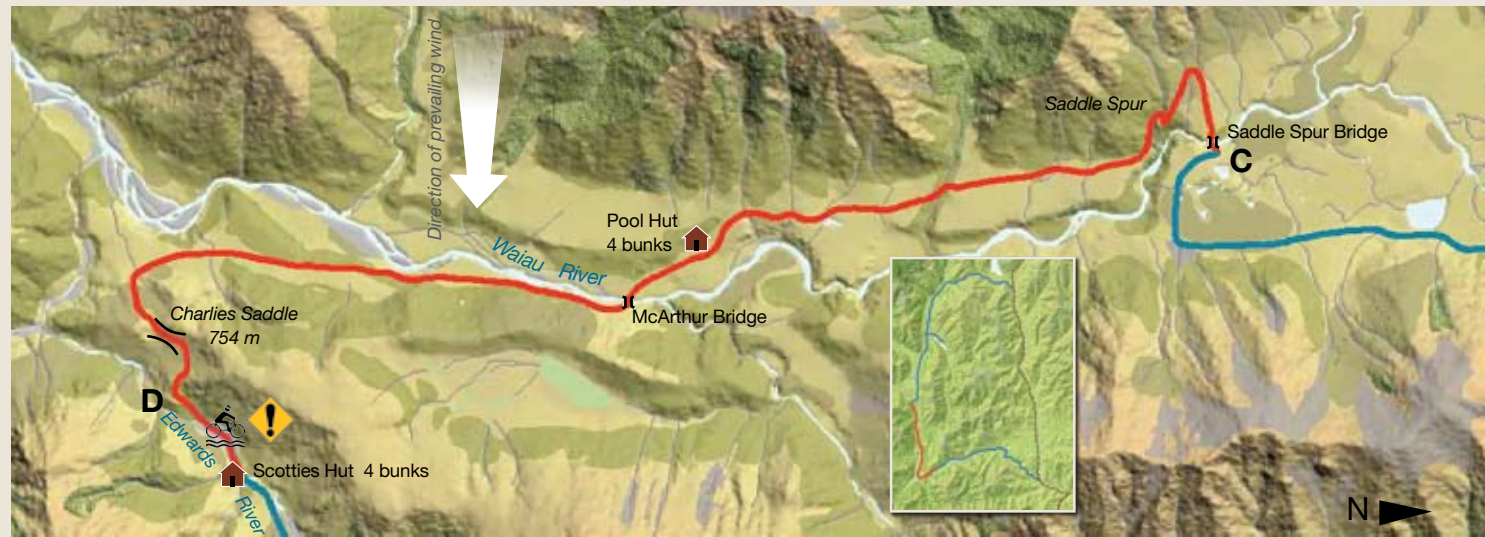
14.5 km, Grade 4, 2–3 hours, climb +240 metres



This section presents the most challenging riding on the trail. The track is very rocky and uneven in places, with hard climbs, tricky descents, and giant matagouri forest. Once over Saddle Spur Bridge, the trail crosses the demanding Saddle Spur to reach Pool Hut (7 km). The trail then crosses the McArthur Bridge, and follows an old farm track up a series of terraces before climbing steeply to Charlies Saddle (12.3 km). After a winding descent, wade the Edwards River to arrive at Scotties Hut.

*Note: Sections of the trail around Saddle Spur and after McArthur Bridge are very narrow, and pass steep drop-offs. It is strongly recommended to walk these sections.*

**Crossing Edwards River:** The Edwards River is shallow but fast flowing and will rise very quickly after heavy rain. Do not attempt to cross the river when discoloured and in flood. If it is high, it's probably wise to return to Pool Hut for overnight shelter.



### Section D–E: Scotties Hut to St James Homestead

17 km, Grades 3 then 2, 1 hr 30 min–2 hr 30 min, climb +200 metres



From Scotties Hut, follow the 4WD track up the Edwards valley. The trail is mostly easy and smooth, with short stretches of rocky riverbed and four unbridged stream crossings. The climb up to Peters Pass (10 km) is the last big effort on the trail—followed by an easy downhill run through the beautiful Peters Valley to the St James Homestead and the end of the trail.

*Note: Once the trail leaves the 4WD track above Peters Pass, be sure to follow the blue trail markers down into Peters Valley*

**Cow Stream:** The short detour to this hot spring is well worth the time and effort (1 km/10 min)—great to ease aching muscles and sore behinds!

**St James Homestead:** Numerous protected historic farm buildings dating back to the 1880s give a glimpse into the past glories of this high-country station. The woolshed deserves exploring.

