



## HIGHLIGHTS

**Whanganui National Park & River Scenery.**

**Matahiwi Gallery Cafe.**

**Connection to the Awa and its people.**

**Beautifully Carved Marae Whare.**

**St Joseph's Convent at Hiruhārama/Jerusalem.**

**Stunning papa geological features.**

**Kawana Flour Mill.**

## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

For more than 800 years, Māori have lived alongside the Whanganui River, building marae and kāinga (villages), cultivating sheltered river terraces and engaging with the forests.

Numerous marae still exist along the river, and the river is home to many descendants of the original inhabitants. European settlers followed in search of a new life in New Zealand and opportunities and in the late 1800s and early 1900s the river became a major visitor attraction, with people enjoying leisurely river boat cruises. The Whanganui River became internationally known as the 'Rhine of New Zealand.'

The Whanganui River Road was constructed in 1934, after taking 30 years to build. The building of the road changed the river communities forever with many marae and important sites desecrated in the process. Prior to construction access to settlements was by river, but with the changes many settlements moved across the river (away from the sun), changing our history forever.

Take your time along this special place.

Te Awa o Whanganui holds deep significance to Whanganui iwi, who have a saying, 'Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au', which translates as 'I am the river, and the river is Me.' This expresses the intrinsic and unbreakable ties that bind the people to the river – a living being from mountains to sea.

In 2017, this connection was officially recognised in the passing of Te Awa Tupua, a government Act according the river the same rights as a living person.

**"E rere kau mai te Awa nui, mai i te Kāhui Maunga ki Tangaroa.**

**Ko au te Awa, ko te Awa ko au"**

**"The river flows from the mountains to the sea. I am the river and the river is me."**

## TRAIL ROUTE

The 65 km journey is just as wonderful in either direction. Here we guide you from inland to sea, starting at the remote riverside settlement of Pipiriki, gateway to the upper Whanganui River and Whanganui National Park, and the major landing point for canoe and jet boat trips.

Before setting off from Pipiriki, take time to read the large information panel recounting the area's rich Māori and European history. It's a good introduction to the journey to come.

**5 km Ōmorēhu Waterfall lookout** is a fine example of the many that cascade into the Whanganui River. The 120m climb to the lookout is well worth it for panoramic views of the river and forested Whanganui National Park.

**9.5 km** It's all downhill to **Hiruhārama/Jerusalem**, home to the century-old St Joseph's church and convent where you can admire the church's beautifully carved altar and kowhaiwhai panels, relax in the serene rosary garden, and stay overnight in the original convent building.

A significant historic site, the mission was founded by Mother Suzanne Aubert (1835–1926), whose influence is still felt strongly around the region today. She is also likely to be canonised as New Zealand's first Saint. More stories surround another former Hiruhārama/Jerusalem resident, the poet James K. Baxter whose commune close to here closed soon after his death in 1972.

**17 km** The small island river of **Moutoa** can be seen from the road. This was the scene of a short and fierce battle in 1864. This helped establish a close bond between local iwi and European settlers.

**19 km Rānana/London** is one of the River Road's larger settlements, and home to an historic Catholic church, school, and a beautiful marae – one of many that can be seen from the road.

**22 km Kawana Flour Mill** was built in 1854. It is the last remaining flour mill on the Whanganui River and the only remaining example of 1850s mill machinery in New Zealand. The rebuilt, water-powered mill features the original waterwheel and grinding stones. The restored, colonial-style miller's cottage can also be seen. Open 7 days, just head in through the gate.

**22.8 km Matahiwi** is the hub of a small farming community. The schoolhouse here was transported by riverboat from Parinui,



nearly 50km upriver, in 1923. Today it is houses Matahiwi Gallery Café, an excellent stop for coffee and home-baked goodies. This is the only refreshment stop on the River Road and also offers accommodation options. Check website – open summer season only.

**30 km** The road undulates onward to **Koriniti**, the site of a small but stunning marae featuring two traditional whareniui and a small museum. This is a popular stop for cultural tours and overnight stays, which must be booked in advance. A further 500m downstream is the truly unique **Flying Fox** accommodation, reached via an aerial cable across the river.

**36 km Tunnel culvert.** The tunnel culvert on the Whanganui River Road, commonly known as the Gentle Annie Tunnel, was constructed in 1936 to improve access along the remote and rugged route. Hand-dug by local road workers through the soft papa rock, the tunnel was designed to divert a stream and prevent flooding, making the road safer and more accessible for the communities along the Whanganui River. Today, it is home to glow worms and features stunning fern displays.

