

# WALKS AND TRACKS

in Whirinaki  
Te Pua-a-Tāne  
Conservation Park



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'Huts and campsites' and 'Mountain biking'  
brochures or go to [www.doc.govt.nz/whirinaki](http://www.doc.govt.nz/whirinaki)



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

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## Nau mai, haere mai and welcome to Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park

Stepping into the Whirinaki Forest is like travelling back in time. Giant trees, ancient and moss-laden, tower overhead, soaring up to 65 m (215 ft) into the sky.

With a combined total of 155 km of walking, tramping and mountain biking tracks, 51 endangered species, and 1000-year-old trees, the Whirinaki Forest is a wonder of our world.



Photo: Reg Quinn





## Ko au ko te Whirinaki, ko te Whirinaki ko au

I am the Whirinaki, and  
the Whirinaki is me

The history of Māori tribe Ngāti Whare is written on the hills, valleys, and trees of the Whirinaki. Numerous historic pā sites are located within the forest, carved wooden bird traps have been found high in the boughs of trees, and living tōtara still bear the preparatory marks of waka (canoe) carving.

From the time their ancestor Wharepakau Tao-Tao-Ki-Te-Kapua (from whom Ngāti Whare take their name) migrated south to the Whirinaki area, Ngāti Whare have lived in close relationship with the Whirinaki Forest. As forest dwellers, the people of Ngāti Whare were dependent on the rich food resources of the forest, where birds were plentiful and held in high esteem. The taking of birds was strictly controlled and rāhui (prohibition) would occasionally be put on sections of forest to allow bird populations to recover.

The forest also provided many other necessities: timber for shelters, waka (canoes), weapons, fortifications, and carvings; bark for household vessels and roofing; vines for lashing and hīnaki (eel pots); and feathers for clothing. Fern root was a staple food product and was cultivated in clearings created in the forest and maintained by fire and shifting cultivations. Many other forest plants were used for rongoā (medicine).

Nowadays, Ngāti Whare's kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of the forest is officially recognised and they co-govern the park with the Department of Conservation. Ngāti Whare has established a native nursery in the Minginui village and has long-term plans to restore hundreds of hectares of land neighbouring the Whirinaki back into native forests. Minginui, once home to sawmills that processed thousands of native logs, is now home to a nursery that will restore the native forests lost to logging.





# Our link to Gondwana

## A precious remnant

Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park is a 56,000-ha old-growth forest, described by acclaimed British botanist David Bellamy as one of the great forests of the world.

The podocarp ancestors of Whirinaki's trees evolved more than 200 million years ago while New Zealand was part of the supercontinent Gondwana. Bellamy was so captivated by the primordial character of the Whirinaki he called it the "Dinosaur forest - one of the best Mesozoic plant communities remaining on Earth". Podocarp (cone-bearing) forests used to be much more extensive in New Zealand, but years of human habitation changed all that. Burning, as a hunting technique by early Māori, and later extensive land clearance for farming and exotic forestry have resulted in few such forests remaining.

Today, 95% of these forests on the North Island have disappeared. Whirinaki is one of the last precious remnants and one of the best remaining examples of lowland podocarp forest left in New Zealand.

### Did you know?

Whirinaki Forest is one of eight security sites established to protect whio/

blue duck. Whio are river specialists and live year-round on fast-flowing rivers. The presence of whio is a key indicator of healthy rivers and streams.







Many people may not realise that it is not the famous kauri but rather the kahikatea (white pine) that is New Zealand's tallest tree.

Kahikatea bear seeds at irregular intervals, usually every 3 to 5 years, but they carry enormous quantities when they do. It has been estimated that a single kahikatea tree can produce 4,500,000 seeds (about 800 kg) during a seed year.



## To save a forest

The campaign to end native logging in New Zealand came to a head with the great battles for the 'Gondwanaland forests' of Pureora and Whirinaki. The Whirinaki Forest Promotion Trust, whose members included Sir Edmund Hillary, published a book, *To Save a Forest*, calling for an end to native logging in the Whirinaki. The sometimes-bitter conflict, with conservationists and loggers facing off, attracted national and even international media attention. Eventually, in 1984, the conservationists won out and the New Zealand Government created Whirinaki Forest

Park. Professor John Morton, one of New Zealand's greatest conservationists, declared: "Whirinaki Forest has no parallel of its kind on Earth today".



