



# Places to Go: Cromwell

**RECENTLY** I saw a very interesting documentary on Old Cromwell. It was about building the dam and the eventual flooding of most of the old town precinct. It was an interesting film and brought back many memories of landing at the Cromwell raceway (18/36, 119.10) and going to the old town to sell deer velvet to an old Korean man with a gold pen in his pocket. Just down the road from Wanaka, I spend much more time there these days as it has lots of great places to visit and many a delight in the food and wine arena.

Flying into the Cromwell raceway is good practice for spacing and correct height on finals. I take our students on their first cross countries and the tendency is to cling to the airstrip on downwind, drift downhill and be too high on approach. It is a fantastic field for practicing accuracy. Watch for the wind coming out of the Cromwell Gorge because it can be strong, also for the curl around effect of a westerly coming out from the Kawarau Gorge which can give a tail

wind on finals for 36. Watch for sheep - they are the same colour as the ground and with rising ground at the northern end, watch out the window if you do a stock fly-by.

There is another Cromwell airstrip that you will see in the AIP 4 which it is on top of a hill. It is huge, being made for the war effort. Later DC-3s flew fertiliser from it. Watch here for rabbit holes. It is nice for a stop but best to have a car pick-up as it is much further north of the town.

Once settled and thinking of staying the night, Golden Gate is a good Kiwi hotel. There are lots of motels in town too, on Barry Avenue, the main street heading south such as Carrick Lodge, see [www.carricklodge.co.nz](http://www.carricklodge.co.nz).

Borrow a car if you can, as there are four must-dos around Cromwell. If you can't, then CR motors are really friendly and have rentals, Ph 03 445 1844. Check into the accommodation and ask for a wine trial map and directions to the Bendigo mines. A short drive up the road towards Tarras will have you up on top of the Bendigo range and amongst real mines from the old days of mining gold in the area. They are intact and walking around the deep hand hewn shafts and hut relics you get a real sense of just how difficult their lives must have been. It can be very hot in the summer and freezing

in winter so take good clothing. The view is outstanding the walk invigorating - a perfect way to work up an appetite.

With so many great wine vineyards available for lunch, it can be easy to get lost in the choice. But the absolute best place is Mt. Difficulty wines. Mt Difficulty's Cellar Door and Restaurant sit on a rocky outcrop, high above the winery on Felton Road. The menu features fresh and flavoursome dishes with locally sourced ingredients, designed to complement Mt Difficulty's wines.

However a word of warning - you must book ahead as seating is limited.

Once you have chosen from the menu you may then taste the wines or simply order the best Rose or Pinot in the country and sit back and take in the view. My one recommendation with this glorious place is do not agonise too much over what to choose from the menu - it is all superb and make sure to take a bottle away with you.

After lunch, explore Bannockburn if you have time.

It is a delightful town from good old gold times gone by. The buildings echo the gold rush days and views looking north may have you looking for a section here.

Next stop is Highlands Motorsport Park. I went there recently and was in awe. It is there by the grace and brilliance of one man, his family and some jolly enthusiast ideas. Walking in reveals a car museum full of brightly coloured cars, fast no matter what era they hail from. Upstairs is a wall of information from our top drivers in NZ racing history, along with a function room which looks out over the race track itself. As well as the history, Highlands offers hands-on motor track driving that is second to none in New Zealand. Choose from Go karts to 'Fastlaps' is in a Porsche GT3 cup car. The driver will take the Porsche up to race pace. The noise, heat, plus G forces and the excitement may well equal or surpass that of flying, so beware! You can watch your mates from the control room as they are thrust into a super car hurtling along at 200kph.

Lastly, Old Cromwell Town is well worth a visit if there are shoppers amongst you. I try to stay away as my love of this area quickly empties my pockets. It is a perfect sunny afternoon stroll anytime of the year. With so much to offer, do give Cromwell a go next time you fly to Central Otago.



Upper: View from the Mt. Difficulty restaurant, a great place for lunch.  
Lower: Visit the museum or go for a fast lap around the Highlands Motorsport Park.

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