

The Inland Scenic Route, NZ's Best Drive.

Staying in Geraldine and keen to explore the wider area? Or, heading north from Geraldine and keen to find out about onward destinations?

Depending on your point of view, Geraldine marks either the beginning or end of Inland Scenic Route 72. This route encapsulates the quintessential Kiwi country drive taking in four very distinct districts and offering a taste of genuine Kiwi life that is not to be missed. As gently rolling farmland gives way to the majestic peaks of the Southern Alps, simple pleasures and secret adventures can be found along the way.

Scenic Route 72 takes around 2 hours to complete if driven without stop but you'll want to allow at least a day, or even a week, to explore all the activities, walks and scenery just waiting to be discovered. It is a quiet route where you'll often find your vehicle to be the only one in sight. Travel times are comparable to the busier highways; it's just a whole lot more enjoyable.



Leaving Geraldine along the Scenic Route the first major turnoff is Peel Forest. Here you'll find native bush walks and adventure activities including rafting, kayaking, canyoning and horse riding.

This area is home to one of the very few pieces of ancient podocarp native forest still to be found in the Canterbury region. Past Peel Forest village the road continues out to Mesopotamia Station where perseverance is rewarded with breath-taking views of the Rangitata River valley below from the aptly named 'wow corner'.

Back on route, the bridge across the Rangitata River signals the boundary of the Timaru District and the entrance to Mid Canterbury District.

The small town of Mayfield is the next stop and the place retro collectable store, Overflow, calls home. If one man's junk is another man's treasure, Overflow could be considered a veritable gold mine. Fossick for hours for all sorts of items but make sure there is plenty of space in your vehicle for purchases as you are sure not to leave empty handed.

Further on, the quaint village of Mt Somers is the setting for a fine dining experience at Stronecrubie restaurant. This award-winning restaurant is a wonderful place for a special occasion.

A casual greenery filled bistro also serves hearty meals for those wanting a relaxed bite. Accommodation is also available so you can dine and relax without the need to drive home. If you are paying attention while exploring the village you may just get a glimpse of a very interesting hedge.



Mt Somers is a great place to pause for a day or two while exploring the hinterland where fantastic walks, rides and fishing can be found. The village has a quaint Holiday Park and a fantastic traditional style shop with long opening hours and **24-hour fuel** available at excellent prices.

The inland turnoff at Mt Somers follows a well formed shingle road to Lakes Camp and Clearwater for boating, wind surfing, fishing and walking. Before reaching the lakes make sure you take the time to stop and view the old Hakatere Station buildings which include a shearer's quarters, cook house and stone cottage. Imagine life as it must have been for the hardy and hardworking souls who lived and worked in this isolated area right up until the 1980's.

Leaving the lakes, continue further along the same road to Mt Sunday, known to *Lord of the Rings* fans as 'Edoras'. The summit is an easy 30-minute walk (each way) where spectacular views of the Rangitata River valley, across towards Mesopotamia Station on the southern side of the river, will impress. At the very end of the road lies Erewhon Station, nestled right among the Southern Alps where majestic Clydesdale horses are the main type of horsepower used for farm work.

Back on route, Staveley is a small town famous for its coffee, café and access to local walks. There is a small museum and in winter a natural outdoor ice rink for skating. An historic limestone kiln can be visited just outside the town while other walks include the very popular Woolshed Creek trail.

This 1-3 hour walk to a well serviced hut (sleeps 26 people) makes an excellent introduction to New Zealand multi-day walks or for those with limited time. The area is full of history and interesting landscape to explore. The walk is suitable for most abilities and families.

On the road again, pass through Alford Forest, site of a very brief diamond rush in 1883, until it was found that the diamonds discovered were in fact common crystals. The layout of streets, for 161 planned quarter acre sections, is all that remains of the hopes of those prospectors.

A short detour from the Inland Scenic Route north of Alford Forest will bring you to Methven, a town that hums as a winter destination and base for New Zealand's most acclaimed Ski field, Mt Hutt. It is also a great place to experience hot air ballooning. For a truly unique café experience in Methven, visit Café Primo e Secundo on McMillan St. Find delicious coffee and fresh fare served in an antique shop type setting.