## A New Zealand rainforest

The Whirinaki is a temperate rainforest with an annual rainfall of between 150 and 225 cm (59 to 88 inches). Unlike Europe, Whirinaki is a forest essentially without seasons. There is never a time when the forest sheds its whole foliage and the floor is opened up to full light, so the lower reaches of the forest are held in deep and permanent shade. The dense lowland forests of Whirinaki are some of the best of their kind and the most visually superb remnants in New Zealand, with podocarps up to 65 metres tall (215 feet) and reaching 3 metres (10 feet) in diameter, with a density of 130 podocarps per hectare.

The northern part of the forest, west of the Whirinaki River, is relatively low country which rises from 360 m to 730 m. There are beautiful river flats and rolling, tree-covered hills and gullies. The lowlands stand in stark contrast to the steep rugged greywacke country in the south which rises to 1365 m at Maungataniwha.





# Whirinaki short walks





Photo: David Finn



## 1. Whirinaki Waterfall Loop Track

**Time:** 3 hr 30 min  
**Distance:** 11 km

**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from River Road car park

The most popular track in the park, this easy loop track follows the Whirinaki River through superb podocarp forest with many excellent vantage points along the river. The waterfall can be heard from some distance. Take your lunch to enjoy along the way – there are picnic tables and a toilet at the waterfall.



## 2. Waiatuu Falls Track

**Time:** 1 hr 15 min  
**Distance:** 3.2 km

**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from River Road car park

An easy, well-graded track that passes through magnificent podocarp forest. The falls are spectacular. Take your camera.



Photo: David Finn

## 3. Arohaki Lagoon

**Time:** 3 hr  
**Distance:** 6 km

**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from Lagoon car park, just past River Road car park

The track passes through impressive tawa/podocarp forest. The ephemeral (rain-fed) lagoon is surrounded by towering kahikatea and is alive with frogs, though it's often dry in the summer.



#### 4. Sanctuary Track and Whirinaki Night Life Walk



**Time:** 1 hr 30 min  
**Distance:** 2.16 km



**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from Sanctuary Road, off Minginui Road

Start across the foot bridge from the Sanctuary Road car park. The sanctuary protects a striking remnant of podocarp forest. The Whirinaki Night Life Walk can be walked night or day, but just after dark is the best time to hear the night animals, such as ruru/morepork, wētā and kiwi, and see glow worms.



#### 5. H-tree Track



**Time:** 1 hr  
**Distance:** 2.2 km



**Track:** Wheelchair accessible with assistance

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from Fort Road

This is an easy walk through grand podocarp forest featuring an unusually shaped rimu tree. The forest here is home to a large population of native birds including kākā and robin. Early mornings or late afternoons are great for seeing and/or hearing the birds. Extra activities on this track include a Treasure Map for kids and adults—find all the answers to the questions along the H-Tree track to discover some of Whirinaki's treasures. The map is available online at [www.doc.govt.nz/h-tree-track](http://www.doc.govt.nz/h-tree-track).



## 6. Whirinaki Recreation Camp tracks

Whirinaki Recreation Camp outdoor recreation and education centre is ideal for schools and other groups. There is a large grassy area around the cabins for activities and several tracks nearby, including a mountain bike track.

### 6a. Loop Track to river



**Time:** 30 min  
**Distance:** 1 km



**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from the Recreation Camp

During summer an easy walk along the Whirinaki River through native forest gives access to the river for swimming.

### 6b. Lookout Track



**Time:** 1 hour  
**Distance:** 1.8 km



**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from the Recreation Camp

The easy walk starts across the road from the Recreation Camp and winds uphill to a clearing giving great views.

### 6c. Wiremu Merito Reserve Track



**Time:** 1 hour  
**Distance:** 2 km



**Track:** Walking

**Restrictions:** Dogs by permit only

**Access:** from the Recreation Camp

A well-graded and interpreted track through magnificent podocarp forest.





# Multi-day adventures



## The Whirinaki Track

2 days, 1 night, 25.6 km

The Whirinaki Track is the premier Whirinaki experience. Following the Whirinaki River, walkers will move from beech forest to lowland podocarp forests with an overnight in Central Whirinaki Hut (25 bunks). As the highest standard tramping track in the park, it is relatively easy and suitable for people of low to moderate fitness levels. There are five toilets along the track.



NZTopo50 map:  
BG38 Wairapukao

### Day 1: Plateau Road end to Central Whirinaki Hut

**Time:** 3 hr

**Distance:**  
9.6 km

**Track:**  
Easy  
tramping



Begin your walk at the Plateau Road end. After 1 hour of walking, cross the Caves swing bridge. Keep an eye out for the massive cave that gives this area its name. After the swing bridge carry on with the river on the left till you reach the next major bridge named Taumutu. From the Taumutu bridge carry on till you reach Central Whirinaki Hut. This is the largest hut in the whole park and is an ideal place for an overnight stay. Relax, cook supper, and keep an eye out for whio/blue duck in the river near the hut. New Zealand forests come alive at dusk, look for pekapeka/long-tailed bats flying around the hut!

### Day 2: Central Whirinaki Hut to River Road end

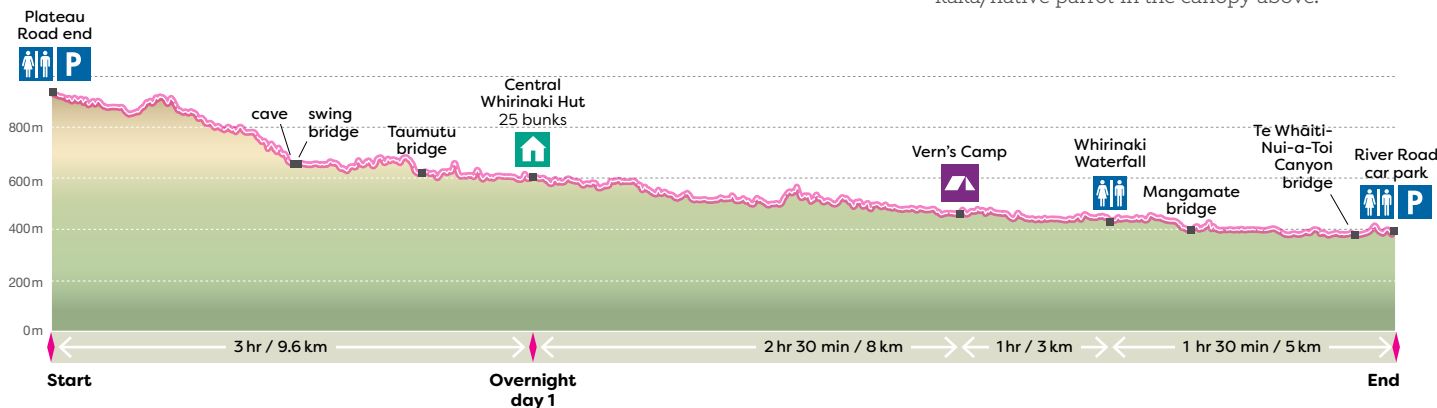
**Time:** 5 hr

**Distance:**  
16 km

**Track:**  
Easy  
tramping



From Central Whirinaki Hut continue on the Whirinaki Track north to Vern's Camp. Vern's has a shelter, toilet and is about 2 hours 30 minutes or 8 km from Central, so it makes a great lunch stop. After lunch carry on down the river for another hour (3 km) to the Whirinaki Waterfall. The 200 metre detour to the falls is well worth the time. Across the bridge about 100 m further on, you'll find another composting toilet and picnic tables. After visiting the falls, double back and follow the track with the river on your left side. Cross the Mangamate bridge and follow the track along the river. After about 1 hour, cross the bridge over the beautiful Te Whāiti-Nui-a-Toi Canyon. From the canyon it is only a short walk further to the River Road car park. Keep an ear out for kākā/native parrot in the canopy above.







## Mangamate Loop Track

3 days, 2 nights, 34.3 km

The Mangamate Loop Track is an ideal introduction to backcountry tramping. Day one is on a well-formed track of a high standard. However, the next two days transition onto unformed tracks where you will be constantly crossing the Mangamate Stream. River-crossing skills are required. The mix of track types make this loop great for building backcountry tramping skills.



NZTopo50 map:  
BG38 Wairapukao

### Day 1: River Road car park to Central Whirinaki Hut

**Time:** 5 hr

**Distance:**  
16 km

**Track:** Easy tramping



Begin at the River Road car park. After crossing Te Whāiti-Nui-a-Toi Canyon bridge, keep the Whirinaki River on your right side and head south. After 1 hour (3.5 km), cross the Mangamate bridge (you'll end up back here on Day 3), and carry on past the Whirinaki Waterfall and up to Vern's Campsite. With a shelter and toilet, this is a good place to stop for lunch. From Vern's it's another 8 km to the first overnight stay at Central Whirinaki Hut.



There are multiple streams crossings on this track. Streams can become unsafe in high rainfall. If you are unsure about crossing, return to the hut until the stream can be negotiated safely.

### Day 2: Central Whirinaki Hut to Mangamate Hut

**Time:**  
4 hr 30 min

**Distance:**  
8.2 km

**Track:**  
Tramping



From Central Whirinaki Hut carry on along the Whirinaki River for 45 min (2 km), till you reach Taumutu bridge. The track branches left onto the Taumutu Stream and after around 1 km branches left again onto the Kakanui Stream. From here the route is almost entirely in the stream. After about 1 hr 30 min, the track climbs sharply to Mangamate Hut (9 bunks) which is located high on a ridge.

### Day 3: Mangamate Hut to River Road car park

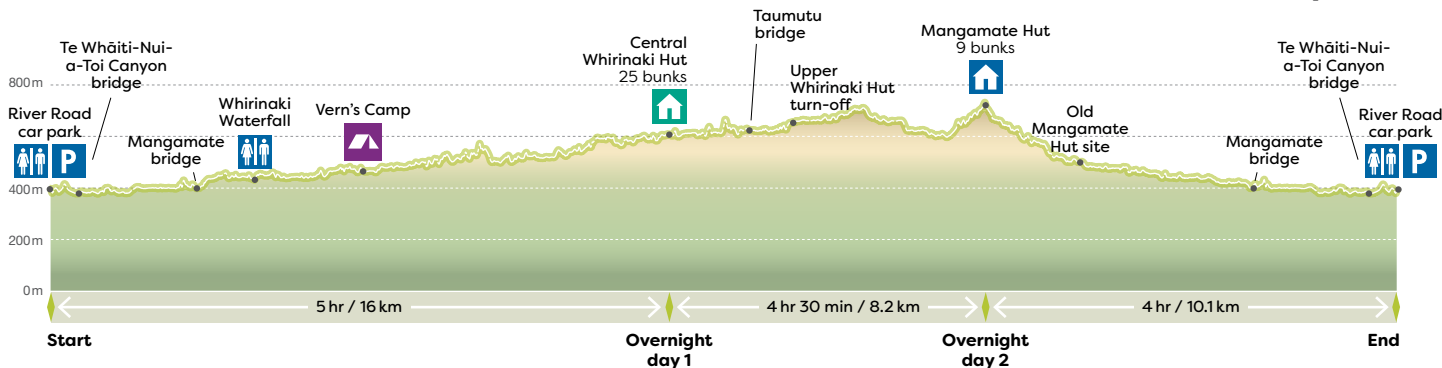
**Time:** 4 hr

**Distance:**  
10.1 km

**Track:**  
Tramping



The track travels steeply down from the hut where it now enters the Upper Mangamate Stream. From the hut it is 3 hr (6.6 km) downstream to the Mangamate bridge. The track is in and out of the stream – expect 60+ stream crossings. At the Mangamate bridge the loop closes. With the Whirinaki River on your left, follow the track back to River Road car park.





## Moerangi Track

3 days, 2 nights, 35 km

This shared-use track includes an overnight stop at the historic Rogers Hut (Te Wairoa) and amazing views from the top of the Moerangi saddle (955 m). There are plenty of North Island brown kiwi in the Okahu valley so make sure you spend some time at night quietly listening for their piercing calls.



