

Central road trip

Local lingo

The Pigroot

The origin of the name 'Pigroot' is not known for sure. Some local historians maintain that it arose from an incident in which two wagons were stuck in a quagmire on this road. When the driver of one wagon asked the other what it reminded him of, the reply was, 'A bloody pigroot'. Another version is that the name originated from the large number of wild pigs that once lived on the Kakanui Range.

Hey guess what?

Ophir was originally known as 'Blacks', but was renamed Ophir in 1875, after the biblical land from which the Queen of Sheba obtained gold for King Solomon. This was thought an appropriate name for a goldmining town!

?! What the...?!

As you travel through Lawrence, why not become an honorary citizen of this historic town? Just call in to the Information Centre to be recorded in the official citizens register!

My two cents

'The wide sweeping expanse of the Pigroot high country road – the waving tussock lands – the vast blue sky above, the distant mountains, snow-capped in winter or simmering under the summer sun. The loneliness broken only by the cry of the wheeling hawk.'

- Margaret Borland

Beautiful gorges and thyme-clad hills... fruit stalls and craggy schist outcrops... just some of the familiar sights to be glimpsed through your car window on one of New Zealand's best road trips. Whether travelling via the popular 'tourist trail' (State Highway 8), or by that route known to locals as the 'Pigroot' (State Highway 85), the dramatic and ever-changing scenery you pass through and the small rural towns you encounter, make for a terrific trip.

Following State Highway 8 from Milton, one of the first towns you come across is Lawrence, a well-preserved goldrush town founded in 1861, after the first gold in New Zealand was discovered in nearby Gabriel's Gully. As you continue on through Beaumont, Millers Flat, and Roxburgh, you can see the scenery change from rolling pastureland to rugged, rocky hills. By the time you reach Alexandra, the hills have become as barren as a moonscape. A little bit up the road you come to Clyde, the historic little town which lies at the end of the Central Otago Rail Trail and at the foot of the controversial dam which created Lake Dunstan. Founded on gold in 1862, Cromwell is now rapidly expanding, largely due to its successful fruit and wine industries.

The trip via the Pigroot is equally stunning. Turning inland at Palmerston, you follow the once tortuous route taken by miners in the 1860s and travel past the turn-off to New Zealand's largest working goldmine at Macraes, through spectacular countryside to the rural art deco centre of Ranfurly. From here the road takes you past a number of goldrush ghost towns, such as St Bathans and Cambrians. Naseby, once home to 5,000 goldminers is a popular diversion en route, and also a great holiday spot in its own right. Continuing on through the beautiful Manuherikia Valley, you pass through Omakau, and then Ophir, with its well preserved stone cottages and post office, before rejoining State Highway 8 at Alexandra.



Lawrence's main street



View from State Highway 85, the 'Pigroot'