**40.5 km Otumaire DOC campsite.**

**41.2 km** On the far bank of the river, historic **Hut** was built in the 1920's by Thomas D. Downes, the original River Foreman, on the former kāinga (settlement) site known as Pukupuku.

**43 km Ātene/Athens** was named after the Greek capital by the missionary Reverend Richard Taylor. Look out for the small meeting house, constructed in 1886. It's also the starting point for the **Ātene Skyline Walk** (42.5km). The full tramp takes 6–8-hours and rises to a height of 572m offering outstanding views. The first section is known as the **Ātene Viewpoint Walk** and takes 2 hours return.

**50.5 km** Keep an eye out for the Shell Rock Cliffs, layers of fossilised oyster shells revealing the secret that this land used to be submerged under the ocean.



**53 km** Two old pā (fortified village) sites – **Parikino** and **Pungarehu** (56km) – signal the end of the undulating sections. Parikino was originally located on the other side of the river, but – as with many of the pā and marae – the opening of the river road saw a gradual shift to the river's true left.

**59 km Aramoana Hill**, also known as Gentle Annie, is the toughest climb on the road but rewards you with a fantastic vista of the river valley, Pungarehu and Mt Ruapehu.

The descent down the other side reaches the junction of Whanganui River Road and State Highway 4. Take care crossing this junction and head right.

**65 km Upokongaro** (is a welcome refreshment stop. Formerly an important ferry crossing and riverboat stop, it now sports a dedicated cycling bridge spanning the Whanganui River.

Stop for a moment to take in the story panels sharing more of our special history.

The trail continues along the opposite side of the river to the historic and arty city of Whanganui and the end of the Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono.

This trail is developed and maintained by the Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono Charitable Trust. Feedback and support [mountainstosea.nz/support](https://mountainstosea.nz/support)

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**RUAPEHU**  
OUR GREATER OUTDOORS

**WHANGANUI**



# WHANGANUI RIVER ROAD



**GRADE 3+**

Sealed quiet road route suitable for cyclists with some on road cycling experience but reasonable level of fitness. There are a couple of steeper gradient sections. *The final 2.5kms is on a State Highway with a broad shoulder but higher traffic speed and volumes.*

More details: [mountainstosea.nz/trail-grades/](http://mountainstosea.nz/trail-grades/)

**LENGTH**  
65 km

**TOTAL DESCENT**  
Undulating

**DURATION**  
4-6 hrs  
(depending on conditions)

**LOCATION**  
Whanganui

**RIDE**  
All year.

**DIRECTION**  
May be ridden in either direction. Shuttles can pick up/drop off from either Raetihi or Whanganui. Jet boat landing is at Pipiriki.

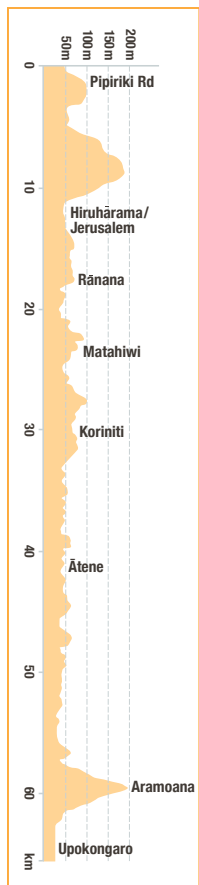
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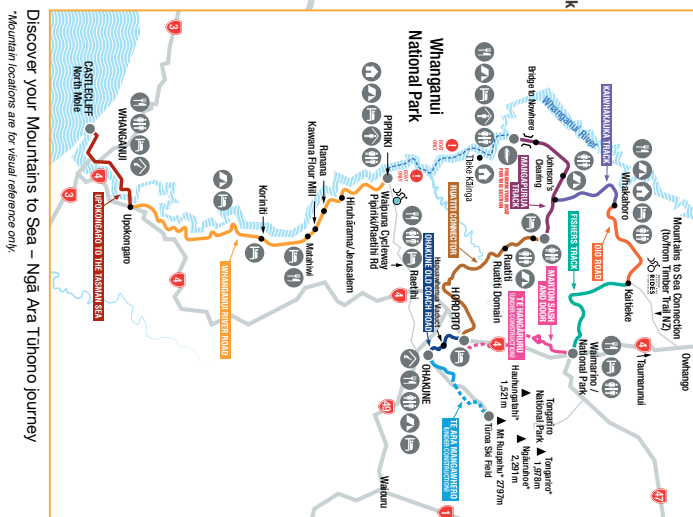
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*Not to scale. Distances are approximate.*



**Discover your Mountains to Sea - Ngā Ara Tūhono journey.**  
*\*Mountain locations are for visual reference only.*