

# Cycle Touring in New Zealand

*A handbook for self-guided bicycle touring*



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Cycle Touring in New Zealand, by David Stillaman, Neil Becker, and Roger Lee, with contributions by Oren Lotan.

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For contact details, please visit [cycletour.org.nz](http://cycletour.org.nz).

Maps throughout this book were created using [OpenStreetMap](https://www.openstreetmap.org/).

## Preface to the First Edition

Way back in 2003 I was planning a solo cycle trip somewhere in New Zealand. But where to go? Where were the beauty spots? Which roads should I avoid? And what services could I expect to find?

This was back before the New Zealand Cycle Trail was even a twinkle in a Kennett brother's eye, before the launch of Google maps, and before blogging had taken hold. What a joy then it was to stumble across David Stillman's website [cycletour.org.nz](http://cycletour.org.nz); crammed with useful advice and with the promise of so much happy, cycling freedom. That year I followed some of David's suggested South Island routes and by the end of the tour I was completely hooked.

New Zealand has seen a phenomenal uptake in cycling, especially since the opening of the New Zealand Cycle Trail circa 2009. Along with this have come a growing number of online cycling resources. But still the cycletour site continues to hold its own, being one of the few websites devoted to self-guided touring. A wee gem that maintains a small but loyal following.

A while ago a reader suggested it'd be nice to have an offline version of the information to travel with, and this e-book - a direct transcription of the website - is the result. Enjoy!

Neil Becker  
January 2014

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>I The North Island</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Touring in the North Island</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 What to Expect . . . . .	2
1.2 Cycling out of Auckland . . . . .	2
<b>2 Auckland to Dargaville</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Auckland to Parakai . . . . .	4
2.2 Auckland to Parakai by Train . . . . .	7
2.3 Parakai to Dargaville via Pouto Point . . . . .	9
<b>3 Dargaville to Rawene</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 Dargaville to Waipoua Forest . . . . .	11
3.2 Waipoua Forest to Rawene . . . . .	14
<b>4 Rawene to Cape Reinga</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 Rawene to Ahipara . . . . .	16
4.2 Ahipara to Cape Reinga via 90 Mile Beach . . . . .	18
<b>5 Auckland to Mangawhai</b>	<b>20</b>
5.1 Auckland to Helensville from Waitākere Station . . . . .	20
5.2 Helensville to Mangawhai . . . . .	23
5.3 Wellsford to Waipu via Mangawhai Road . . . . .	25
<b>6 Mangawhai to the Bay of Islands</b>	<b>27</b>
6.1 Mangawhai to Whangārei . . . . .	27
6.2 Whangārei to the Bay of Islands via Oakura . . . . .	29
<b>7 Auckland to Kawhia</b>	<b>31</b>
7.1 Pukekohe to Waingaro . . . . .	31
7.2 Waingaro to Raglan . . . . .	33
7.3 Raglan to Kawhia . . . . .	35
<b>8 Kawhia to Mokau</b>	<b>37</b>
8.1 Kawhia to Marokopa . . . . .	37

8.2	Marokopa to Mokau . . . . .	40
<b>9</b>	<b>Hamilton to Waitara</b>	<b>42</b>
9.1	Hamilton to Te Kuiti . . . . .	42
9.2	Te Kuiti to Mokau . . . . .	45
9.3	Mokau to Waitara . . . . .	47
<b>10</b>	<b>The Forgotten World Highway</b>	<b>49</b>
10.1	New Plymouth to Whangamōmona . . . . .	49
10.2	Whangamōmona to Taumarunui . . . . .	52
10.3	Alternate Ideas . . . . .	54
<b>11</b>	<b>Taumarunui to New Plymouth via Ōhura</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Te Kuiti to Whanganui</b>	<b>58</b>
12.1	Te Kuiti to Taumarunui . . . . .	58
12.2	Taumarunui to Pipiriki by Canoe or Kayak . . . . .	60
12.3	Pipiriki to Whanganui . . . . .	63
<b>13</b>	<b>Taumarunui to Ohakune</b>	<b>65</b>
13.1	Taumarunui to Whakahoro . . . . .	65
13.2	Whakahoro to Ohakune . . . . .	67
<b>14</b>	<b>Ohakune to Masterton</b>	<b>70</b>
14.1	Ohakune to Taihape . . . . .	70
14.2	Taihape to Palmerston North . . . . .	72
14.3	Palmerston North to Masterton via Pahiatua . . . . .	75
<b>15</b>	<b>Introduction to the Coromandel</b>	<b>77</b>
15.1	Why the Coromandel? . . . . .	77
15.2	Auckland to Papakura by Train . . . . .	77
<b>16</b>	<b>The Coromandel West Coast</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>The Coromandel East Coast</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Tauranga to Ōpōtiki</b>	<b>90</b>
18.1	Tauranga to Whakatāne . . . . .	90
18.2	Whakatāne to Ōpōtiki . . . . .	92
<b>19</b>	<b>Introduction to the East Cape</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Ōpōtiki to Te Araroa</b>	<b>95</b>
20.1	Ōpōtiki to Te Kaha . . . . .	95

20.2 Te Kaha to Te Araroa . . . . .	97
<b>21 Te Araroa to Gisborne</b>	<b>99</b>
21.1 Te Araroa to Tokomaru Bay . . . . .	99
21.2 Tokomaru Bay to Anaura Bay . . . . .	101
21.3 Tokomaru Bay to Gisborne . . . . .	103
<b>22 Gisborne to Wairoa</b>	<b>105</b>
22.1 Gisborne to Wairoa via Tiniroto . . . . .	105
22.2 Gisborne to Wairoa via Mōrere . . . . .	108
22.3 Gisborne to Wairoa via Mahia . . . . .	110
<b>23 Wairoa to Napier</b>	<b>112</b>
23.1 Wairoa to Lake Tutira . . . . .	112
23.2 Lake Tutira to Napier . . . . .	114
<b>24 Napier to Herbertville</b>	<b>116</b>
24.1 Napier to Blackhead Beach . . . . .	116
24.2 Blackhead Beach to Herbertville . . . . .	119
<b>25 Herbertville to Featherston</b>	<b>121</b>
25.1 Herbertville to Tiraumea . . . . .	121
25.2 Tiraumea to Featherston . . . . .	123
<b>26 Cape Palliser</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>27 Featherston to Wellington</b>	<b>129</b>
27.1 Featherston to Wellington via Ōrongorongo Station . . . . .	129
27.2 Featherston to Wellington via the Remutaka Rail Trail . . . . .	132
<b>28 Wellington</b>	<b>135</b>
28.1 Wellington Airport to the City Centre . . . . .	135
28.2 Wellington "Round the Bays" Loop . . . . .	137
<b>II The South Island</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>29 Picton</b>	<b>140</b>
29.1 Arriving at Picton by Ferry from Wellington . . . . .	140
29.2 Where to go from Picton . . . . .	140
<b>30 Picton to Nelson</b>	<b>143</b>
30.1 Picton to Nelson . . . . .	143

30.2 Pelorus to Nelson via the Maungatapu Road . . . . .	146
<b>31 Nelson to Tākaka</b>	<b>149</b>
31.1 Nelson to Motueka . . . . .	149
31.2 Motueka to Tākaka . . . . .	151
<b>32 Golden Bay</b>	<b>153</b>
32.1 Tākaka to Anatori . . . . .	153
<b>33 Motueka to Murchison</b>	<b>156</b>
33.1 Motueka to Tapawera . . . . .	156
33.2 Tapawera to Murchison . . . . .	158
<b>34 Murchison to Christchurch</b>	<b>160</b>
34.1 Murchison to Maruia Springs . . . . .	160
34.2 Maruia Springs to Hanmer Springs . . . . .	163
34.3 Hanmer Springs to Christchurch . . . . .	165
34.4 Amberley to Sheffield via Route 72 . . . . .	167
<b>35 St Arnaud to Blenheim</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>36 St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>37 Molesworth Road</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>38 Picton to Kaikōura</b>	<b>176</b>
38.1 Picton to Blenheim . . . . .	176
38.2 Blenheim to Kaikōura . . . . .	178
<b>39 Kaikōura to Christchurch</b>	<b>180</b>
39.1 Kaikōura to Waipara via the Inland Road . . . . .	180
39.2 Kaikōura to Cheviot . . . . .	182
39.3 Cheviot to Christchurch . . . . .	184
<b>40 Christchurch</b>	<b>186</b>
40.1 Christchurch Airport to the City Centre . . . . .	186
<b>41 Christchurch to Lake Tekapo</b>	<b>188</b>
41.1 Christchurch to Geraldine . . . . .	188
41.2 Geraldine to Lake Tekapo via Fairlie . . . . .	190
<b>42 Lake Tekapo to Cromwell</b>	<b>192</b>
42.1 Lake Tekapo to Omarama . . . . .	192
42.2 Omarama to Cromwell via the Lindis Pass . . . . .	194

<b>43 Omarama to Oamaru and down to Otago</b>	<b>196</b>
43.1 Omarama to Oamaru and the East Coast . . . . .	196
43.2 Duntroon to Naseby via Danseys Pass . . . . .	198
43.3 Omarama to St Bathans . . . . .	200
<b>44 Oamaru to Dunedin</b>	<b>202</b>
44.1 Oamaru to Waikouaiti . . . . .	202
44.2 Waikouaiti to Middlemarch . . . . .	204
44.3 Waikouaiti to Dunedin via Karitane . . . . .	206
<b>45 Dunedin</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>46 Dunedin to Invercargill</b>	<b>210</b>
46.1 Dunedin to Balclutha via the Coast Road . . . . .	210
46.2 Balclutha to the Caitlins and Invercargill . . . . .	212
<b>47 Invercargill to Te Anau</b>	<b>214</b>
47.1 Invercargill to Tuatapere . . . . .	214
47.2 Tuatapere to Te Anau . . . . .	216
47.3 Te Anau to Milford Sound . . . . .	218
<b>48 Queenstown to Te Anau via the Mavora Lakes</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>49 Dunedin to Alexandra</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>50 Dunedin to Middlemarch</b>	<b>226</b>
50.1 Dunedin to Middlemarch by Train . . . . .	226
50.2 Dunedin to Middlemarch by Bike . . . . .	226
<b>51 The Otago Central Rail Trail</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>52 Ophir to Alexandra</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>53 Omakau to Lindis Crossing</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>54 Cromwell to Clyde</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>55 Cromwell to Queenstown</b>	<b>243</b>
55.1 Cromwell to Garston via the Nevis Road . . . . .	243
55.2 Kingston to Queenstown . . . . .	246
<b>56 The Southern Lakes</b>	<b>248</b>
56.1 Cromwell to Wānaka . . . . .	248
56.2 Wānaka to Queenstown via the Crown Range . . . . .	250



<b>57 Wānaka to Fox Glacier</b>	<b>252</b>
57.1 Wānaka to Makarora . . . . .	252
57.2 Makarora to Haast . . . . .	254
57.3 Haast to Fox Glacier . . . . .	256
<b>58 Fox Glacier to Greymouth</b>	<b>258</b>
58.1 Fox Glacier to Harihari . . . . .	258
58.2 Harihari to Hokitika . . . . .	260
58.3 Hokitika to Greymouth . . . . .	262
<b>59 Arthur's Pass</b>	<b>264</b>
59.1 Greymouth to Arthur's Pass . . . . .	264
59.2 Hokitika to Arthur's Pass via the Old Christchurch Road . . . . .	266
59.3 Arthur's Pass to Christchurch . . . . .	268
<b>60 Heading North from Greymouth</b>	<b>270</b>
60.1 Greymouth to Karamea . . . . .	270
60.2 Greymouth to Reefton . . . . .	272
60.3 Reefton to Murchison . . . . .	274
60.4 Murchison to St Arnaud . . . . .	276
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>A Getting Started</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>B Resources</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>291</b>

# **Part I**

## **The North Island**

# Touring in the North Island

## 1.1 What to Expect

The principal beauty spots in the North Island tend to focus around Northland (north of Auckland), Coromandel to the east, and East Cape. This is not to ignore pockets of real scenic beauty in Hawkes Bay, the Bay of Plenty, New Plymouth and around the thermal areas of the central North Island. In this guide I will try to address all of them.

A Few Cautionary Words...

- The North Island is more populated than the south, so expect a higher density of traffic.
- Be aware of careless heavy traffic vehicles, in particular logging trucks and tour buses.
- Keep well left and practice defensive cycling.
- Never ride two abreast.
- Do not leave valuables in your tent.
- Do not leave your tent loosely secured on your racks.
- There is often a long distance (over 80 km) between towns, stores and services.
- Northland hills tend to be short and steep. So you barely get your breath and the correct cog on the way down before you are climbing again. The south island has more mountains, but the incline is gentler.

## 1.2 Cycling out of Auckland

It is difficult and unwise to cycle out of Auckland. There are few bike paths and those that exist are difficult to access without detailed local knowledge. There is also a large amount of heavy traffic that is not known for being bike-conscious or friendly. The best way out overall is to [catch a train](#)<sup>1</sup>. This is the cheapest option, but be aware that local passenger trains in Auckland do

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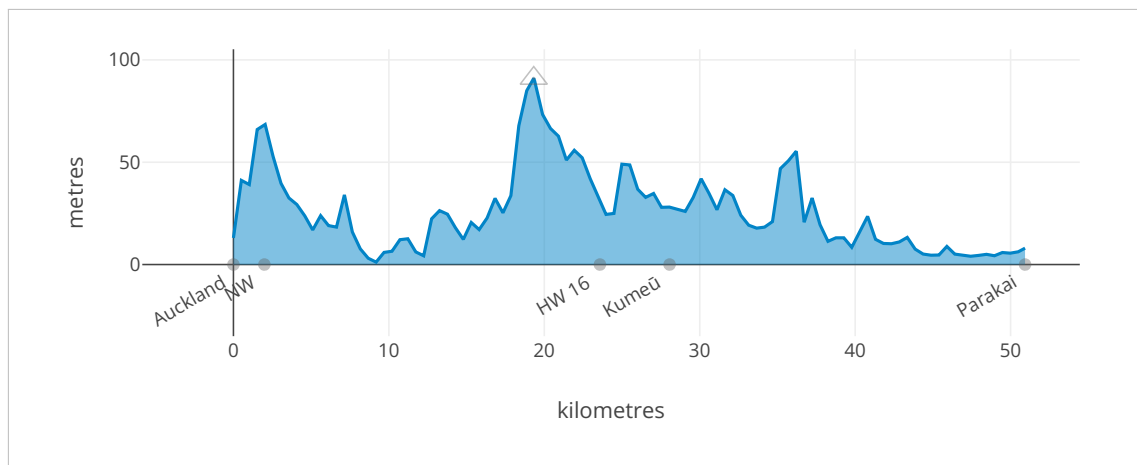
<sup>1</sup><https://at.govt.nz/bus-train-ferry>

not have baggage cars and you will be leaning your bike in the aisle. Taking this into account, ensure you catch a train outside of rush hours. The main departure station in Auckland is at Britomart at the bottom of the city, but there are branch lines to the west you can access at several points including Newmarket, Mt Eden, and Mt Albert.

# Auckland to Dargaville

## 2.1 Auckland to Parakai

Distance: 51 km   Ascent: 224 m   Descent: 229 m



To the uninitiated cycling out of Auckland can be a real challenge. But with care and a bit of luck this route to Parakai along the North Western Cycle Way can be done!

Let's assume you are at the Britomart Transport Centre at the bottom of Queen Street. Start by proceeding up Queen Street for about 2 kilometres until you come to the intersection with Ian McKinnon Drive. Here you turn right onto the [North Western Cycle Way](#)<sup>1</sup>.

Hats off to the Auckland City Council for building these great cycle lanes. Not always beautiful but clearly popular judging from the number of cyclists who were making use of the North Western on the day I cycled through. Unfortunately the council has stopped short of making them truly useful to anyone without local knowledge, as crucial junctions are missing signage. This can make for slow progress as you second guess yourself at every intersection and perhaps have to backtrack when occasionally you take the wrong turn.

A case in point is the first turn-off up and over the Newton Road overpass then down to follow the North-Western Motorway. You have to intuit some-

<sup>1</sup><https://www.aucklandbikemap.co.nz/nwcycleway>

how the requirement to veer left and up to the overpass, because it's only once you reach Newton Road that any signage appears. And this deficit of signage continues right along the route.

I had stopped and was puzzling over my map, trying to marry it with the scene in front of me when, in a proud-to-be-a-Kiwi moment, a fellow cyclist pulled up and asked if I needed help. This good Samaritan then guided me all the way through to Te Atatu where he left me in the certain knowledge that I couldn't go wrong from this point on.

About 200m further along I was again checking my next move when yet another cyclist stopped. This time I was guided all the way to the turn-off onto Highway 16, where I really couldn't go wrong. I would have got there in the end but these two cyclists of generous spirit probably saved me an hour or so of false starts and backtracking.

As with leaving any city, once you're out of the urban area then navigation becomes plain sailing. And so it is heading along the final stretch through Kumeū (store, café, cycle shop) and into Parakai. The highway is busy but, apart from a few danger spots where you're better to get off and walk, there is a goodish shoulder. Perhaps a better alternative though is to take the [back roads though Helensville](#).

Parakai is a tiny hamlet, popular for its thermal pools, with a store, take-aways and a pub. The campground is attached to the [Parakai Springs](#)<sup>2</sup> complex and campers get half price admission to the pools. Nice enough, but I found the quieter Palm Springs over the road more my speed.



Where is the signage?

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<sup>2</sup><https://parakaisprings.co.nz/>

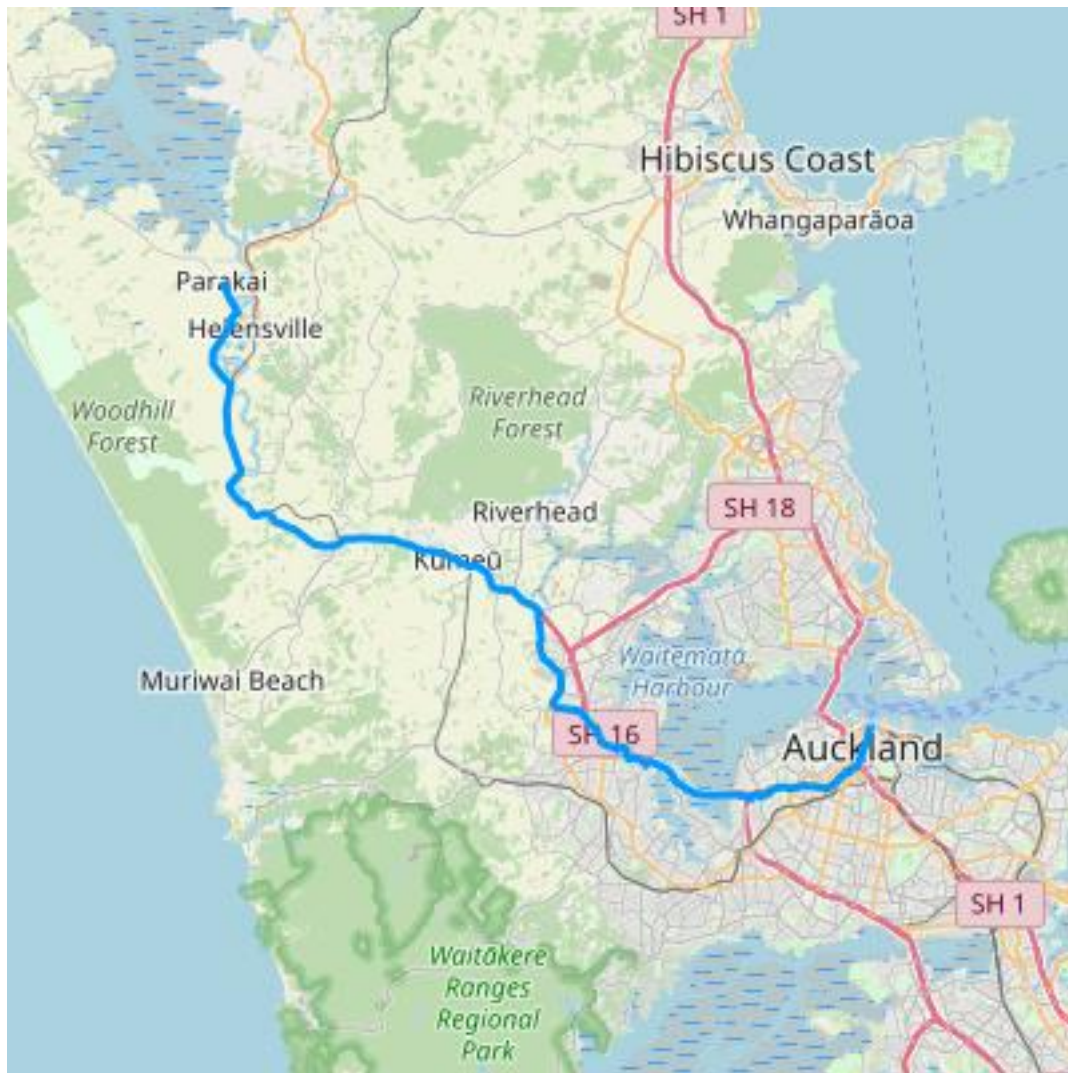
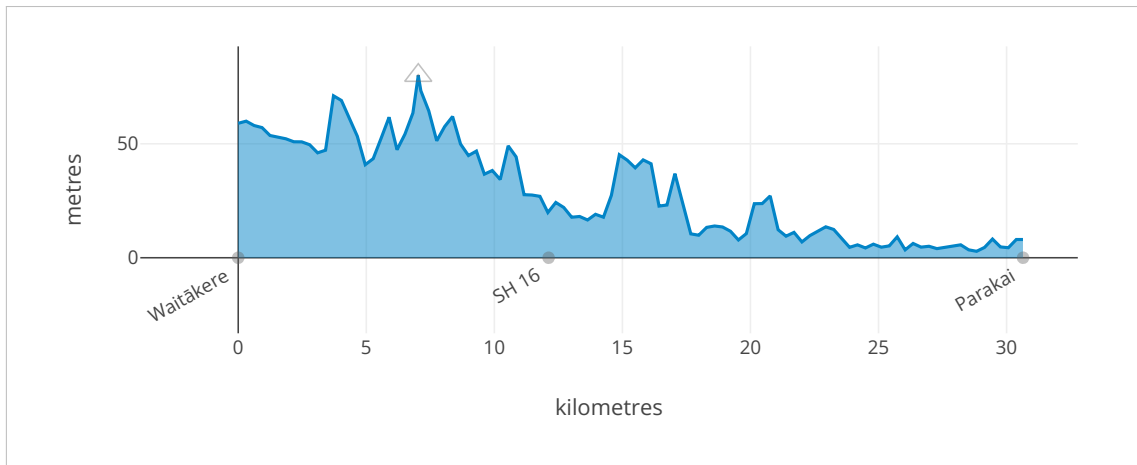


Figure 2.1: Auckland to Parakai

## 2.2 Auckland to Parakai by Train

Distance: 31 km   Ascent: 88 m   Descent: 139 m



A good alternative is to [take the train](#)<sup>3</sup> to Waitākere (week days only) then cycle the relatively flat 30 or so kilometres to Parakai.

<sup>3</sup><https://at.govt.nz/bus-train-ferry/>



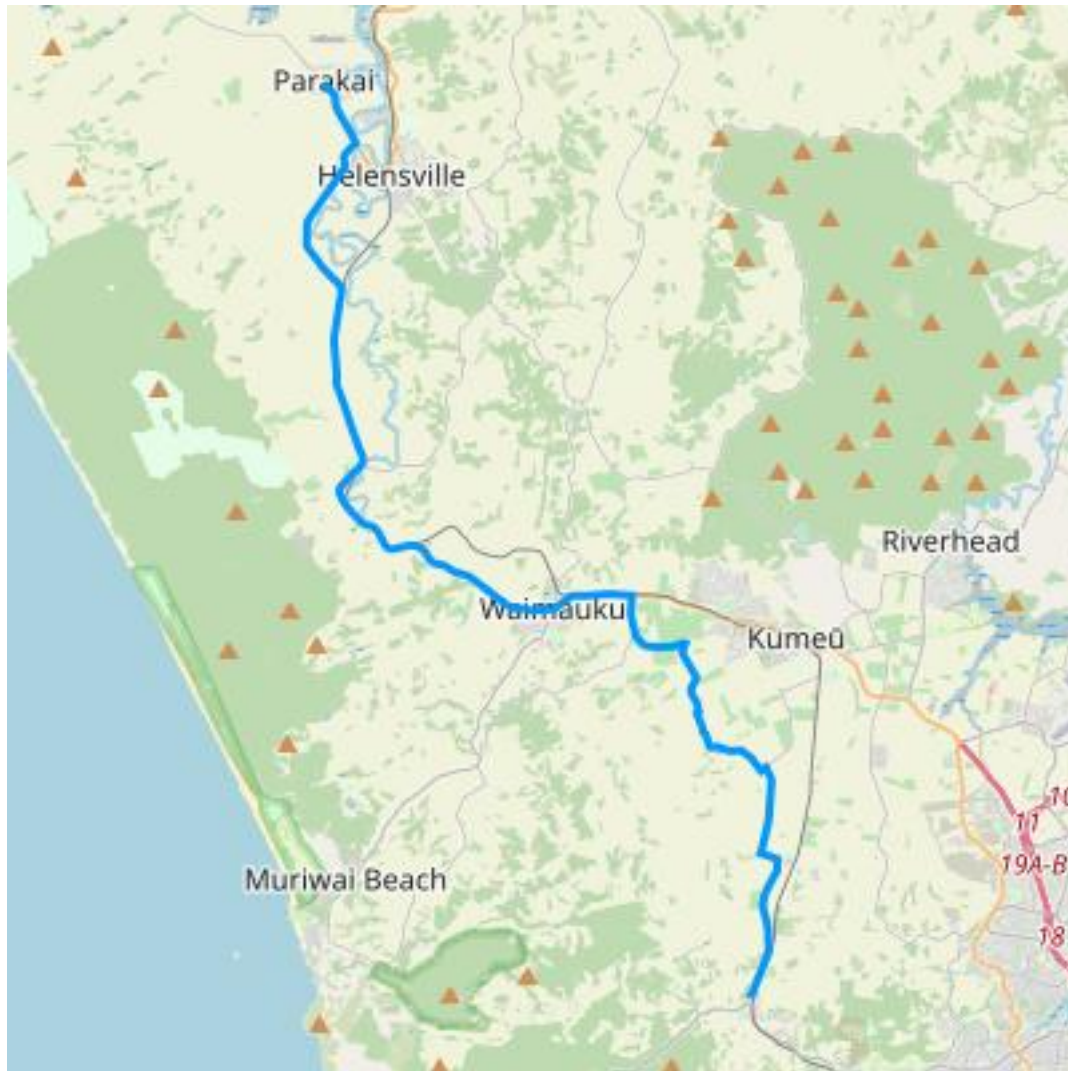
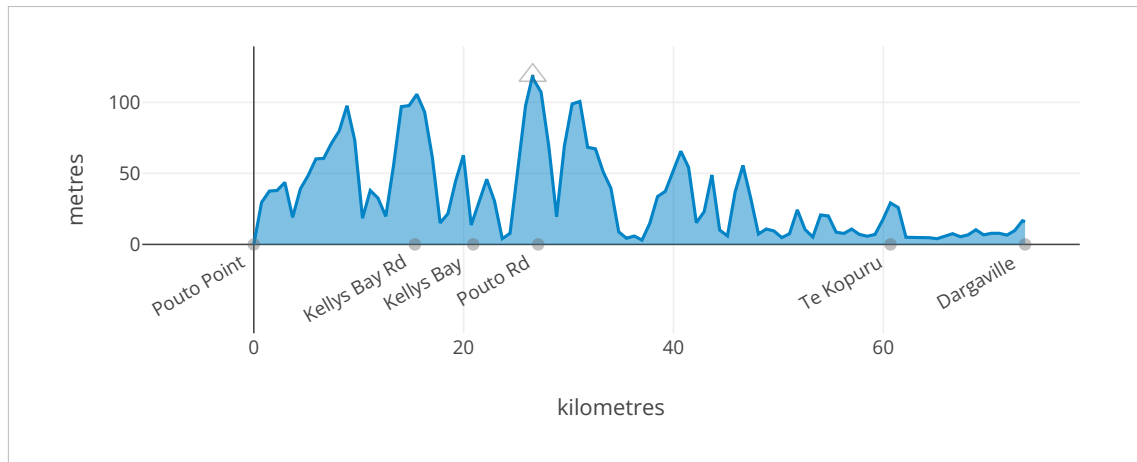


Figure 2.2: Auckland to Parakai by Train

## 2.3 Parakai to Dargaville via Pouto Point

Distance: 74 km Ascent: 730 m Descent: 714 m



Several charter services operate in and around the Kaipara Harbour and will take you - subject to weather - to Pouto Point. Your best bet is to join up with a fishing trip as the cost to charter the boat is prohibitive. I went with Shamrock Charters who picked me up at first light from the pontoon down the end of Springs Road. The trip wound its way down the Parakai River and out onto the Kaipara Harbour, stopping briefly to pick up the fishing group and eventually arriving at Pouto Point after about 3 hours.



Boarding at Parakai

Those wishing to dawdle may choose to stopover at the Pouto Point Motor Camp. Otherwise you begin the slow climb up the gravel Pouto Rd. At about 15 km you have the choice to continue along Pouto Rd or turn right into Kellys Bay where there is a campground. The distance is roughly the same but the Kellys Bay route is quieter and gets you safely away from the logging trucks that work this area.

Once you rejoin the main road the gravel gives way to tarmac and the remainder of the day is spent riding through rolling farm land into "New Zealand's Kumara Capital", Dargaville, a small town with everything you need.

For an alternate view of this ride (in the other direction) see the Kennett Brothers' book [Classic New Zealand Cycle Trails](https://kennett.co.nz/)<sup>4</sup> or checkout the online de-

<sup>4</sup><https://kennett.co.nz/>

scription in the [NZ Cycle Trail<sup>5</sup>](#) site (has boat charter contact details). Note that when I last cycled through there were no services on this route, as the store at Te Kopuru had closed.

