



Mountains to Sea
Ngā Ara Tūhono

MANGAPURUA TRACK
36KM



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 of 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 WWII 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.



SUITED TO MOUNTAIN BIKES



NO CELL COVERAGE



BOOK JET BOAT

ROUTE NOTES

Always check the trail status at mountainstosea.nz/trailstatus. Information boards at each entrance also provide details and will indicate if the trail is closed for any safety reason.

Trail is most suited to mountain bikes with good knobby tyres and riders with good fitness and off-road trail riding experience.

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!

Much of the trail surface is papa clay, which is a dream to on ride when it's dry. In the wet, it is tough on bikes and people.

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 life and manoeuvre your bike across.

This is a remote wilderness ride with few facilities. It is recommended that riders take a PLB. Please follow all safety information on the track.

Pick a fine day to ride if possible, and check in with local operators, or the official trail status page on our website for the latest details.

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 10 km mark is the junction of the Mangapurua and Kaiwhakauka Tracks. The carved tōtara pou – signifying the spirit of ngahere (the forest) and symbolic protection of riders in this special place.

It's a short climb (5 minutes) to the Mangapurua Trig from which Whanganui National Park unfolds ahead of you in a series of forested ridges and valleys, with the cone of Mt Taranaki glimpsed way out to the west on a fine day. Near the trig is a memorial to the WWI servicemen and their families who settled the Mangapurua and Kaiwhakauka valleys more than one hundred years ago. Take the 5 minute scramble to the trig and nearby hidden former explosives cave.

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 to even camp overnight).



TRAIL ROUTE

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

The track continues down the valley it passes 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 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 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 and the end of the quad-bike access on the track.

From here the trail navigates series of sheer bluffs where riders should dismount as advised by signs. The bluffs are constantly shedding their edges as Papatūānuku continues to evolve especially with the assistance of the weather. 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.

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 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 and a scenic gorge, 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.

- Check with your official trail partner for jet boat options.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE TRAIL AND SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE VIA OUR SHORT SURVEY.

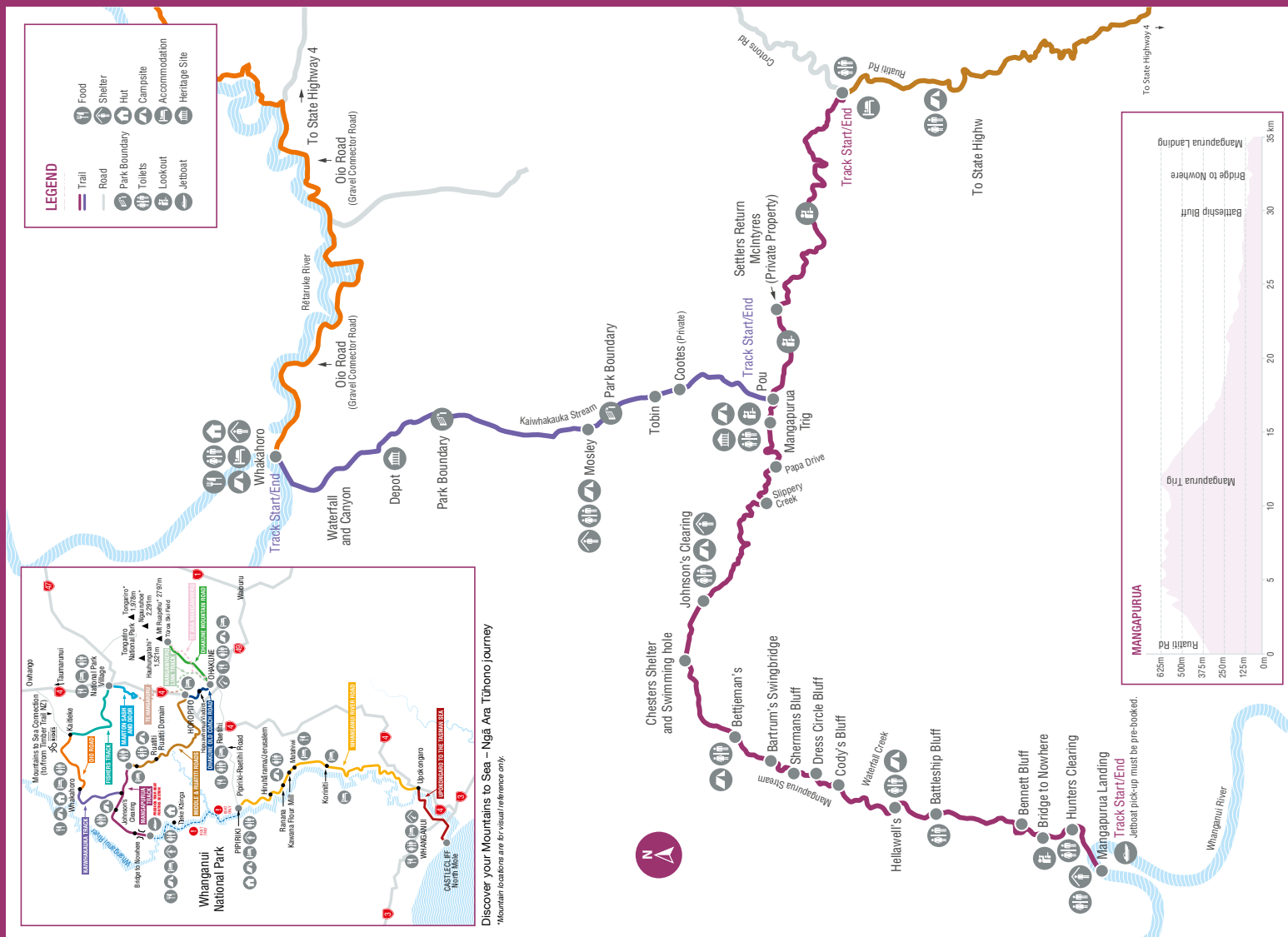


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MANGAPURUA TRACK



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
Closed in Winter – check mountainstosea.nz/track/status

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

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

KAIWHAKAUKA

GRADE
4 (advanced)

LENGTH
17 km
(or 41km to Mangapurua landing)

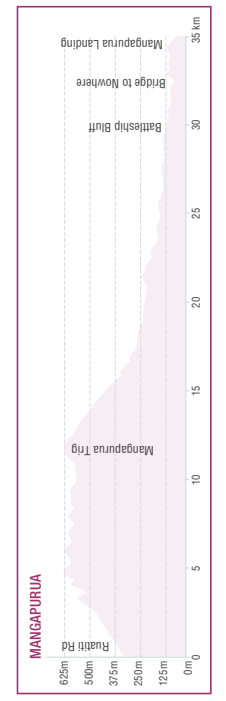
TOTAL ASCENT
400m

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).



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