

## Heritage Item 13

### Ashburton Railway Footbridge



#### Location

<b>Address:</b>	549 East Street, Ashburton
<b>Co-ordinates:</b>	Northing 5700023 , Easting 2409830
<b>Legal Description:</b>	Pt Reserve 953
<b>Owner:</b>	KiwiRail

#### Purpose

<b>Current Use:</b>	Footbridge
<b>Original/Past Uses:</b>	Footbridge

#### Heritage Significance and Category

<b>Heritage Significance:</b>	Physical; Historic		
<b>Heritage NZ:</b>	Historic Place Category 2	<b>List #</b> 7665	<b>Date Listed:</b> 30 June 2006
<b>Ashburton DC:</b>	Category A		

#### Site Assessment

<b>Assessed by:</b>	Arlene Baird, Davie Lovell-Smith Ltd.
<b>Date Assessed:</b>	27 November 2014

Detail	
<b>Description:</b>	<p>The extent of the Heritage New Zealand's list entry includes:  <i>The registration includes the Footbridge and its ramps and the land on which it stands on Pt. Reserve 953, Main South Railway, SO 10006.</i></p> <p>The same listing previously also included: <i>the Station building, its fixtures and fittings, including the platform and the land on Lot 1 DP 62073, CB 36D/1150; and the land between the two structures, Pt Reserve 953, NZ Gazette 2000, p. 1897. The boundary is shown on the aerial photograph in Appendix 2 of the registration report.</i> The Station building was demolished in mid-2013 and the platform, bowstring footbridge and a small and rarely used vintage engine shed remain, along with the core of a once much larger freight yard.</p> <p>The Footbridge is constructed of iron and jarrah timber. Originally accompanying the large Railway Station, this Footbridge was built in 1917 and stands as a landmark heritage feature on the main street of Ashburton. The current Footbridge replaced an earlier small wooden bridge built in 1911. By the turn of the century the Ashburton rail complex was the eighth busiest in New Zealand, requiring a large, fully appointed station building. The railway lines bisect the town and the Footbridge was necessary to allow safe pedestrian access to the Station.</p> <p>The Footbridge crosses the rail tracks some 200 metres south of where the Station was located with ramps descending at right angles both towards the town centre and towards the Station building. It is larger than many footbridges of the time with its 84 foot (25.6 metre) span. Today, the only surviving example that exceeds this is the 97 foot (29.5 metre) span of the Dunedin pedestrian over bridge. The Footbridge is constructed of metal and jarrah timber. It has the commonly used bowstring truss as its main span and had four ramps to provide access from all directions. In 1983 the ramp descending to the platform was removed and only one of the West Street ramps has been retained.</p> <p>In 1918, when the Cameron Street level crossing was closed as part of the re-arrangement of the railway yard, the small, timber former footbridge which had been erected in 1911 was moved to provide for pedestrians to cross at Aitken Street. This bridge, which had steps rather than ramps, was removed in 1974.</p>
<b>History:</b>	<p>In the 1840s early European explorers travelling through the Ashburton district closely followed the coastline, but as land was taken up by pastoralists a better route across the plains soon evolved. This widely accepted route traversed the Ashburton River a few miles inland to avoid coastal swamps. Through the 1860s and 1870s the small township of Ashburton began to grow here on the river's north bank as the place became a frequent overnight stopping point and coach staging post.</p> <p>Provision of a rail transport system was an early goal of the Canterbury Provincial Government. Following the construction of a link from Christchurch to the port at Lyttelton in 1867, work began on development of the rail link extending to the Waitaki River. The formal turning of the first sod at Christchurch took place on 24 May 1865. The route largely followed what had become that normally taken by travellers and was planned to pass through the slowly growing township of Ashburton. The link reached Selwyn on 7 October, 1867. Local funds were then exhausted and work halted. Vogel's 1870 Public Works Scheme provided national funding for railways and placed a high priority on completion of a main trunk line between Christchurch and Invercargill.</p>

Detail	
	<p>The line reached Rakaia in 1873 and the extension from Rakaia to Ashburton was completed by August 1874. The railway line ran straight through the middle of the burgeoning Ashburton township close beside East Street. The large railway reserve area with its marshalling yards bisected the town. With Branch lines running to the interior from Rakaia to Methven and from Tinwald to Mt. Somers and Springburn, the Ashburton rail network carried a great deal of traffic, and the station saw a large throughput of passengers. Apart from those travelling the main trunk line there were frequent excursion trains taking upwards of 2,000 people to Timaru or Christchurch for occasions such as Agricultural and Pastoral Show Days or race meetings. Similarly, trains from Christchurch brought large numbers to Ashburton for the local Show or a picnic day in the town's acclaimed domain.</p> <p>By the 1880s the amount of traffic through Ashburton was ranked eighth in New Zealand with the refreshments room fourth in its usage, yet the station building was considered substandard and worse than the smaller facilities at Rakaia or Rolleston. Although new premises were promised, in 1895 the existing structure was enlarged and given a new coat of paint, which according to the Ashburton Guardian allowed the building "to look as proudly at us as a tramp with a new shirt".</p> <p>The government-run railways department became one of Ashburton's largest employers during the system's peak decades and everyone had some association, be it as an employee or user. The Ashburton Railway Station and Footbridge reflect the era when railways were New Zealand's dominating means of transport, an important aspect of the country's history.</p> <p>Footbridges were provided nationwide to give pedestrians safe passage across the rail tracks and access to stations. They were a significant component of many rail station complexes. This well used example is now one of only a handful remaining of the structures that were formerly common in railway precincts.</p> <p>The Footbridge illustrates the technical accomplishment of the engineers in New Zealand Rail who designed it. They prepared standard designs, which could be adapted for use in various locations, using mass produced components efficiently and economically. The practicality and effectiveness of these designs is demonstrated by their wide and sustained use. Its location gives it a prominence in the town and the aesthetic qualities of the graceful central span can be widely seen.</p> <p>The cessation of passenger traffic led to the sale of the Station for private commercial use in 1990. However, the privately owned station building was demolished in mid-2013. Local people attempted to raise the \$580,000 to purchase and save the building, but to no avail. The Footbridge still provides convenient pedestrian access over the rail tracks and continues to be well used. It is considered to be not only an important historic item but also a valued public amenity.</p>
<b>Notable Features:</b>	Iron and jarrah timber construction; bowstring truss; large span; access ramps.
<b>Condition:</b>	The footbridge appears to be in relatively good condition. It has lost two of the four ramps, but the other two are still regularly used. The iron and the woodwork is weathered and worn but still strong and in full workable order.
<b>Setting:</b>	The footbridge is within the railway setting. Its immediate environment has changed considerably with the loss of the railway station. The setting is of high importance due to the role the bridge has played throughout the evolution of the railway in Ashburton and the important on-going role of pedestrian safety.







