

Great Walks

Whanganui JOURNEY GUIDE

Duration: 3 or 5 days  
Distance: 88 km or 145 km (one way)

For in-depth local knowledge, visit:  
Ruapehu i-SITE Visitor Information Centre  
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- Protect nature**  
Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Feeding wildlife is harmful to them. Follow any rules restricting fires, vehicles or boats. No dogs or unpermitted drones allowed.
- Show respect**  
Respect others, respect culture. Follow the protocol at Tīke Kāinga. Do not enter Tamatea's Cave, it is wāhi tapu (a sacred place). Minimise noise when others are sleeping.
- Keep New Zealand clean**  
Take all rubbish with you. Use toilets where provided. You can find them at all huts, campsites and shelters.
- Be prepared**  
Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip. Share your plans and take a distress beacon.

Care for Whanganui Journey



Photo: Canoe Safaris

**Welcome to the Whanganui Journey, one of ten unforgettable journeys.**  
Paddle through a landscape of towering cliffs and deep valleys on the magical Whanganui Journey. You'll travel through calm waters and foaming rapids, on an unforgettable trip into the heart of the Whanganui National Park.  
Choose a 5-day journey from Taumarunui to Pipiriki (145 km), or a shorter, 3-day journey starting at Whakahoro (88 km), featuring the most spectacular stretches of the Whanganui River.



Plants and wildlife

**Short-tailed and long-tailed bats/pēkapeka** may be fluttering overhead around John Coull Hut and Campsite at dusk. They are New Zealand's only native mammal. Long-tailed bats are smaller than the short-tailed bat, are chestnut brown in colour, have small ears and weigh 8–11 g.



**Eels/tuna** migrate up streams to find a suitable adult habitat in the river. They are secretive, mainly nocturnal, and prefer habitat with plenty of cover. Tuna (the Māori word for eels) are not only historically important to Māori, they are considered a taonga (treasure) species.



**Wood pigeon/kererū** are large birds with iridescent green and bronze feathers on their heads and a smart white vest. The noisy beat of their wings is a distinctive sound. They are the only remaining native bird capable of distributing large fruits such as karaka and tātare.



**Blue duck/whio** live only in clean, fast-flowing streams in the forested upper river catchments. Nesting along the riverbanks, they are at high risk of attack from stoats and rats. You might see them on the main stem of Manganiutēao River on the last day of your journey.



Broadleaf-podocarp forest has grown over this land, composed of **rātā**, rewarewa, rimu, tawa and kāmahī, with beech dominant on the ridge tops. Podocarp forest can be lush with a dense undergrowth of shrubs, ferns and tree ferns. Tree ferns and plants that cling to the steep riverbanks are very distinctive.



**Land surrounding the river** is only about one million years old. Formed of soft sandstone and mudstone (papa) from the ocean-bed, it has been eroded by water to form striking sharp ridges, deep gorges, sheer papa cliffs and waterfalls.



Photo: DOC

Photo: DOC

Photo: Sabine Bernert

Photo: DOC

Photo: David Kelly

Photo: DOC



PADDLING GUIDE

*The 145-km river journey from Taumarunui to Pipiriki usually takes 5 days to complete by canoe. A shorter 3-day journey from Whakahoro to Pipiriki is also possible.*

The times are approximate and will vary according to your fitness and the weather.