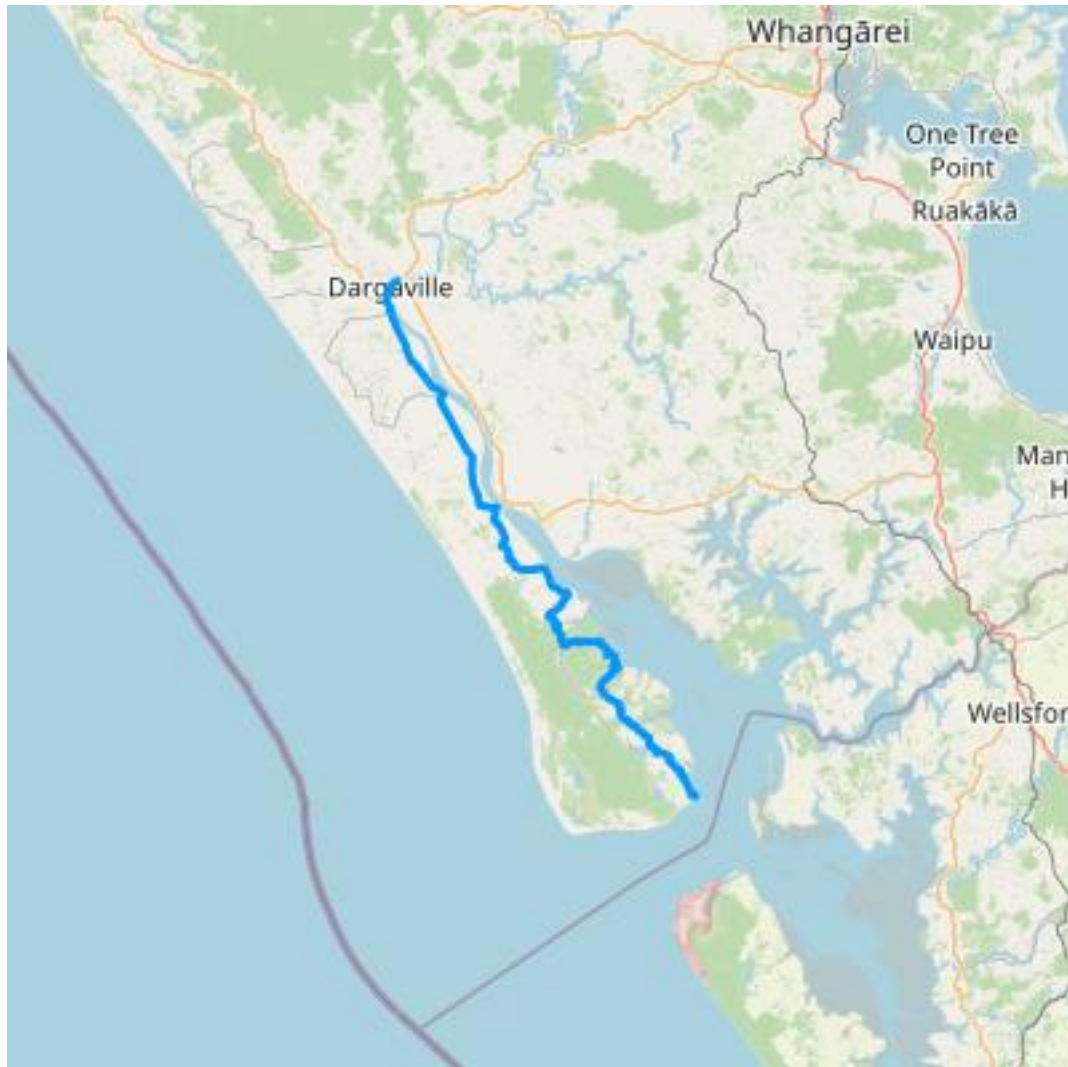


Figure 2.3: Parakai to Dargaville via Pouto Point

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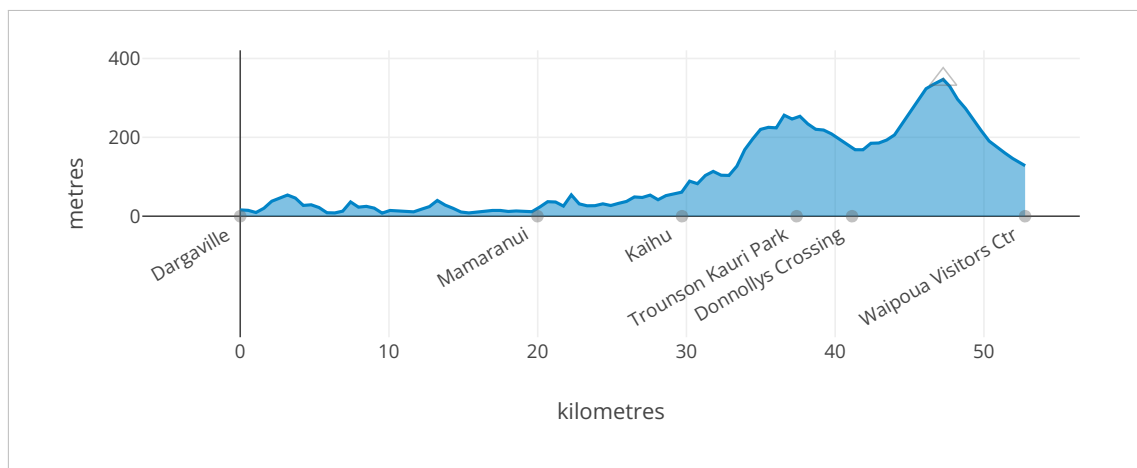
<sup>5</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/heartland-rides/kaipara-missing-link/>

# Dargaville to Rawene

This route mainly follows the highway 12 tourist trail north. Although traffic volumes aren't high, the road is winding and generally with no margin, so it pays to keep yourself highly visible.

## 3.1 Dargaville to Waipoua Forest

Distance: 53 km   Ascent: 535 m   Descent: 423 m



You can avoid the worst of the Dargaville traffic by heading out along the quieter Hokianga Rd, which soon becomes Waihue Rd, forking left at Parore West Rd to join Highway 12.

Soon after Kaihu (Service Station, pub) you have the choice to continue along the highway, but I recommend instead turning right into the quieter Trounson Park Road. No sooner have you turned off when you come to the "Kauri Coast" [Top 10 Holiday Park](https://www.kauricoasttop10.co.nz/)<sup>1</sup> along the banks of the Kaihu River. Here the promise of a guided night-walk through the forest may entice to stop early for the day. As the road signs attest, this is Kiwi country and if you are lucky a night walk may reward you



Waipoua Forest

<sup>1</sup><https://www.kauricoasttop10.co.nz/>

with a sighting of these shy, nocturnal birds. At the very least you're likely to hear their surprisingly raucous cry when night falls.

Another 5 or so km brings you to [Trounson Kauri Park](#)<sup>2</sup>, a forest reserve with a DOC campground and bush walk through Kauri forest. The camp, while a little close to the road, is pretty flash for a DOC offering, having a kitchen with cooking facilities, a fridge and even showers which are purportedly hot. This is a good place to stop and perhaps enjoy your own DIY night-walk.

Personally I wanted a bit more ride out of the day so after pausing to fortify myself with a spot of lunch I pressed on along the now gravel road through the tiny hamlet of Donnelly's Crossing and up to rejoin the smooth tarmac of highway 12. The reward was a wonderful 5 km downhill run through the luxuriant Waipoua Forest.

At around the 50 km mark you reach the turn-off to the Waipoua Visitors Centre. The centre is a kilometre down the road, with a café and an excellent campground set along the banks of the Waipoua River. A great place to stop for the night.



Waipoua River

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/northland/places/trounson-kauri-park/things-to-do/trounson-kauri-park-campground/>



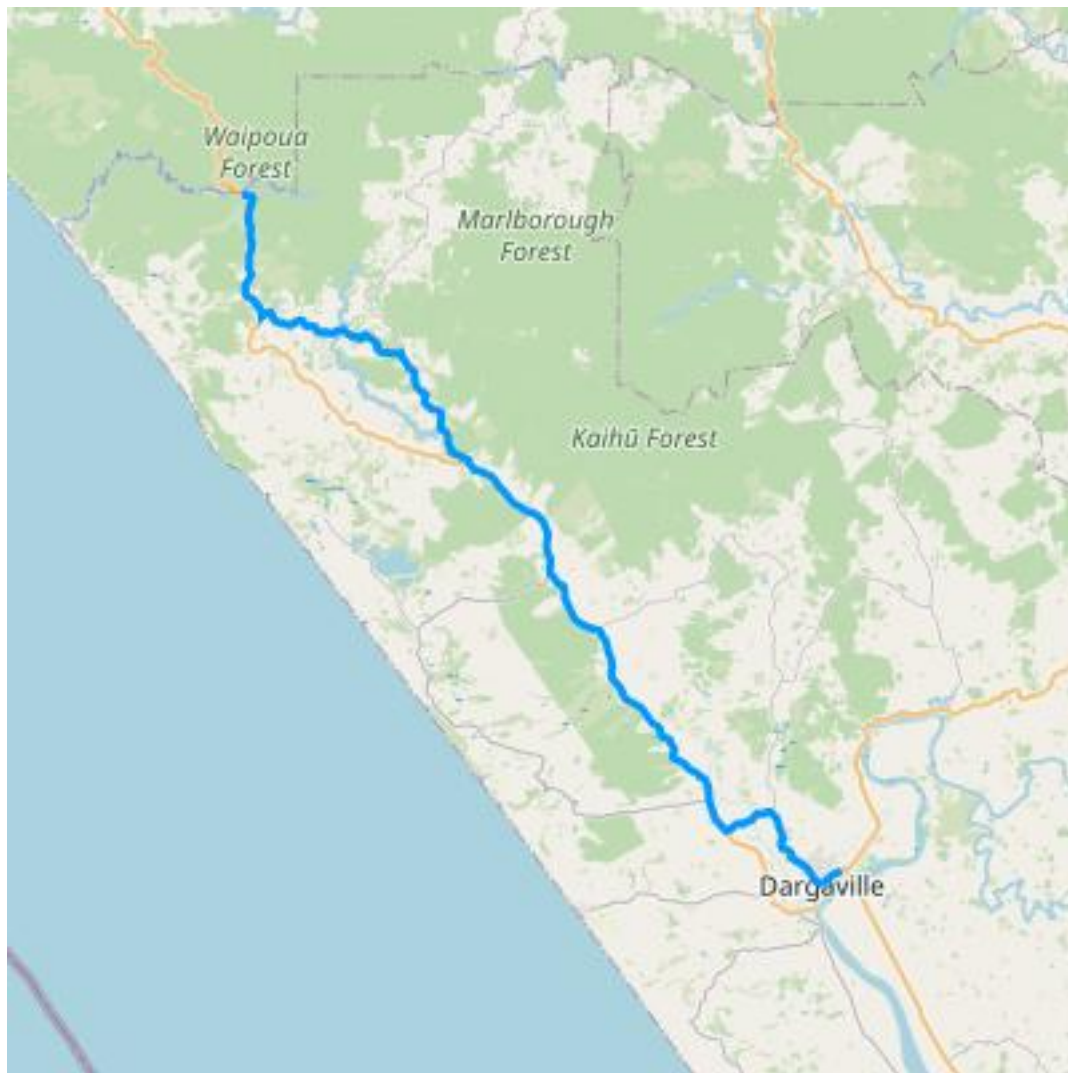
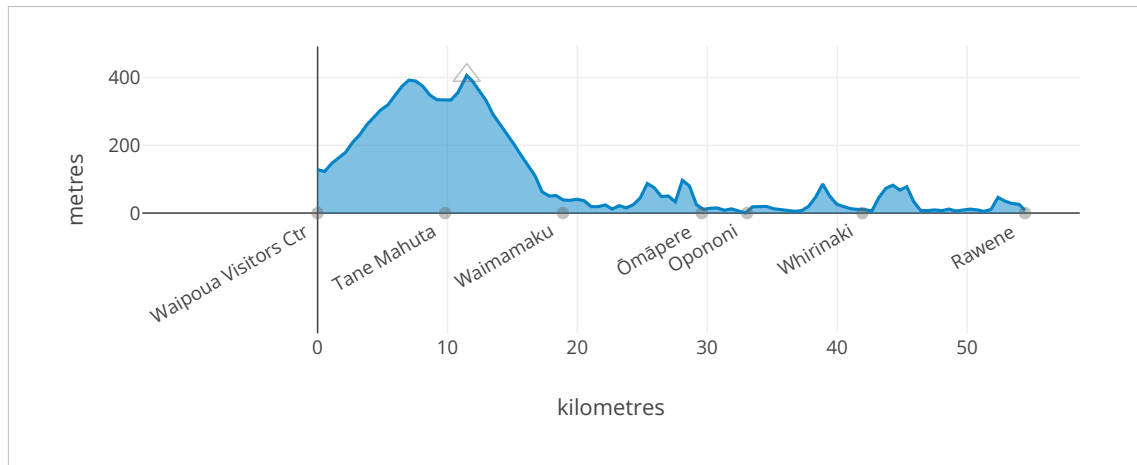


Figure 3.1: Dargaville to Waipoua Forest

## 3.2 Waipoua Forest to Rawene

Distance: 54 km Ascent: 755 m Descent: 875 m



Day two starts with a 300m climb; a daunting prospect, but the gradient is forgiving and on fresh legs the ride is not overly arduous. The scenery is here is spectacular, with huge Kauri rising out of the surrounding forest. Near the peak the road squeezes into a single lane between the massive "Darby and Joan".

Tour buses abound at the short bush walk to *Tāne Mahuta* (Lord of the Forest). But despite the spectacle of so many tourists this magnificent tree, estimated to be around 2000 years old and with a [girth of over 15 metres](https://register.notabletrees.org.nz/tree/view/800)<sup>3</sup>, really is an awe-inspiring sight.

Another magnificent downhill takes you out of the Waipoua Forest and into Waimamaku where there is a service station, store and great café called Morrell's. The remainder of the day is an up-and-down affair following the beautiful Hokianga coastline through the holiday spots of Ōmāpere and Opononi (stores, camping & cafés aplenty), then veering inland again briefly before turning off to the quaint seaside village of Rawene (galleries, pub, cafés and store).



Hokianga sunset



Rawene

<sup>3</sup><https://register.notabletrees.org.nz/tree/view/800>

After having a look around town you can head back up the hill to the only campground. Alternately, for a small fee you can catch the ferry across the harbour (they run all day, leaving Rawene at half past every hour) then ride the few easy kilometres to the picturesque seaside village of Kohukohu.

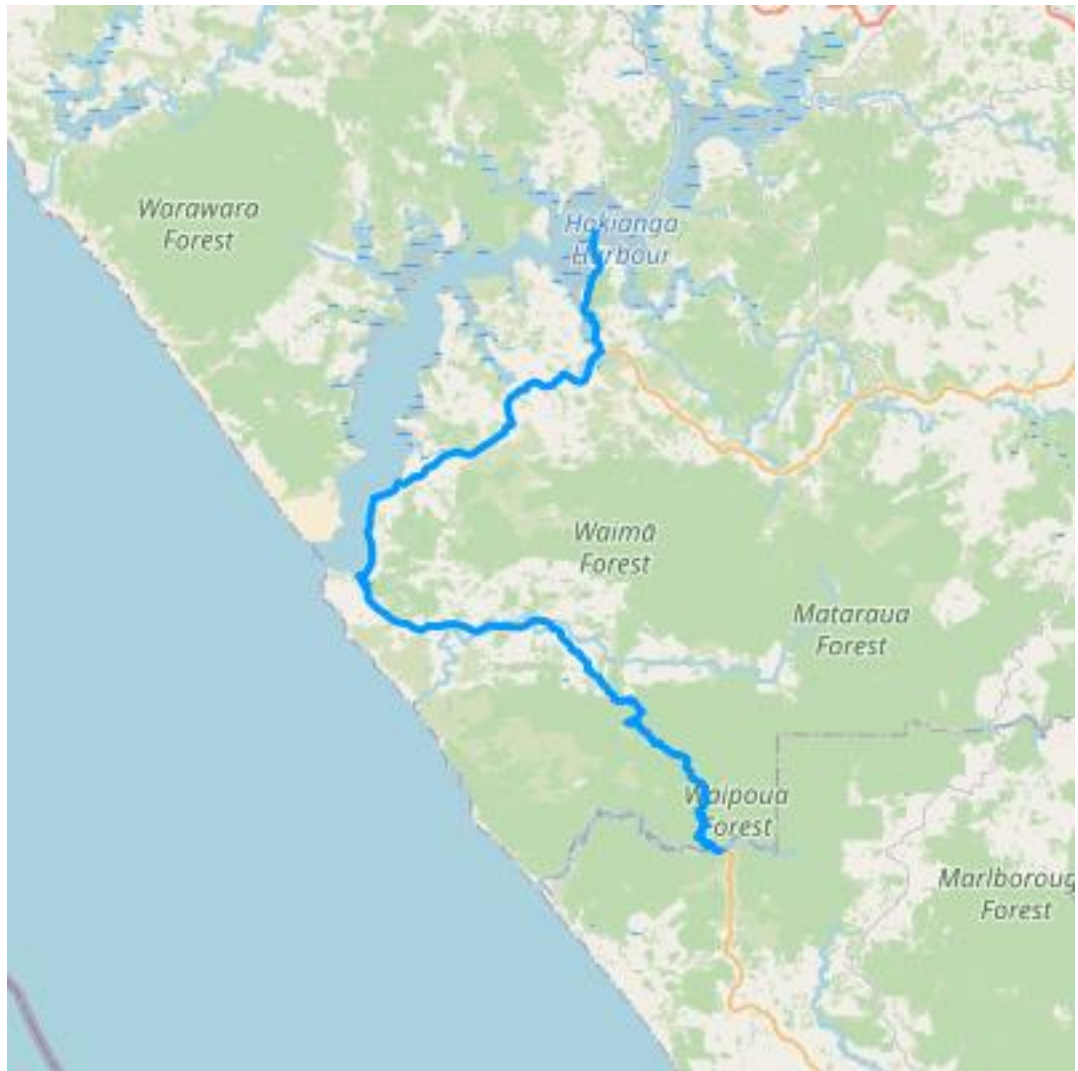


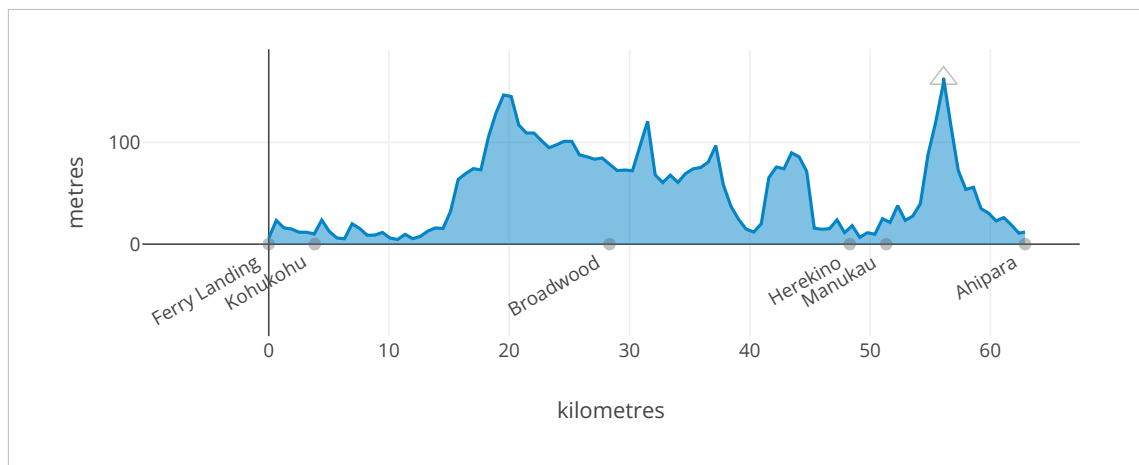
Figure 3.2: Waipoua Forest to Rawene



# Rawene to Cape Reinga

## 4.1 Rawene to Ahipara

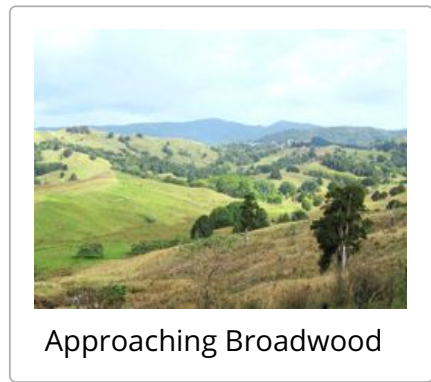
Distance: 63 km Ascent: 524 m Descent: 518 m



This is an easyish day through rolling countryside. Once off the ferry it is a quick, flat ride into the village of Kohukohu. Although smaller than Rawene, Kohukohu is every bit as picturesque and offers several good cafés, galleries, a store, library and camping.

Quiet country roads take you onwards to Broadwood (store, toilet). At Herekino (camping at the pub 1 km down a side road) you can see how the next 15 km will unfold, as you pick your way through the few remaining hills to the small settlement of Ahipara at the base of Ninety Mile Beach. Here there is a café (pricey), mini-mart (also pricey) and a dairy/takeaway. The campground is about a kilometre down the road and also has a small rudimentary store.

If the tides are favourable and you want a bit more ride out of the day then you might consider cycling the 15 km to the next campground at Papakauri.



Approaching Broadwood

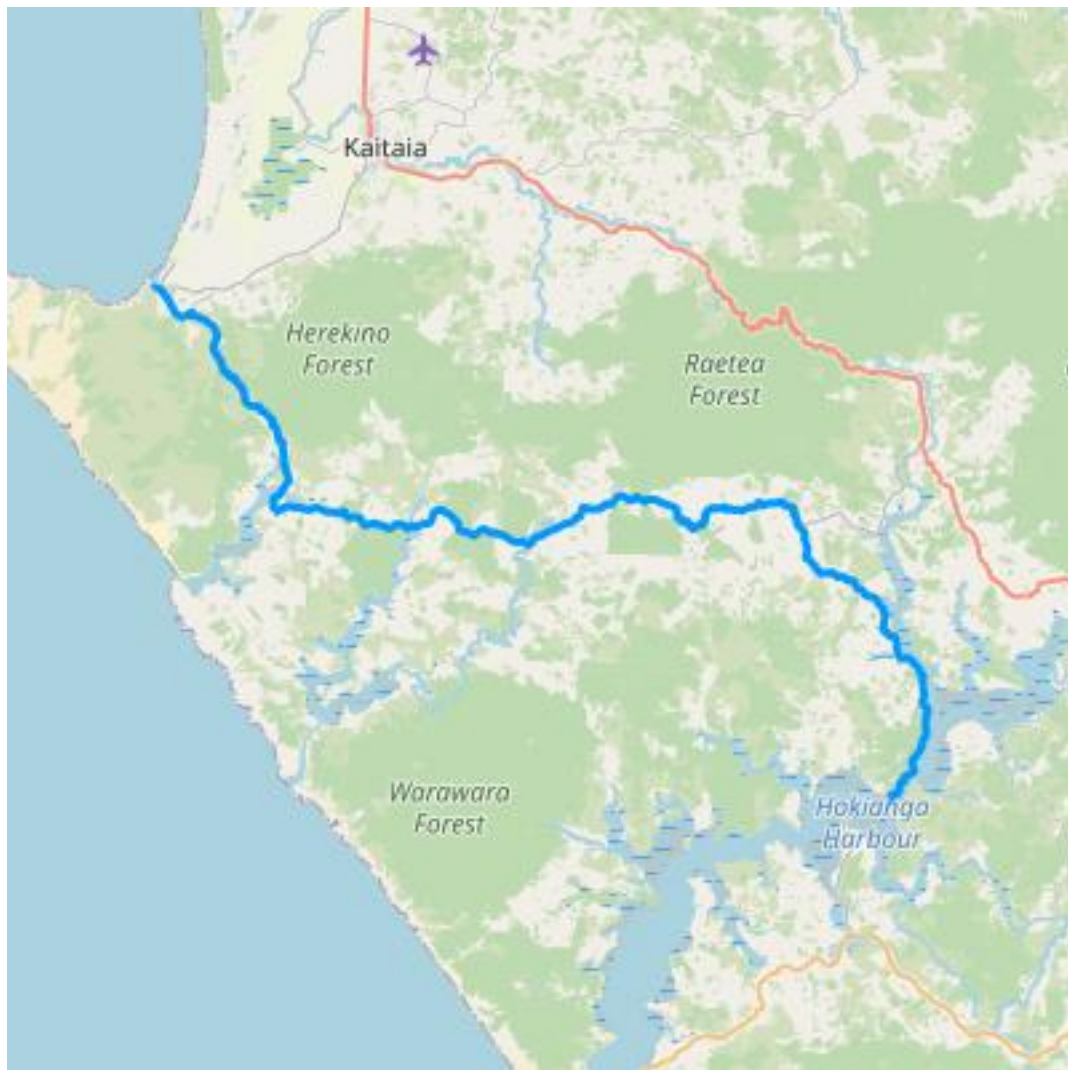
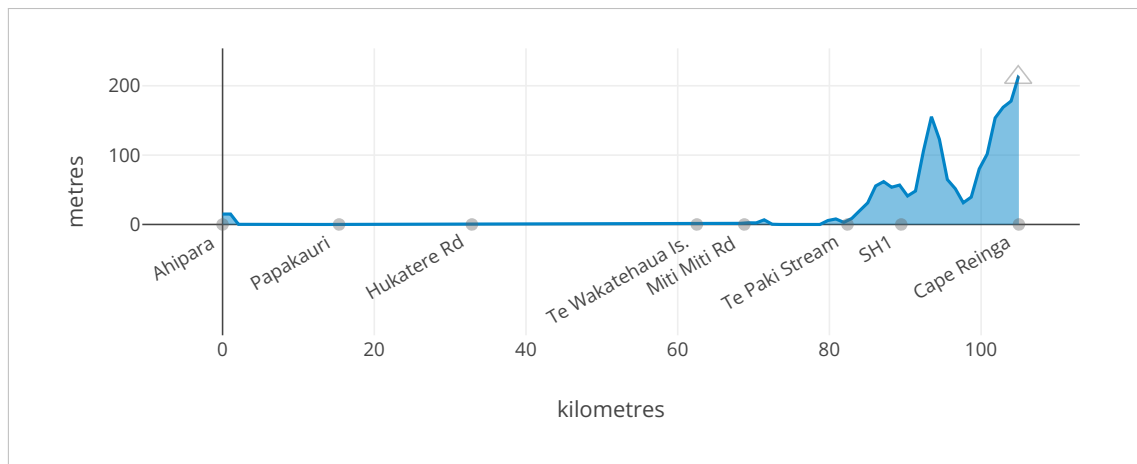


Figure 4.1: Rawene to Ahipara

## 4.2 Ahipara to Cape Reinga via 90 Mile Beach

Distance: 105 km    Ascent: 425 m    Descent: 229 m



Despite its name, *Ninety Mile Beach* is not really 90 miles long; it is actually just 55 miles (about 90 km). The origin of the name is unknown, though there are several theories, including this from [wikitravel.org](https://wikitravel.org/en/Ninety_Mile_Beach)<sup>1</sup>:

*It got its name from the estimate which the early farmers in the area used when bringing their cattle to market. They figured they could drive their livestock 30 miles per day and it would take them three days to make the trip from the top to the bottom of the beach. Thus the ninety mile name.*

For roughly 3 to 3½ hours either side of low tide the beach is eminently rideable as the sand is compact and hard. If you can, try to plan your trip to coincide with a favourable [low-tide time](#)<sup>2</sup> so that you have enough daylight hours to complete the ride. Apart from the campground at Papakauri there are no services en route.

Although initially a bit jarring traipsing with your bike through the soft sand to the water's edge, trepidation is very soon replaced with delight at the novelty of riding along the beach. A beautiful sunny day; a zephyr of a tail wind; what could be better?

Actually, the novelty does wear off and by about half way I'd fished out my MP3 player to help break up the monotony. Those cyclists with internal gearing will be thankful for their setup because sand unavoidably gets everywhere - but this route is still by far preferable to Highway 1 which has no road margin, is longer, undulating, and attracts a surprising volume of traf-

<sup>1</sup>[https://wikitravel.org/en/Ninety\\_Mile\\_Beach](https://wikitravel.org/en/Ninety_Mile_Beach)

<sup>2</sup><https://metSERVICE.com/marine/regions/northland/tides/locations/cape-maria-van-diemen>

fic.

At around 80 km from Ahipara you turn up Te Paki Stream, joining the roadway which leads to Highway 1 for the last push up to Cape Reinga (or *Te Rerenga Wairua* meaning *leaping-off place of spirits*) where there is a walkway to the iconic lighthouse. The nearest campground (the most northern in New Zealand) is the DOC camp about 5 km away at [Tapotupotu Bay](https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/northland/places/te-paki-recreation-reserve/things-to-do/campsites/tapotupotu-campsite/)<sup>3</sup>. A beautiful spot, but the mosquitoes are fierce!



Rush hour, 90 Mile Beach

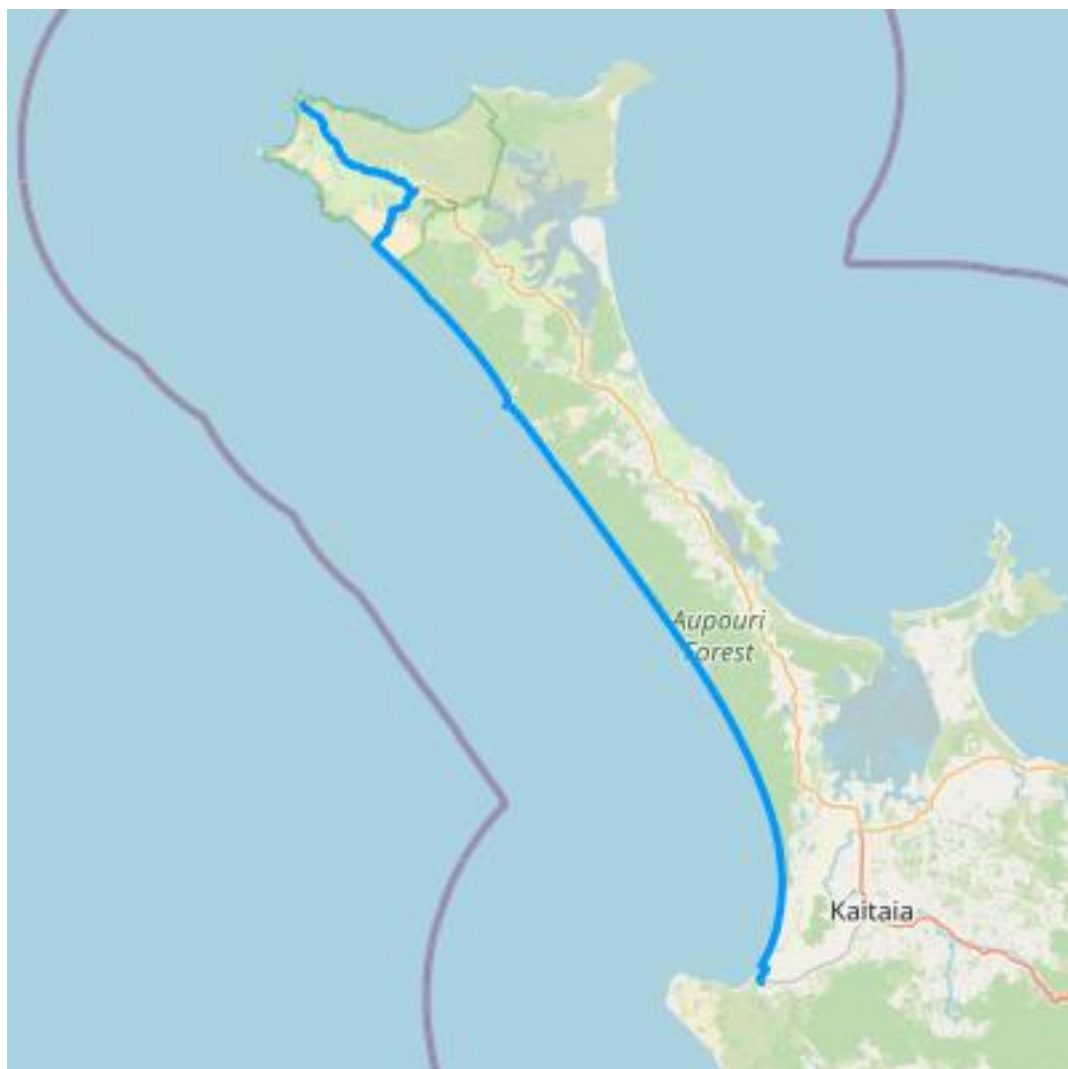


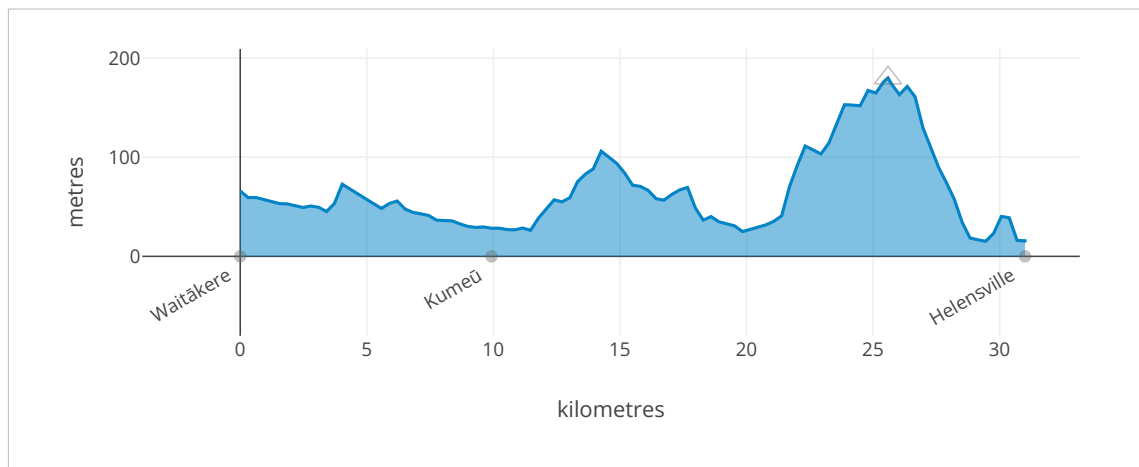
Figure 4.2: Ahipara to Cape Reinga via 90 Mile Beach

<sup>3</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/northland/places/te-paki-recreation-reserve/things-to-do/campsites/tapotupotu-campsite/>

# Auckland to Mangawhai

## 5.1 Auckland to Helensville from Waitākere Station

Distance: 31 km   Ascent: 258 m   Descent: 310 m



First off, you will need to [catch a train](#)<sup>1</sup> that heads out west and alight at Waitākere Station. This is generally not a problem and they run fairly frequently

Let us assume you have arrived at Waitākere Station from Auckland and it is 11.30 am. Your next point is Helensville (camping ground, hostel, supermarket etc). This is approximately 45-50 km and can be reached by using the back roads through to Kumeū via Taupaki and thence the back road from Kumeū to Helensville. There is a main road, Highway 16, but this is a busy thoroughfare and while there is a broad border in parts, you are often left on a narrow fringe of tar-seal with traffic passing close by at high speed. The back roads are very pleasant and allow a little sightseeing of small rural holdings and a background of pine forested hills.

