



HISTORY & BACKGROUND

This classic New Zealand mountain bike ride takes riders back in time through a remote, long-deserted valley to the Bridge to Nowhere and mystical Whanganui River.

Suited to experienced cyclists, this journey through Whanganui National Park takes in overgrown farms, native forest, dramatic bluffs, and deep ravines before reaching the Bridge to Nowhere, a graceful monument to early settlers' broken dreams. The jet boat ride to Pipiriki is an invigorating way to end this wilderness adventure.

The Mangapurua Valley is rich in history, being one of the first areas offered to returning WWI soldiers in 1917. At its peak there were 30 farms in the Mangapurua Valley and 16 in the Kaiwhakauka, established through the back-breaking work of families who cleared and worked the land.

Strong communities formed and thrived for a while despite the arduous conditions and constant physical labour. But just 25 years later, the Mangapurua was virtually deserted following the decision to close the treacherous access road.

Today the native forest is regenerating in this 'valley of abandoned dreams' but there are still signs of the original settlements offering visitors a fascinating glimpse into post-war life.

Many settlers had already abandoned the valley by the time the Bridge to Nowhere was completed in 1936, and after a storm six years later the whole road was doomed. The bridge now stands as a poignant memorial to the broken dreams of settlers, and an iconic symbol of Whanganui National Park. Ironically, the bridge is now used more than it was when it was first built. As well as riders and walkers tackling the Mangapurua Track, it attracts thousands of people who visit on guided tours from Pipiriki or as part of the Whanganui River journey, one of New Zealand's Great Walks (a canoeing adventure).

HIGHLIGHTS

Stunning papa geology.

National Park wilderness.

Bridge to Nowhere and the remnants of a failed post WWI settlement programme.

Remote farming valleys.

A place full of stories and nature vs. humankind.

Connection to the Whanganui River – NZ's longest navigable river and legally protected as a living entity.

TRAIL ROUTE

Ruatiti Road—Mangapurua Trig (12.2 km, 2-2.5 hours)

From the Ruatiti Road car park, a 4WD track climbs steadily for around 6 km through private farmland and regenerating native bush, opening up impressive views of Tongariro National Park to the east and the Kaiwhakauka Valley to the north.

At the 10km mark, you'll reach the junction of the Mangapurua and Kaiwhakauka trails. A carved tōtara pou here symbolises the spirit of the ngahere (forest) and offers symbolic protection to riders in this special place. Two kilometres further, you arrive at the summit and the ANZAC memorial, which honours the sacrifices of WWI service personnel and their families, who settled in these valleys over 100 years ago. A short climb up the hill behind the memorial leads to a trig station, offering 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains, including the distinctive cone of Mt Taranaki on a clear day. Ahead, the valleys of the Whanganui National Park unfold, with a series of forested ridges and valleys beckoning you towards the river.

On the descent, take a short two-minute detour to visit the hidden explosives cave. This cave offers a tangible link to the region's rugged pioneering history, where explosives were extensively used for construction as settlers attempted to tame the challenging landscape. These explosives were vital for clearing land, building tracks, and constructing bridges, marking the efforts of those striving to develop the remote Mangapurua Valley.

Mangapurua Trig—Johnson's (6.8 km, 1 hour)

It's downhill or flat virtually from here all the way to the Bridge to Nowhere. Descending steadily from the trig on a wonderful section of track (when it's dry, that is), riders pass virgin forest in the Mangapurua Valley.

Take a moment on the way down to check out the Papa Drive. One of the unique features tied to our papa geology – these hand dug culverts not only managed water away from the road but also provided a place for cold storage!

After crossing Slippery Creek, the track starts to level out and after another 1.5 km reaches the Johnson's, named after the farmer who collected mail from Mangapurua Landing and distributed it through the valley twice a week. (This a great spot to take a break or even camp overnight).



Johnson's—Bettjeman's (3.4 km, 30 mins)

The track continues down the valley passing various grassy clearings and papa clay bluffs named after the settlers. Their memories live on in wooden signs marking the sites of the original houses and exotic trees and plants that still grow here.

The old Bettjeman's farm is identified by a straight row of poplars lining the road. The family was one of the first to settle in the valley, and some of the last to leave when they gave up the land in 1942. (There is a side track to the site just after the bridge).

A chimney stack and plants such as holly and cotoneaster are all that's left of what was once a thriving homestead and bunkhouse that even had its own tennis court. There's also a toilet here and a good water source from the stream by the old house site.

Bettjeman's—Hellawell's (4.6 km, 45 mins)

After a gentle descent for 1.5 km the track reaches Bartrum's swing bridge.