NZTopo50 map:  
BG38 Wairapukao,  
BG39 Ruatahuna



Photo: Reg Quinn

### Day 1: Okahu Road end to Rogers Hut (Te Wairoa)

**Time:**  
3 hr 30 min

**Distance:**  
13 km

**Track:** Easy  
tramping/  
shared use



Begin at the Okahu Road end; it's 2 hr (7 km) from there to Skips Hut (Whangatawhia). From Skips the track climbs up over a saddle before tracking down to Rogers Hut making for a total of 13 km on the first day. Rogers Hut (6 bunks) is one of the original deer culler huts in the Whirinaki and is constructed of massive beech slabs and even has a stained glass window! Keep an eye out for whio/blue duck in the stream next to the hut.

### Day 2: Rogers Hut to Moerangi Hut

**Time:** 3 hr

**Distance:**  
9 km

**Track:** Easy  
tramping/  
shared use



From Rogers it is an easy walk to the next overnight destination: Moerangi Hut (9 bunks). Moerangi Hut is located about 500 m up a slight detour from the main track. There are plenty of kiwi around the hut so listen for their shrill calls as night falls.

### Day 3: Moerangi Hut to River Road car park

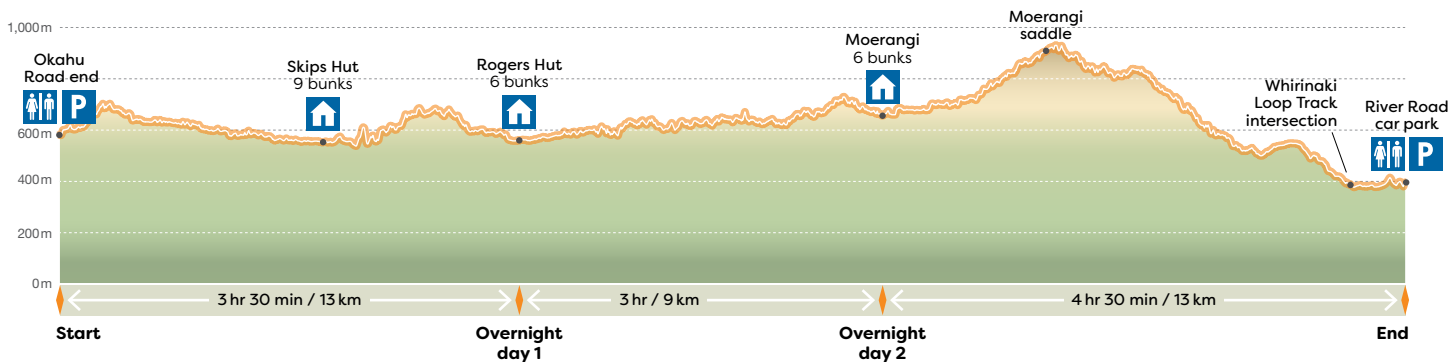
**Time:**  
4 hr 30 min

**Distance:**  
13 km

**Track:** Easy  
tramping/  
shared use



The final day of walking includes a big climb over the Moerangi saddle. The saddle tops out at 955 metres and has spectacular views of the Rangitaiki Plains far below. As the track travels down from the saddle it enters into lowland podocarp forest. Walk among the giant trees until you end at the River Road car park.







## Te Pua-a-Tāne Circuit

5 days, 4 nights, 78.7 km

The Te Pua-a-Tāne Circuit is the ultimate Whirinaki challenge for the more adventurous. Traversing nearly 80 km around the park, trampers will experience the full range of the Whirinaki's prehistoric forest. With miles and miles of forest, no mobile coverage, and rustic huts throughout, the circuit offers a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.