From the Waitākere Station, follow Waitākere Road through Taupaki till it meets up with the main road at Kumeū (about 4.5 km). Cross the main highway and take Oraha Road. This climbs up (about 2 km) to a T junction with Old North Road. Take a left onto old North Road and continue for 5 or so

<sup>1</sup><https://at.govt.nz/bus-train-ferry>

kilometres until you reach another T junction. Take the left onto Wishart Road and this will lead you into Helensville. The roads are not always clearly marked. Avoid any deceptive side roads masquerading as T junctions including Pinetone Road, Ararimu Valley Road, Inland Road, Waikoukou Valley Road, Peak Road, Taylor Road and Kiwitahi Road. The route gives good views over rolling farmland and the Kaipara Harbour. If this sounds complicated, it isn't really and you can always ask locals if you are unsure.

Helensville is a small rural town with all facilities and has a history of river traffic because it is bordered by the vast Kaipara Harbour on its western side. Helensville could have been the capital of New Zealand but the shifting sandbars of the Kaipara proved to be too treacherous for shipping. A few kilometres out of town is the mineral spa of Parakai Springs. This is worth a look if you like hot water bathing/soaking.

Alternatively, you can skip Helensville and catch an Intercity bus from Auckland to Wellsford (or get dropped at the Mangawhai turnoff) and start your journey there.



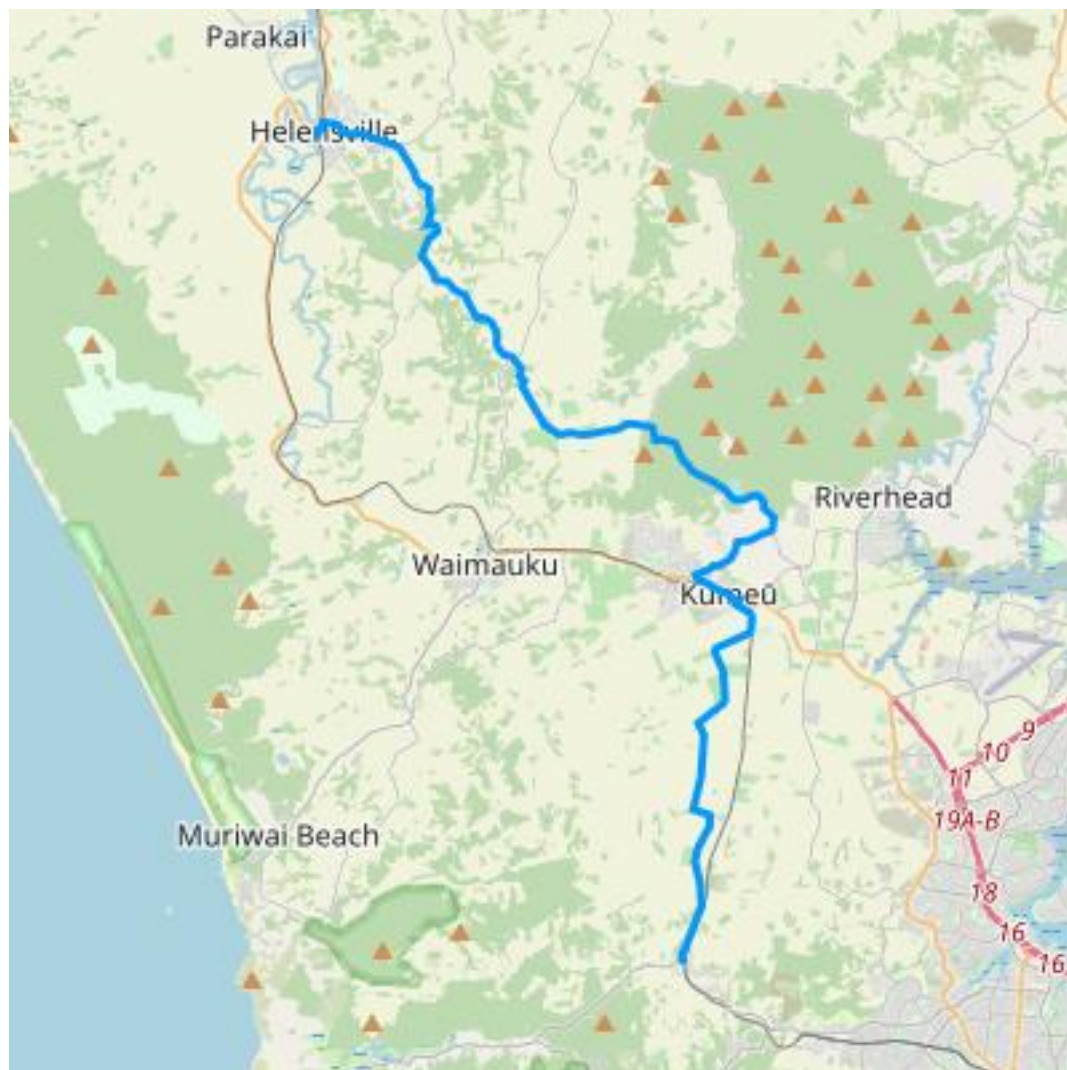
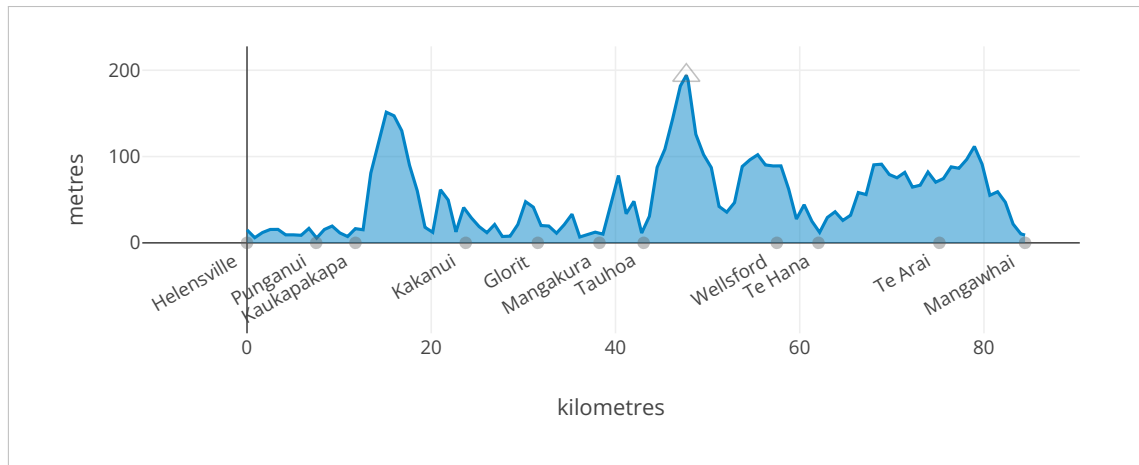


Figure 5.1: Auckland to Helensville from Waitākere Station

## 5.2 Helensville to Mangawhai

Distance: 84 km   Ascent: 857 m   Descent: 863 m



This is a longish day, not because of the distance, but because there are a series of steepish rises and falls on the road to Wellsford and these can be tiring. Take Highway 16 out of Helensville heading out toward the small township of Kaukapakapa (12 km). The road passes through farmland and affords great views over the Kaipara Harbour. Keep following the road for another 46k's to Wellsford. Wellsford is a large town on Main Highway 1.

There is a accommodation here at the pub, but no campground. Continue following the main highway for about 6 k's or so passing through the township of Te Hana and then turn right onto the road to Mangawhai (approx 24 km).

Mangawhai has several campgrounds, stores and hostels. My favourite is the Riverside Camping ground just before the town. You can camp on the estuary and watch the moon rise over the water. To your right are the great dunes of the bird sanctuary. To your left the mangrove swamps and the inland river. There is a further campground at Mangawhai Heads, another 7 km or so that is right on the mouth of the estuary looking out toward Sail Rock.

Mangawhai will likely be your introduction to Northland's famous beaches. A coastline of fine, yellow sand and clear waves that are tinged with phosphorescence at nighttime. You might like to take a break for a day here before pressing onward. If you can, hire a kayak and head over the estuary to



Mangawhai bird sanctuary



the bird sanctuary, part of a great sand bar bordering the coast. You can spend a day just moseying around here or walk across to the beach and swim. It's a long, beautiful beach and mostly empty. Mangawhai is called magical by the locals and there is some evidence for this. Be aware that Mangawhai consists of two villages some six or seven kilometres apart; Mangawhai and Mangawhai Heads.

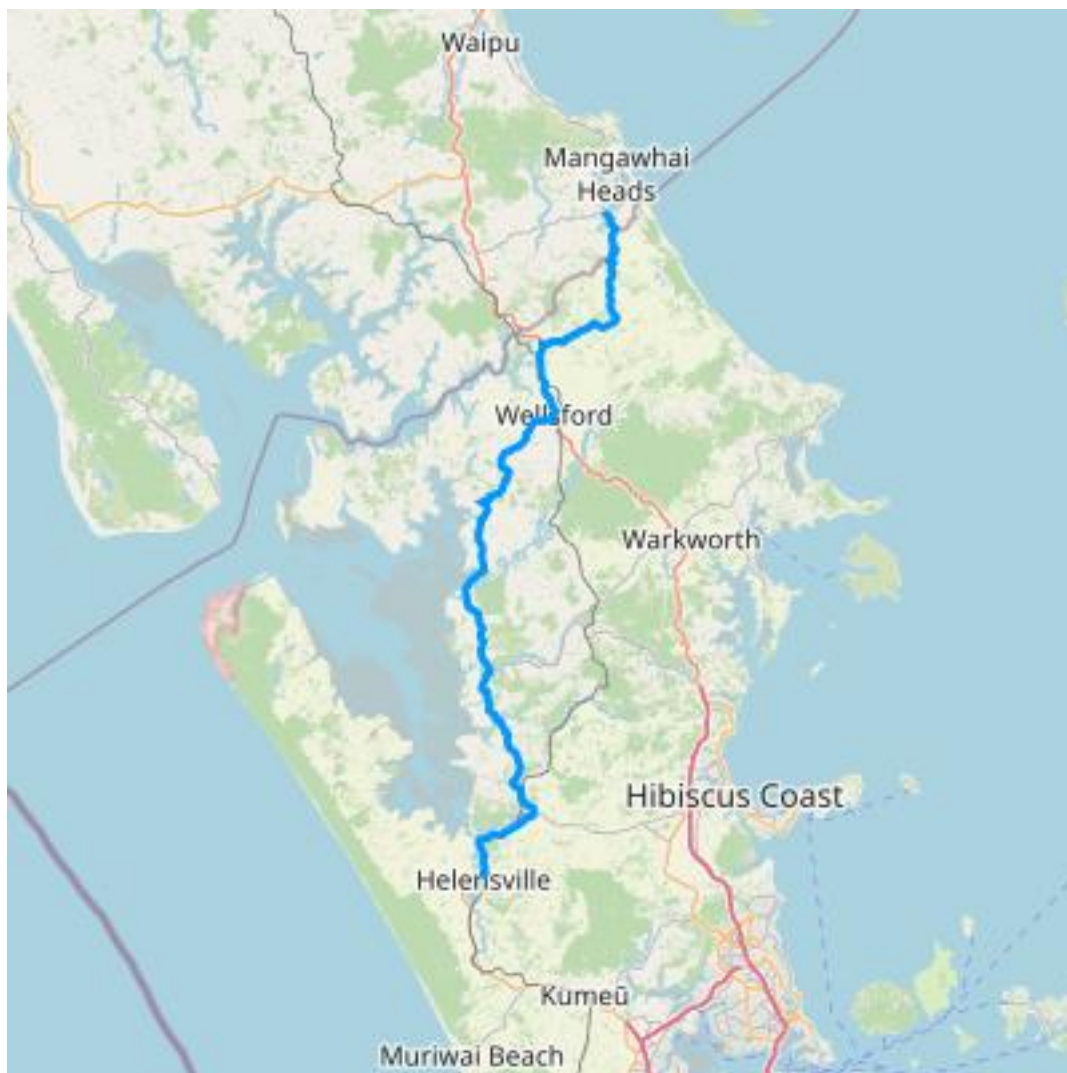
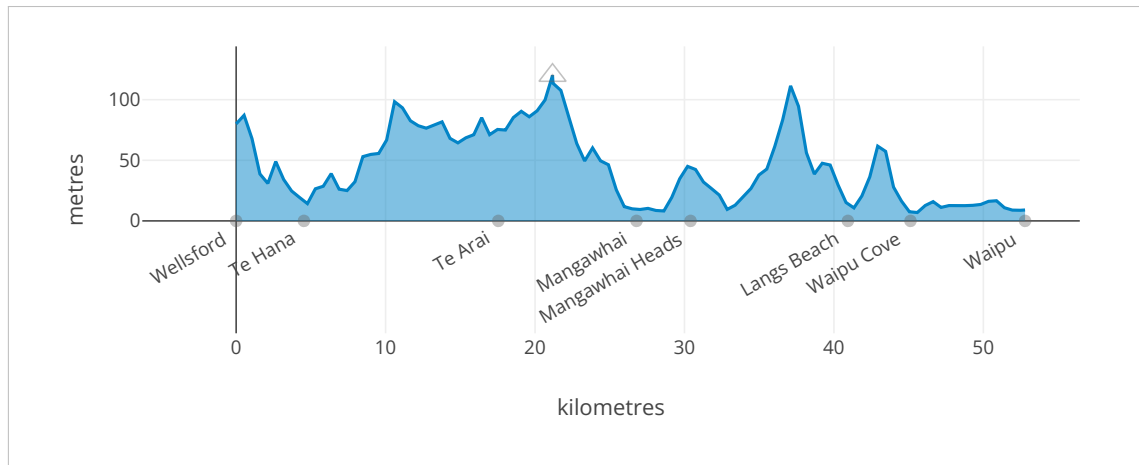


Figure 5.2: Helensville to Mangawhai

## 5.3 Wellsford to Waipu via Mangawhai Road

Distance: 53 km   Ascent: 366 m   Descent: 437 m



These observations are courtesy of Nic, a fellow cyclist from South Africa...

*Once you get off the heavy trafficked highway 1 the Mangawhai road is much less busy and quite beautiful as you pass over the rolling hills made up mostly by farms. Preferably one would try to avoid the highway altogether. The scenery is serene and calming but not really comparable to what is further up north. There are some swim friendly beaches and Mangawhai Heads offers some surfing spots, but it seems a little spoilt being too populated (by New Zealand standards). The funny thing about the North Island is that there seem to be fewer mountains, but more climbs on the bike, as you are always going up or down over the hills. This makes for some hard climbs with a heavy bike. The road is also narrow but the sparse traffic makes it better.*

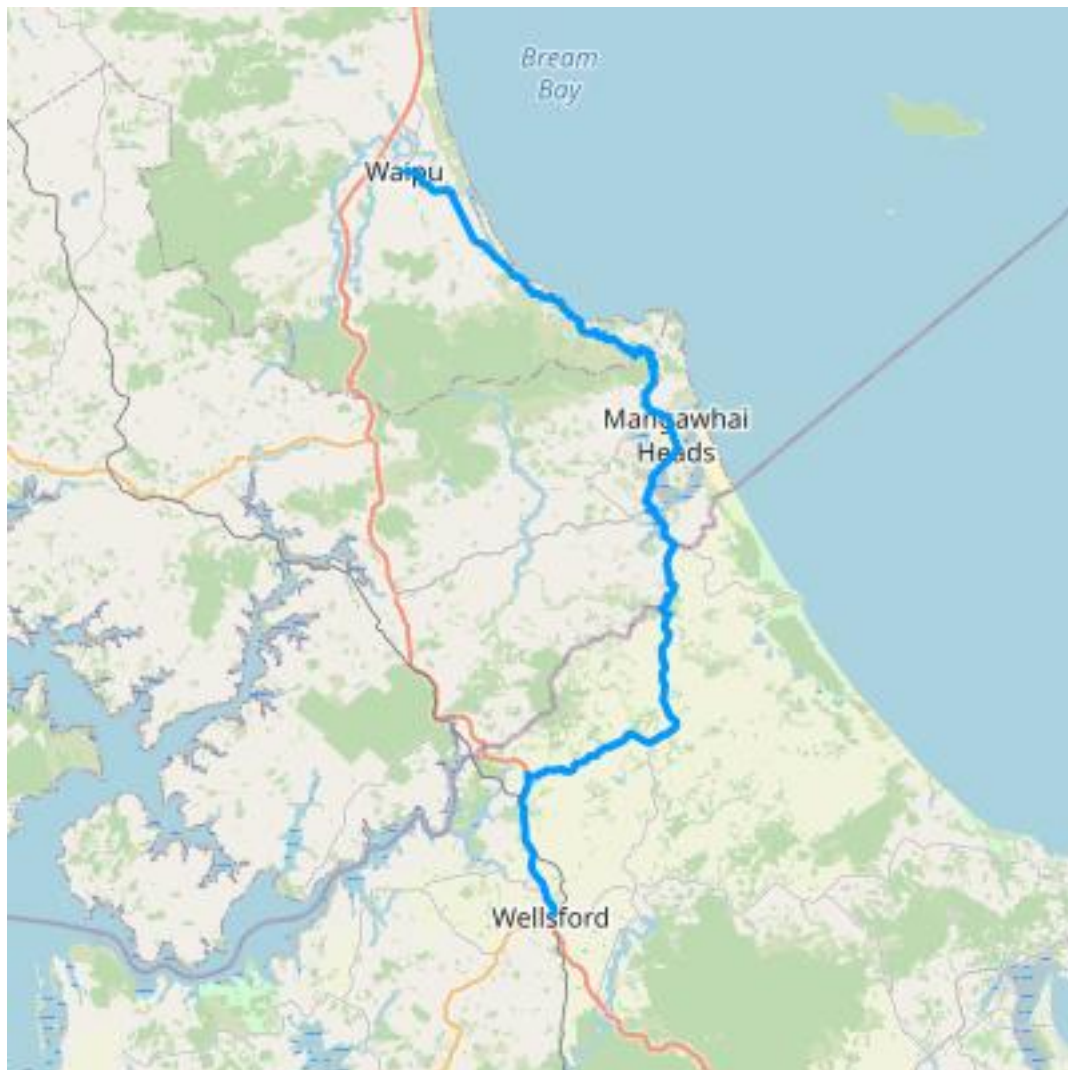
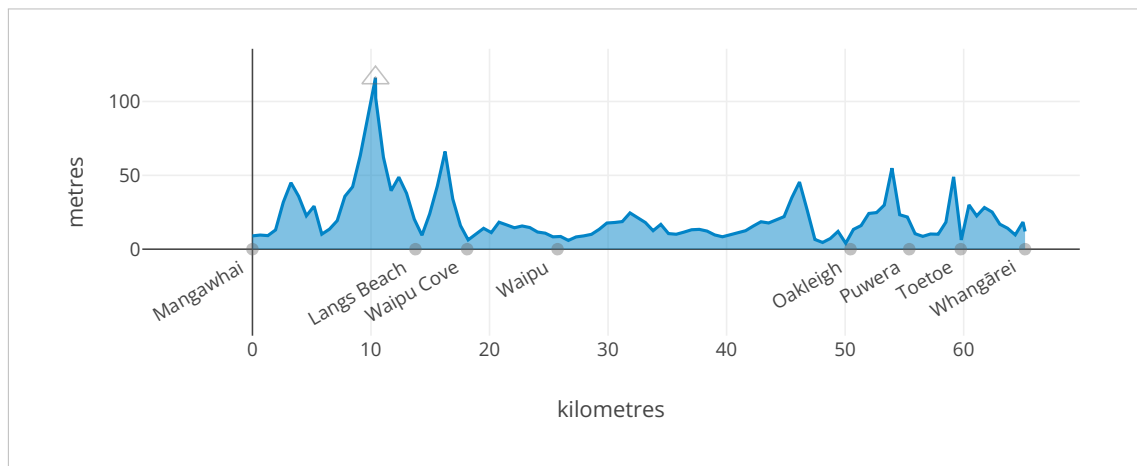


Figure 5.3: Wellsford to Waipu via Mangawhai Road

# Mangawhai to the Bay of Islands

## 6.1 Mangawhai to Whangārei

Distance: 65 km Ascent: 377 m Descent: 374 m



Take the coast road out of Mangawhai Heads and head up through Langs Beach to Waipu (25 km approx). Although it begins with a winding hill, this avoids the steeper hills on the main highway and is much prettier. The route curves along with coastal views past Langs Beach and Waipu Cove (store and camping, a great family beach) The road then heads into Waipu proper along a flattish straight.

Waipu is an old Scottish settlement and has most of the facilities you might require. Take the side loop heading north rather than heading for the main junction and this will take you eventually and unavoidably out onto Highway 1. There is a good shoulder however and after 4-6 km you will come to a DOC campground (no store, boil-your-water) at Uretiti. This is a lovely beach-front government camping ground among the pine trees and worth a night if you want a short day. If you want to press on, head up to Ruakaka (a further 5 km, store, campground). Another 30 km will take you into Whangārei, a large town, almost a city, with all facilities. Whangārei is the place to make decisions. Below is a fellow cyclist, Nic from South Africa... a bit of contrast to get an alternate view of the same journey.

*This was mostly made up by highway and is not recommendable. Busy, lots of*

trucks and I even had a close call. I just couldn't figure out another way to do it practically. Whangārei itself I did not find very attractive but I guess this could be relative to where you are in the town. I went to a camping/backpackers that I just could not get myself to stay at as it felt too much like a motorpark and ended up staying at a Guest house called Chelsea House that was really great, an awesome 100 year old place where one feels right at home.

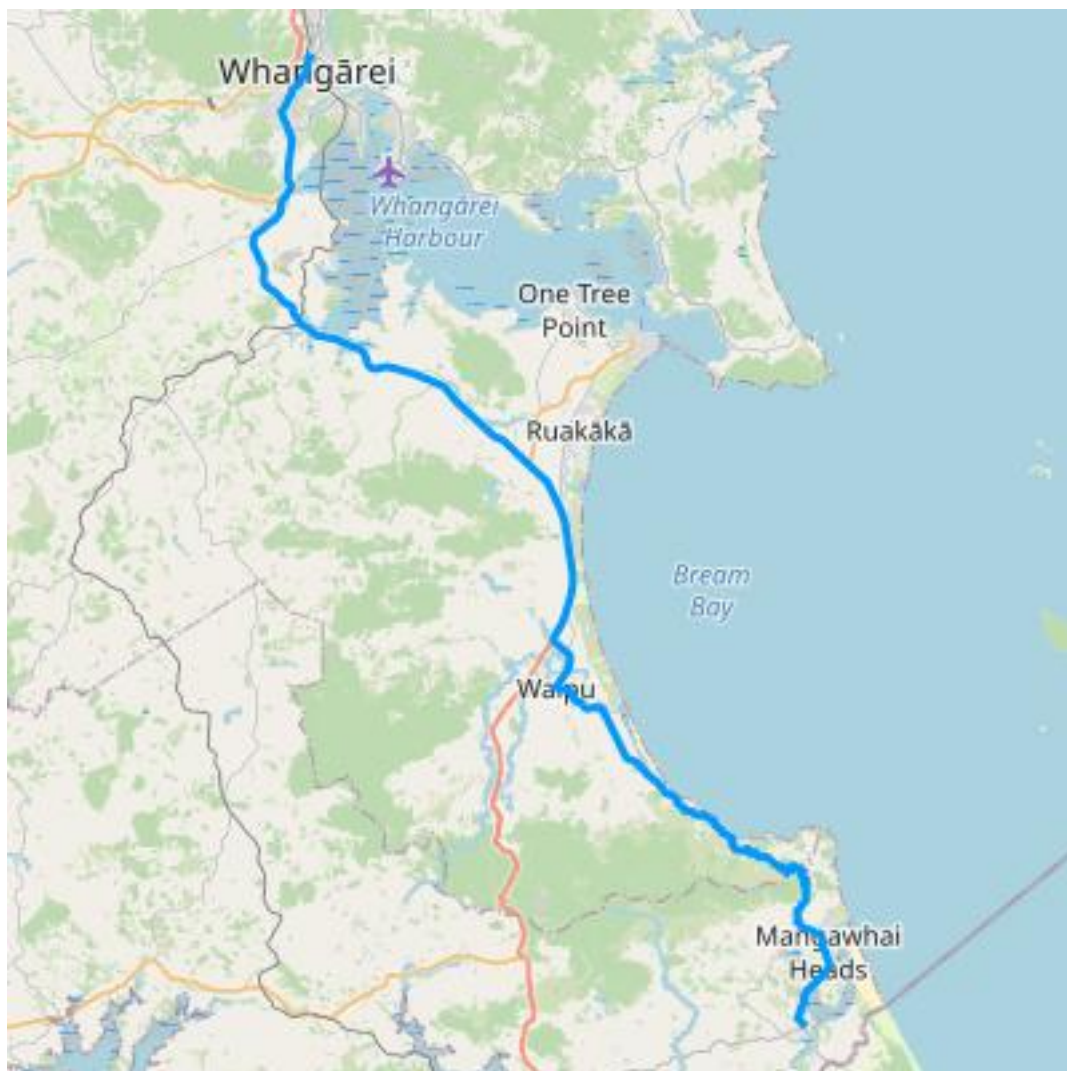
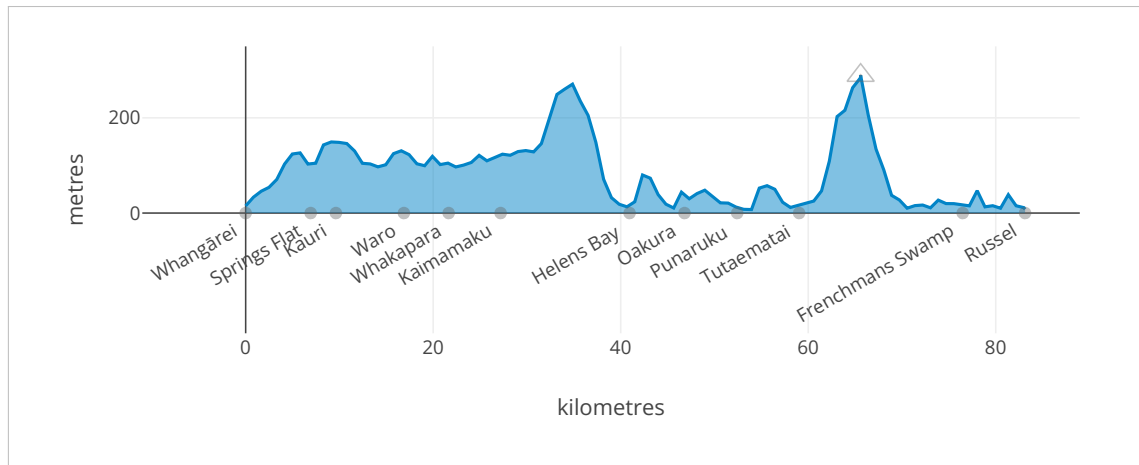


Figure 6.1: Mangawhai to Whangārei

## 6.2 Whangārei to the Bay of Islands via Oakura

Distance: 83 km    Ascent: 1044 m    Descent: 1051 m



You can take a fairly arduous but beautiful series of side roads from here out to the coastal townships of Ngunguru, Matapouri and Whananaki and side roads to Helena Bay. This will take at least a couple of days, possibly three. It is probably best to grit your teeth and take Highway 1 and the 20 or so kilometres to Whakapara and then turn right at the junction that will eventually take you to the Bay of Islands (Russell). Let me quote Nic again for this part of the journey.

*I stayed overnight on this route in an amazing cottage called Lucky Hill. The coastal scenery here is surely some of the most spectacular in New Zealand, with little islands and intricate shapes in the coastline all along the way. The hills makes for interesting times though, again, I found it more difficult to do this route than most of the routes I did in the South Island. It's up and down, up and down. Good thing it's so beautiful. From Russell I cycled up to Keri Keri Airport and flew back to Auckland as my time was up.*



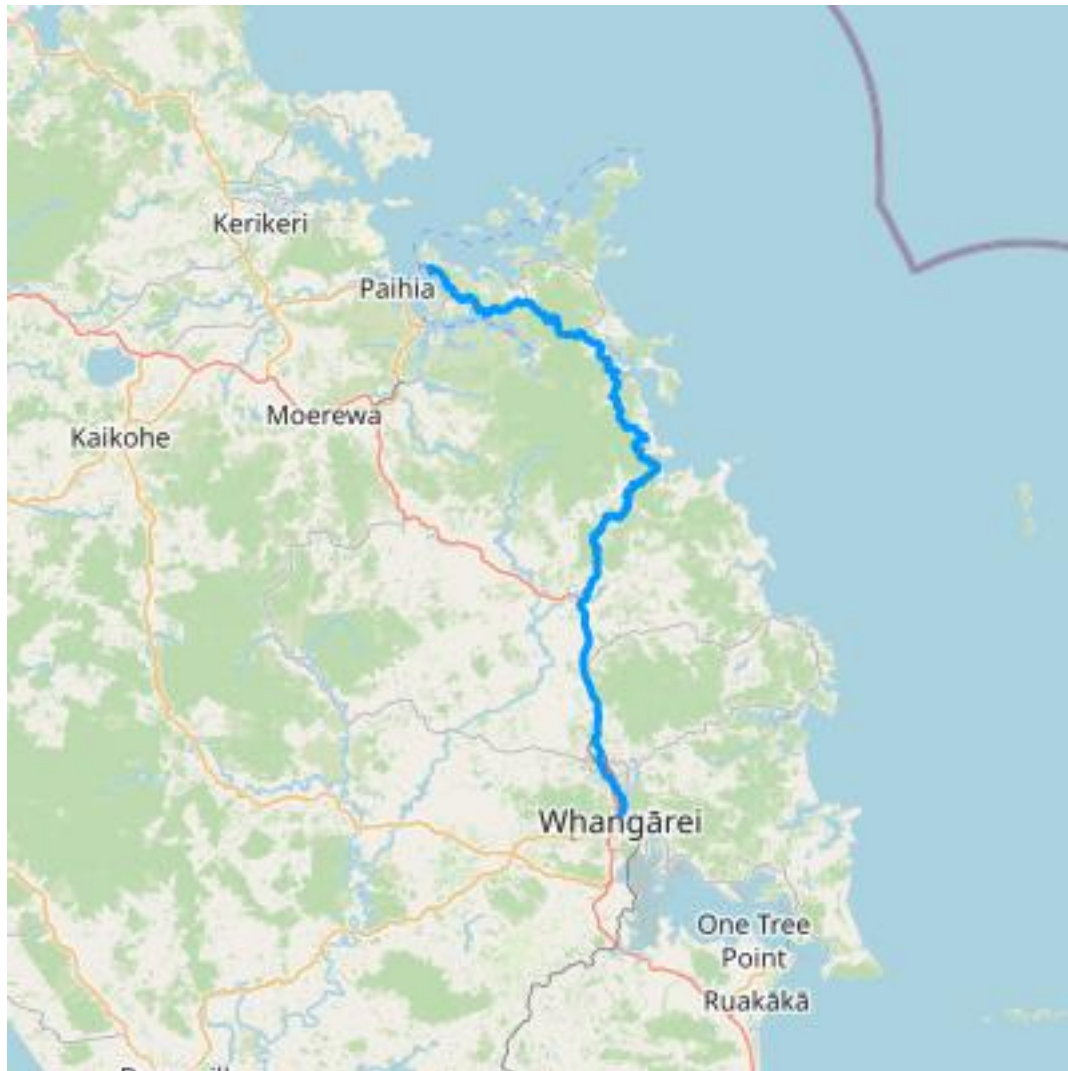
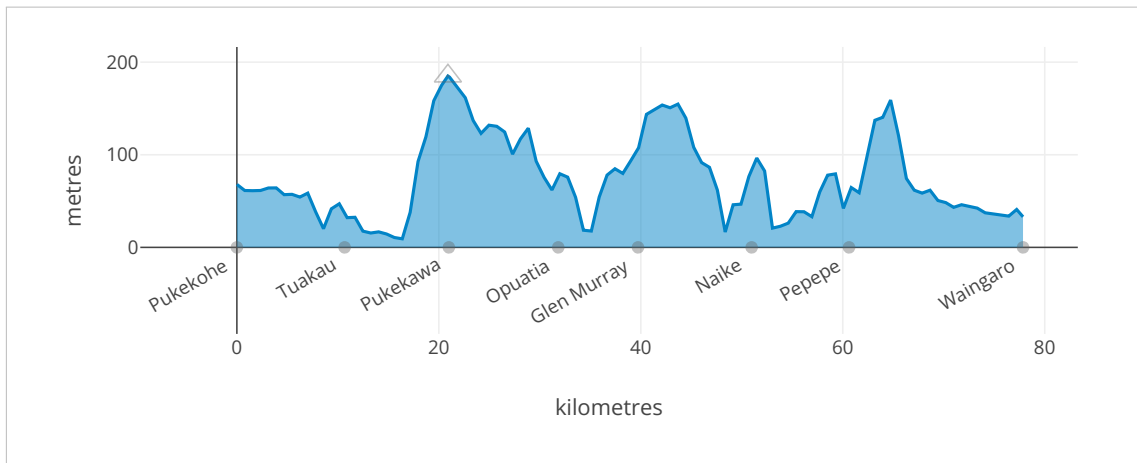


Figure 6.2: Whangārei to the Bay of Islands via Oakura

# Auckland to Kawhia

## 7.1 Pukekohe to Waingaro

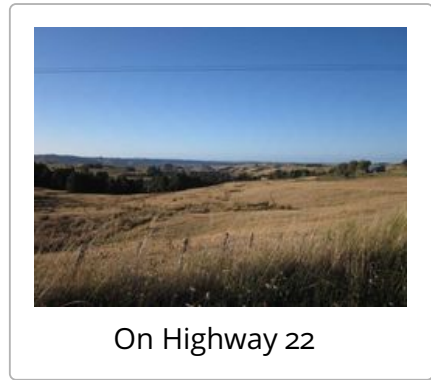
Distance: 78 km Ascent: 677 m Descent: 712 m



There's really only one sane way to head south out of Auckland - and that's to [take the train](#)<sup>1</sup>. The service to Pukekohe takes around an hour and gets you safely out of Auckland's motorway madness, but the train doesn't run in the weekends and with a bike in tow is best avoided during rush hour.