For more information on the Mid Canterbury District visit www.midcanterburynz.com. For more information on Methven and surrounds visit www.methven.com.

Back on the road; travel down into the Rakaia River Gorge. One of the South Island's mighty braided rivers, the Rakaia is briefly confined in a narrow canyon to form the gorge which is traversed by two road bridges. This is a great stop for photographs and to stretch your legs.



If you have a little more time the Rakaia Gorge Walkway is a 3-4 hour walk that follows the rim of the gorge through spectacular geological areas, with a side loop that takes walkers down to the river itself. Another way to experience the river is by jet boat, which weaves its way through the opalescent blue waters rich with salmon and trout.

In the car and climbing out of the gorge on the northern side brings travellers to the Selwyn District and Windwhistle where the road makes a sharp 90 degree turn, for no apparent reason. Oh, and it's windy (the clue is in the name!)

Close by is the resort and championship golf at Terrace Downs, the hidden gem that is Washpen Falls, as well as pristine Lake Coleridge.

Continuing, Glentunnel is a lovely little village with a picturesque country school and a fascinating museum detailing the coal mining history of the area. Visit historic Homebush estate, home to the Deans family, prominent early settlers of Christchurch and Canterbury.

The Glentunnel Post Office, an intriguing ornate small brick octagonal shaped building was opened around 1860 and is one of the oldest operating Post Offices in New Zealand. It was built with bricks from the adjacent (now demolished) Homebush Brick and Pottery works established by the Deans Family at that time. The Post Office is staffed by volunteers and is open Monday to Friday 9 to 11am and acts as a community library. For accommodation and more info about lovely Glentunnel visit www.accommodationintheglen.co.nz.

A little further on, the road divides in two with the Inland Scenic Route 72 heading off to the left and the right leading into the plains town of Darfield and on to State Highway 73, all the way to central Christchurch.

For more information on the Selwyn District visit www.sensationalselwyn.co.nz.

For those continuing northwards, or with a little more time to take a longer route into Christchurch, it is well worth the effort to stick with the scenic route where you'll soon find yourself at the intersection with the road to the West Coast.

Arthurs Pass, at the top of the main divide, is an amazing destination but if you are planning on staying on the East Coast then follow the road across the Waimakariri River Gorge to the cute town of Oxford.

This is the place to which Christchurch residents make a bee line to escape the city on sunny days and long weekends. It has bags of character, great cafes and boutique shopping. A must see is the Oxford Gallery, Museum and Heritage Jail.

If books are your weakness Emmas at Oxford is the place for you – with the tag line ‘The best (not so) Little Book Shop in Canterbury. Swing by Cavan Farm to grab a bottle of fresh milk from the self-serving milk dispensing machines at the farm shop. Delicious milk straight from the cow.



Nearby Ashley Gorge is a favourite camping and swimming spot for families.

The last leg of the Inland Scenic Route takes in the pretty village of Cust. Take a breather at the Route 72 Cafe Bar Emporium, enjoy a stroll and take in the scents at Querky Style

and Roses at Cust and visit the magical world at Away with the Fairies.

Back on the road takes you to the bustling north Canterbury town of Rangiora - A growing town with a vibrant community and plenty of annual events.

While the Inland Scenic Route officially ends here, a tour would not be complete without a visit to the planned modern town of Pegasus. Just a 10-minute drive from Rangiora, situated off State Highway 1, this highly desirable town was first developed in 2008 and features a lake, golf course, town shopping centre, wetlands and beach. Take a stroll around and see if you might like to live in Pegasus.

Leaving Pegasus, a right turn onto State Highway 1 takes you to the coastal delights of Kaikoura or a left turn will steer your course into the historic city of Christchurch.

For more information on the Waimakariri District visit www.visitwaimakiriri.com.

Whether travelled from south to north, or north to south, the Inland Scenic Route is one of New Zealand’s great drives and a must do for all visitors to this dynamic, interesting and stunning region.

Note: this journey could become a loop by adding a visit to Christchurch, Akaroa and Ashburton, via the Canterbury Pacific Highway, to the itinerary and ending back in Geraldine, where a warm welcome awaits!