

*Plan and prepare*

# WHANGANUI JOURNEY



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



Great Walks season:  
1 October – 30 April



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa  
New Zealand Government

# WHANGANUI JOURNEY

Paddle through a landscape of towering cliffs and deep valleys on the magical Whanganui Journey. It is a remarkable but demanding trip, which requires canoeing skills and experience.

In 2017, the Whanganui River was legally recognised as Te Awa Tupua, a living being that nourishes and sustains the land and the people, both physically and spiritually, from the mountains to the sea.

Care and respect for the awa (river) has always been a key expectation of tangata whenua, and this legal status reinforces this.



Conditions are more hazardous outside the Great Walks season (May to September) – see the safety section on the back page for more information.



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



Great Walks season:  
**1 October – 30 April**

## Trip style options

There are different ways to do the trip, depending on your skills and experience:

- A guided canoe trip, where you paddle your own canoe but are accompanied by a guide.
- An independent, unguided canoe trip, where you hire your gear and then paddle the trip yourself.
- A jet boat tour visiting sections of the river, including the Bridge to Nowhere. This is a great option for people who are short on time or do not have the skills or fitness to canoe the river.

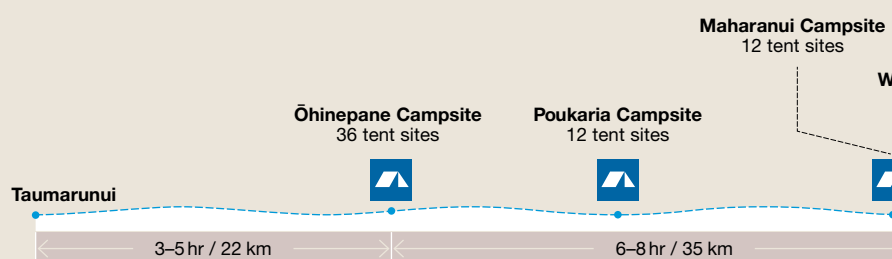


Photo: Janette Asche



Photo: © Monster Valley



Photo: Matthew Pike / Wilderness Magazine



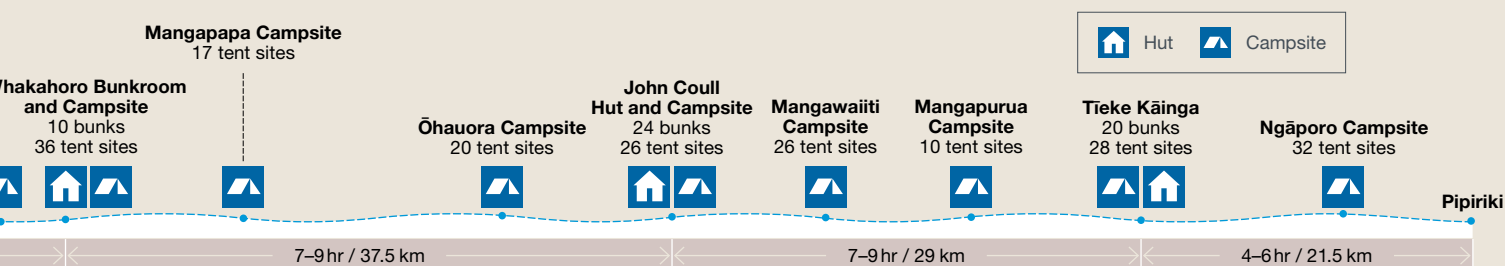
## Trip length options

The journey can be completed as a full trip or in shorter sections:

- The full trip is 145 km and takes 5 days to canoe, travelling from Taumarunui to Pipiriki.
- The shorter option covers 88 km over 3 days, taking in the most scenic section of river from Whakahoro to Pipiriki.
- Businesses offer a range of 1-day and 2-day trips along sections of the river, some of which include jet boat experiences.

## Skills and experience needed

An independent, unguided trip is not suitable for beginners – you need canoeing experience and skills. You also need to be a confident swimmer and fit enough to paddle for 6–7 hours a day (8+ in low river flows). The unguided trip is not recommended for solo travellers or children under 10. We strongly recommend that less experienced or solo travellers take a guided trip rather than paddling independently.



Show respect

**Tieke Kāinga is a functioning marae – make sure you follow tikanga (protocol):**

- Ask for permission before taking photos or videos.
- Do not drink alcohol at Tieke Kāinga or while on the river.

Do not enter Tamatea's Cave, it is a wāhi tapu (sacred place).





Photo: Daniel Deans

## Bookings

The huts and campsites along the river must be booked in advance during the Great Walks season (1 October – 30 April). Outside this time, they work on a first come, first served basis and bookings are not required.

## Facilities

During the Great Walks season, the huts have mattresses, a water supply, toilets (without toilet paper), handwashing facilities and heating with fuel. They may also have a lighting source and basic cooking facilities with fuel, and a hut ranger may be present.

