

Tuapeka punt

X marks the spot

From Balclutha, take the sealed road up the north bank of the river. After 20km you'll reach the settlement of Clutha Valley, with Clydevale on the hillside opposite. At Greenvale, instead of turning right and down to the Clydevale bridge, drive straight ahead for about 5km.

Stat attack

The 1896 fares on the Tuapeka Mouth punt were sixpence for passengers and horses, threepence each for cattle, a penny each for 20 or less sheep, a halfpenny each for between 20 and 200 sheep, and a farthing each for over 200 sheep.

Local nuggets

If you want to try it out the 130m trip, skippered by Peter Dickson, takes about four minutes. It is available for two hours in the morning (8am to 10am) and another two (4pm to 6pm) in the afternoon.

Crossing rivers seems so easy when all you have to do is drive over a bridge, but for people wishing to get from one side of the Clutha River to the other in the 19th century it was a major issue, particularly if they wanted to move farm stock at the same time.

After a lengthy period of lobbying, tenders were called for the provision of a public ferry service at Tuapeka Mouth in August 1895. The building contract was let to Tyson & Dunlop for the sum of £333 and the Tuapeka Mouth punt, 'essentially a platform on two boats', was officially opened on 22 February 1896. The imposition of charges was a contentious issue, and the *Otago Witness* opined the following month, 'the settlers here are as much entitled to a free punt as any other part of the country, and I think they are just the people to have their rights (and a little more)'.

In its first month of service, 336 passengers and 255 horses crossed the Clutha on the Tuapeka Punt. It became one of three within a 14km stretch of the river: there was one at Clydevale 11km downstream, and the Rongahere punt operated 3.2km upstream. The original craft was replaced in 1915 by the punt that had previously operated on the Waiau River at Tuatapere, in neighbouring Southland.

The local community celebrated the Tuapeka Mouth punt's centenary in 1986 with a day of special events. The punt remains fully operational today.



Vintage car ready to cross on the Tuapeka Mouth punt in the 1960s



The Tuapeka Mouth punt, 2007