**NZTopo50 map:**  
BG38 Wairapukao,  
BG39 Ruatahuna,  
BH38 Te Haroto,  
BH39 Putorino

### Day 1: River Road car park to Central Whirinaki Hut

**Time:** 5 hr  
**Distance:** 16 km  
**Track:** Easy tramping



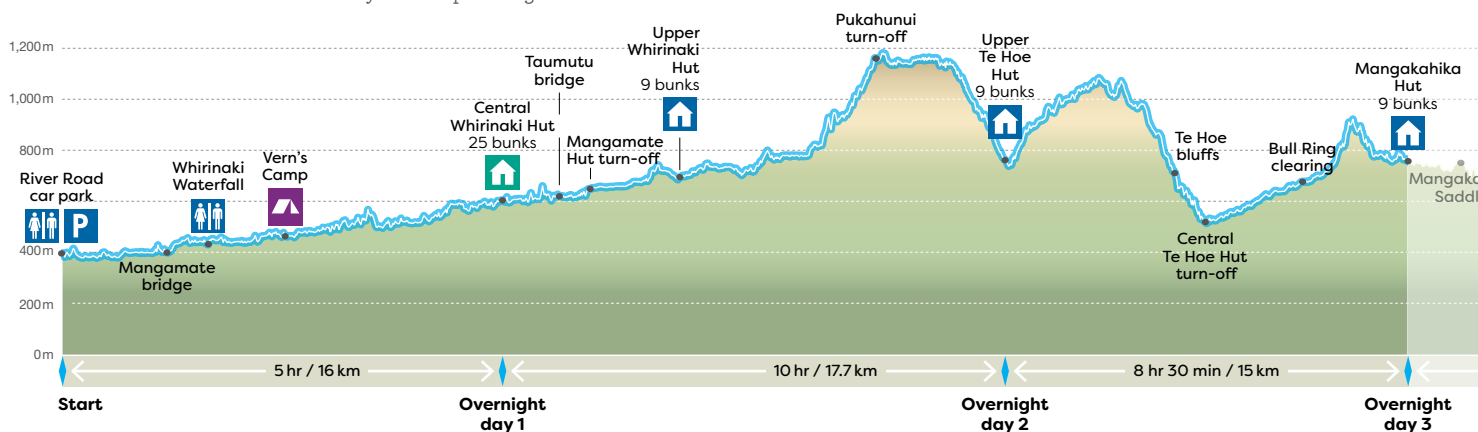
### Day 2: Central Whirinaki Hut to Upper Te Hoe Hut

**Time:** 10 hr  
**Distance:** 17.7 km  
**Track:** Tramping



### Day 3: Upper Te Hoe Hut to Mangakahika Hut

**Time:** 8 hr 30 min  
**Distance:** 15 km  
**Track:** Tramping



Do you know what 'Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne' means?

Te Pua-a-Tāne means the abundance or the blossoming of Tāne. For Māori, Tāne is god of the forest and all the creatures within the forest. As one of New Zealand's greatest forests, Whirinaki represents Tāne's domain in its fullest and most abundant state.

Photo: Tāwari in flower.



## Day 4: Mangakahika Hut to Moerangi Hut

**Time:**  
6 hr 30 min

**Distance:**  
17 km

**Track:** Easy tramping



On day four the track climbs up over a saddle before dropping down to Rogers Hut 3 hr 30 min (8.5 km). At Rogers take the track along the Moerangi Stream towards Moerangi Hut. It's another 3 hr (9 km) of easy walking from Rogers to Moerangi and night number four.

## Day 5: Moerangi Hut to River Road car park

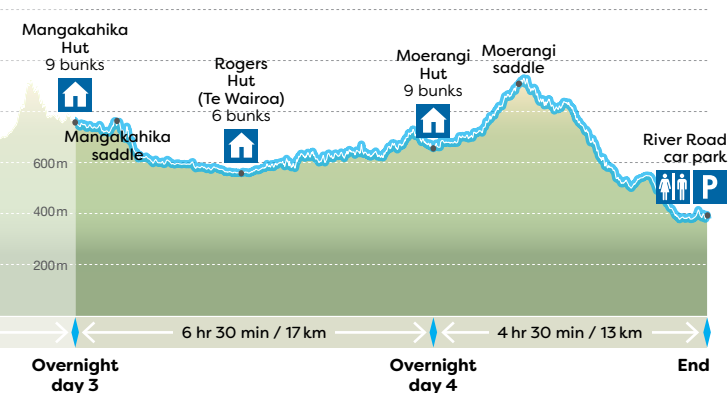
**Time:**  
4 hr 30 min

**Distance:**  
13 km

**Track:** Easy tramping



The final day is 4 hr 30 min (13 km) of walking and a big climb up and over the Moerangi saddle (955 m). The track travels downhill from the saddle into lowland podocarp forest. Finish where you started at the River Road car park.