After having a look around Pukekohe head south on Manukau Road through Buckland and onto Tuakau and the start of Highway 22. There's a bit of traffic dodging to be done as this route is initially quite busy, and soon after Pukekohe the road margin disappears altogether. But once you're safely over the Waikato River the main bulk of the traffic veers off to Port Waikato, making the riding immediately more pleasant.

Pleasant...but plain is probably the best way to describe it, passing as it does through rolling farm land, with no services except a lonely service station at Glen Murray (closed Sundays). After Naikē, though, the ride becomes



<sup>1</sup><https://at.govt.nz/bus-train-ferry/>



increasingly enjoyable as mature trees start to line the road, first as wind breaks, then as strands of forestry and native bush. Find a spot of shade at Naikē to see out the midday sun with a book, then enjoy the final descent into Waingaro in the cool of the early evening. Here there is a hot-pool complex with a campground attached. Don't leave your run too late as the pools close at 9pm.

A friend had warned me that the Waingaro pools were a bit run down and while that may be true - there's nothing Ritzy about the place - I found it instantly likeable; like stepping back a few decades to a bygone era where last-  
ing summer holiday memories are made.

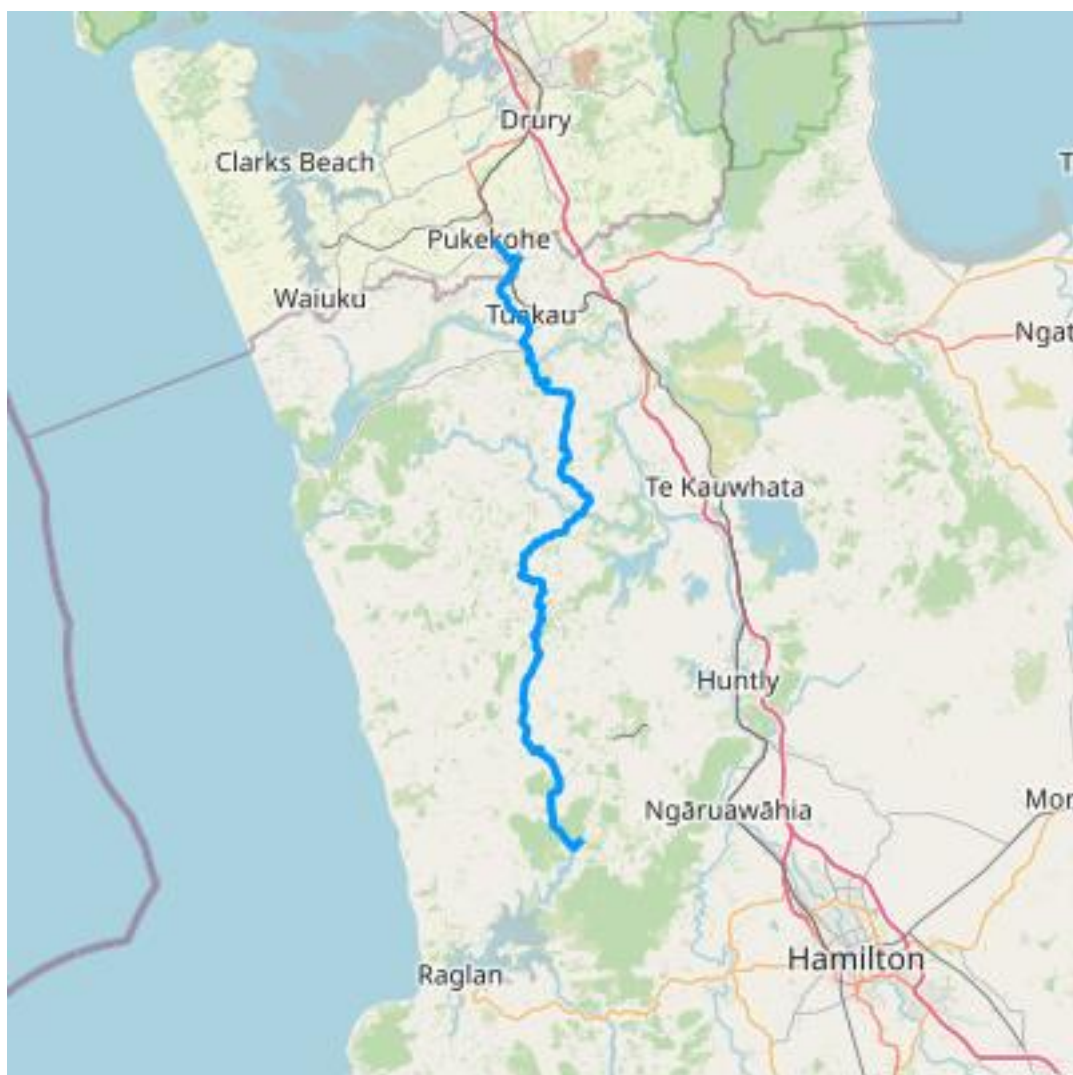
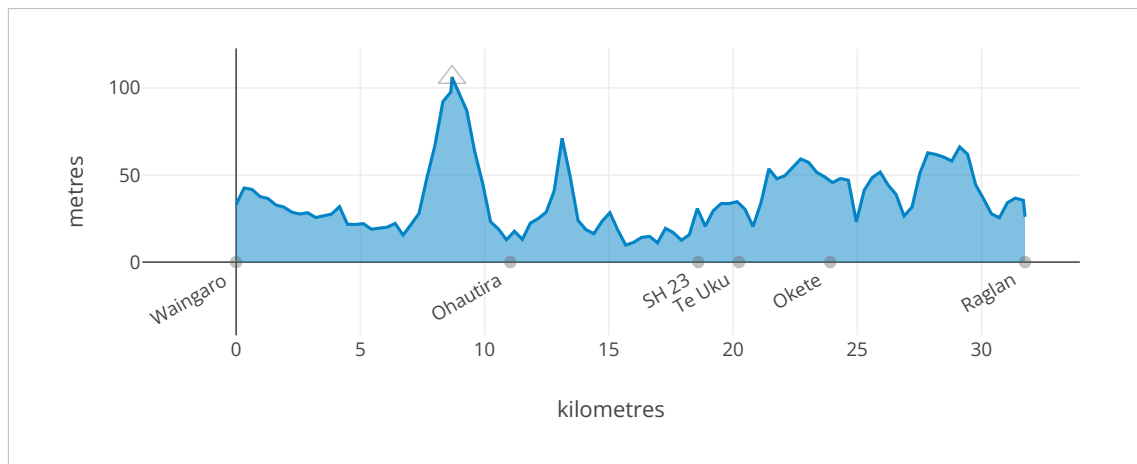


Figure 7.1: Pukekohe to Waingaro

## 7.2 Waingaro to Raglan

Distance: 32 km    Ascent: 281 m    Descent: 288 m



At just 32 km this is undeniably an easy day, again along quiet, rolling country roads until you join State Highway 23 at Te Uku. Te Uku has a great little café (The Roast Office) and a 4 Square store. Just after the 4 Square turn right into Okete Road and make a slight detour through Okete to avoid the busy highway, rejoining it again about 5 km out of Raglan.

Raglan is a small town with a supermarket, garage, internet access, and plenty of cafés and watering holes. A Mecca for surfers as well as day-trippers from nearby Hamilton and Auckland, the place is now well and truly on the map, yet it still manages to retain some of its village feel.



Raglan

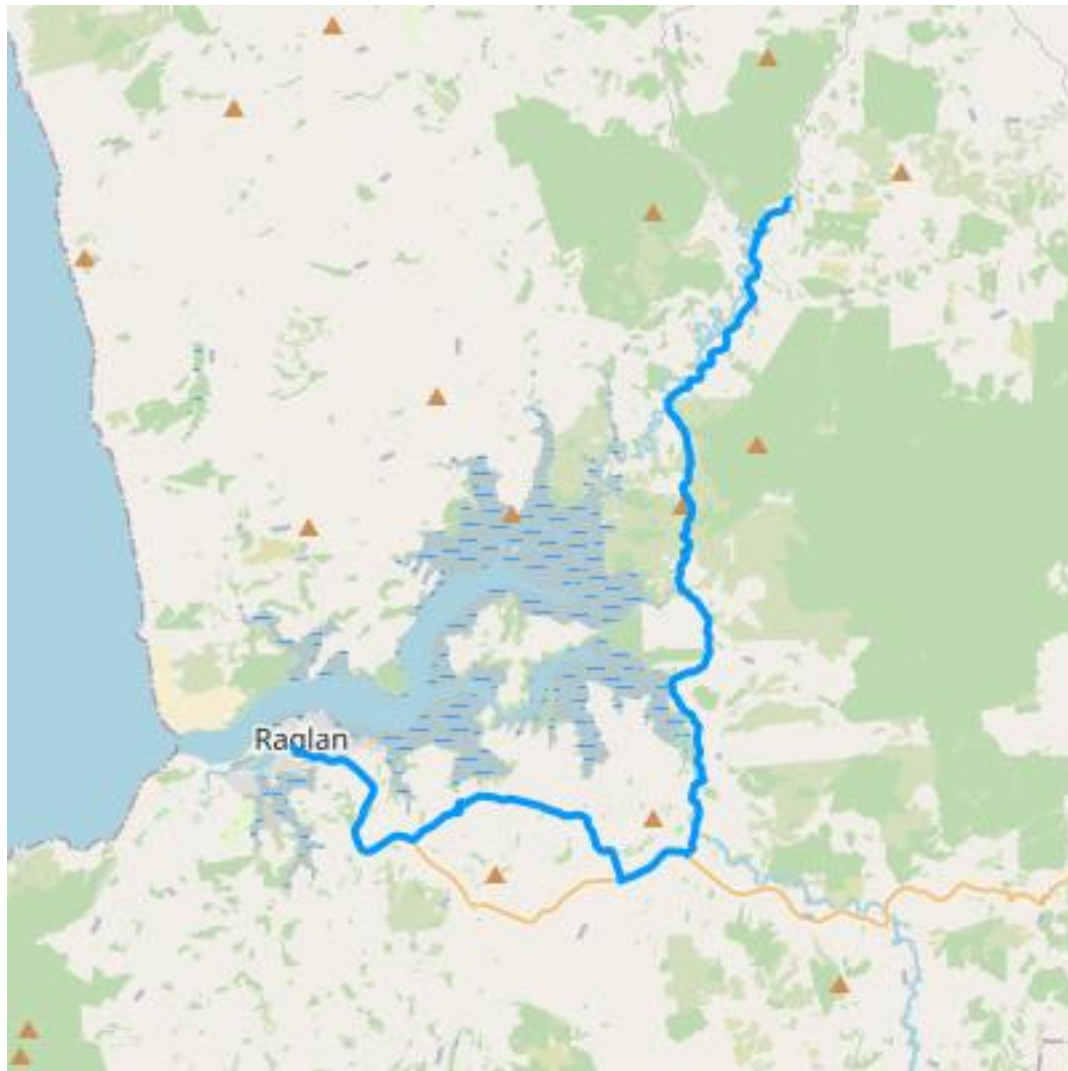
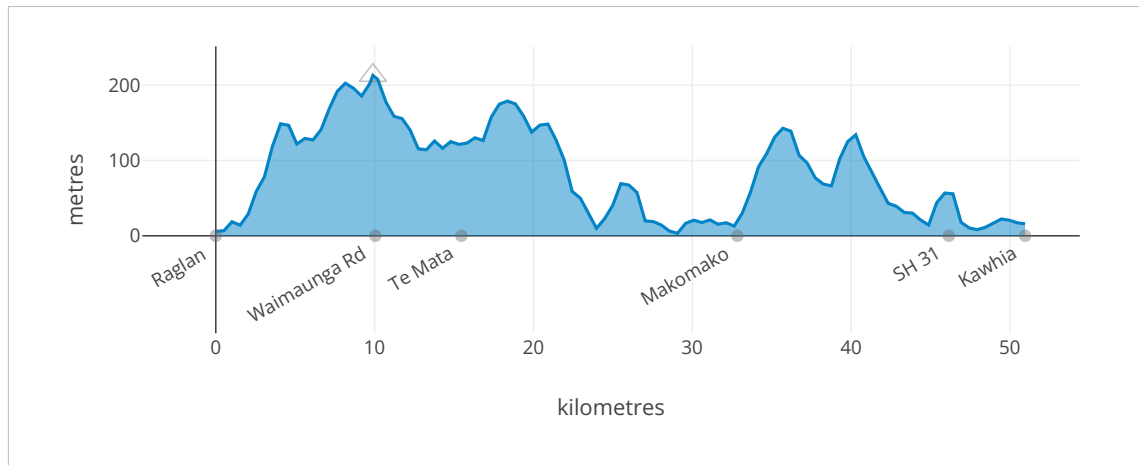


Figure 7.2: Waingaro to Raglan

## 7.3 Raglan to Kawhia

Distance: 51 km    Ascent: 700 m    Descent: 690 m



There are a few ways to start your trip to Kawhia. You could head out along the main highway for a few km then take a right into Te Mata Road. Arguably nicer, though, is to take Wainui Road east across the causeway then turn left, following Te Hutewai Road up through the quieter back-country. It's a fair climb, but leave early in the day and most of the hard work will be done in shade. About 4 km in you reach the first peak and here the tarmac gives way to pretty rough gravel, which remains until you reach Te Mata.



Kawhia

At Te Mata there is a picnic table nestled under the shade of some trees. A good opportunity to break out the billy and make a fortifying cup of tea. Tarmac returns as you pass through Te Mata, but only briefly, and soon after your first glimpses of the Aotea Harbour below, the gravel returns and remains until you join Highway 23 about 5 km out from Kawhia.

Although only 53 km in distance this ride will take you a full day, as your pace is slowed considerably by the rough riding surface. But equally, this road-less-travelled rewards with sumptuous scenery.

Kawhia is like a smaller version of Raglan - only minus the tourists. A real gem of a place with that small-town New Zealand charm. There is a garage, general store, cafés and several campgrounds to choose from. If you still have the legs then ask your host for the loan of a shovel and take the 3 km

trip out to Ocean Beach where - just like Hot Water Beach in the Coromandel - hot springs rise from the sand at low tide.

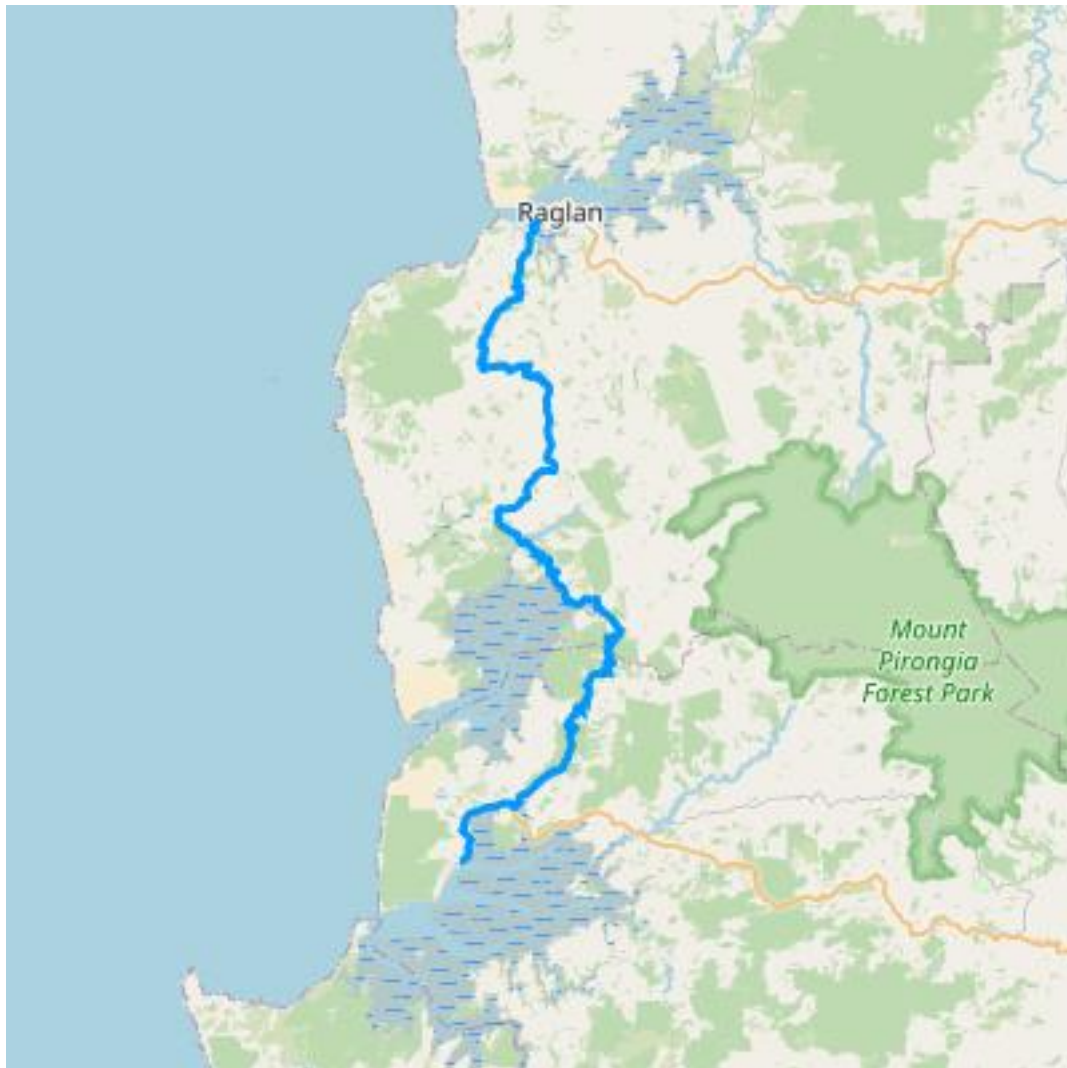
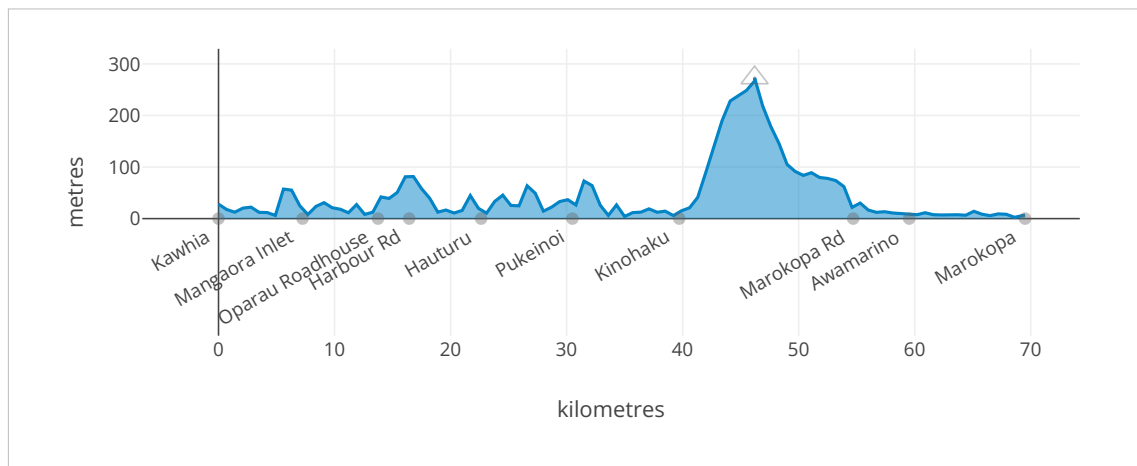


Figure 7.3: Raglan to Kawhia

# Kawhia to Mokau

## 8.1 Kawhia to Marokopa

Distance: 70 km   Ascent: 668 m   Descent: 689 m



Start the day by heading back out along Highway 31. After about 13 km you reach the Oparau Roadhouse, a general store/garage/café that offers free camping and - for hungry cyclists - a chance to enjoy the best of meals: second breakfast.

A few more kms bring you to the turnoff right into Harbour Road. The riding is easy with only minor rises and falls, and almost no traffic. Visible from the roadside are some interesting rock formations, which presage your entry (at around the 35 km mark) into the Waitomo district. Here the road skirts the coast again. You might stop for lunch along the foreshore before cycling on to Kinohaku and tackling the day's only significant climb - up and over Te Waitere Road to Te Anga (no services - the Te Anga pub has long been closed).

Te Anga is a place where decisions must be made. Many cyclists continue the remaining 33 km along Te Anga Road to the caves district of Waitomo.



Morning cloud Over  
Mangaora Inlet



From Waitomo you can venture further south through Te Kuiti to the [Timber Trail](#)<sup>1</sup> or perhaps the quiet Ongarue-Waimiha Road to Taumarunui.

For those continuing south along the coast (or perhaps just wanting a shorter stopover) the alternative is to turn off down Marokopa Road, following the Marokopa River down to... Marokopa, a small fishing village with a few holiday batches, a campground and very little else. The campground is fairly rudimentary, but pleasant enough. Marokopa is a place of quietude. Take an evening stroll down to the black-sand shore and enjoy the isolation.



Marokopa beach

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<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/22-great-rides/timber-trail/>

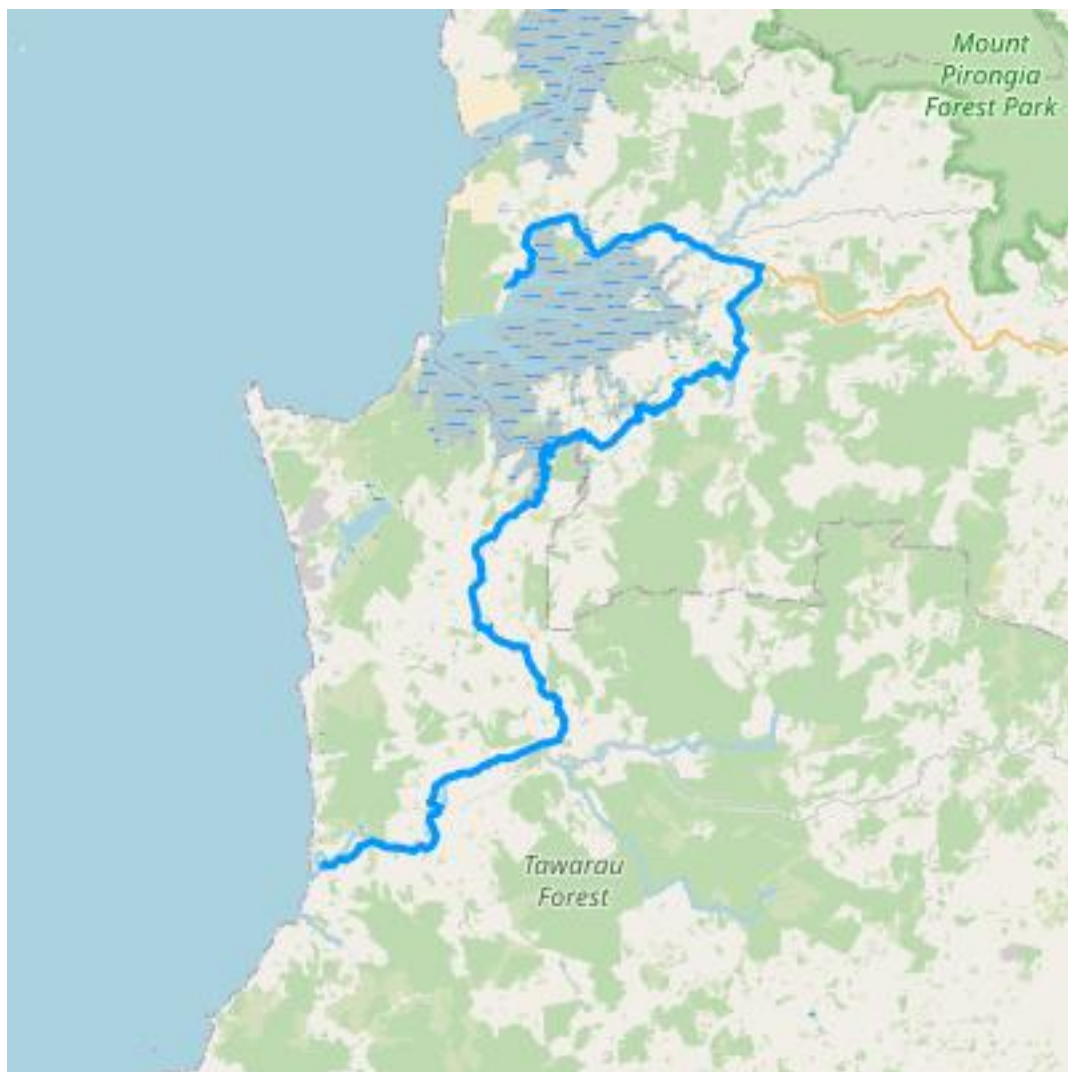
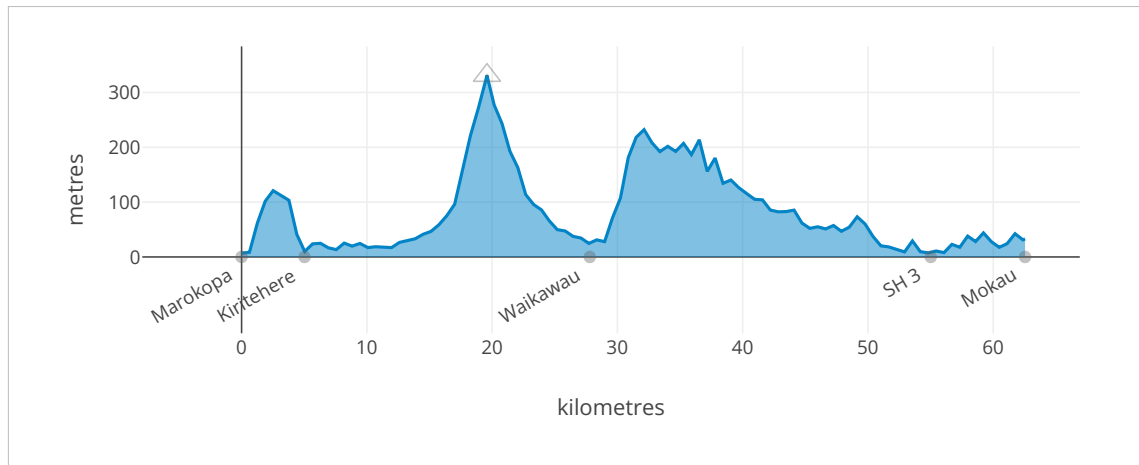


Figure 8.1: Kawhia to Marokopa



## 8.2 Marokopa to Mokau

Distance: 63 km Ascent: 789 m Descent: 763 m



Head out over Mangatoa Road and over the hill to Kiritehere. On my old map the road is marked as shingle all the way from Kiritehere to the junction with State Highway 3. Gladly, this is no longer so. There is still a small metal section starting at Kiritehere and continuing along the flat for 13 km, but it's in good nick and you can make good time on it.

I'd been dreading the 330m climb over the Mangatoa Road saddle. Parts of this road will make you sweat - even in your lowest granny gear. But the ride is made easier by the stunning scenery through the Whareorino native reserve.



Leaving Kiritehere

This is big country. I'd made the elevation chart above prior to the trip and, seeing the line zig-zag up & down between the 30 km and 50 km marks, was expecting a rolling descent into Awakino. In fact it is almost a clear downhill run all the way. So why the zig-zag lines? My guess is that satellite-based elevation data is only accurate to so many metres. In this terrain even a small misread could put you high up a bluff or deep down a gully. Which just goes to show you should take these charts with a grain of salt.

Anakiwa appears soon after you join SH3. Here this is a pub, and swanky lodge on the site of the old general store. Mokau, another black-sand/river-mouth settlement, is another 5 km down the road and has two takeaway/café outlets, one of which has a campground attached. The campground seems

to be a bit of an afterthought though and has definitely seen better days.

The one unfortunate aspect of this ride is that it deposits you onto SH3. This is a busy stretch of road with a large volume of trucks transporting goods between New Plymouth and parts further north. What's more, parts of this road are not very cycle-friendly, with blind corners and often no margin. My original plan was rise early and cycle the 20 km to Ahititi before sunrise - then try my luck along Okau Road, eventually connecting up with the [Forgotten World Highway](#). Alas, gear failure prompted a change of plan, so it was off to New Plymouth in the bus. If you'd rather avoid busy roads then the bus may be a good option here, otherwise the route is described elsewhere from [Mokau to Waitara](#).

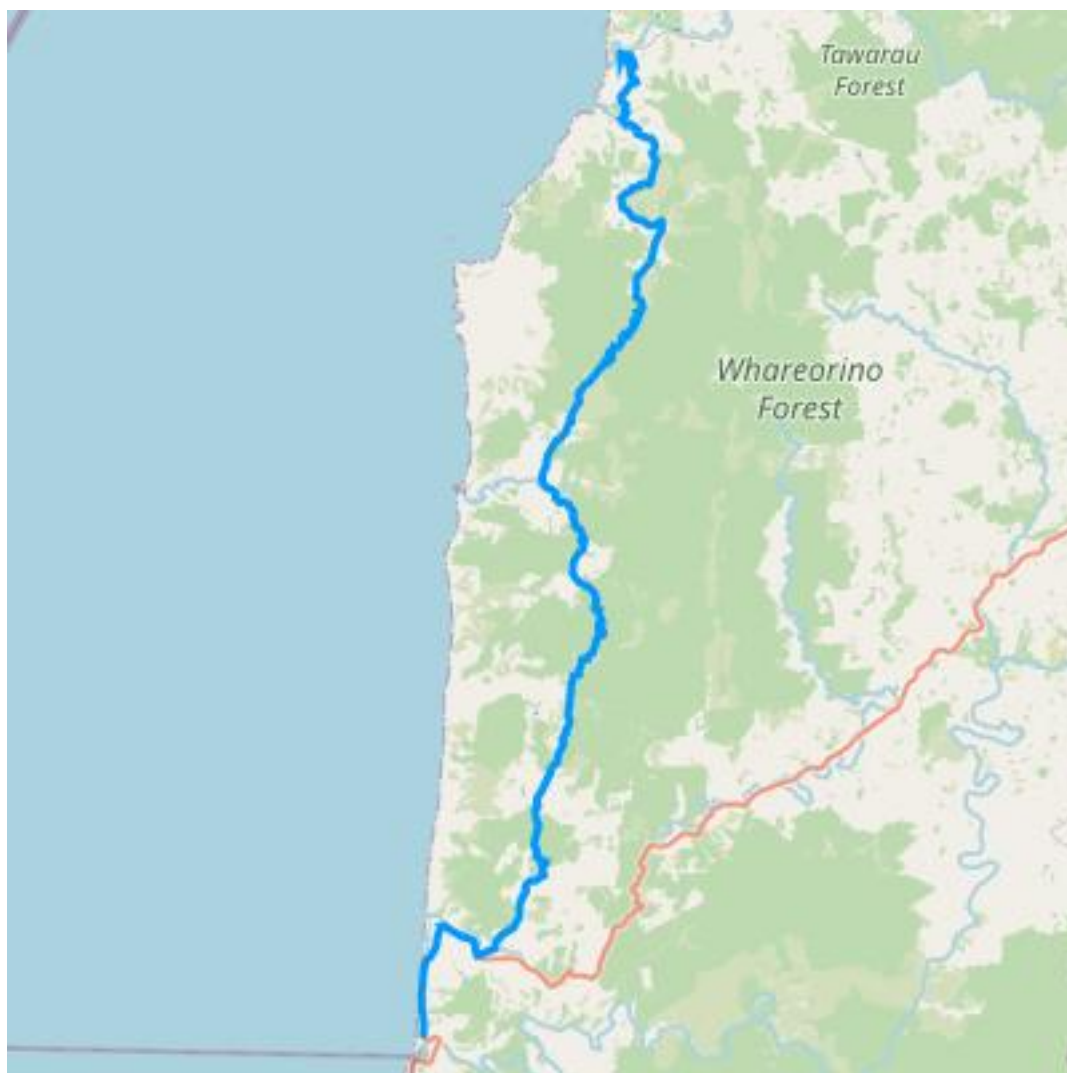
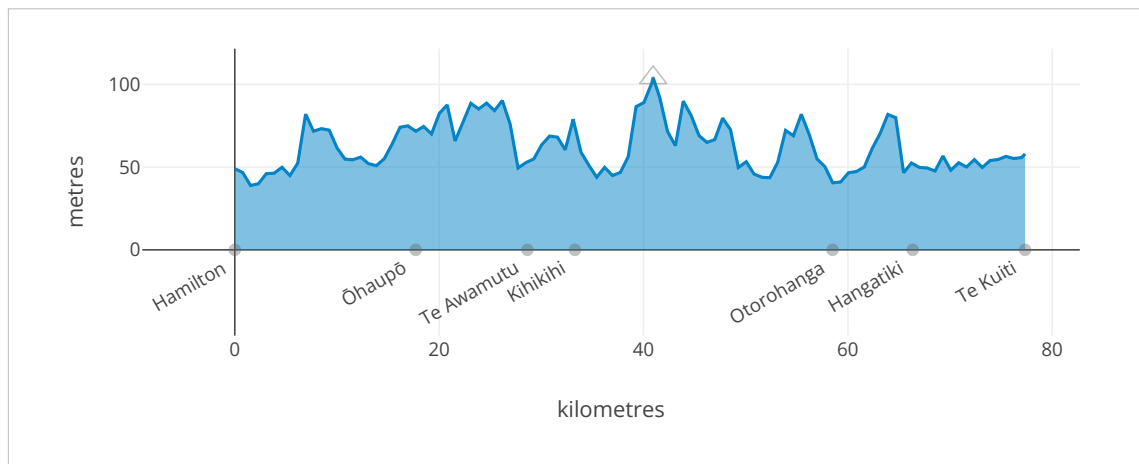


Figure 8.2: Marokopa to Mokau

# Hamilton to Waitara

## 9.1 Hamilton to Te Kuiti

Distance: 77 km   Ascent: 323 m   Descent: 314 m



Tent sites and camping huts are available 2 km from Hamilton town centre at the quiet and well-equipped Hamilton City Holiday Park. The impressive Hamilton Gardens, featuring examples of typical gardens from a dozen or so countries world-wide, are well worth a visit, even if you're not usually interested in horticulture. The Waikato Museum in the town centre has interesting displays, and next door is the Museum's art gallery, housed in the old Post Office and featuring a good selection of quality artworks, many for sale.

