

At the height of summer the spectacular crimson canopy of southern rata is visible in special places in many parts of Otago and Southland. Often tucked away on islands, coastal valleys, the margins of lakes and estuaries, inland hills and high ridges, southern rata features in a diverse range of forests, sometimes in pure young stands, or scattered, venerable sprawling trees, or upstanding shaggy giants of the tall forest. Southern rata is one of the many treasures revealed along the well known, and the remote, tourist routes of the far south.

On this Crimson Trail you will explore the wild and beautiful coast of southern New Zealand, the rich plains of Southland, the eastern edge of the vast wilderness of Fiordland and the spectacular scenery of the southern lakes.



Southern rata (*Metrosideros umbellata*).
 Supper Cove, Dusky Sound.



Southern rata

Southern rata is distinguished by its shiny, pointed leaves and scarlet flowers. It can mature as a tiny shrub, or tangled scrub. It can also form huge trees with trunks three metres thick, clothed in a shaggy grey-brown bark. Roots can descend from the trunk, anchor a sprawling tree, or cling like a giant hand to an outcrop of rock, creating tree forms as distinctive as any in the New Zealand bush.

It tolerates many types of soil from sand-dunes and coastal rocks, swamp, estuary and lake, river and fiord margins to wet, montane beech and bog forest, dry inland ridges and plateaux. All these places share one thing in common: open ground where the tiny seeds can germinate unimpeded by other trees. Southern rata is the home of mohua and nectar-feeding birds like tui and bellbird.

It graces many gardens and the ironwood timber has warmed many hearths. Today, rata is increasingly rare and it needs our help.

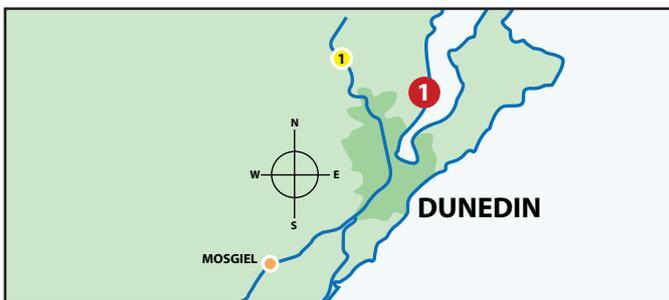
Let's explore the Otago/Southland Crimson Trail

1. Dunedin Botanical Gardens

To become familiar with southern rata and its relatives, visit Dunedin's Botanical Gardens. Take the Lovelock Avenue access, park in the Upper Gardens and follow the signs to the native section.

2. Moturata (Taieri) Island

Exit the Southern Motorway at Green Island and follow the coast road to Taieri Mouth. Stop at the lookout to view the island where local iwi, Department of Conservation and Project Crimson are restoring the original rata forest. View 'Rata Cottage' and the 1000-year old rata tree, just along Moturata Road.



3. Allison Conservation Area

To see the most northern natural stand of southern rata in coastal Otago, follow the Taieri Beach-Waihola Road to Ridley Road where you come to a walkway that takes you through a large grove of rata.



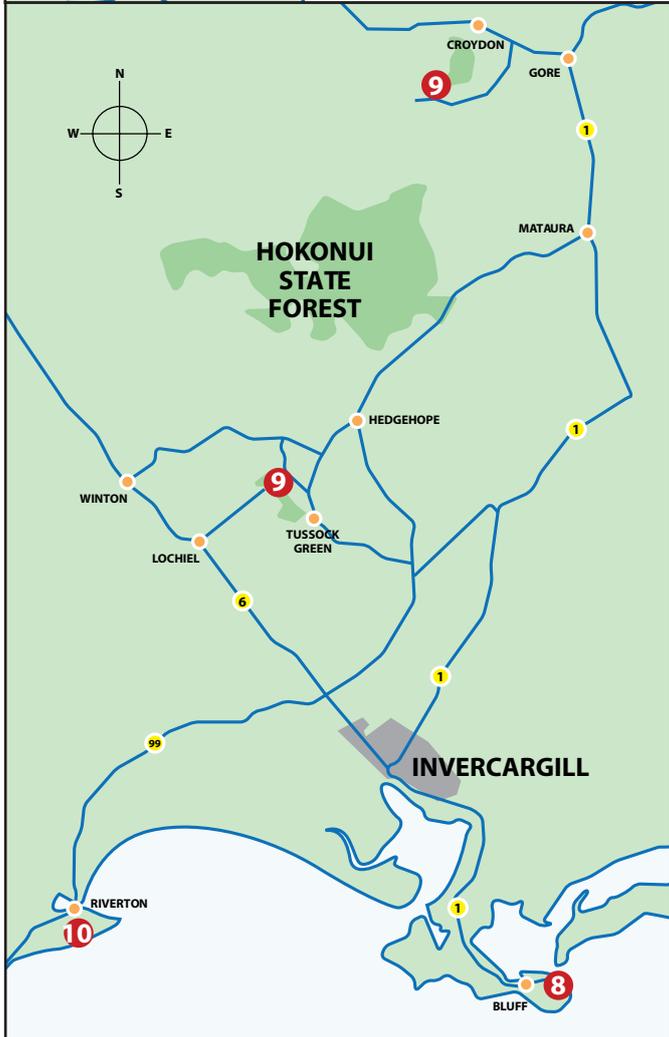
4. Bull Creek

This is a spectacular coastal valley dominated by rata down to the coast. Access is via Bull Creek Road, off Taieri Mouth Road or from Milton. A walkway leads up the valley from the settlement of holiday 'cribs' (baches or holiday cottages). The community here is planting rata seedlings to ensure long-term survival of the species in the area.