## Track grades

Tracks are developed to different standards to cater for a variety of experiences. Choose the type of track that matches your skills, fitness and the experience you want – be realistic. Safety is your responsibility.



**EASY ACCESS SHORT WALKS** are for people of all abilities, including wheelchairs and strollers, on a well-formed track with an even surface, for up to an hour's easy walking. Walking shoes required.



**SHORT WALK TRACKS** are well formed with an even surface for up to an hour's easy walking, with few if any steps. Suitable for people of most abilities and fitness. Walking shoes required.



**WALKING TRACKS** are mostly well-formed, reasonably easy extended walks for up to a full-day return. Major water courses are bridged and track entrances and junctions are signposted. Walking shoes or light tramping/hiking boots.



**EASY TRAMPING TRACKS** are comfortable multi-day tramping/hiking tracks. They are generally well formed, though some sections may be rough, muddy or steep. Suitable for people with limited backcountry (remote area) experience. Light tramping/hiking boots required.



**TRAMPING TRACKS** are challenging day or multi-day tramping. Tracks generally have an unformed surface, but with track directional markers, poles or cairns. Suitable for fit people with backcountry skills and experience. Tramping/hiking boots.



**DUAL USE** tracks are shared tracks used by walkers and mountain bikers. People heading uphill should give way to those heading down. Respect others, respect the rules, respect the track.

## Track times/distances



Loop track



One way



Return

## Symbol key



Lodge/cabin/cottage



Serviced hut



Standard hut



Basic campsite



Backcountry campsite



Toilet



Car park



Picnic shelter



Heated shower



- Dual use
- Short walk
- - - Walking track
- - - Tramping track
- Sealed road
- Gravel road

#### Multi-day adventures

- The Whirinaki Track (p 18)
- Mangamate Loop Track (p 20)
- Moerangi Track (p 22)
- Te Pua-a-Tāne Circuit (p 24)

\* Managed by DOC and the NZ Deerstalkers' Association



## Getting there

Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park is 90 km from Rotorua, off Te Whaiti Rd, via SH38. The most popular entrance to the park is past Minginui village and up River Road to the River Road car park, where many walks begin.



## Know before you go

### Weather

The weather in the park can be very unpredictable and visitors should be prepared for cold, wet spells even in summer. Frosts and snow are also likely on high ground throughout the year. High rainfall causes rivers in the area to rise very quickly although they usually fall rapidly once the rain stops. You need to be well prepared for tramping and walking in the park.

### Your safety is your responsibility

Leave your intentions with a trusted contact via the outdoor intentions on the Mountain Safety website [mountainsafety.org.nz](http://mountainsafety.org.nz) and follow the steps below:

- Plan your trip
- Tell someone before you go
- Check the weather
- Know your limits
- Take sufficient supplies.

### For your safety

The maps in this brochure are a guide only and should not be used for navigation. The appropriate NZTopo50 maps for these trips can be found on the relevant track page.

Always contact the nearest DOC Visitor Centre or check with Department of Conservation staff for the latest information about tracks, facilities and conditions.

## Please ensure you have:



- ☐ Strong, comfortable boots
- ☐ A first aid kit
- ☐ Warm clothing (wool or polypropylene)
- ☐ Food and water
- ☐ A good raincoat
- ☐ A map

For tramping trips you will need other items such as a gas cooker, plenty of food and drink, a map and compass.

All huts have rainwater collection, and most tracks are near streams or rivers. Boil water for 3 minutes before use if you are unsure of the quality.

### Dogs

Whirinaki supports high numbers of North Island brown kiwi which are flightless and have few to no defences against introduced predators.

Dogs are allowed in Whirinaki by permit only. Contact your nearest DOC Office.

### Guided walks

A number of DOC-approved operators provide guided walks in the Whirinaki – for a full list go to: [www.doc.govt.nz/whirinaki](http://www.doc.govt.nz/whirinaki).



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

## For more information

Pick up a copy of the 'Huts and campsites' and 'Mountain biking' in Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne brochures, go to [www.doc.govt.nz/whirinaki](http://www.doc.govt.nz/whirinaki), or contact:

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