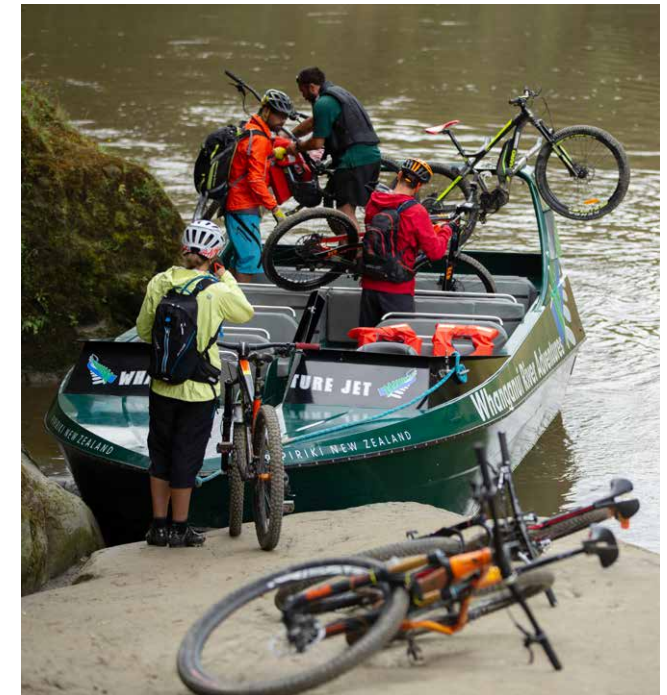
From here the trail navigates a series of sheer bluffs where riders should dismount as advised by signs. The bluffs are constantly shedding their edges as Papatūānuku continues to evolve with natural weathering. There are also several narrow swing bridges with access steps that require manoeuvring your bike by the back wheel across.

Near Cody's House, keep an eye out for Cody's bluff (also known as Current Bun Bluff) with its spherical boulders sticking out of the cliff face.

Just before Hellawell's is Waterfall Creek, where there's a 1.5 km side-trip up the true left to see the actual cascade. Hellawell's was once the site of community picnics and hockey games and still makes a great spot to linger.

Hellawell's—Bridge to Nowhere (5.7 km, 45 mins)

About half an hour further along the valley is Battleship Bluff, one of the most striking features along the track. Resembling the prow of an old ship, it presented one of the greatest obstacles to early settlers who spent two years blasting a route across the mighty cliff face.



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Today the bluff makes a fantastic photo-opportunity. *Don't linger in this papa bluff country and do follow the dismount/walk signs (with your bike on the fall hazard side).*

Emerging from bush and old homestead clearings the Bridge to Nowhere suddenly appears. It's an incongruous yet impressive sight arching elegantly across the steep ravine with the Mangapurua Stream 40 metres below. Just beyond the bridge is a lookout track that winds up above the Mangapurua Stream for lofty views of the bridge and surrounding bush.

Bridge to Nowhere—Mangapurua Landing (2.7 km, 20 mins)

The final section is a popular shared path downhill through the trees, (maybe best walked as the boardwalks are narrow in places).

The Landing used to be the main supply point for the valley but is now used by canoeists on the Whanganui Journey and jet boat operators running guided trips or collecting riders and bikes for the transfer downriver to Pipiriki.

Mangapurua Landing—Pipiriki (32 km on the Whanganui River by boat only)

Pre-booking a jet boat trip is essential. This 32 km river section can also be canoed.

The Whanganui River is a highlight of the Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono adventure as it winds through dense forest, scenic gorges, and bounces over the exciting Ngaporo and Autupu rapids and past the culturally significant Manganuioteao River. This tributary flows from the slopes of Mt Ruapehu and is a significant transport artery for Māori.

ROUTE NOTES

The trail is most suited to riders with good fitness and off-road trail riding experience, and mountain bikes with good knobby tyres. Pick a fine day if possible.

- Much of the trail surface is papa clay. A dream to ride on when it's dry, in the wet it is slippery and can be tough on bikes and people. **Pro Tip**, always wash your bike especially the drivetrain and brakes after coming off this section of trail wet or dry.
- There are a series of small wooden bridges and swing bridges that will require you to be able to lift and manoeuvre your bike across.
- This is a remote wilderness ride with few facilities, ensure you have good supplies of food and water.
- Start early so you have plenty of time to stop and explore the abandoned farms along the way without fretting about missing your pre-booked boat from one of our official trail partners.

Please follow all safety information on the track. It is recommended riders take a PLB, there is no cell phone access beyond the Trig.

Always check the trail status at mountainstosea.nz/trailstatus or local operators for latest details.

Information boards at each entrance also provide details and will indicate if the trail is closed for any safety reason. The section of the trail from the Mangapurua Trig to Bridge to Nowhere may be closed in some weather conditions or in winter, this will be notified on our website and information boards.



