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# Wairoa district walks

Waterfalls, wetlands, hot pools,  
coastal walks and caves



Mangakawa Stream, Morere  
Springs Scenic Reserve.  
Photo: Jamie Quirk

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*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Highlights

- Enjoy a soak in the **Morere Springs** hot pools after a walk in the Morere Springs Scenic Reserve.
- Combine a visit to the **Mangaone Caves** with either a hot pool and walk in the Morere Springs Scenic Reserve, or a beach visit and a walk in the Mahia Peninsula Scenic Reserve.
- Enjoy the excellent bird-watching at **Whakamahi Lagoon Wildlife Reserve**. Freedom camping is available here.
- Picnic at the **Te Reinga Scenic Reserve** and enjoy the spectacular view of the Wairoa River waterfall.



Caving



Picnic



Information panels



Lookout/viewpoint



Fishing



Bird and wildlife watching



Waterfall



Surfcasting

Share your Wairoa walk experiences 

# Nau Mai, haere mai Welcome to Wairoa

The Wairoa area has a huge variety of outdoor pursuits to enjoy: from waterfalls, wetlands and coastal walks, to hot pools and caves. There are walking opportunities from short easy walks to more demanding tramping tracks, a variety of native plants and a wealth of native birdlife.

All walks are well marked and maintained, and most are for people of average fitness.

## Your safety is your responsibility

Before you go, know the Outdoor Safety Code – 5 simple rules to help you stay safe:

1. **Plan your trip**
2. **Tell someone**
3. **Be aware of the weather**
4. **Know your limits**
5. **Take sufficient supplies**

Leave your trip details with a trusted contact. For more information see [www.adventuresmart.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.nz).

**Essential gear:** for your safety you should wear sturdy footwear and take warm clothing, especially if your walk is longer than 1 hr 30 min. For longer walks, pack a lunch, a drink, and take a raincoat as the weather can change suddenly.

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**

Report any safety hazards  
or conservation emergencies  
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111



Top to bottom right  
Shining cuckoo. Photo: Leon Berard  
Rimu bark. Photo: Sabine Bernert  
Bellbird. Photo: Shellie Evans



### 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.



leave no trace  
NEW ZEALAND

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire  
*Check before you light a fire – a ban may be in place*
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others





## Walking and tramping

Track times are based on an average family group and allow for stops. They are a guide only and may vary depending on the weather and track conditions. All times quoted are return unless stated otherwise.

### Top left to bottom right

Rimu. Photo: Sabine Bernert

Rewarewa. Photo: DOC

Giant puka, Waiatai Scenic Reserve. Photo: Helen Jonas

Australasian bittern. Photo: Peter Langlands

Weka. Photo: Shellie Evans



Giant puka Waiatai Scenic Reserve and Waitai Scenic Reserve. Photo: Helen Jonas



## Waiatai Scenic Reserve

10 min



This small, tranquil reserve is 4 km east of Wairoa. Turn off SH2 onto Waiatai Road; the reserve is 200 m along the road.

Although there is no formal track, the reserve is very small (about half a hectare) – ideal for a quick break or a family mini-adventure in the bush.

The reserve is known for its plants, in particular for its giant puka, a rare tree with enormous leaves that occurs naturally only on the Three Kings and Taranga islands. There are numerous small plant-identifier signs within the reserve.

There is a picnic table atop a small hill, once the site of a farmhouse damaged in the 1931 earthquake and relocated down on the flats. The reserve was its front garden.

Culturally significant to tāngata whenua, this area hosts the largest puka tree in the world and features Māori pits, wahi tapu (sacred places) and a burial site for a local rangatira (high-ranking people). Local legend tells the story of the local tohunga (expert) Tahutoria, who cared for seven whales in this area. He shared his name with the first of the whales.





## Te Reinga Scenic Reserve

10 min



Te Reinga Scenic Reserve is 35 km inland from Wairoa, just off SH36 (Tiniroto Road). Turn onto Ruakituri Road at Te Reinga and cross the bridge over the river. The car park is at the western end of the bridge.

Just above the bridge, the Hangaroa and Ruakituri rivers combine to form the Wairoa River. A 5 min walk from the car park takes you to a view of the spectacular 35 m waterfall of the Wairoa River.

The Ngāi Kōhatu people have always lived here through their two tīpuna taniwha (ancestors), Ruamano and Hinekorako. They have the strongest link to the reserve and are regarded as the custodians of the area by other hapū and iwi.



## Whakamahi Lagoon Wildlife Reserve



This reserve is south of the Wairoa river mouth – just follow the river around from central Wairoa. The lagoon, once protected with a dam wall that has since washed away, is now exposed to the tides. The reserve offers excellent bird-watching opportunities as many wetland bird species are protected here.

There is no walking track, but a road running parallel to the coast gives access to the beach and lagoon. The beach is unsafe for swimming but is a delight for driftwood collectors and surf-casters.

This reserve is managed by Wairoa District Council and Tātau Tātau o Te Wairoa.

The Tahuna-mai-Hawaiki cemetery is culturally significant to tāngata whenua (local people) and Te Wairoa rohe as the place where Ruawharo deposited sands from Hawaiki. Generations later the two infamous brothers, Te Maha and Tapuwae, were born and raised in the area.

The final rangatira (high-ranking person) to live here was Te Apatu, in the early to mid-1800s.





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## Mahia Peninsula Scenic Reserve Track

2 hr 30 min, 4.5 km (loop)



The reserve is 7 km south of Mahia beach up the narrow, winding and unsealed Kinikini Road.

Although steep in places, the track is not difficult for someone of average fitness. Sturdy shoes are needed as there are stream crossings – you will get your feet wet.

Wander through the 374-ha reserve to a lookout that offers excellent views of the Wairoa coast and reserve. The highest point of the reserve is Putoetoe (366 m).

The loop track runs alongside picturesque streams, passing through one of the best semi-coastal forests on the North Island East Coast. The lush vegetation is a mixture of tawa, kohekohe, rewarewa, podocarps (rimu, mataī and kahikatea) and hardwoods. Nikau palms are abundant. There is a healthy sub-canopy of tarata, karaka, māhoe, ngaio, cabbage tree and lancewood. Birdlife is abundant.

A picnic area is part-way along the track, a perfect spot to have a break beside the stream.

This reserve's catchment and native bush were important as a mahinga kai (food gathering place) and source of rongoā (medicines), and were used to harvest food and resources, such as weaving materials. The area is associated with the Rongomaiwahine iwi, and is particularly important to hapū of Ngāi Tū, Ngāi Te Rākato, Ngāi Tama, Ngāi Tarewa and Ngāti Hikairo.

### Note:

- Pest control is carried out to protect this special place. Stay on track and follow the orange markers.
- **German wasps are common in summer. Take care and consider visiting at another time if you are allergic to wasp stings.**

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## Mangaone Caves Historic Reserve

40 min



This reserve is 40 km from Wairoa, 6 km up the narrow and unsealed Mangaone Road. Turn off SH2, approximately 4 km north of Nuhaka or 5 km south of Morere Springs. The track is signposted on the roadside, where you can park your vehicle.

First-time cavers can explore the **Mangaone Caves**, which feature distinctive stalactites, stalagmites and calcite wall coverings.

The track to the limestone cave follows a poled route over private farmland. Once past the first steep section there are magnificent views of the coast – on clear days you can see as far as Mahia.

At the caves, steps lead into the main cavern. Two passages, about 3 m above the floor of the main cavern, are reached by ladders.

The caves were a significant life source for Ngāti Rakaipaaka, and contain underground pathways that kept them safe during tribal wars. Kōiwi (human remains) were buried in parts of these caves; other areas have healing waters used to heal sickness, and for drinking and cooking.

### Note:

- Access to the passages is tight – take care.
- The main cavern can be wet and muddy in winter.
- A torch or headlamp is essential. Hard hats are recommended.
- The track crosses private land – leave gates as you find them.



Inside Mangaone Caves. Photos: Moira Lee



Tūi. Photo: Rachel McMillan



Kererū. Photo: Logan Vickers

## Track grades



**Short walk** – Track is well formed, with an even, well-drained surface. There may be steps. Stream and river crossings are bridged. Suitable for people of most ages and fitness levels. Walking shoes required.



**Walking track** – Easy to moderate walking from a few minutes to a day. Track is mostly well formed, some sections may be steep, rough or muddy. Suitable for people with low to moderate fitness and abilities. Stream and river crossings are bridged. Light tramping/hiking boots required.



**Tramping track** – Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking. Track is mostly unformed with steep, rough or muddy sections. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings. Suitable for people with good fitness. Moderate to high-level backcountry skills and experience required. Tramping/hiking boots required.

## Morere Springs Scenic Reserve



This reserve is on SH2, 40 km north-east of Wairoa, 52 km south of Gisborne and 15 km north of Nuhaka. The Morere Springs Hot Pools are at the main entrance to the reserve.

The 363 ha scenic reserve is one of the last remaining tracts of coastal native forest on the East Coast. The dramatic shapes of nīkau palms feature throughout the reserve. Other species include kohekohe, tawa, rimu, tōtara and mātai. The reserve is also home to abundant birdlife, including tūi, bellbird, kererū and shining cuckoo.

This reserve was a source of natural healing waters, kiekie (native vines) and other traditional materials used for raranga whariki, kete (baskets) and rongoā (medicines). The area is most closely associated with Ngāti Rakaipaaka and Ngāi Te Rakato. Other hapū associated with the reserve are Ngāi Tama, Ngāi Tu, Ngāi Tarewa and Ngati Uaha.

## Morere Springs Hot Pools

The hot pools' mineral waters have long been prized for their therapeutic and curative properties. There are three pool options; private, large open and the Nikau pools (with a variety of temperatures). There is also a large cold pool perfect for hot summer days after a bush walk.

Information panels at the entrance describe the area's history.

### Note:

Walking tracks are reached from the main entrance. You can also reach them by passing through the hot pools complex, but you will have to pay for the hot pool facilities.



## Walking tracks

The reserve's four tracks offer a range of walking experiences.

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### Cemetery Track

10 min



A short and easy track leading from the cemetery off Tunanui Road to the Ridge Track. The cemetery was first used in 1903 and is still in use today.

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### Ridge Track

2 hr, 2.5 km



This is a more demanding track between the Nikau Loop Track and the Mangakawa Track. It climbs through tall forest to a ridge covered in black beech, lancewood and mingimingi. Clearings offer pleasant views over the forest and farmland hills beyond.

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### Mangakawa Track

2 hr 30 min, 3.3 km



Known by some as the 'stairway to heaven', the picturesque Mangakawa Track is a challenge, suitable for trampers of above-average fitness. Wear sturdy footwear.

The track follows the stunning Mangakawa Stream. It presents waterfall views and small gorges along the way and leads back to the Nikau Loop Track, passing the source of the hot pools.

There are several river and stream crossings, and some rock-hopping along the stream bed is required in places. Access during wet weather may be difficult - if in doubt, check track conditions at the reserve's reception.

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### Nikau Loop Track

20 min (loop)