The campsites have basic facilities, including toilets (without toilet paper), sinks and a water supply. Some also have picnic tables and cooking shelters.

The huts and campsites do not have rubbish bins, so please take all your rubbish away with you.

Outside the Great Walks season, facilities are greatly reduced and there are no hut rangers.

## Getting there

Entry or exit points for the Whanganui Journey are from State Highway 4 at:

- **Taumarunui**
- **Ōhinepane**  
(access from Taumarunui)
- **Whakahoro**  
(access from State Highway 4 near Ōwhango)
- **Pipiriki**  
(access from Raetihi or Whanganui)



**Check, Clean, Dry**  
Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests. Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all items before entering and when moving between waterways. For more information, visit [mpi.govt.nz/cleaning](http://mpi.govt.nz/cleaning).



This map is a guide only and should not be used for navigational purposes.

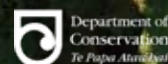


# Highlights

1

Photo: Department of Conservation / 90 Seconds

Air New Zealand partners with the Department of Conservation to bring birdsong back to our Great Walks.



2

Photo: Shellie Evans (tikitouringnz.blogspot.co.nz)

3

Photo: Canoe Safaris

4

Photo: Department of Conservation / 90 Seconds

6

5

Photo: Sabine Bernert

Photo: Matt Binns

- 1 Take a break from the water at Mangapurua Landing and walk to the iconic **Bridge to Nowhere**. Lost deep in the forest, completely isolated from civilisation, this lonely concrete bridge was built for returned World War I servicemen to reach a now-abandoned settlement.
- 2 Look out for plump **kererū / New Zealand pigeons** as they plummet from the forest canopy before gaining enough speed to rise again, and then noisily crash-land into the foliage in search of more berries.
- 3 Experience the unique landscape of the Whanganui National Park as you **paddle through deep gorges** and past cascading waterfalls.
- 4 Visit **Tieke Kāinga**, which functions as a marae and a hut, and learn about the intimate connection that Whanganui iwi have with the awa.
- 5 Watch for **pekapeka / long-tailed bats** fluttering overhead at dusk when you reach John Coull Hut.
- 6 Watch and listen for the native birdlife of the Whanganui National Park. If you are lucky, you might also spot rare native species like **whio / blue duck** and **kiwi-nui / North Island brown kiwi**. Partnerships with iwi, Air New Zealand (our national partner for conservation), the Horizons Regional Council and private landowners mean that more native species are benefiting from greatly increased pest control.



# What do I do next?

BOOK

Book your huts and campsites online at [doc.govt.nz/online-bookings](https://doc.govt.nz/online-bookings).



Train your paddling muscles and practise your canoeing skills.



Book your canoes, equipment and transport to and from the track.



Buy your food and pack your bags. For a list of what to take, visit [doc.govt.nz/whanganuijourney](https://doc.govt.nz/whanganuijourney).



Read up on safety and check the weather to make sure you are well prepared for your journey.



Download and print your paddling guide and booking confirmation.



All set! Jump in your vessel and get paddling!

For more information, contact:  
**Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre**

Whakapapa Village  
State Highway 48  
Mount Ruapehu  
Phone: 07 892 3729  
Email: [tongarirovc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:tongarirovc@doc.govt.nz)  
[doc.govt.nz](https://doc.govt.nz)

This information was accurate at the time of printing.  
For the latest information on the Department of Conservation's policies and facilities, visit [doc.govt.nz](https://doc.govt.nz).

Published by:  
Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai,  
PO Box 10420, Wellington 6140  
October 2025

Editing and design:  
Te Rōpū Ratonga Auaha, Creative Services

Cover: Canoe Safaris



## Safety on the Whanganui Journey

- Do not canoe if the river is flooded or predicted to rise. Make sure you know how to navigate the many rapids and obstacles (some hidden) that you will encounter on the river.
- Always pull your canoe up high on the riverbank and tie it to something secure in case the river rises.
- Be aware that the river is more difficult to canoe in very low flows and strong winds.
- Be aware that rain and flooding can happen at any time of the year – bring lots of warm, quick-drying and waterproof clothes. Cotton, denim and hiking boots are not suitable.
- Always wear a life jacket when on the river.
- Make sure you know what to do if a jet boat approaches while you are canoeing.
- Be aware that there are no exit points between Whakahoro and Pipiriki and you cannot turn back.



## The Whanganui Journey in winter

The Whanganui Journey should only be attempted outside the Great Walks season by people who are very experienced in canoeing remote Aotearoa New Zealand rivers in winter.

Whanganui National Park from May to September is very cold and wet, with short daylight hours. The river level is much higher than in summer and the water is very cold. Travellers will need to be independent, have a full understanding of the safety risks and be prepared for extremely cold conditions.

Care for  
Aotearoa



Protect nature



Be prepared



Keep NZ clean



Show respect



Department of  
Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai

