Built 1936  **Bridge to Nowhere**

Photo: DOC Post card in conjunction with Friends of the Whanganui River c.1981.

Map: Scale 1:50 000  
Source: NZMS 260 R20 803130

Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*
The Bridge to Nowhere

Built 1936

Management: Mangapuru Valley Scenic Reserve, Whanganui National Park
VAMS asset number 5149
Whanganui Area Office, Wanganui Conservancy
Department of Conservation

Fabric: A steel-reinforced concrete bridge, span of 34.1 metres with substantial abutments and supported by a 39.6 metre arch and upright members. Deck height above water is 38 metres. The fluted balustrades impart an elegance to the slender 3.1 metre bridge. The bridge's distinctive character is derived from its extraordinary setting spanning a steep papa ravine amidst encroaching forest.

History: The Mangapuru Valley was opened by a Government scheme in 1919 to provide land for farming for returned soldiers. A timber swing bridge for horse traffic was erected in 1919 connecting the isolated valley with a steamer jetty on the Whanganui River. The concrete bridge was built in 1936 following many years of agitation by settlers for improved vehicle access. It was designed by the Public Works Department and built by private contractors Sandford and Brown of Raetihi. Too late, the fine new bridge was used for only six years. The soils of the valley were not fertile enough for farming and the last settlers walked off their land in 1942. This was a personal tragedy for the families who had endured 20 years of hardship for no gain. By 1946 earth and grass covered the bridge decking. In recent years the bridge has become a key tourist attraction on the Whanganui river and is nationally known. Increasing use by trampers led to the opening of the two-day Mangapuru Walkway in 1988, which includes the bridge. Major concrete repairs were undertaken in 1996. The history of the valley is detailed in a book The Bridge to Nowhere; The ill-fated Mangapuru Settlement, by Arthur P. Bates, Wanganui Newspapers Ltd. 1981.

Fabric Value: Although not an innovative design the Bridge to Nowhere is a fine example of the typical ferro-concrete style bridges constructed during the 1930s and 1940s and an oddly elegant structure in a remote, striking location. Building such a substantial structure nearly 40 metres above the river within the steep ravine walls was a considerable engineering achievement.

Historic Value: The Bridge to Nowhere is the most conspicuous built heritage in Whanganui National Park. It is the foremost monument in New Zealand to many attempts made throughout the country to farm marginal land that was eventually abandoned. It represents a significant chapter in New Zealand’s farming and environmental history. For these reasons it was registered by Historic Places Trust in 1994 as category one heritage. (reg. no. 7168) The bridge gets far more use today than when it was built.

Community Value: The bridge is nationally known as a monument to ill-fated farming attempts. For the Whanganui River tourism it is a foremost attraction and destination. It is also a trampers's bridge on the Mangapuru Walkway. DOC will maintain the bridge to minimise deterioration.