The road shoulder between Hamilton and Te Kuiti is good for most of the way, but occasionally rather narrow. The road passes through attractive, rolling farming country, with moderate rolls and undulations all the way but no real hills. There are two sizeable towns along the route, Te Awamutu and Otorohanga. The latter describes itself as NZ's Kiwiana Capital, being home to NZ's first Kiwi house and having more recently expanded its scope to include all things typically Kiwi - a good place to explore during an extended lunch break.

About 10 km before Te Kuiti is the turnoff to Waitomo and its famous glow-worm caves (14 kms return diversion). Waitomo is situated in a pretty, limestone area that is riddled with caves and underground rivers. Several operators offer underground caving and rafting trips of varying durations, but

reckon with at least half a day if you decide to be so adventurous. For the less ambitious, there are several options for walking dry-foot in caves with spectacular displays of stalactites and stalagmites. Inquire at the [Waitomo Caves Museum](https://waitomocaves.com)<sup>1</sup>, which has an informative display and sells various packages of tours. The glow-worm caves are situated about 500 m away from the museum and the very popular tour takes 45 minutes or so. The other caves are further away, accessed by road or a very pleasant walking track.

If you intend to visit only the glow-worm caves, the side-trip and cave tour can probably be done on the way to Te Kuiti. If you're tempted to do other tours in addition, you'll need more time and may prefer to stay at the friendly, well-equipped but rather expensive Waitomo Top Ten camp site opposite the Museum. It offers both tent sites and cabins.

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<sup>1</sup><https://waitomocaves.com>



Waitomo limestone caves

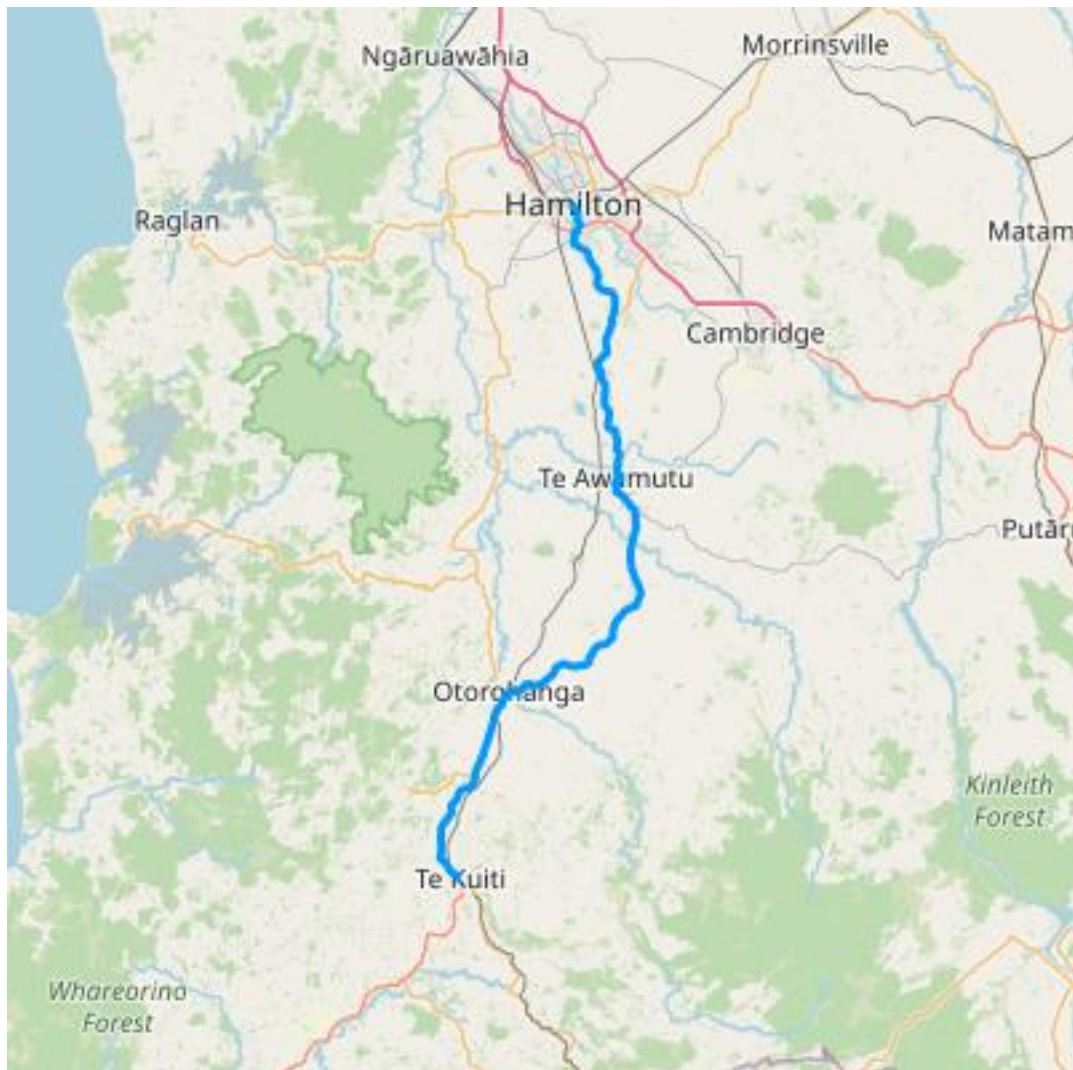
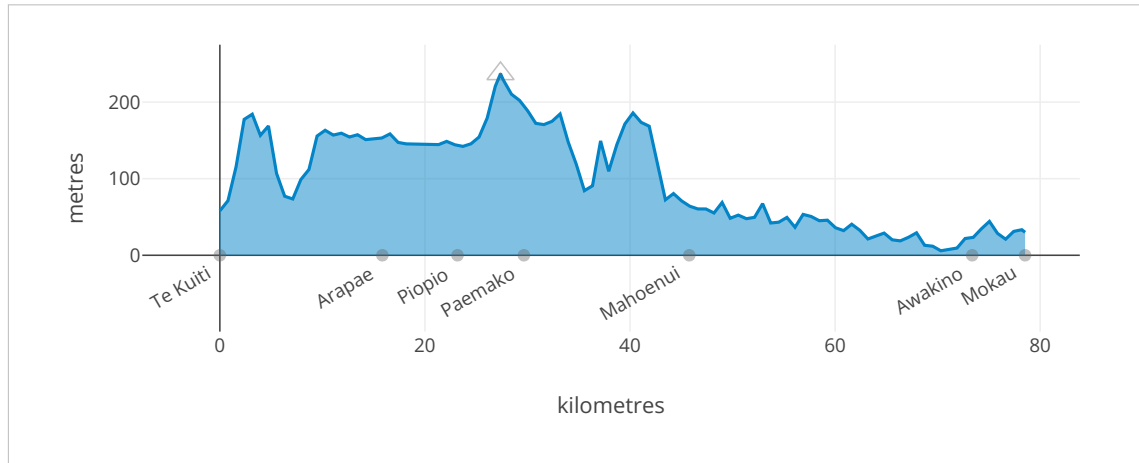


Figure 9.1: Hamilton to Te Kuiti

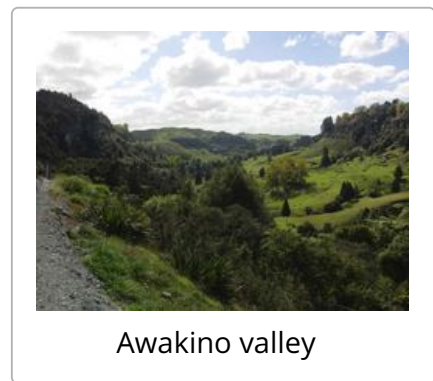
## 9.2 Te Kuiti to Mokau

Distance: 79 km   Ascent: 615 m   Descent:  
643 m



There's a small but friendly and well-equipped council-run campsite at the north-east corner of the Te Kuiti domain. It has tent sites but no cabins. There are supermarkets, shops and cafés/take-aways a few hundred metres away on Rora St.

The road to Mokau starts with a fairly steep, 150 m climb, and then settles down to moderate undulations that increase in severity between Piopio and Mahoenui. The scenery is predominately rolling farmland. After Mahoenui, the cycling becomes easy, as the road follows the Awakino River all the way to the sea. There are fine views along the way, particularly through the scenic Awakino Gorge.



Awakino valley

There's a café/pub at tiny Awakino, but you'll probably want to continue the final 3 km to the well-situated, moderate-standard sea-side camp site 2 km north of Mokau, or to Mokau itself, where there's another, rather small camp site which also houses the village's only, poorly-stocked shop. There's a small café/take-away offering good-value, typical road-side meals about 100 m north of the shop, along the main road.



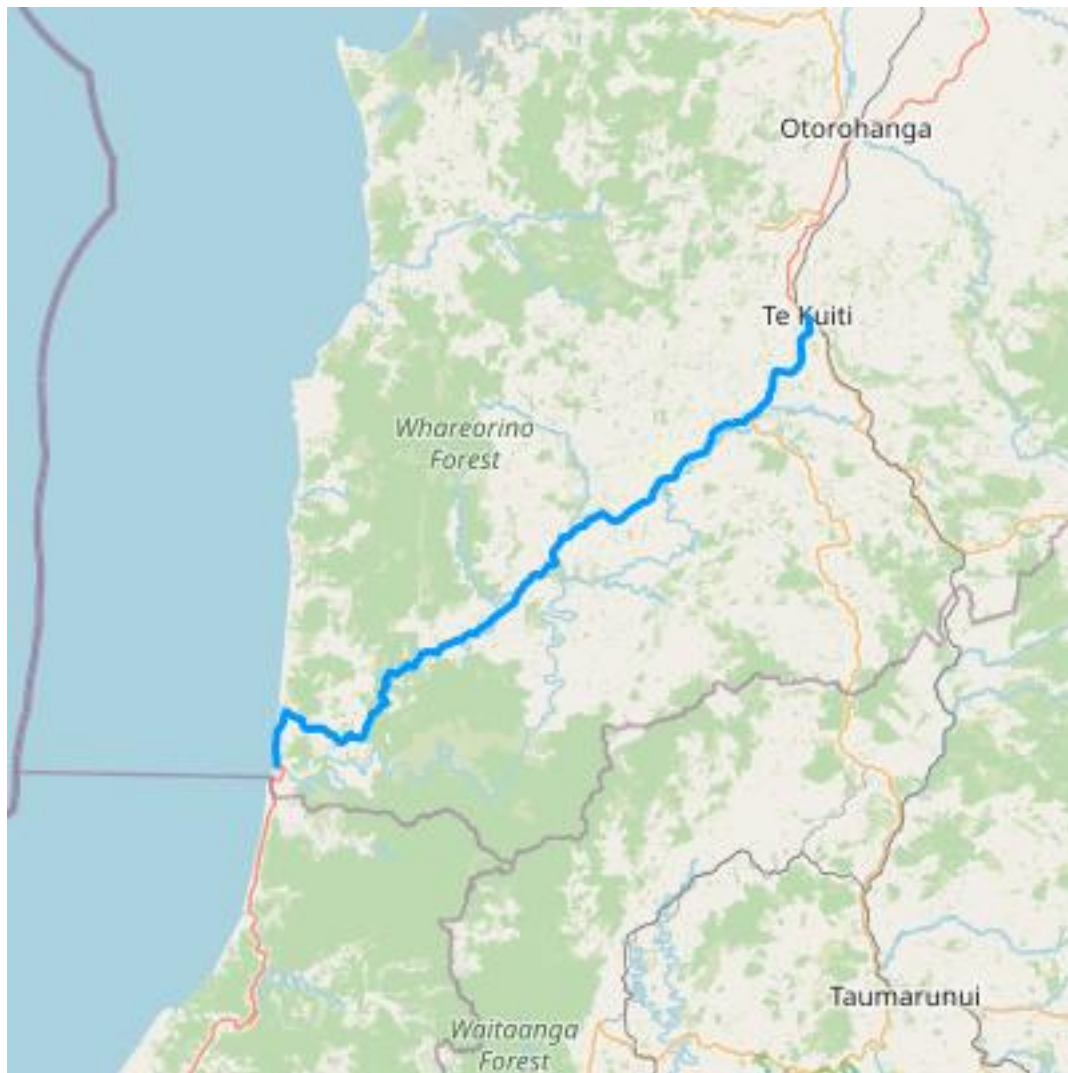
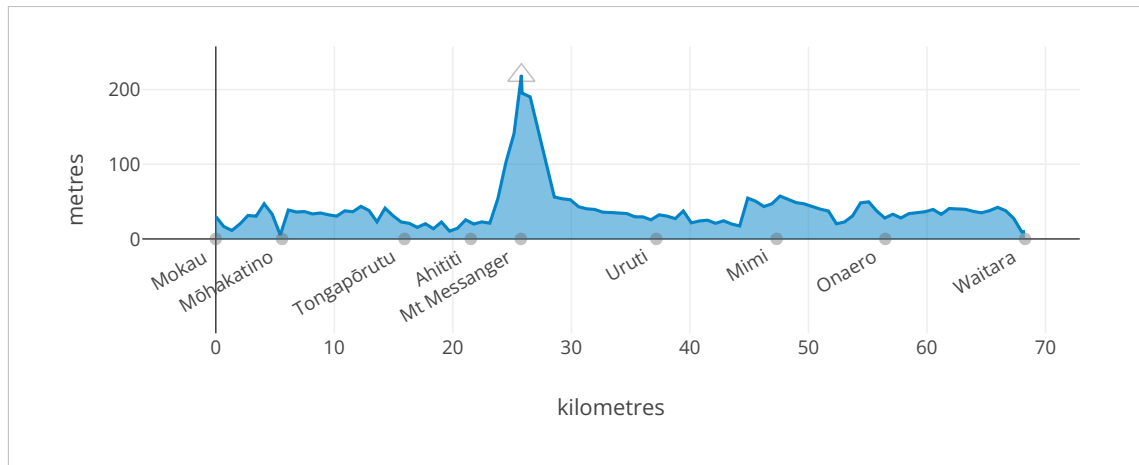


Figure 9.2: Te Kuiti to Mokau

## 9.3 Mokau to Waitara

Distance: 68 km   Ascent: 419 m   Descent: 439 m



**Alert:** State Highway 3 between Mokau and New Plymouth is heavily trafficked, often narrow, and has many blind corners. Keep yourself highly visible and ride defensively!

After undulating along the coast for 10 km or so, the road to Waitara turns inland. Except for Mount Messenger, with its fairly-steep climb on the north face and its definitely-steep descent on the south, the road stays almost flat as it twists and turns through the valleys, until it nears the coast again at Mimi. From there, the gentle undulations change into rolls and the height differences increase somewhat as the road continues to Waitara.



Seaside at the Mokau  
Campsite

Waitara is a slight detour off the SH3, and has both shopping centre and camp site, the latter next to Marine Park at the mouth of the Waitara River (west side). The large, reasonably-priced camp site is of moderate standard but unfortunately lacks an indoor kitchen table or lounge area. There are tent sites but no cabins. From Waitara one can continue along the SH3 to New Plymouth and the SH45 "Surf Highway", or along the SH3A towards Stratford, or the NZ Cycle Trail's [Forgotten World Highway](#).





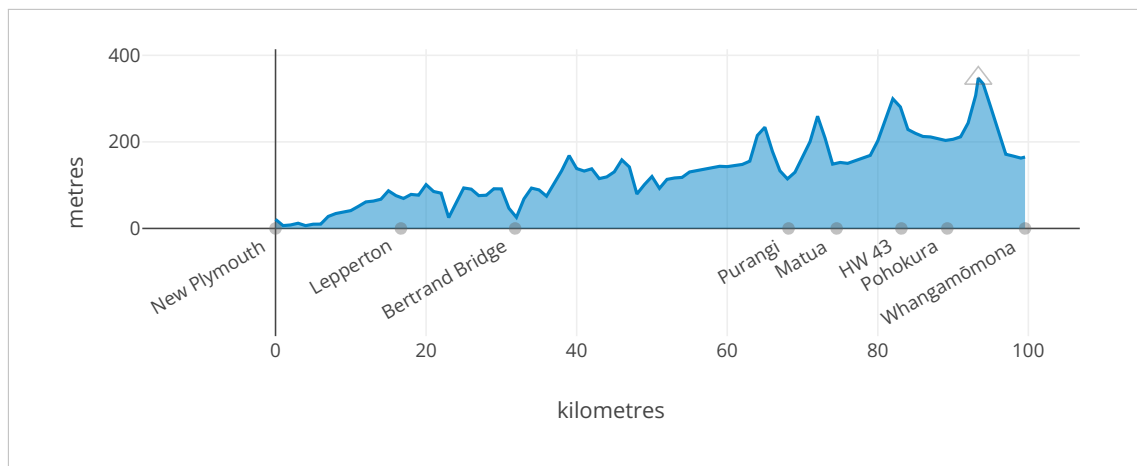
Figure 9.3: Mokau to Waitara

# The Forgotten World Highway

The Forgotten World Highway is an old heritage trail that mostly follows State Highway 43 from New Plymouth to Taumarunui in the King Country. A wonderful, remote, and scenic route passing through many historical and natural points of interest.

## 10.1 New Plymouth to Whangamōmona

Distance: 100 km   Ascent: 1103 m   Descent: 959 m



The best way to leave New Plymouth is to make your way to the Wind Wand then head east along the [Coastal Walkway](https://www.npdc.govt.nz/leisure-and-culture/coastal-walkway/)<sup>1</sup>, crossing over Te Rewa Rewa bridge and continuing all the way to the end at Hickford Park. Take the Ellesmere Ave exit, making a left into Parklands Ave then a right into Nugget St, continuing over the motorway overpass into Henwood Rd, which soon becomes Manutahi Rd. Cross over Highway 3A, continuing along Manutahi Rd for another 1 km to arrive at Lepperton where there is a dairy.



Bertrand Rd Suspension Bridge

<sup>1</sup><https://www.npdc.govt.nz/leisure-and-culture/coastal-walkway/>

Around Lepperton you should start to see [NZ Cycle Trail](#)<sup>2</sup> signs, which will lead you through the labyrinth of back-country roads, over the historic Bertrand Rd Suspension Bridge and onwards east. This really is some wonderful riding over uber-quiet roads, with the added interest of the Tarata Tunnel and views out over Mt. Taranaki.

After a while you may start thinking that this much tar seal this far out into the boondocks is too good to be true. Alas, at around 55 km, just before you reach Purangi, this turns out to be true. And what a transformation - a corrugated, rough as guts, metal road takes you through to the junction with SH43 some 17 km further, slowing your pace to a crawl. Take plenty of water.



Out in the boondocks

Whangamōmona is a pretty settlement known for the historic Whangamōmona Hotel, and with a great campground on the grounds of the old school (which was closed in 1979). Whangamōmona declared itself an independent republic in 1989, originally as a protest against boundary changes which put half the district in Taranaki and half in the Manawatū. Today "Republic Day" is an annual event which attracts thousands to this small township of about 40 permanent residents.

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<sup>2</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/heartland-rides/forgotten-world-highway/>

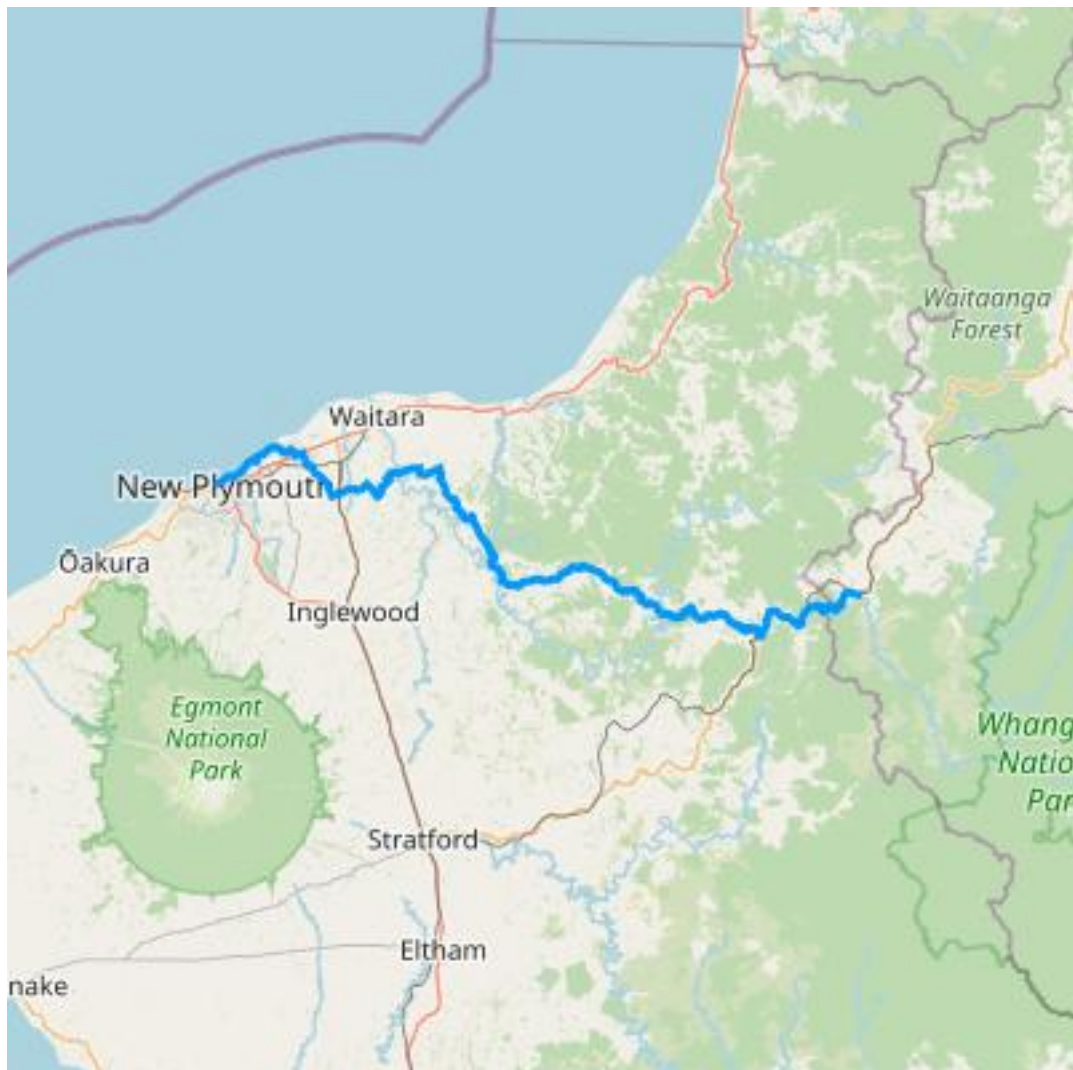
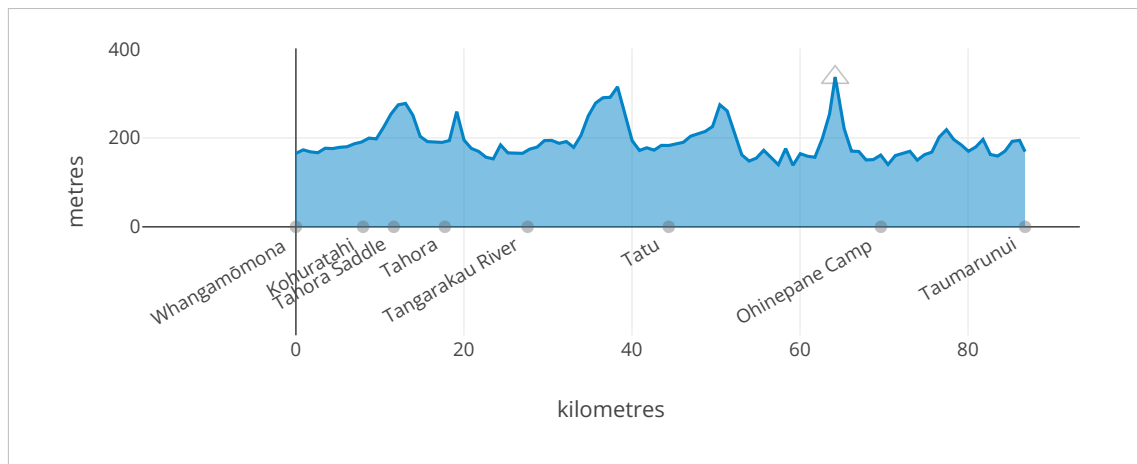


Figure 10.1: New Plymouth to Whangamōmona

## 10.2 Whangamōmona to Taumarunui

Distance: 87 km    Ascent: 1095 m    Descent: 1091 m



This day gets off to an easy start, but soon enough you're tackling the Tahora Saddle (B&B/campground). The views here are pretty impressive. Soon after Tahora you pass through the Moki Tunnel, then about 22 km into the ride there begins a 10 km section of gravel, though it is well graded and is mostly downhill.

At 27 km, just before the crossing the Tangarakau River, there is a rest area with a picnic table and a short walk to the grave of pioneer surveyor Joshua Morgan. Morgan was working in this remote area in February 1893 on what was to have been his last surveying job before retiring when he fell gravely ill. Help was quickly dispatched but to no avail. He was buried on the spot where he died, aged just 35. Almost 60 years later Morgan's widow Anne died, aged 85, and was buried with her husband.



View from Tahora Saddle

Rest well here because the remainder of the day could best be described as arduous. Although you start and end this day at an elevation of around 150m, in between you cycle up and over saddle after bluff after countless hill so that over the course of the day you ascend many hundreds of metres.

Most write-ups about the Forgotten Highway have you starting at Taumarunui and finishing at New Plymouth. I guess the rationale is that you start 150m higher than you end and therefore have an easier ride. In reality I don't think it matters much which direction you take because in this terrain 150m is

small change.

You can break up the journey with a stay at the DOC [Ohinepane Campsite](https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/manawatu-whanganui/places/ohinepane-recreation-reserve/things-to-do/ohinepane-campsite)<sup>3</sup> (21 km from Taumarunui), and 14 km from Taumarunui there is a Lavender Farm and café.

Taumarunui is a smallish town set on the upper reaches of the Whanganui River. It has a supermarket, garage and most everything you'll need. The campground is about 4 km out of town. Avoid the highway and take the back route instead. Head down Hikaia St (directly opposite the information centre) continuing past Taumarunui Domain and over the river. Once across the bridge hang a left into Marsack Rd. The next left into Racecourse Rd takes you over the main trunk line and out onto the highway directly opposite the campground.

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<sup>3</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/manawatu-whanganui/places/ohinepane-recreation-reserve/things-to-do/ohinepane-campsite>



Sage advice



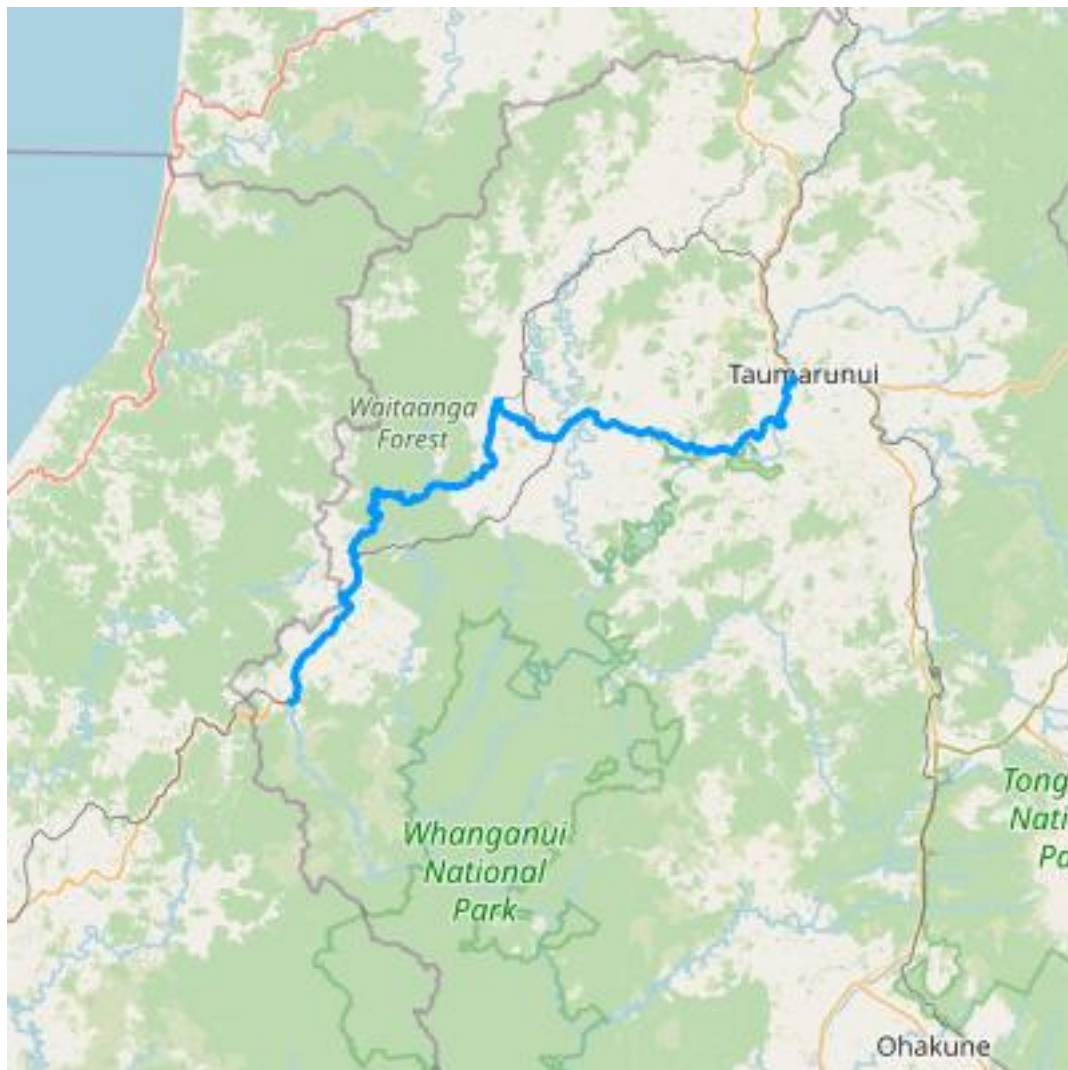


Figure 10.2: Whangamōmona to Taumarunui

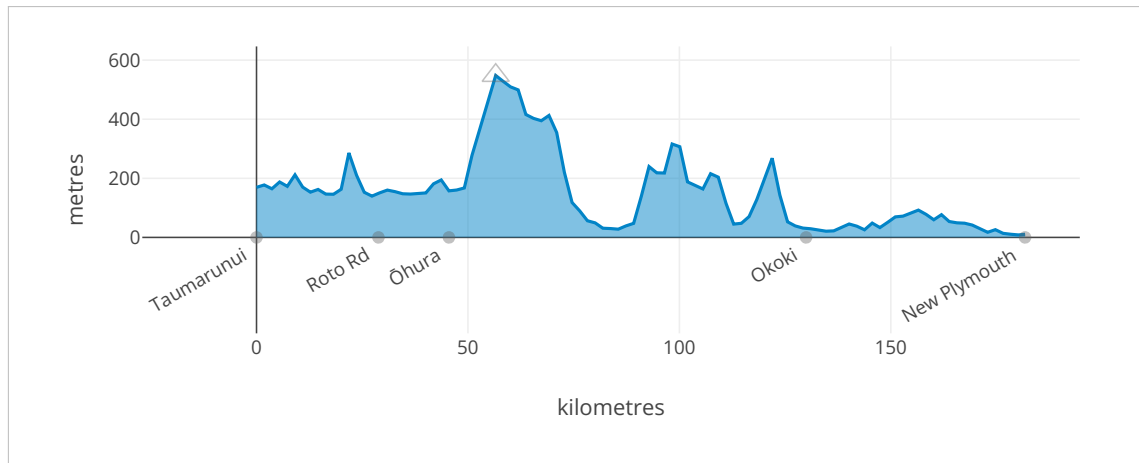
### 10.3 Alternate Ideas

The [Surf Highway](#)<sup>4</sup> follows the coast from New Plymouth down to Hawera in the south. Relatively flat, low traffic, plenty of services en route, and with every side road heading to a stunning coast; no wonder some cyclists pick this as a highlight of their New Zealand tour. One thing to bear in mind though is that the road from Hawera onwards is not cycle friendly and you'll probably want to bus from there to Whanganui. From Whanganui you can connect up with some quieter roads to head further south.