SUITED TO MOUNTAIN BIKES



NO CELL PHONE COVERAGE



BOOK JET BOAT





HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Originally a six-foot horse and cart track, then a tramping track, the Kaiwhakauka Track is a rewarding adventure ride amongst our connected pathways of the Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono.

The twin valleys – Kaiwhakauka and Mangapurua – share fascinating and ultimately sorrowful WWI settler history, with the iconic Bridge to Nowhere a fittingly forlorn finale to the story.

A significant feature of this valley and connecting Mangapurua is the papa geology. Towering bluffs constantly shed their edges, the bluey grey surface of Depot Road reminds us of its origin in the wet (it's soft and slippery), and the unique papa drives are testament to humans trying to tame this wild place.

ROUTE NOTES

A converted tramping track, the Whanganui National Park section (approximately 4 km) is single track with some drop offs. If you are not confident – we recommend taking your time and walking these short sections – enjoying the bush. This section has been widened and improved, but it will always be a remote adventure.

Note: the distance (42 km) and time provided are for the combined Kaiwhakauka and Mangapurua Tracks: from Whakahoro to the Pou junction (17 km), then through the Mangapurua Valley to Mangapurua Landing jet boat pick-up.

The jet boat pick-up must be booked in advance. (See Mangapurua notes).

The trail is best suited for mountain bikes with knobbly tread and riders with good fitness and single-track riding experience.

An alternative option takes in the Kaiwhakauka and returning down the Ruatiti valley with its spectacular views of snow-clad mountains to the east (29 km total).

HIGHLIGHTS

Blue Duck Station with native Whio, Kiwi and other natives.

Stunning podocarp forest and secret waterfalls.

Link to Mangapurua Track.

Remote, rural valley packed with history.

View-filled climb.

Traditional farm heritage mixed with forward focused conservation and hospitality.

TRAIL ROUTE

Kaiwhakauka is a true back country trail, best suited to fit, experienced, and well-equipped mountain bikers with no fear of sweat and mud. The track can get can get seriously muddy after rain.

It is, however, exceptionally beautiful, boasting hidden creeks, lush bush, pretty farmland, and rustic relics of a bygone era. The fact that few people venture here adds a feeling of intrepid adventure.

Whakahoro–Park Boundary (6 km)

The trail starts at Blue Duck Station at Whakahoro, on the banks of the Whanganui River, 45 km west of SH4 near Owhango. The station is a working farm, so named for the resident whio (blue ducks); the team are serious about preserving the bird populations and put considerable work into conservation. They also offer authentic, homespun hospitality in both food and lodging. It is a great spot to recharge before heading out on the Kaiwhakauka.

Follow the (sometimes muddy) gravel road up towards the Whanganui National Park entrance. Along the way take

a few minutes to climb down the short walking track to admire the waterfall that cascades into a canyon that is also home to glow worms, whio and more.

Just before heading into the bush is the “Depot.” A historical stone floored building filled with remnants of the past. The Depot was used to store deliveries from the riverboats for the settlers of the area. Back towards the trail entrance is Wades Landing which was the key site for transfer of goods and people into this area and onwards to the Ruapehu settlements off the river.

Through the gate, the track leads up the valley through a mixture of regenerating bush and farmland to the Whanganui National Park boundary.

Park Boundary–Mosley’s (4 km)

Not far into the park is a rediscovered Papa drive, one of a few in the area built to tame streams and contribute to the road.

Keep your eyes peeled for the wooden nameplates indicating the “settlement” plots of the post WWI soldiers. Long since abandoned, you can only wonder at how tough it was to settle this area. The regenerating podocarp forest is home to rewarewa, kāmahi and hinau with rimu and tawa towering above. The farm to the east is today being actively “farmed” for Manuka honey.



Mosley’s–Pou Junction (7 km)

Near the park boundary you come to the old Mosley homestead site near the Waione Stream. The open clearing with a shelter lends itself well to camping.

The track continues towards Cootes’ homestead (private land), crossing many small, bridged side streams with a few small open flats. The old Tobin homestead, which is marked by an old chimney stack, can be seen to the right of the track.

From here it’s a steady climb up a farm road (mostly clay) to the junction. As it climbs, it passes through relatively undisturbed mixed tawa/podocarp forest for about 3.2 km.

The track junction is marked by a carved tōtara pou on the old Kaiwhakauka and Mangapurua roads. The pou symbolises the ngahere (forest) and provides spiritual and cultural safety for visitors. The pou also pays tribute to the settlers of the Mangapurua and Kaiwhakauka Valleys.

It is short distance from here to the Mangapurua trig and settlers war memorial.