Taumarunui to Whakahoro  
2 days, 57 km

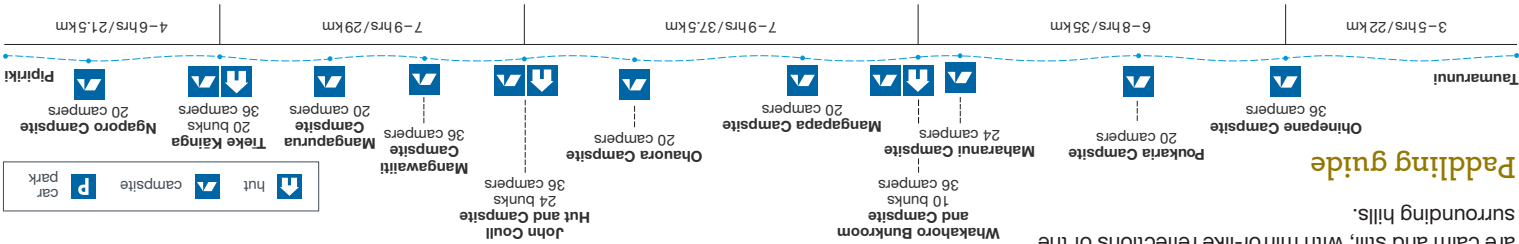
Access points are at Ngahuinga (Cherry Grove) in Taumarunui or further downstream at Ohinepane (accessed from River Road SH43).

Travelling the upper reaches of Whanganui River you'll pass through a mix of farmland and native bush. You'll be in for excitement as you shoot down rapids on this section of the river. Camp beside the river at Ohinepane, Poukaria or Maharanui campsites. From here, you get the feeling of venturing into the heart of a rich and rugged landscape.

Whakahoro to John Coull Hut  
1 day, 37.5 km

Many begin their river journey here, at the most scenic middle section of the river. You'll travel through towering gorges, the sides dripping with moss and ferns. After heavy rain, there are numerous waterfalls. Long stretches of the river are calm and still, with mirror-like reflections of the surrounding hills.

Paddling guide



Past Mangapapa Campsite, you'll take a long loop around the Kiriikiriroa peninsula, pass the Tarapokio (whiripo) rapid and then the large overhang known as Tameata's Cave. Please do not enter the cave as it is wahi tapu (a sacred place). Otaihanga Reach leads to your overnight stop at John Coull Hut and Campsite.

On this section, you'll continue your journey through deep and past stunning native forest. The Tangarakau and Whangamomona rivers join the Whanganui on this stretch. Perched high above the river, Mangawaiti is an attractive spot to camp or stop for lunch. Continue your trip downstream past the Mangapurua Landing, where you can stop and walk to the iconic Bridge to Nowhere. Afterwards, you'll continue on to Tike Kainga, one of many old marae on the Whanganui River.

Tike Kainga to Pipiriki  
1 day, 21.5 km

You'll pass the scenic narrow gorge of the Manganiotea River where it enters the Whanganui River after its journey all the way from the slopes of Mount Ruapehu. The Ngaporo and Autapu rapids can provide plenty of excitement and perhaps a cool dip on a hot day. Exotic trees and farmland indicate you are getting close to Pipiriki and the end of your journey. Shoot the Paparoa rapids and you will see the boat ramp below Pipiriki village up ahead.

A Side trip – Bridge to Nowhere

At Mangapurua Landing, where the old riverboats used to tie up, hop out of your canoe and take a walk to the Bridge to Nowhere. It's a poignant reminder of the Mangapurua Valley farm settlement, carved out of the bush and then abandoned between the two world wars. Look out for cyclists as the track is also part of the Mountains to Sea Cycle Trail. Please keep the downstream end of the Mangapurua Landing clear, except when getting in or out of canoes.



Photo: Herb Christophers

Visiting Tike Kainga

*Tike Kainga is the only former pa site that also doubles as a Great Walks Hut. Facilities are jointly managed by Te Whānau o Tīke and DOC. Visitors may be welcomed onto the marae if Tīke people are available on that day. Visitors are welcome to use the marae facilities and camping area while observing the general tikanga rules.*



Photo: 90 Seconds

- Visitors may be expected to participate in a pōwhiri if whānau are present at the marae. The process will be explained if necessary.
- The marae ātea (grassy area in front of the marae) must be kept clear when visitors are going through the pōwhiri.
- It is customary to leave a koha (donation) during pōwhiri (for example, money or food).
- The wharenui (meeting house on the marae ātea) is for local people only; access into the wharenui is by invitation only.
- All rubbish must be carried out.
- Absolutely **no alcohol** is permitted at Tīke Kainga or while on the river.
- Smoking is permitted outside only. Please keep the buildings smokefree.
- Shoes are not to be worn in the buildings; they should be left neatly on the deck.