<sup>4</sup><https://newzealand.com/int/feature/surf-highway-45/>

# Taumarunui to New Plymouth via Ōhura

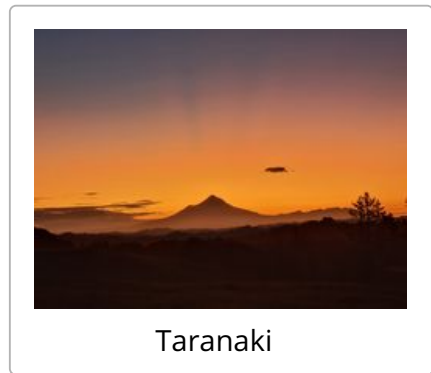
Distance: 182 km   Ascent: 2004 m   Descent: 2162 m



For those of you feeling intrepid this is a great alternative to the [Forgotten World Highway](#) through the tiny settlement of Ōhura, deep in the heart of the King Country.

This route is wonderfully scenic, and you will have it practically all to yourself because daily vehicle numbers are in the single digits. The total ascent is slightly less than that of the Forgotten Highway but, more importantly, it has a few long climbs instead of a lot of short ones, which I much prefer.

But of course there is a price to pay for all this quietude...the road is mainly gravel, and with practically no services en route you should reckon on finding a camp site at the end of each day. You will also need to pack enough supplies to last 2-3 days. Ōhura does have a small store, but opening times vary. For water refills you may try your luck with farm houses along the way, but bear in mind that through stretches the Waitaanga Saddle and Kiwi Road there are no farms to be found. Another option, if you have a water filter, is fresh water from streams. You'll pass a few when climbing up the Waitaanga Saddle, but there are none on the saddle itself.



Taranaki



Your first task for the day is to decide which way to head out of Taumarunui...

I started by heading south-west along SH 43, turning right at about 29 km into the gravel Roto Road, which follows the Ohura River gradually upstream to Ōhura.

Another option is to head north along the Ongarue Back Road. This follows the Ongarue River upstream for about 10 km, shadowing the course of SH 4 along the opposite bank, then joining it briefly before turning left into Okahukura Saddle Road. The road, though largely sealed, turns to gravel at various points, including over the saddle. Take the left fork at Matiere to follow Ohura Road through to Ōhura.

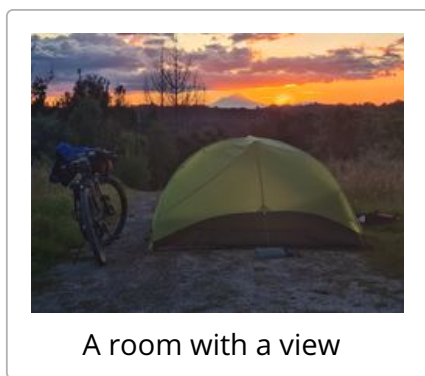
One last option is to head west along the gravel Kururau Road, joining SH 43 for a few km before the turnoff to Moto Road. With two significant climbs this choice is for the stubbornly adventurous only.

Once at Ōhura you can take a break, try your luck at the store, and then begins your ascent up the Waitaanga Saddle. At the top of the saddle, about 1 km after the road levels out, you can find a nice camping spot with a good view of Mount Taranaki.

Day two takes you back down the saddle and then up Kiwi Road, forking right onto Moki Road, then left into Uriti Road towards Okoki. This section takes you through several hand-carved tunnels. To your left, after the second tunnel, is a location used for the filming of the movie *The Last Samurai*. The scenery here is wonderful.

Ask locally and camping may be possible at the old school grounds in Okoki. Preferring a shorter day I stopped earlier, asking a local farmer if I could camp on his land; a great spot high on the hill, again with views out to Mount Taranaki. If you camp close to Kiwi Road then a night walk may reward you with a sighting of the shy, nocturnal Kiwi. There are plenty around, and you will almost certainly hear their raucous cry come nightfall.

The final leg from Okoki follows the Urenui River down to join SH 3. There are a few campgrounds nearby to choose from, but if you're pushing on to New Plymouth then you can avoid the busy highway by heading inland to Huirangi or Lepperton, then through Bell Block to join the [Coastal Walkway](https://www.npdc.govt.nz/leisure-and-culture/coastal-walkway/)<sup>1</sup> into the city.



A room with a view

<sup>1</sup><https://www.npdc.govt.nz/leisure-and-culture/coastal-walkway/>

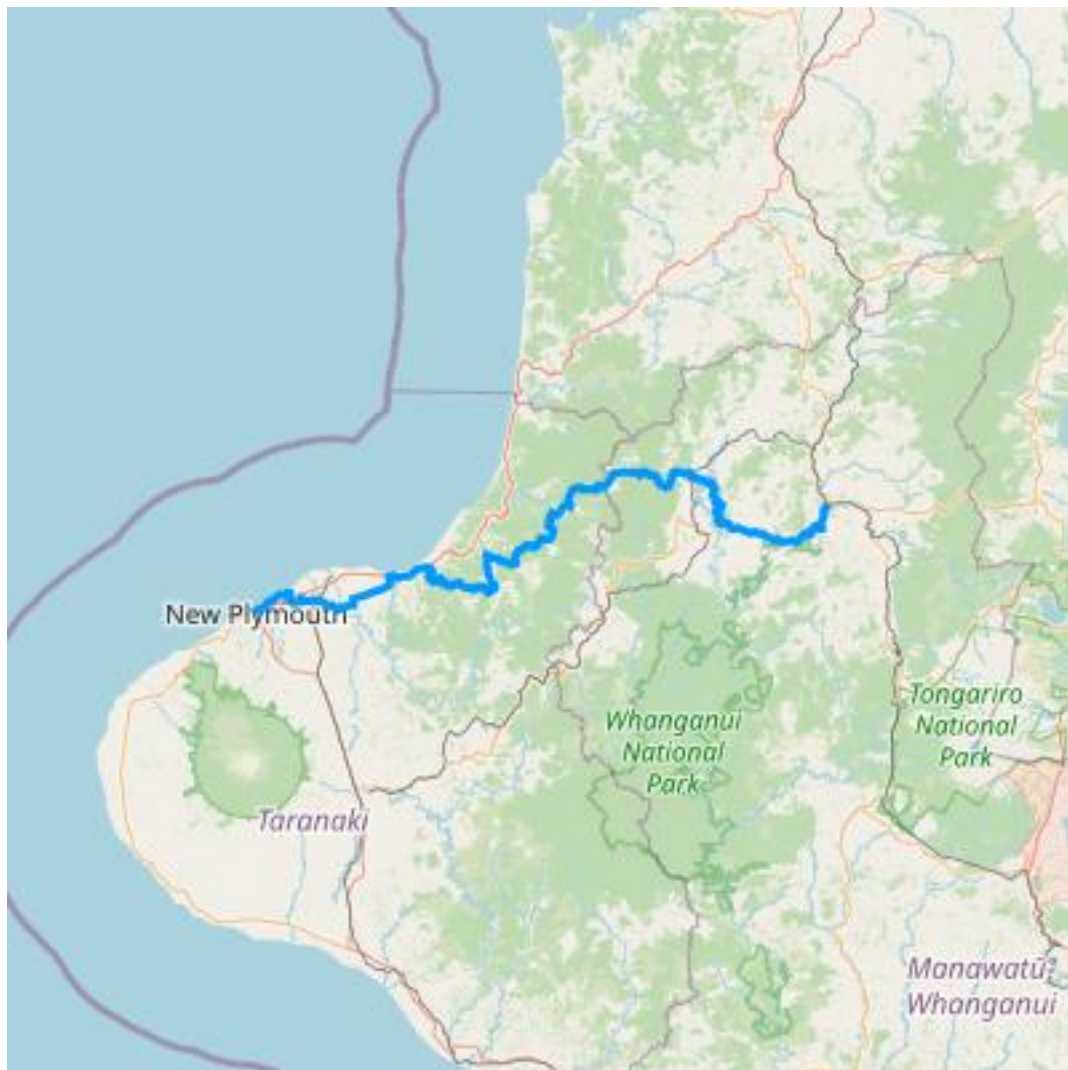
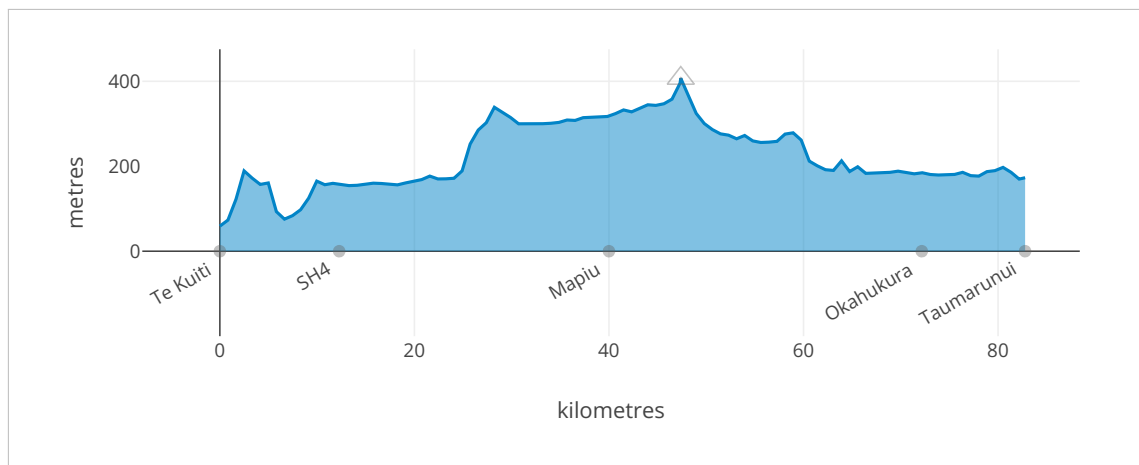


Figure 11.1: Taumarunui to New Plymouth via Ōhura

# Te Kuiti to Whanganui

## 12.1 Te Kuiti to Taumarunui

Distance: 83 km Ascent: 638 m Descent: 524 m



There are no shops on this stretch of road, so stock up with enough food and water for the day before you leave Te Kuiti.

As soon as you've left Te Kuiti on SH3, you'll start on the first of the day's three substantial hill-climbs, which culminates in a rapid descent back down to your original elevation. There's a short flat stretch, then the road climbs to 8 Mile Junction, where you turn left onto SH4, leave a lot of the traffic behind you and continue climbing for another 35 km, gaining 300 m of elevation in the process. However, apart from two steeper sections, one to the Kopaki Rd turn-off and the other to the Tapuiwahine saddle, the gradients are gentle and you'll be able to maintain a respectable speed. After the saddle there is just one sharp rise and a couple of bumps to spoil what is otherwise a gentle descent all the way down to Taumarunui. The final 10 km is pleasantly even, as the road follows the Ongarue river valley imperceptibly downhill.

At Taumarunui, camp at the well-equipped and friendly camp site 4 km east of the centre, on the bank of the Whanganui river. If you need provisions, buy them before you leave the town centre.

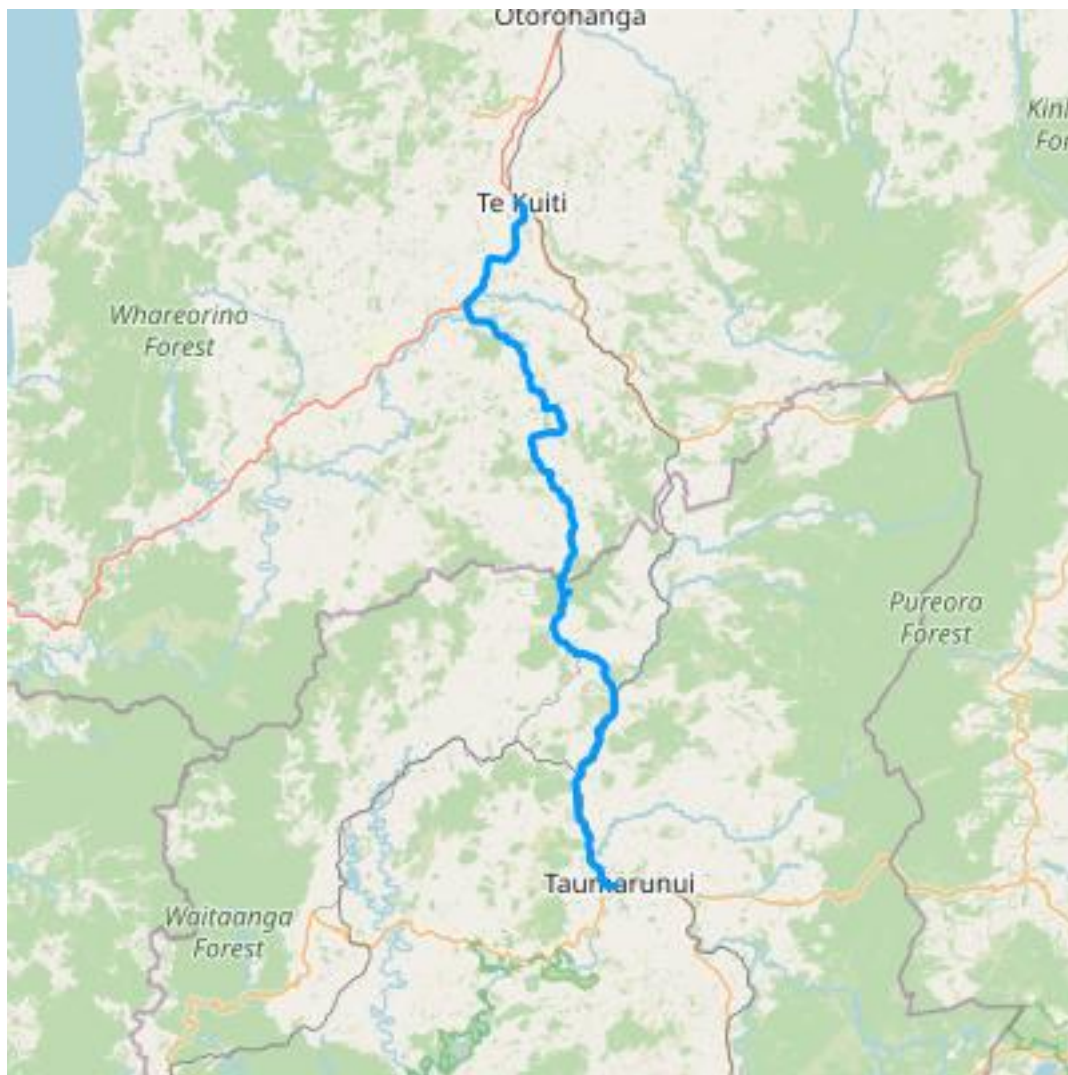
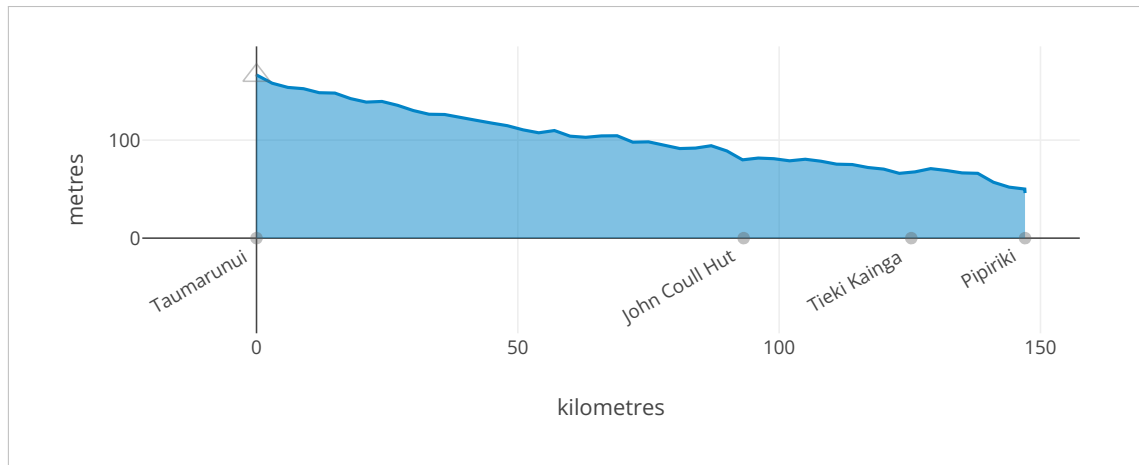


Figure 12.1: Te Kuiti to Taumarunui

## 12.2 Taumarunui to Pipiriki by Canoe or Kayak

Distance: 147 km Ascent: 367 m Descent: 487 m



Several operators in and around Taumarunui offer both guided and self-guided canoe or kayak trips down the Whanganui to Pipiriki. Contact the i-site at Taumarunui for initial assistance. Various durations of trip are available, from half a day and upwards, but a minimum of three days terminating at Pipiriki is recommended to fully experience the peace and quiet of the river, with its towering cliffs, winding course and numerous rapids. The rapids are mostly low-grade affairs that are exhilarating but not seriously dangerous: you might fall in and get wet, but you'd be very unlucky to hurt more than your pride. Wild camping is not allowed - you must stay at DOC camp sites, of which there are many, spread regularly along the river. A few of them offer bunk-room huts in addition. You must book and pay in advance, either by internet or via your tour operator.



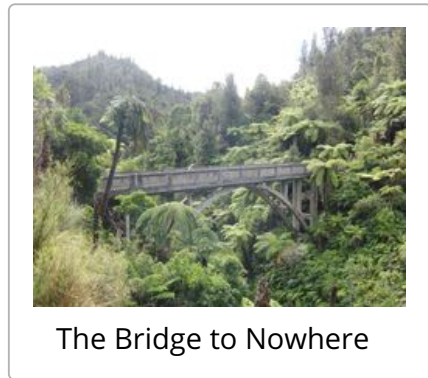
Paddling down the Whanganui

The main advantage of a guided tour is the guide's knowledge of local stories, wild-life, and jokes - and the fact that they might do the cooking for you. The disadvantage is the added cost. Self-guiders will be equipped with a set of maps that show camp-site locations and points of interest along the route. The 2-hour return walk to the "Bridge to Nowhere" is especially recommended. If you're travelling by yourself, you must reckon that you won't be allowed on the river alone. This means either joining a guided tour or joining up with one or more other self-guiders; the tour operators should be



able to help you in this respect.

Because tour operators have to drive their vehicles empty down to Pipiriki in order to recover their canoes/kayaks and take them back to Taumarunui, you will most probably be able to arrange with them to store your bike and any superfluous gear while you're paddling, and then bring them to Pipiriki for you when they collect your canoe/kayak. The alternative is to get a lift with them back to Taumarunui and continue cycling from there: either to Pipiriki by road (SH4 to Raetihi, then side-road to Pipiriki, 85 km in total); or to some other destination. Cycling from Taumarunui to Pipiriki is also the solution if you don't have the time or inclination to paddle down the river, but you'll miss out on a great experience.



The Bridge to Nowhere

There are no shops along the Whanganui, nor at Pipiriki, so before leaving Taumarunui you'll need to buy enough food to last the duration of your river journey, plus an extra day's rations in case of emergency (e.g. weather too bad for paddling), plus breakfast and lunch for the final stage from Pipiriki to Whanganui. Dense, dark high-energy bread and lightweight, dehydrated meals that require the addition of boiling water are recommended (especially as the water at the DOC sites is advised to be boiled before drinking in any case). Accommodation possibilities are limited once you arrive at Pipiriki, but camping is now possible in the grounds of the old school, where you may also be able to buy a meal and a coffee from the friendly owners. Ring to check the current status before leaving Taumarunui: blissfully, there's no coverage for mobile phones once you're on the river.

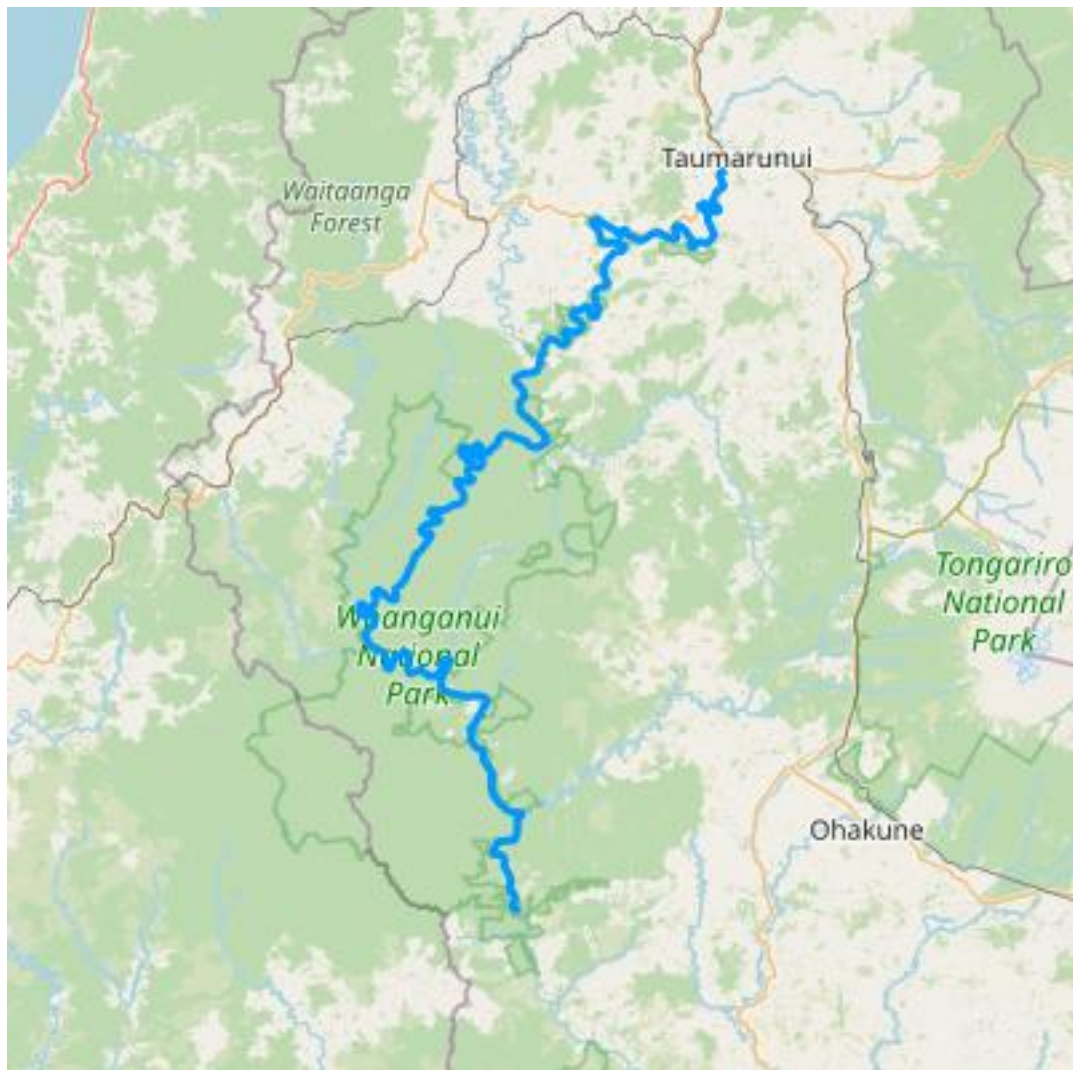
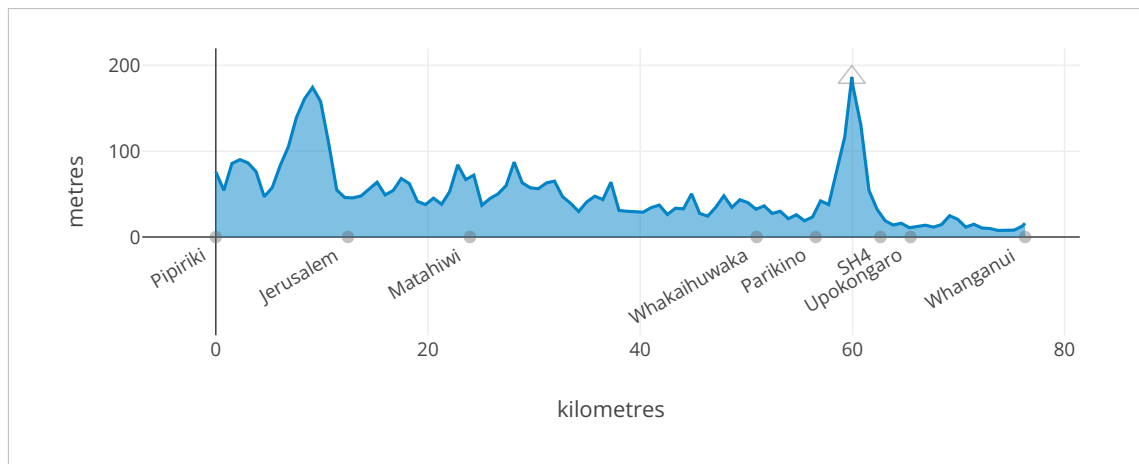


Figure 12.2: Taumaranui to Pipiriki by Canoe or Kayak



## 12.3 Pipiriki to Whanganui

Distance: 76 km   Ascent: 693 m   Descent: 753 m



The Whanganui River Road follows the course of the river most of the way to the junction with SH4 about 12 km before Whanganui, but the steep sides of the gorge sometimes necessitate strenuous deviations: The road is narrow and undulating, with an unsealed 12 km section including a 200 m climb soon after leaving Pipiriki and another 200 m climb shortly before joining the SH4. But there is virtually no traffic and there are superb views all the way. As you cycle along, you'll pass through tiny hamlets bearing surprising names such as London, Corinth, Jerusalem, etc, that reflect the ambitions of early, competing protestant and catholic missionaries who wanted to record their respective conquests for posterity.



Whanganui River near Pipiriki

As you approach Whanganui, you need to cross the river to get to the town centre, most of the hostels and the camp sites. This is possible at the first bridge you come to, which looks like (and is) a railway bridge but which has a pedestrian walkway cunningly concealed on the side facing away from you, making it easy to miss. Cross over the river and turn right up Somme Parade to cycle 3 km up-river to the well-equipped campsite idyllically situated on the river bank, or turn left down Somme Parade to get to the town centre and a variety of hostels including the YHA (which doubles as a B & B, should you feel that you need/deserve a little luxury after several nights of DOC-style frugality). The i-site is on Taupo Quay, which is the continuation of

Somme Parade in the town centre.

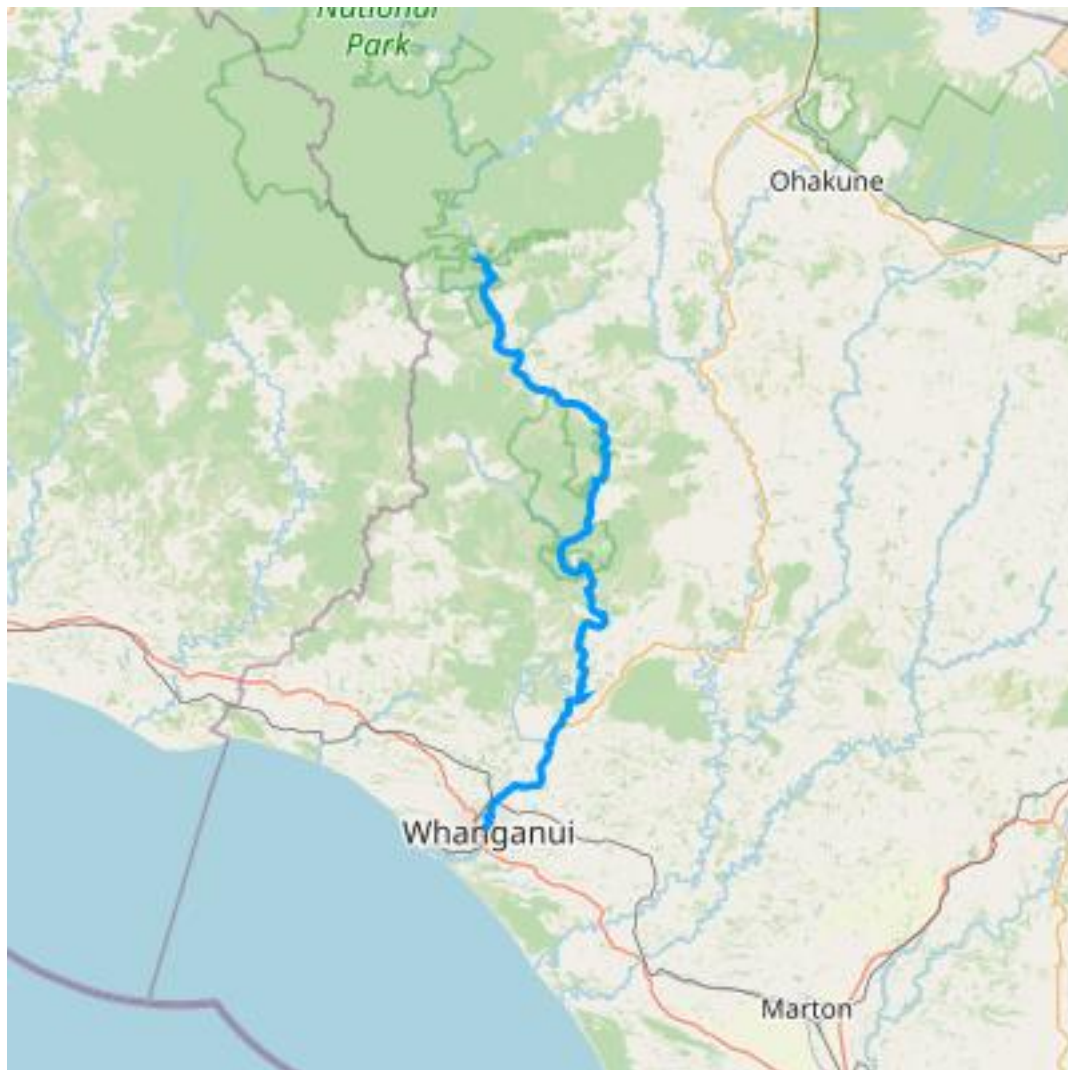
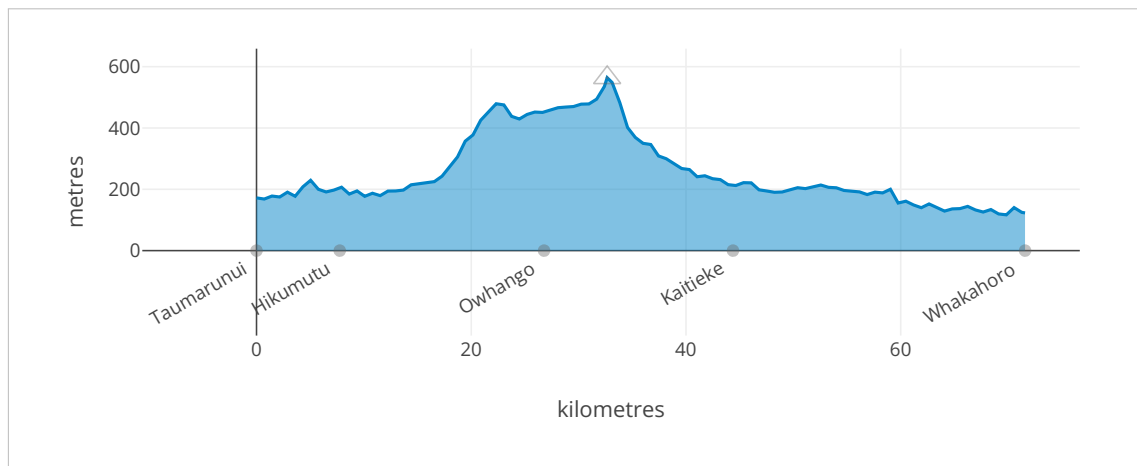


Figure 12.3: Pipiriki to Whanganui

# Taumarunui to Ohakune

## 13.1 Taumarunui to Whakahoro

Distance: 72 km Ascent: 732 m Descent: 781 m



You can travel the 78 km along HW4 from Taumarunui through National Park to Ohakune in a single day, but consider the quieter roads through Whakahoro and Whanganui National Park. The following is just one option, have a look at the [NZ Cycle Trail](https://nzcycletrail.com)<sup>1</sup> site to checkout other possibilities...