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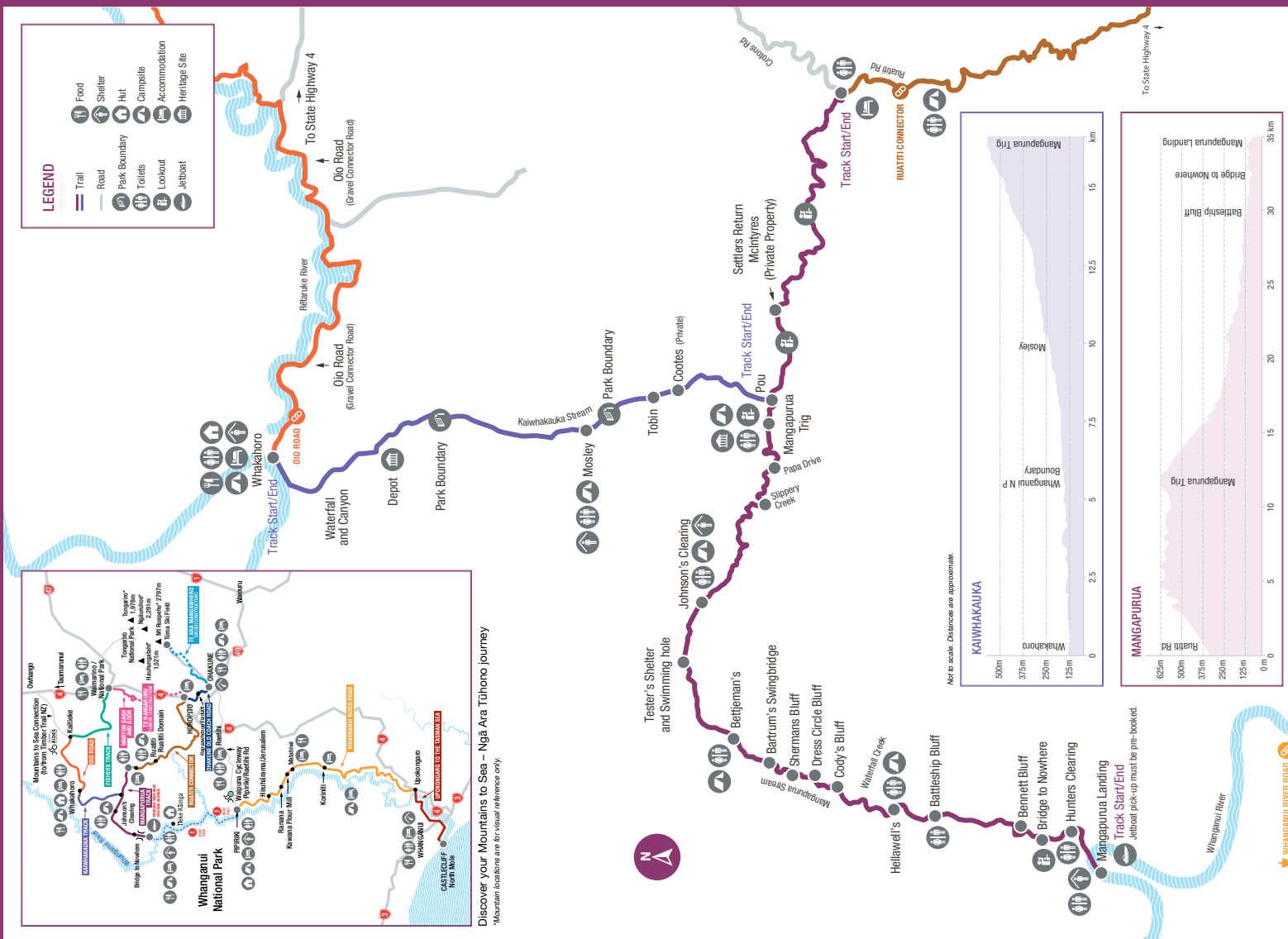
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MANGAPURUA / KAIWHAKAUKA TRACK



KAIWHAKAUKA

GRADE
3

LENGTH
17 km
(or 41km to Mangapurua landing)

TOTAL ASCENT
400m

DURATION
5-7 hrs
Including Mangapurua

LOCATION
Retaruke – Whanganui

RIDE
All year – best in dry conditions.

DIRECTION
Generally ridden from Whakahoro (Blue Duck Station towards the Pou on the Mangapurua).

MANGAPURUA

GRADE
3* (intermediate)

*In or after significant rain may ride as a Grade 4 with slippery papa surface.

LENGTH
36 km

TOTAL DESCENT
590m

DURATION
4-7 hrs
(depending on conditions)

LOCATION
Whanganui National Park

RIDE
May be partially closed in Winter or after heavy rain. Check mountainstosea.nz/trail-status/ or signs at entry.

DIRECTION
Generally ridden from Ruatiti Valley or connected via the Kaiwhakauka towards Mangapurua Landing.

Note: Jet Boat must be pre-booked to exit.



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