- Clothes and washing should be hung on the designated clothes lines near the campground, not on the decks or marae area.
- Please ask the local people if in doubt.
- Do not sit on tables, kitchen worktops or chilly bins. Do not sit on any surface that would come in contact with food.
- Kitchen facilities are not to be used for personal hygiene, eg brushing teeth. Please use the washbasins outside for these purposes.
- Please do not put tents up in the marae ātea, use the designated campsites.
- It is polite to ask for permission from the local people before taking photos at Tīke Kainga.
- If in doubt, feel free to approach your local hosts.

Staying safe on the Whanganui Journey

STAYING SAFE ON THE WHANGANUI JOURNEY

- On the river – always give way to jet boats.
- Remember: craft travelling up river give way to craft travelling down river.

- When a jet boat approaches, canoeists should move to the right. If close to the left, stay there rather than paddle across the path of an approaching boat. To minimise the effect of the wake, turn at right angles to it.
- Canoeists should stop and even back-paddle to allow jet boats to overtake and get clear as quickly as possible.

- Jet boats passing canoes travelling in the opposite direction should either wait or move slowly forward until clear of the canoes. Canoeists in this situation should keep paddling forward. Jet boats moving slowly are much less manoeuvrable and canoeists should not expect them to be able to get out of the way quickly.
- Jet boats in rapids are unable to slow down or stop.

BE PREPARED FOR ALL CONDITIONS

Hypothermia (too cold)

- **Prevention:** wear warm and weatherproof clothing. Eat and drink regularly during your walk.
- **Watch for symptoms:** people may shiver, be clumsy, confused, have slurred speech, and deny they have a problem.
- **Treatment:** immediately make or find shelter; get the person into warm, dry clothing; put them into a sleeping bag; give them warm, sweet drinks; monitor them and seek immediate medical help.

Take sufficient supplies

- You must be self-sufficient: be sure you have enough food, clothing, equipment and emergency food for the worst-case scenario.

- Always pull your canoe up high on the bank and tie it to something secure. It may not be raining on the river, but rain elsewhere in the large catchment can cause the river to rise several metres overnight.
- Check the local weather forecast at [weather.mwa.co.nz/parks](http://weather.mwa.co.nz/parks).

- No dogs or other animals are permitted.
- No hunting.
- Wasps are a known hazard so carry antihistamine if you need to.
- Ensure your booking ticket is available for inspection at all times.
- No open fires.
- All rubbish must be carried out of the park.
- Boil, filter or treat water if you doubt its purity.
- Use the toilets provided.
- Keep soap and detergents out of waterways.

REMEMBER

- Emergency communication is available (by DOC radio) only at John Coull Hut and Tike Kainga. The only road access to the river is at Ohinepane, Whakahoro, Pipiriki or while on the river journey.
- Many sites are of high cultural significance – please respect them.
- Once you are on the river below Whakahoro there is no turning back, and nowhere to buy anything you may have forgotten.
- Wear your lifejacket at all times when on the water.
- Put all items into barrels or dry bags and have these securely tied to the canoe at all times when on the water. This will keep your possessions safe if you capsize.

Track history

Māori cultivated the sheltered terraces, and built elaborate eel weirs along river channels to trap eels and lamprey on their migration up river. Every river bend had a kaitiaki (guardian) which controlled the mauri (life force) of that place. The mana (prestige) of a settlement depended upon the way food supplies and living areas were looked after for the benefit of the hapū (sub-tribe) and visitors.

The Ātihaunui, a Paparangi people, settled the valley from early times. Eventually the river became linked by a series of hapū which were called 'the plaited braids of Hinegakau'.

European missionaries arrived in the 1840s. In 1891 a regular riverboat service began carrying passengers, mail and freight to other European settlers on the river between Whanganui and Taumarunui.

Photo: Herb Christophers