Head out along Hikumutu Rd and soon enough you're climbing a gravel road which you'll have pretty much to yourself. At around 25 km the road forks. A NZ Cycle Trail sign directs you right down the gravel Kawautahi Rd, but I prefer the alternative which is to continue left the remaining few hundred metres into the tiny settlement of Owahango, an old mill town, located exactly along the 39° latitude line.



Traffic jam, Hikumutu Road

A kilometre or so south of Owahango you reach the turnoff right onto the alternate route down the paved Oio Rd. After a small climb you start a glorious descent which just seems to keep going and going. All good things must come to and end, and for the final 20 km

<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/22-great-rides/mountains-to-sea>

the road levels out and turns once more to gravel, following the Retaruke River to Whakahoro and the start of the Whanganui National Park.

The surprising find here is the [Blue Duck Lodge](https://blueduckstation.co.nz)<sup>2</sup>, where you can get a bite to eat and perhaps refill your water bottles. All in all this day has a nice shape to it: get the climbing out of the way early then enjoy an extended downhill to end the day in the wilderness.

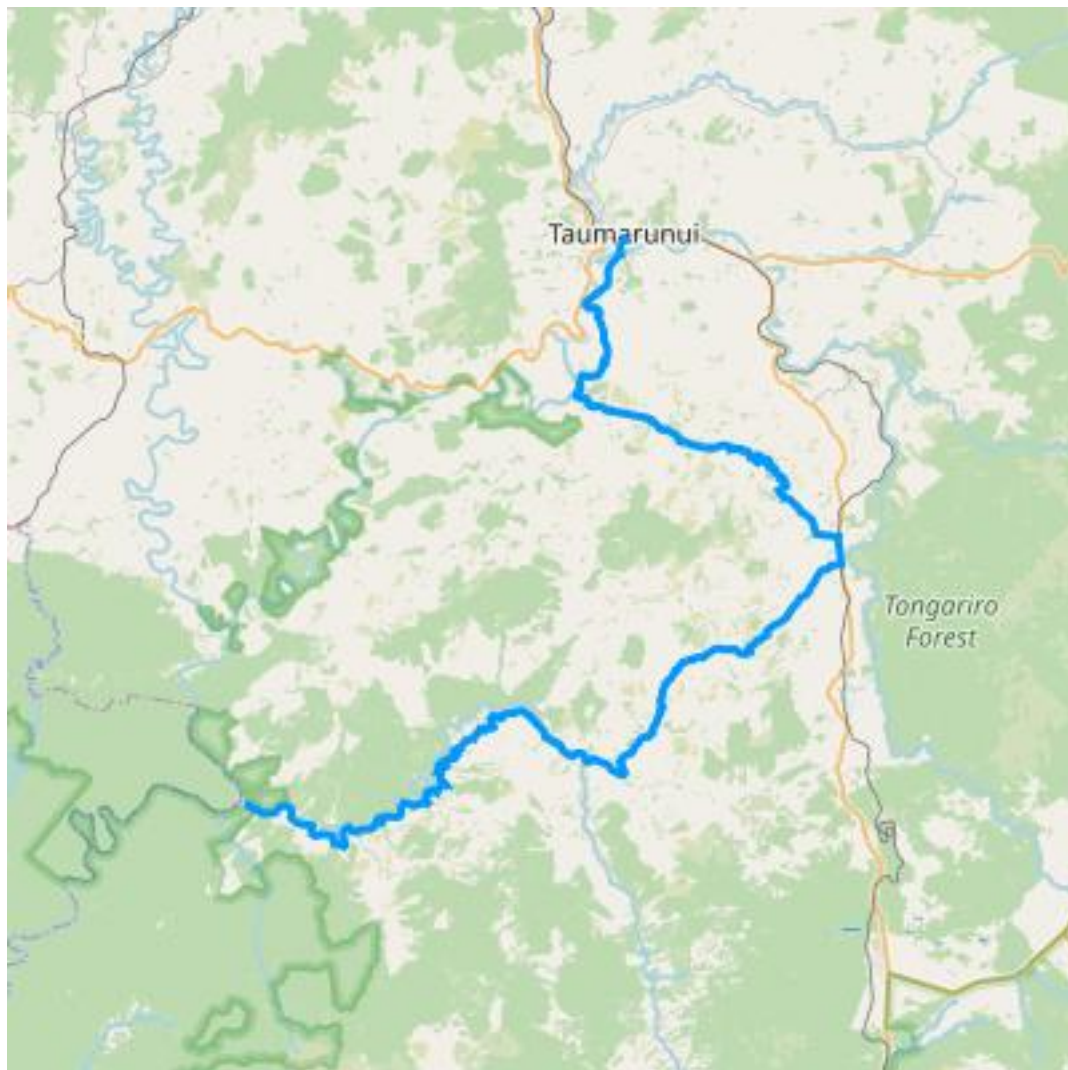


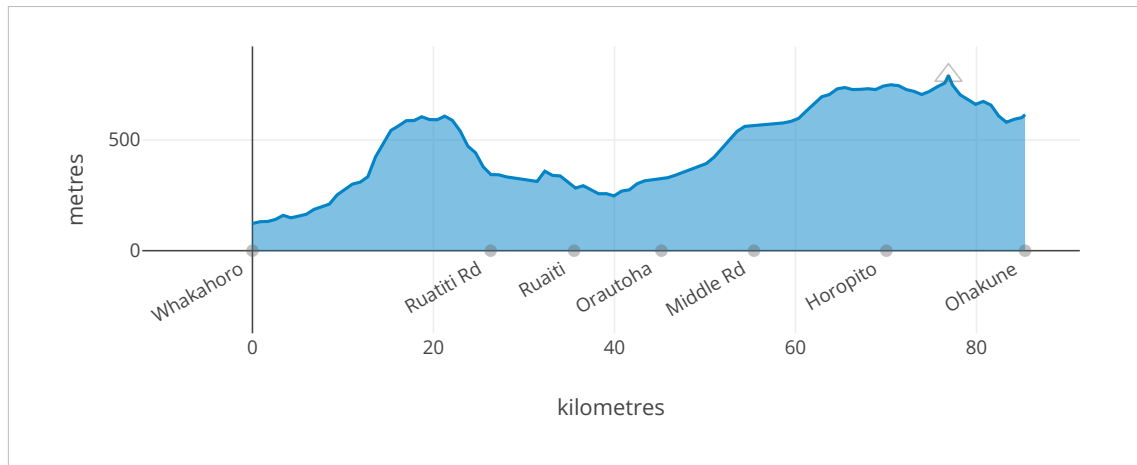
Figure 13.1: Taumarunui to Whakahoro

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<sup>2</sup><https://blueduckstation.co.nz>

## 13.2 Whakahoro to Ohakune

Distance: 85 km   Ascent: 1390 m   Descent: 899 m



**Alert:** This route includes a 10 km section of grade 3 single track. Attempt this only if you are lightly packed and confident cycling off-road. Best avoided after rain when the track may be muddy and slippery.

Yesterday you joined up with the [Mountains to Sea Cycle Trail](#)<sup>3</sup> (Ngā Ara Tūhono) along the last few kms of Oio Rd. Today is a continuation of that trail, along the Kaiwhakauka Track through Whanganui National Park. The Mountains to Sea Cycle Trail is often on the suggested itinerary for long-haul tourers but NZ Cycle Trail rides can be something of a mixed bag, so I was curious to see what the track conditions would be like, especially since the ride is graded 3 (intermediate difficulty). Here's what the NZ Cycle Trail site has to say about grade 3 rides...

- Off-road trails can be narrow and may include hill climbs, steep drop-offs and small river crossings.
- The trail surface is mostly firm, but may include muddy or loose sections.
- There may also be obstacles such as rocks or tree roots to avoid.

In fact most of this route is 4WD track, but there is a 10 km section of single track (roughly 5 km either side of Mosely Campground) which demands some care, and it is for this 10 km that the ride earns its grade 3 rating. I normally ride with only rear panniers. By strapping my tent onto the handlebars I was able to transfer some weight to the front of the bike and so pick my way slowly and carefully through. But the bike still got a good shake up;

<sup>3</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/22-great-rides/mountains-to-sea/>



not the kind of place you want to suffer gear failure. Having said that...well the pictures speak for themselves: it's just beautiful.

Soon enough a more manageable 4WD track returns. Once you reach the Mangapurua Track junction you can either turn right to continue to the [Bridge To Nowhere](#)<sup>4</sup> and your (pre-booked) jetboat ride down the Whanganui River to Pipiriki, or left to the road end.

The ride from Ruatiti Rd onwards is pretty relentlessly uphill, and it's easy to see why as views of Mt Ruapehu begin to appear; you are riding up and onto the central volcanic plateau. Initially gravel, the road is sealed once you cross the Manganuioteao River (at about 4 km before Orautoha). At around the 40 km mark you reach the [Ruatiti Domain](#)<sup>5</sup> where there is camping by the Manganui-O-Te-Ao River.

As you near the end of Ruatiti Rd a NZ Cycle Trail sign directs you left onto the rough, gravel Middle Rd, eventually spitting you out onto the main road at Horopito. The reason? Horopito is the starting point for the Ohakune Old Coach Road, a beautiful cycle route incorporating some fascinating rail heritage by way of the Taonui and Hapuowhenua Viaducts.

Beautiful...but not well suited to bikes laden with panniers. In this case probably better to sail straight past the Middle Rd turnoff and take a more direct route into Ohakune, leaving the Ohakune Old Coach Road for a day-trip. Ohakune is a pretty town. A popular ski resort it has all the things you would expect of a tourist destination, including a supermarket, pubs, cafés, and plenty of accommodation options.



On the Kaiwhakauka Track



Mt Ruapehu

<sup>4</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/manawatu-whanganui/places/whanganui-national-park/bridge-to-nowhere/>

<sup>5</sup><https://ruapehudc.govt.nz/our-facilities/parks-reserves-and-camping/camping>

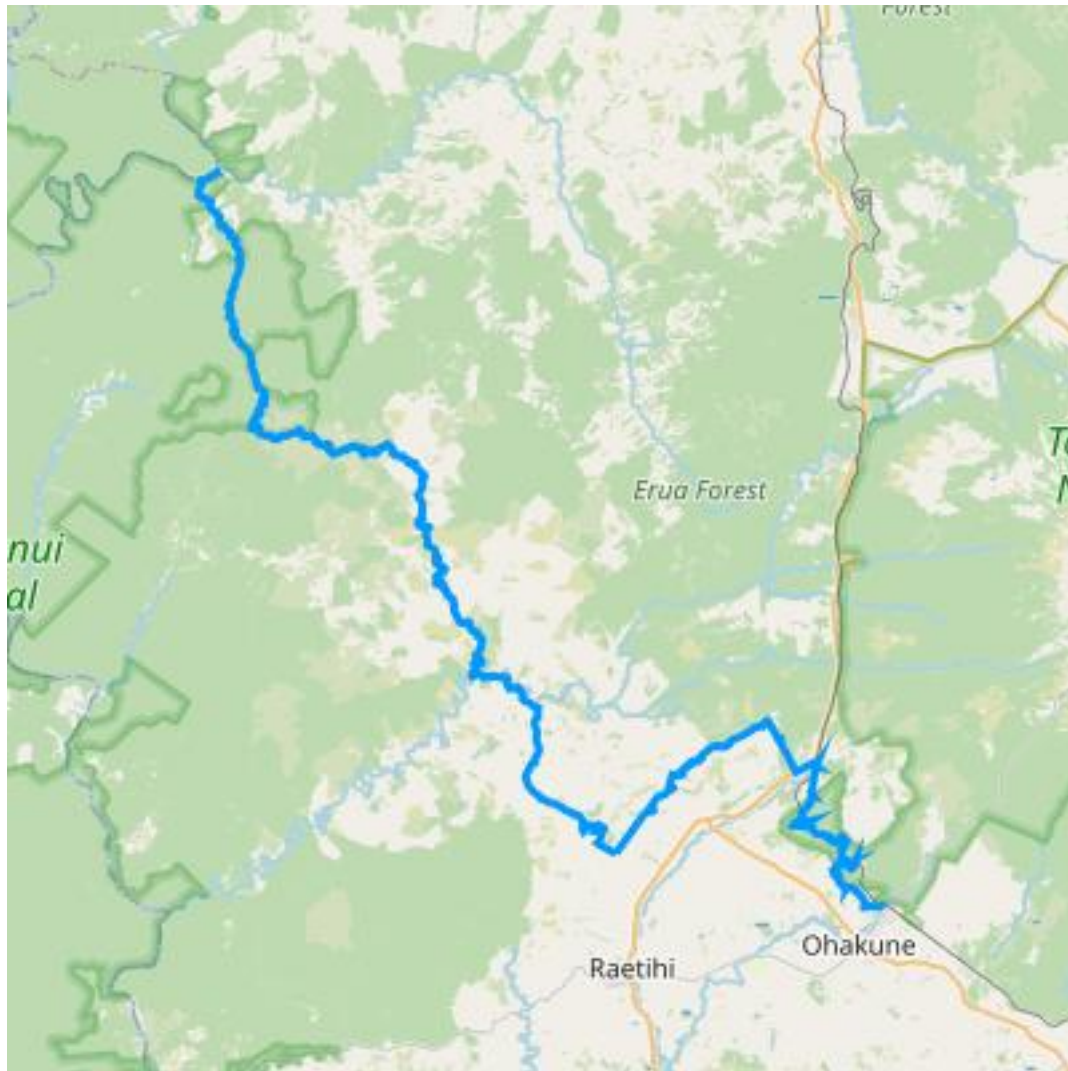


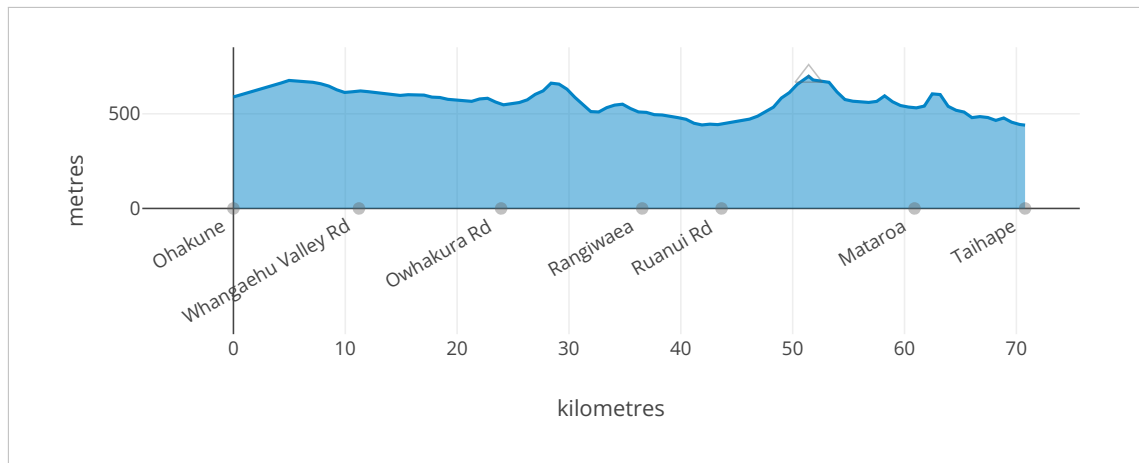
Figure 13.2: Whakahoro to Ohakune



# Ohakune to Masterton

## 14.1 Ohakune to Taihape

Distance: 71 km Ascent: 753 m Descent: 902 m



Follow HW49 east towards Waiouru then after about 11 km turnoff right into Whangaehu Valley Rd. This road looks so enticing I was sorely tempted to [follow it](https://crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page_id=74659)<sup>1</sup> all the way through to Whanganui. Another time...

Instead, at about 24 km from Ohakune turn left onto the gravel Owahakura Rd through to Bells Junction. Tarmac returns as far as Rangiwaea Junction, turning to gravel again for the last few km into Colliers Junction. With all this junction hopping it's a good idea to have a map handy.



Whangaehu Valley Rd

Dairy may have taken hold in Canterbury, but the central North Island is still home to a good number of New Zealand's 30 million sheep. The volcanic soils in this area are cobalt deficient and must be supplemented to avoid "bush-sickness" in livestock. Sure enough, the day I was riding through an aerial topdresser was at work, swooping low over the fields and landing regularly in a nearby paddock to take on more payload. Highly entertaining.

<sup>1</sup>[https://crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page\\_id=74659](https://crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page_id=74659)

There are no services on this route, nor any stand-out drawcards; the real attraction is the landscape. Despite the hills all around, this day has no major climbs and is not too taxing. Just settle back and enjoy the slower cadence of the country.

About 5 km past the picturesque little village of Mataroa the road joins up with SH1 and you must cycle the remaining 4½ km along the motorway; heavily trafficked, but there is mostly a good shoulder. Taihape (the "Gumboot Capital of the World") is a popular stopover for HW1 travellers and has a supermarket, cafés and many accommodation options.

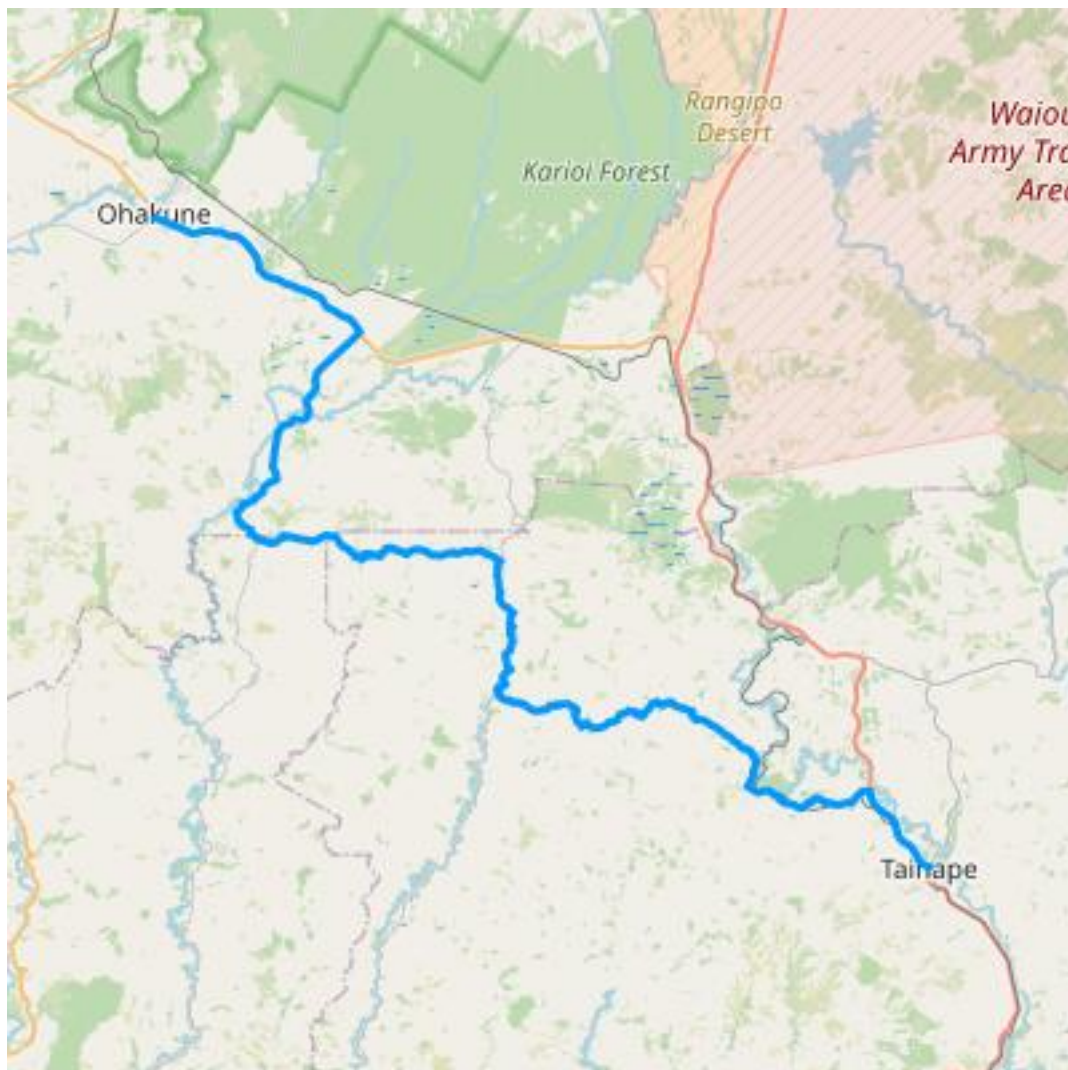
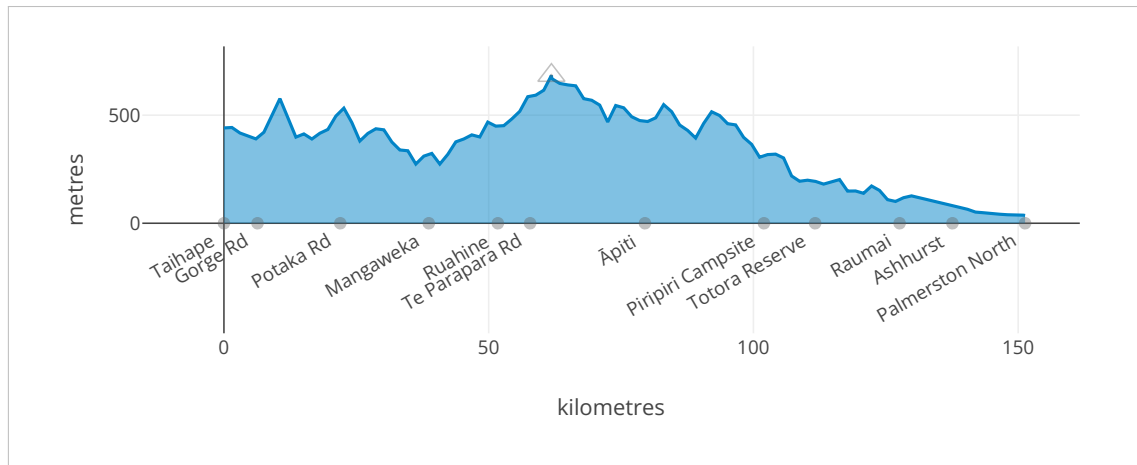


Figure 14.1: Ohakune to Taihape

## 14.2 Taihape to Palmerston North

Distance: 151 km   Ascent: 1803 m   Descent: 2208 m



Head south down Highway 1 for about 6 km till you reach the turnoff left into Gorge Rd. Don't be tempted to continue along the highway past this point; although there is a good shoulder up until Gorge Rd, it soon disappears to make way for an overtaking lane which snakes up the hill, over a bridge and around a blind corner.

The rivers in this area cut deep gorges and soon after the turn-off you're crossing high over the Hautapu River. It's a climb through quiet, tree-lined country roads and the Omatane Scenic Reserve, then at about 15 km you cross over the Rangitikei River turning into Omatane South Rd which soon becomes gravel. Gravel remains for 8 km until you reach Potaka Rd. From here you mostly descend into Mangaweka, dipping into the deep ravines and crossing the Rangitikei a few more times. If you've cycled enough for one day then there are accommodation options here, including a campground.

Mangaweka is the starting point for the [Manawatū Cycle Trail](https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/heartland-rides/manawatu-cycleway/)<sup>2</sup>, 125 km of cycling through quiet, back-country roads. And it's all paved! Head back out and start the climb up Ruahine St. Once along the top the views are expansive and it feels like you're up in the heavens; a sense reinforced often as the road cuts down deep into a gorge and you climb your way back up. At about 38 km from Mangaweka you reach the turnoff to Pohangina Valley East Rd. Here you have the option to cycle the remaining 2 km into Āpiti where there is a pub.

Once you've climbed out of Āpiti most of the hard work is behind you and

<sup>2</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/heartland-rides/manawatu-cycleway/>

the remainder of the ride descends through the quiet, rolling farmland of the Pohangina Valley. There are several options to camp along the way with a DOC campground at [Piripiri](#)<sup>3</sup>, and [Totara Reserve](#)<sup>4</sup> a further 10 km down the road. There are no services between Āpiti and Ashhurst.

Ashhurst is a supply town for the surrounding farmlands and has everything you need. The highway south to Palmerston North has a good shoulder and is safe to cycle. After a few kms a NZ Cycle Trail sign directs you down a side road toward the [Manawatū Riverside Pathway](#)<sup>5</sup> which adds a few kms to the trip but gets you away from the traffic. If you prefer you can continue along the highway, as the good shoulder remains all the way through to Palmerston North.

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<sup>3</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/manawatu-whanganui/places/pohangina-valley-area/things-to-do/piripiri-campsite/>

<sup>4</sup><https://horizons.govt.nz/managing-natural-resources/parks-projects/totara-reserve-regional-park>

<sup>5</sup><https://pncc.govt.nz/Parks-venues-Recreation/Walks-and-walkways/Manawat%C5%AB-River-Shared-Pathway>

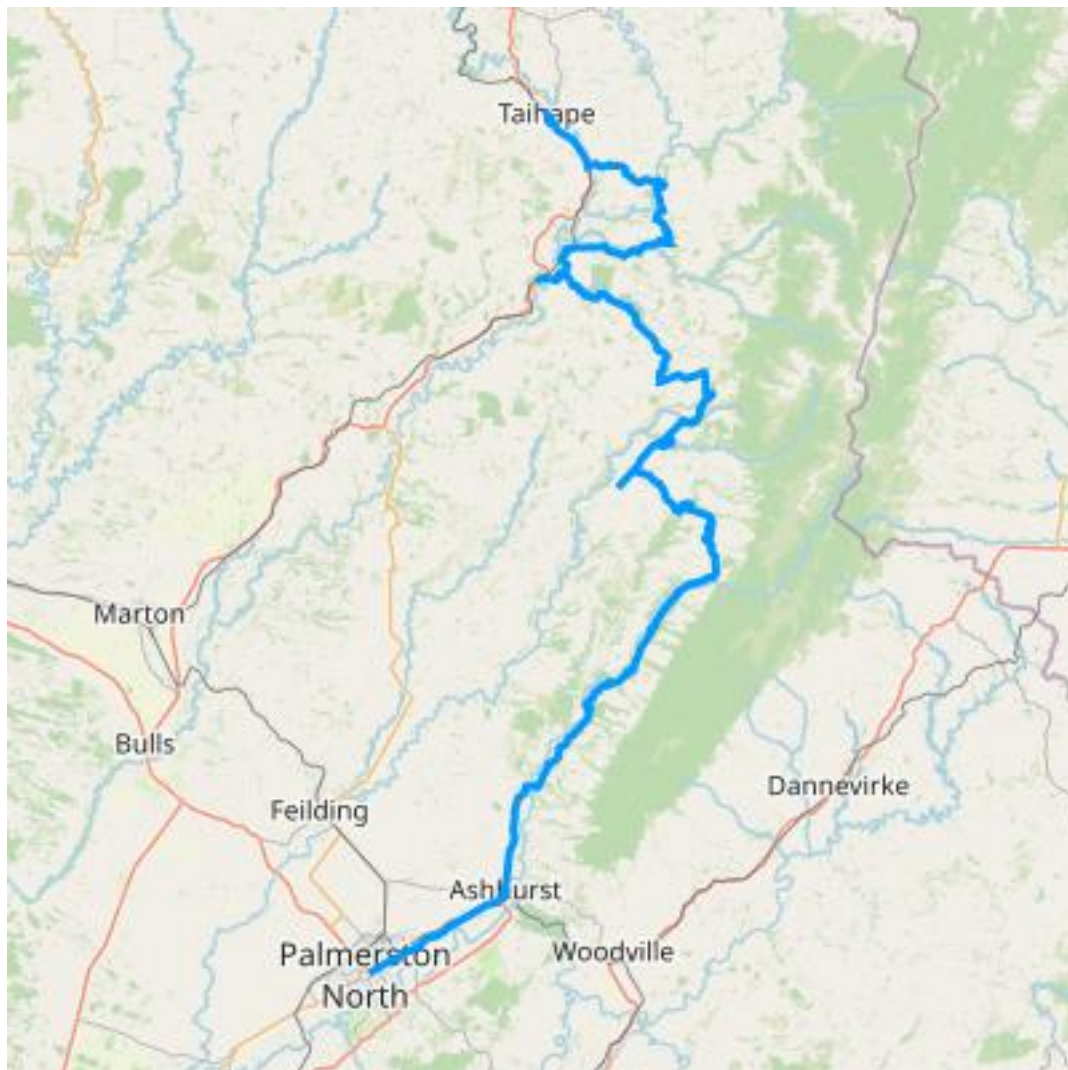
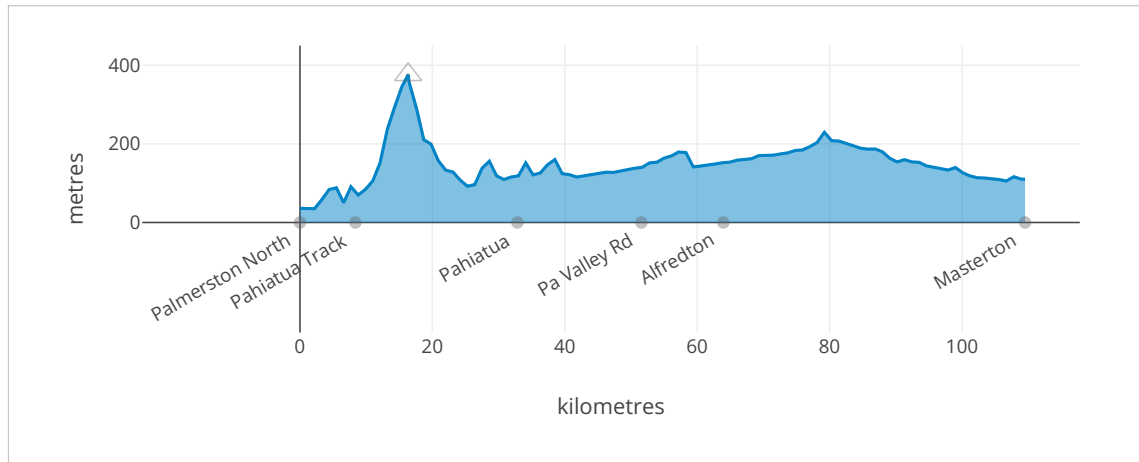


Figure 14.2: Taihape to Palmerston North

## 14.3 Palmerston North to Masterton via Pahiatua

Distance: 110 km Ascent: 779 m Descent: 705 m



This day starts with a fairly steep climb over the Pahiatua Track. Have a breather at the summit and take in the array of wind turbines lining the road. Once down the hill you arrive at Pahiatua, a small town with supermarket, supplies, and a lovely campground bordering a nature reserve.

There's a bit of a climb out of Pahiatua, but the remainder of the day is wonderful riding along quiet, rolling, country roads along the [Tararua Traverse](https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/heartland-rides/tararua-traverse)<sup>6</sup>. At Alfredton there's the opportunity to free camp at the domain. Otherwise it's onward to Masterton. The Wairarapa district has a host of quiet country roads to enjoy, and safe passage into Wellington over the [Remutaka Rail Trail](#).