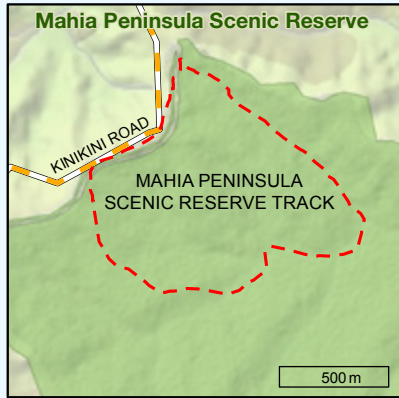
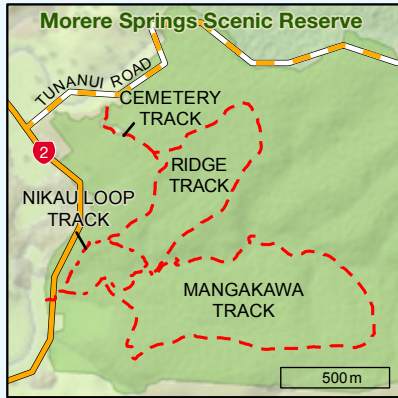
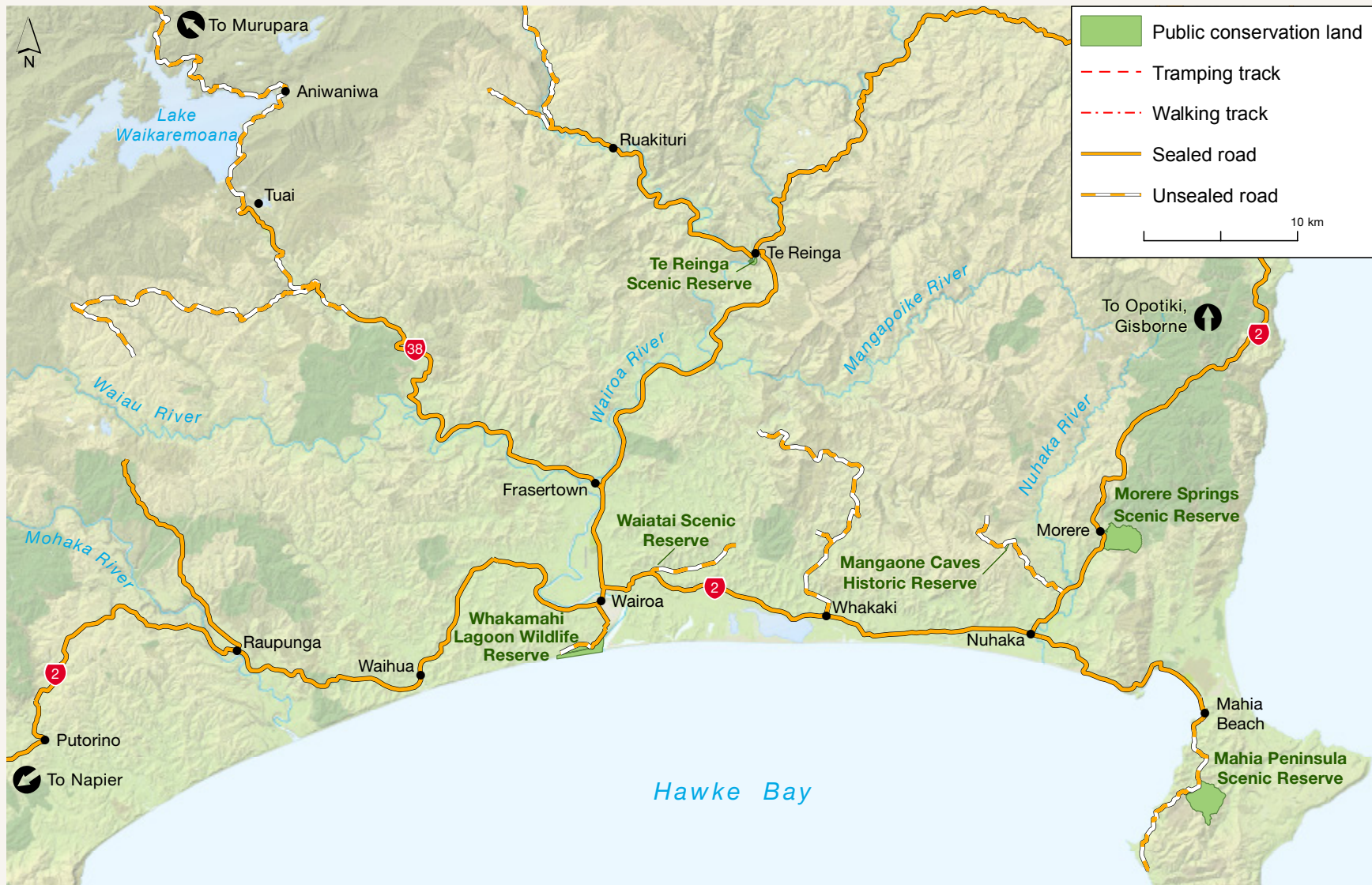
This track was upgraded in 2016 to an all-weather track with new steps and bridges over all streams. It is an easy walking track through beautiful bush, suitable for family groups. Expect some gentle inclines.

The track passes the Nikau pools, so stop for a soak, then continue down to the main complex.

The Ridge Track and the Mangakawa Track branch off this track. Both tracks are more challenging.



Nikau Loop Track. Photo: Sandra Groves



Mahia Peninsula

Portland Island