Welcome to the Catlins Coastal Heritage Trail Situated in the South Catlins area of Southland, Te Aau Tai Tonga, this trail provides a rewarding detour off the Southern Scenic Route. Covering approximately 317 kms along 11 trail sites, including 112 kms of gravel road, the Catlins Coastal Heritage Trail runs between Niagara (389 kms from Dunedin) and Fortrose (73 kms from Invercargill). It can be travelled in either direction, thereby complementing your existing travel plans.

The South Catlins is an area of isolated beaches, rugged coastline, native forest and wildlife as well as sheep, beef and dairying farming. The ports at Waikawa and Fortrose each had a whaling station and throughout the years an interest in fishing. Though small, the Falls could not be seen the large North American falls and with an obvious sense of humour! He had named these small falls after them. The Niagara Falls was named by a surveyor for its saw milling. Sadly today little evidence remains of those settlements, most of which were sited on what is now private farmland.

The scenic beauty and rich history of the area undoubtly along the Coastal Heritage Trail. To fully appreciate 11 trail sites, including the short walks, be sure to allow at least 5 hours for the total experience. Food is available at Fortrose, Slope Point, Curio Bay, Waikawa and Niagara. If you have more time to spare, prolong your stay and enjoy some genuine South Catlins hospitality from the varying options of country accommodation available. See website www.catlins.org.nz. Drive safely and have fun exploring this special part of New Zealand!

The first people to live at Waikawa were Southern Māori of the Kāi Tahu, Kāi Maramo and Waitaha tribes to travel to their many sites of cultural significance. It was later used as a bridge track by goldminers.

The actual road was formed in the 1880’s so that the coach could run between Waikawa and Fortrose (approximately 50 km). It was also used by other horse draw vehicles. The Waikawa end followed the beach and was built up by hand with stone quarried locally. By 1900 the alternative inland route, through Tokanui, was used by the coach and other travellers.

A section of the old road near the Waikawa Harbour is a twenty-minute return walk, which should only be undertaken at low tide.

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The Waipohatu walking track and picnic area has been developed on conservation land at the edge of the Waikawa Forest, which is a strictly protected area. They are a national treasure and the rock face is 180 million years old. They are a national treasure and the rock face is 180 million years old. They are a national treasure and the rock face is 180 million years old.

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The Waipua Reef was the scene of New Zealand’s worst civilian shipwreck at Waipapa Point were buried here in 1881. Other recovered bodies are buried at the Fortrose Cemetery.

On 29 April 1881, the SS Tararua ran aground on Waipapa Reef. Attempts were made to get passengers and crew ashore by lifeboats, but they encountered difficulties because of the rising sea. George Lawrence successfully swam 300 metres from a lifeboat to shore and made it to the nearest building owned by the Bruntons. From there he made a run to Wyndham to raise the alarm. Of the 151 passengers, 131 lives were lost.

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