5. Rata Range, Catlins

From Owaka, drive 20 kilometres up the Owaka Valley Road to Chloris Pass.

Park and walk up the forestry road on the east (Rata Range) to view old rata forest typical of the high ridges of the Catlins. From the Pass, walk into the forest on Cedar Hill (behind the 'Coastal Catlins Rain Forest' sign) to the west to see large, old southern rata in their natural forest setting.



6. Tahakopa Estuary

At Papatowai, drive to the Picnic Point carpark. At low tide walk north along the Tahakopa estuary to view the fringe of rata reaching out across the sand; another characteristic pattern of rata growth in the Catlins.

7. Lake Wilkie

This walk is one of the gems of the Catlins. A forest succession is visible along the path, from rata seedlings at the lake edge, through shrubs growing in manuka bog, to large, mature trees in podocarp forest.

8. Bluff Hill

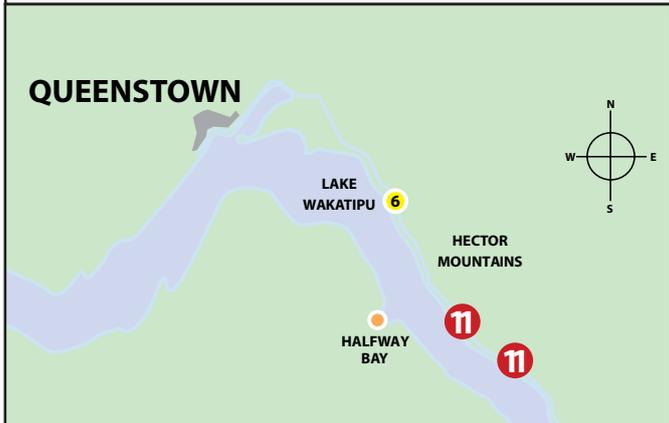
Start the Glory Track loop (named after a ship wrecked on the coast) at the elevated Gun-pit entrance, and enter the magic of primeval New Zealand rata forest, the tall dark rata trunks rising up from the fern-covered ground.

9. Inland Southland

At Dolamore Park, in the Hokonui Hills west of Gore, view inland rata trees within a remnant of podocarp forest featuring huge rimu. Note the dry ridge-line rata towards the lookout. Drive south-west to visit the giant rata tree at Forest Hill (Tussock Creek entrance) and other large rata along the northern track (Lochiel entrance).

10. Mores Reserve, Riverton

Wind has sheared the canopy of the coastal forest growing on limestone and old trees are dwarfed to a few metres high. Visit the lookout to see the wind-pruned canopy. Seek details on the best track to view rata from the Department of Conservation (Invercargill).



11. Lake Wakatipu

From Staircase Creek, north to the Wye River, groups of low, dense rata trees and shrubs grow on bluffs along the lake edge. Rata can also be seen at Kingston and (preferably by boat) at Bleakleys Creek, south-west of Queenstown, where rata is growing with a remnant of red beech forest.



Southern rata bloom



Southern rata in the Catlins



Southern rata forest



Southern rata bloom

Other Places of Interest

Borland Valley, Fiordland

From the Borland Lodge, drive along Transmission Tower Road and view scattered rata in mountain beech forest. Six kilometres along the road, take the steep forest track to the Borland Burn, observe the rata growing with Hall's totara in beech forest along the limestone bluff.

Other rata places of interest

- A salmon-pink-flowered rata grows at the Nugget View Motel, Kaka Point, and rata is a rare component of wind-swept scrub at spectacular Nugget Point
- In the Catlins, rata is a feature at many natural sites. It forms a coastal band in the Scenic Reserve at Pounaweia Campground. You can see rata across the estuary at the Tautuku boardwalk and at the Waikawa Cemetery. You find it on the beach at Purakaunui, as a fringe around McLeans Falls, on the banks of the Fleming River, on the crags of Mt Samson, and rata also forms pure stands on the remote ridges of the inland ranges
- In Otatara, a few trees grow in remnant forest on dune-land, and in the Longwood Range rata can be seen at Falls Creek Road. They grow all along the ranges of eastern Fiordland especially near Tuatapere, and on islands within Lakes Manapouri, Te Anau and Wanaka, where restoration planting is taking place
- All the Fiordland Sounds have gnarled old giants around the coast
- Invercargill is the gateway to Stewart Island where rata forest is widespread, and to the subantarctic Auckland Islands where rata forms a tangled coastal fringe among the southern-most forest in the world.

Rata spotting in the south can be adventurous, so always seek advice or information from local Department of Conservation staff.

The **Otago/Southland Crimson Trail** is one of a series of Project Crimson's Crimson Trails throughout New Zealand. Each Crimson Trail is unique to its region. What the Crimson Trails share is that special time of the year when glorious crimson blooms cloak the trees and the wind blown stamens carpet the ground beneath.

Crimson Trails can be explored in the following areas:

- Auckland
- Coromandel
- Mount Maunganui
- Rotorua
- Wellington
- Golden Bay
- Canterbury
- West Coast
- Otago/Southland

Brochures for each Crimson Trail can be downloaded from www.projectcrimson.org.nz

Renewing our pohūtukawa and rātā

For over 25 years Project Crimson has been working with communities around New Zealand to renew and restore our precious ecosystems, with a particular focus on our iconic pohūtukawa and rātā trees. All New Zealanders can be part of our work by joining our planting days, making a donation to the Trust or buying our products.

Join us in our mission to protect and enhance New Zealand's natural environment. Visit: www.projectcrimson.org.nz