On the Tararua Traverse

<sup>6</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/heartland-rides/tararua-traverse>



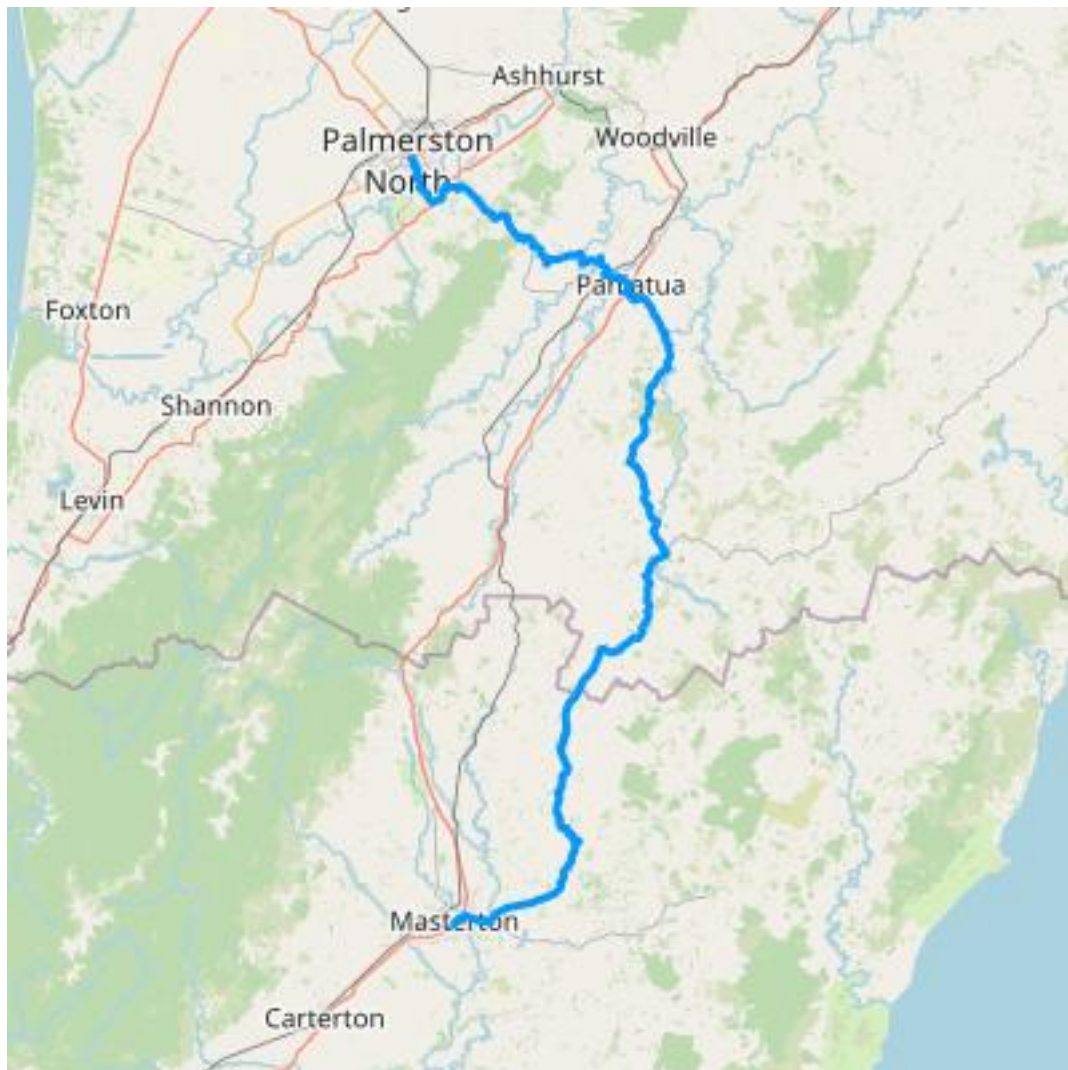


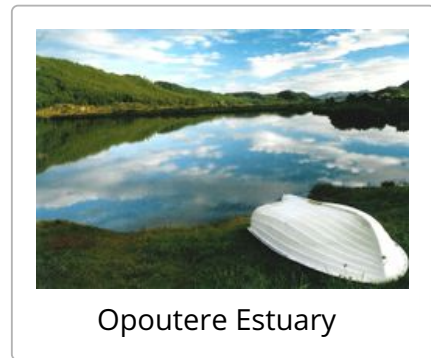
Figure 14.3: Palmerston North to Masterton via Pahiatua



# Introduction to the Coromandel

## 15.1 Why the Coromandel?

The Coromandel is a scenic peninsular bounded by the Hauraki Gulf on one side and the Bay of Plenty on the other. It is not far from Auckland and regarded as one of the beauty spots of the North Island. It has a wide range of lovely bays and broad sandy beaches and the road frequently borders the coastline.



Opoutere Estuary

The Coromandel can be a real joy to cycle with clean, safe swimming every few kilometres. The camping grounds are often right on the beach and they can, if you wish, be beautifully isolated. Between the coasts are sealed roads travelling often through thick native bush. The Coromandel Ranges are a bit hilly in parts but I have never heard anyone complain this area was not worth the effort. The views over the sea and valleys are spectacular and some cyclists say this is the best part of their tour of New Zealand.

The route I describe is one that includes the best of the Coromandel with the most suitable touring roads. Bearing this in mind there are side trips to isolated beaches etc. and someone truly smitten with this area could spend many weeks exploring all the side roads, bays, native bush areas and DOC campsites.

**A Note on Camping:** *The Coromandel has probably more 'no camping' signs than anywhere else in New Zealand. Careless campers may inadvertently camp on private or 'tapu' (sacred) land. Having said that, if you do wish to free camp ask the local landowners. Most, if you approach them politely, will point out a good spot where you can camp without upsetting anyone.*

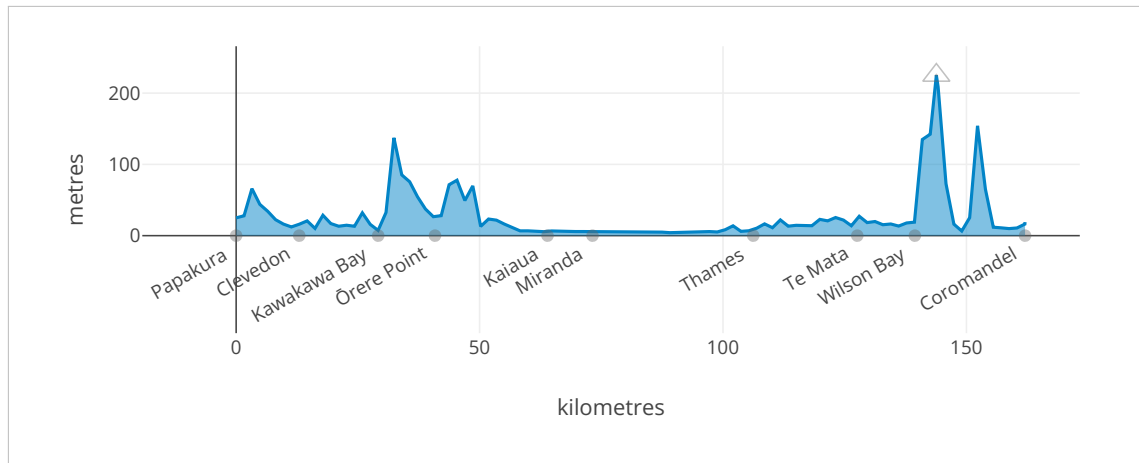
## 15.2 Auckland to Papakura by Train

Let's assume you are starting in Auckland. The train south gets you out of Auckland quickly and safely. Once you alight at Papakura station the route

to your first campground is generally straightforward cycling through farmland and along scenic foreshores. The first campground from Papakura Station is Ōrere Point (about 40 km). If you start late, then this is a good place to stop for the night. I recommend Miranda however, but this might stretch you a bit at 68 km. Some head on to Thames at 88 km, but often the train and your first day out can be a bit tiring and you might want to ease yourself into this part of the tour.

# The Coromandel West Coast

Distance: 162 km   Ascent: 994 m   Descent: 1000 m



## Papakura to Clevedon

Leave the station, cross the rail bridge and take the Clevedon road out of Papakura. This will wind through the suburbs for about two kilometres. Then you are into rolling hills and farmland. Clevedon, the first town you reach, is a small town with dairies, cafés, pub and an organic shop. No campground or hostel.

## Clevedon to Kawakawa Bay

This is pretty, lightly undulating countryside with an intermittent shoulder along sealed country roads. After ten kilometres you will get your first glimpse of the sea as you approach the coast with the Hauraki Estuary to your left. Kawakawa Bay appears just as you breast the hill. Here amongst this blue loveliness is a store, takeaways and a garage. I have asked for, and been given permission, to camp on the beachfront here on two occasions. There is nothing like fish and chips and watching the sunset. But be mindful, it pays to ask and not assume you can free camp.

**Kawakawa Bay to Ōrere Point**

This is your first hill of any consequence. Turn left after the store and then follow the road as it gradually winds upward through native bush away from the sea. After a few rises and falls the road curves to the right and Ōrere Point is well signposted to your left. This is your first official camp site with a reasonably well-stocked store. The campground has good facilities set among native bush. The camp includes a beach close by and a clean river with a swimming hole.

**Ōrere Point to Kaiaua**

The road continues to climb through bush and farmland and winds down eventually to the coast. From here you cycle along a lovely coastal road, generally flat but with little shoulder. The traffic should be fairly light however. Eleven ks from Ōrere Point you will come to Waharau Regional Park on your right. Although this looks like a DOC camp you need to book to use it apparently.

The road is generally flat from here to Thames passing quarries, coastline and bird sanctuaries. As you come into Kaiaua there is a store, pub and takeaway shop. Kaiaua has two campgrounds but they are only open intermittently. I suggest your best bet is to continue a bit further to Miranda.

**Kaiaua to Miranda**

The very scenic flat coastline continues with wildlife reserves for seabirds on your left. About 10 km out from Kaiaua the road curves inland and you then turn left toward Miranda Hot Springs (signposted). The campsite here is pricey but has the added attraction of hot springs included in the price. There is a small store attached to the campsite.

**Miranda to Thames**

After Miranda, the road continues flat for 6 ks until it meets Highway 25 at Waitakaruru. There is a store and tearooms at the junction where you turn left toward Thames. You will cross the flat expanse of the northern Hauraki Plains with a good shoulder most of the way. After about 10ks you reach the notorious Kopu Bridge. It is notorious because it is old and overdue for replacement and the scene of many traffic hold-ups during the holiday season. The bridge is only one lane wide and operates on traffic lights. It is 470 metres long and has several bays if you want to get out of the way or want to take photos. Generally, assume a brisk pace and you should be OK. There

is a café, pub and garage at Kopu itself. Turn left after the bridge and head toward Thames.

Thames is a substantial old town whose earlier wealth was based on mining. There is camping at either end of town and hostels. There is also a supermarket, two bike shops (one on the main road and one in the mall), information centre, pubs, museum etc. I used Dickson's motor camp at the far end of town (close to the butterfly and orchids display). Time for a small aside.



Thames Holiday Homes

*In my early days I took pride in the small size of my tent. It was a Mac Microlight, very well made and with good storage for panniers as well as an adequate, if limited sleeping area. It used a single hoop and was so small and light I carried it in my pannier rather than on my rack. On this day I pitched my tent in Dickson's campground and was off to the shower when an American touring cyclist named Larry arrived and began to pitch his tent opposite mine. When I had showered, I returned and noticed Larry had set himself up in what looked like a marquee. His tent was so big he had a chair inside and was eating his evening meal sitting up. My Microlight now looked like a sailing yacht alongside a tanker. We began to chat and I commented on the size of his tent and asked how much it weighed. 'Four and a half kilos', was his response. 'That must be a bit heavy to carry on your bike', I suggested. Larry looked at me and smiled. 'How much does your tent weigh?' I looked at my little Microlight. 'One point nine kilos', I said, just a little smugly. 'So the difference between your tent and mine is about two bags of rice.' I took his point. Larry was quite right. I had suffered a small tent because I took pride in meticulously cutting back on weight. But I also carried other things that more than made up the difference, including two books. Much later, I sold the Microlight on Trade Me and bought the last of the New Zealand made Fairydowns, an Assault II weighing 3.2 kilos. It is beautifully made, resilient and wonderful to stretch out in.*

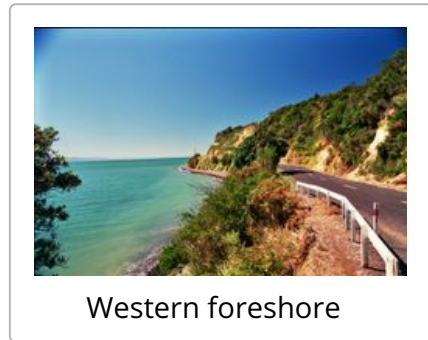
### Thames to Coromandel

This is a pleasant but narrow coast road. The coastline is rocky with a smattering of holiday homes to your right and the green Hauraki foreshore close by on your left. There are many swimming spots and two holiday parks with access to the beach. Both have camp stores. This is a pretty coastal route with sandy bays strewn with driftwood and the occasional rocky inlet. At Tapu, about 17 ks from Thames there is a campground pub and store and

the road to Coroglen on your right. The main disadvantage with the coast road, lovely as it is, is that it is narrow and winding with the shoulder often narrow or non-existent. However the road is tree edged and gives shade in summer.

Coromandel is famous for its old converted trams. Fifty years or so ago when Auckland gave up its tram system for buses, a number of Coromandel locals bought them and refitted them as holiday homes. Several still exist and are noticeable as you pedal past.

30 ks from Thames is Wilson's Bay. The road begins to wind inland with a stiff climb and great views back toward Thames and out toward the gulf. Flat riding is over and the road winds in and up and down through farmland. A good looping descent into bays and estuaries before you start climbing again. Stock up with water... this is a long ride on a hot day. There are two saddles before dropping down to a bay with black swans on your left and oyster beds further out. A few ks before Coromandel is route 309, a mostly gravel road through to Whitianga. It is winding, narrow and hilly, and recommended only if you like a challenge.



Western foreshore

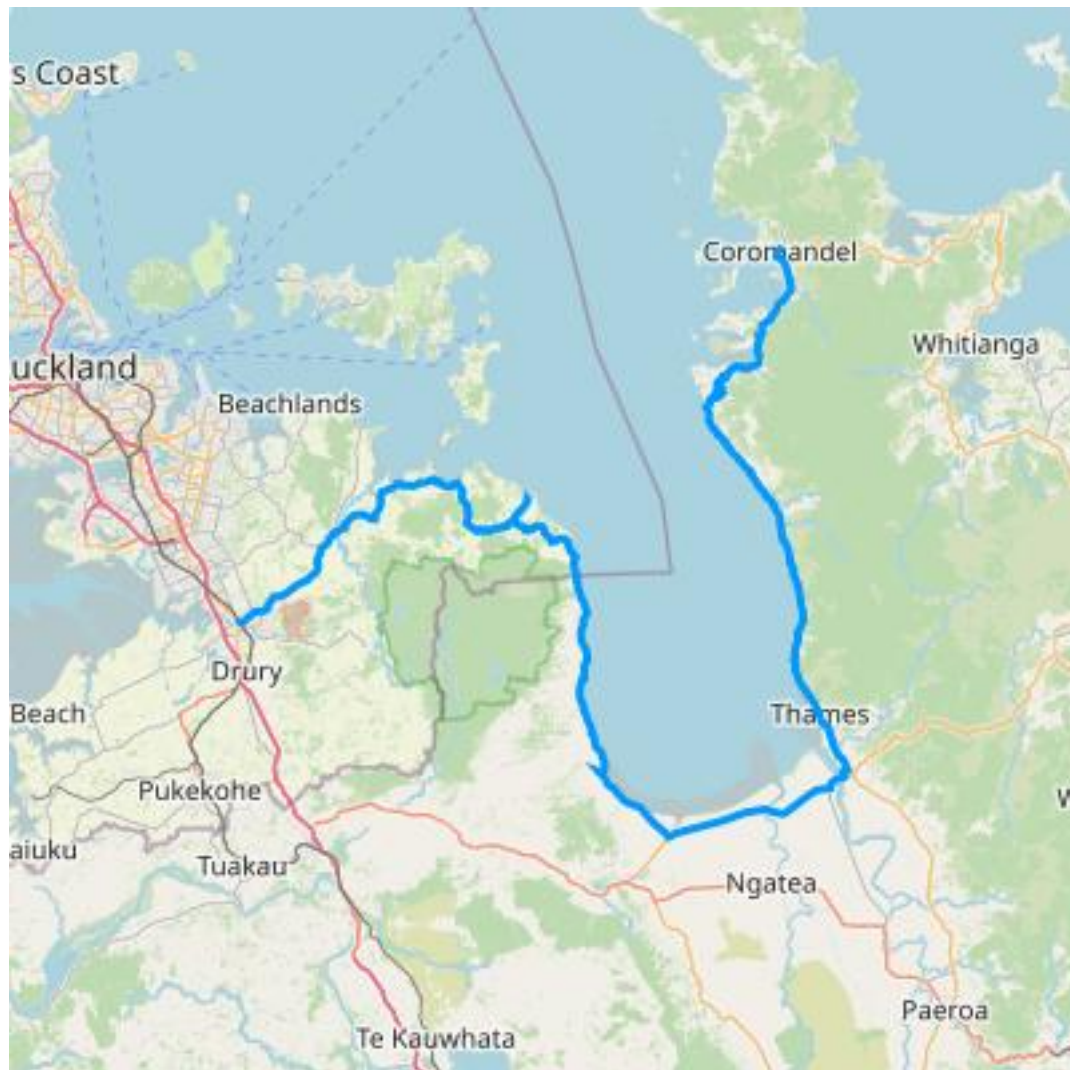
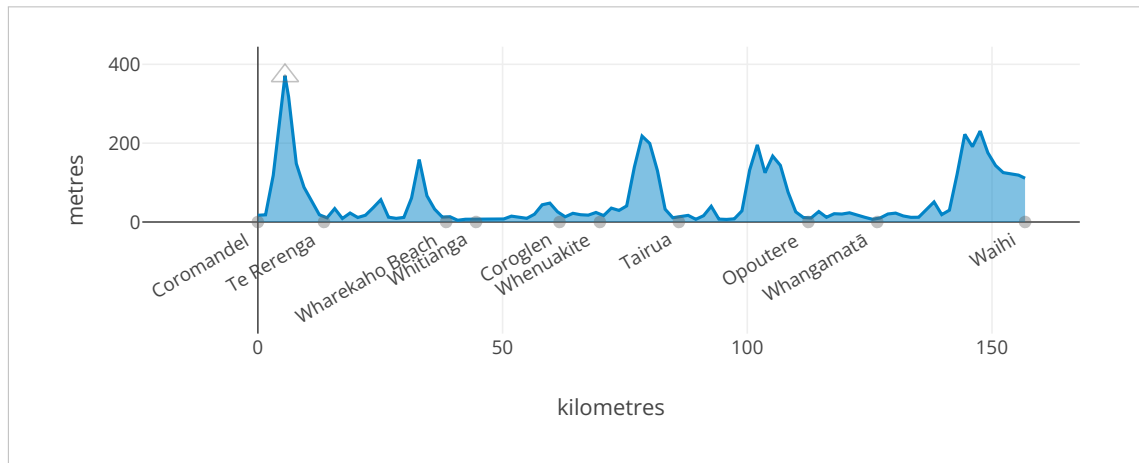


Figure 16.1: The Coromandel West Coast



## The Coromandel East Coast

Distance: 157 km   Ascent: 1759 m   Descent: 1665 m



### Coromandel

Coromandel is one of New Zealand's earlier hippy destinations and served as a retreat from suburbia for young people from the 1960's on. Swathes of young people set up artist colonies, homesteading, organic farms, beekeeping and pottery. Most of the communes failed as idealism drifted out of their sails and they left or settled into satellite dishes, internet and tourism ventures. Coromandel still carries an atmosphere of the alternative however, and this gives it a good feeling. The YHA has camping attached to the hostel and the township itself is substantial with all the facilities you require. Coromandel, like Thames, has a history of gold-mining. I have a question mark next to the local campground however. On the one occasion I camped there someone decided to have a meal and regale the campers with their music at 3.00 am. The camp owner appeared absent and the experience was such I wouldn't go there again. A kilometre or two out of Coromandel (if you turn left from the main street) is a very beautiful campground close by a beach called Long Bay. This is a great spot, very pretty, with camping on the foreshore. The Information Centre should give you all



Bays for swimming

the instructions you need.

At this point I recommend turning off the west coast and heading over the hill to the east. You can of course continue on a sealed road up to Colville (small store/camping) and beyond to Fletcher's Bay with some excellent and beautiful scenery and campsites available on unsealed roads right up to the tip of the peninsula. There is a loop road that is unsealed, narrow and winding but very scenic. It leads to Kennedy Bay and Waikawau Bay on the east coast and there are a range of DOC camps and possible free camping sites available. But be aware there is no through road and you have to return eventually to Coromandel town. Beautiful places but, given the rough roads and isolation, I would only recommend this route to the more stalwart cycle tourists. If you go beyond Coromandel into the area around Mount Moehau, you may also be interested in the following legend...



Rocky Bay, western  
foreshore

**Coromandel's Yeti** *Beyond Coromandel are a number of rugged ranges and hills. One in particular is Mount Moehau. Local legend, going back to the Māori, has it that a monster lives in this remote area. It has been described as being about two metres tall and covered with silver-white hair. It has large, pink, vacant eyes and its body is ape-like, with long arms and short thin legs. In the evenings, its growl can be heard over long distances. Be warned, if you ask locals about this creature, most will respond with scepticism, yet there was apparently a sighting in 1969...*

### Coromandel to Whitianga

There are several routes over Coromandel from west to east. The best I suggest is Highway 25. It is certainly the most direct, it is sealed and probably the least hilly. The drawback is that it is also the busiest. The other routes are steep, unsealed in large sections and narrow and winding and often leave you vulnerable to traffic on tight bends. Highway 25 route starts with a long steep climb... beautiful views, but 5 km to the scenic lookout at the top. No stores. Three ks of downhill are followed by undulating often hilly road and you are on your way through the Coromandel Ranges. As you approach the eastern side you notice a shift in geography. The beaches of the west coast tend toward leafy bays that are sometimes shingle and sometimes sand. The east coast beaches are broader and sandier and many are popu-

lar with surfers. There is also the sense that tourism and an accompanying affluence plays a greater role on the east coast.

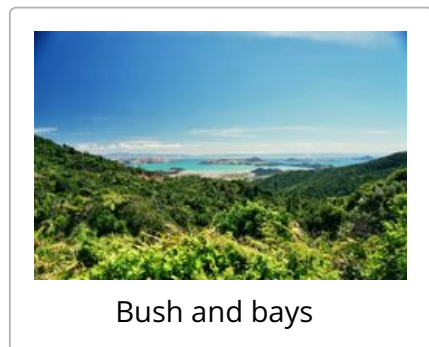
After the seascapes of the west coast you are travelling through dense native bush with ferns and nikau that gradually give way to pine forests and small settlements. There are several turn-offs to beaches and campgrounds, most of which are isolated, but beautiful and most of the campgrounds have a basic store for supplies.

There is a campground at Kūaotunu (25 ks from Coromandel) a beautiful place looking out toward the Mercury Islands. For more beautiful and isolated beaches, you can head up Black Jack Road which is the turn-off that leads to Otama and Opito Bay. These are two remote and beautiful sandy beaches.



Here monsters dwell

The road climbs steadily out of Kūaotunu and then dips and winds through more bush and farmland. Eventually you arrive at Mercury Bay and Whitianga. A fair sized well-established seaside town fringed with retirement homes and offering most tourist attractions like kayaking etc. There are several hostels and campgrounds. The best route I suggest is to stock up and take a ferry over to the lovely beaches and camping grounds around Cooks Beach, Hahei and Hot Water Beach. You might like to take a trip out to Cathedral Cove or Hot Water Beach, famous for its hot springs. At low tide you dig a hole in the sand and it fills with warm water for you to lie in. This is a relatively quiet loop road and you can rejoin Highway 25 at Whenuakite (campground, hostel).



Bush and bays

### Whitianga to Tairua

If you skip the loop road, continue on Highway 25; a flat start to a winding, hilly day. There is more undulating farmland and another campground 10 ks out at Kaimarama. Sixteen ks further out is the Coroglen Tavern, a well known haunt for local rock bands. A slow winding hill takes you into Tairua with impressive views of the islands and Ocean Bay. Coming down you pass

the Twin Kauri reserve on your left, a food opportunity to see examples of giant kauri trees. Tairua, which translates as 'two hills', has two distinct beaches, one open and broad and the other bounded by an estuary. There are several hostels and a campground. It is a small town but has most facilities. It also has a ferry that can take you across to Pauanui, yet another seaside town, somewhat new and suburban, but beautifully situated. There is also a loop here which allows you to come back onto Highway 25 further on.

Alternately, there is a forestry road from Pauanui directly to Opoutere. A friend of mine tackled this some years ago and recommends it. However the road may well be private and you may wish to check this out before you head in that direction. It appears a good short cut and there is unlikely to be any traffic.



Tairua Estuary

### Tairua to Opoutere

The road meanders along the estuary on your left and on the right is the rugged hinterland of the Coromandel ranges. Plenty of old mine shafts and the remains of old stamper batteries. Gold is still up there they reckon. Take a sharp left (signposted) 11 ks out of Tairua and, after 8 ks or so, there is the turn off to Opoutere. Follow the level road alongside the estuary and it eventually leads out to the Wharekawa Harbour and Opoutere.

I am a great fan of Opoutere and while it is off the highway and lacks a large store, it is nonetheless a very pretty spot with a YHA hostel that takes tents. Opoutere also has a regular campground closer to the beach. The beach is wonderful and the surrounding hills have tracks to wander up and look down and over the bay. The YHA has a very basic store so it is best to take in supplies. You can easily spend two or three days here. After

Opoutere, cycle back out onto the main highway and a further ten or so fairly easy kilometres will take you into Whangamatā, an established town with all facilities and a pretty foreshore. Another small aside...



Estuary at Opoutere

*The oldest touring cyclist I ever met was here at Opoutere; a wonderful German man called, perhaps inappropriately, Adolph. Adolph was 75 years old and touring a foreign country with little English but a lot of good heart and attitude. He accompanied me on a walk to the top of one of the lookouts overlooking the estuary. This was a stiffish climb but he reached the top without pause or panting. A few days later I saw him cycling up one of Coromandel's steeper climbs with full panniers. He was going well and that was the last I saw of him. However, Adolph was not the most remarkable senior cyclist I have met. That honour goes to an anonymous elderly Englishman I met on the road in France. This man had just finished the Camino across Northern Spain and was cycling back to the UK. I surveyed his bike and innocently inquired why he rode on a bike that had an old fashioned step-through woman's frame. He smiled and told me he had an artificial hip and couldn't lift his leg over a regular, higher, crossbar.*

### **Whangamatā to Waihi**

The road winds slowly inland and takes you eventually into Waihi, another established town with all facilities. Waihi marks the end of the Coromandel tour and from here you have choices of where to head next. By far the most scenic and most recommended beauty spot is a tour of East Cape. Or you might want to head to Wellington in the south. Some tourists are eager to head to Rotorua and view mud pools and geysers (a bit overrated

in my opinion). Either way you are going to encounter a bit of traffic and logging trucks as you skirt or enter the region known as the Volcanic Plateau to the south or the more heavily populated area around Tauranga to the east. Some catch a bus at this point either to Whakatāne or to Rotorua. This will cut out the worst of the traffic. Whichever route you choose, the landscape is always wonderful.



Hills for climbing



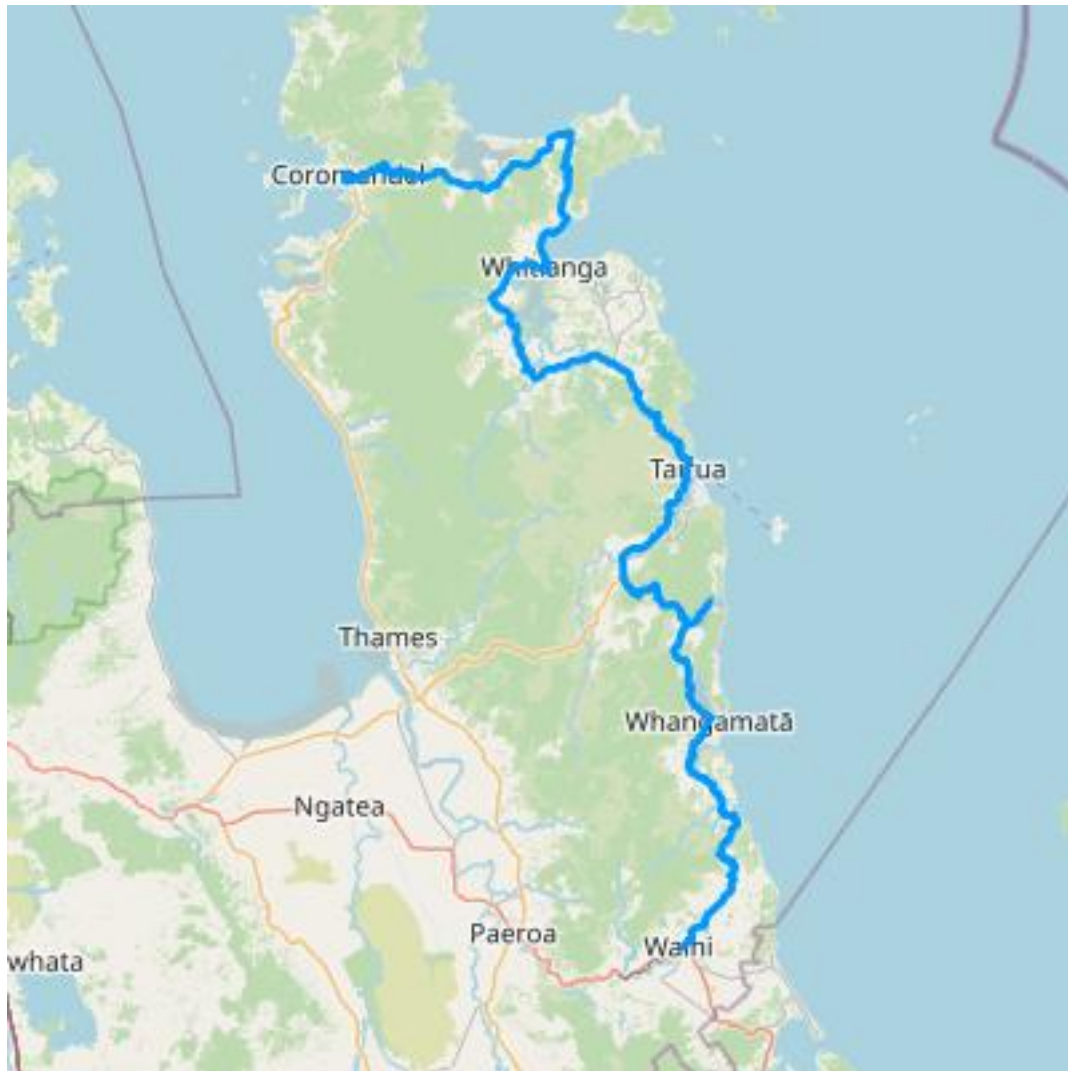


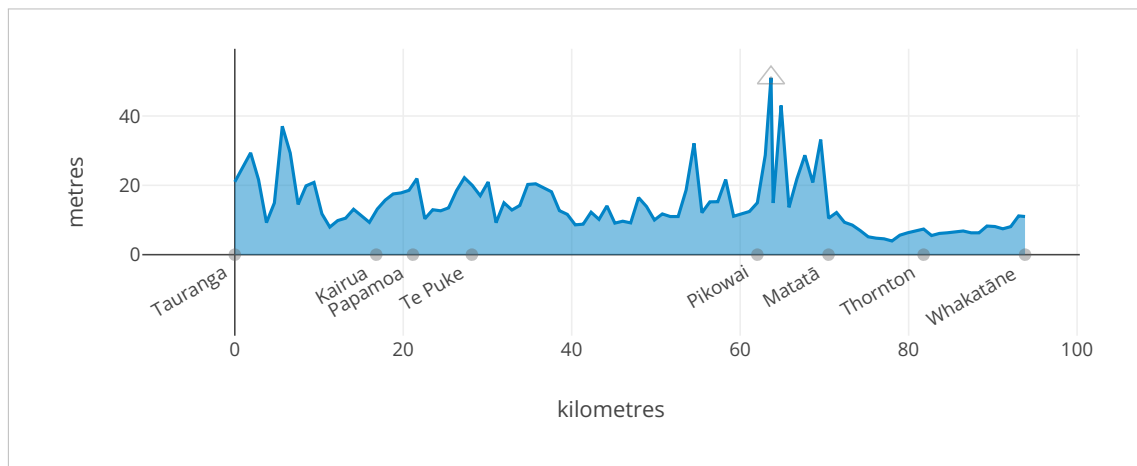
Figure 17.1: The Coromandel East Coast



# Tauranga to Ōpōtiki

## 18.1 Tauranga to Whakatāne

Distance: 94 km   Ascent: 118 m   Descent: 128 m



Although 90 kilometres may seem a bit of a stretch, this ride is almost completely flat and, with a tail wind, can be completed in a single day. The first leg of this trip takes you along state highway 2; busy, but safe enough, with mostly wide road margins through to Te Puke (a pleasant service town with camping, supermarket & cafés).

Soon after Te Puke the Tauranga/Rotorua traffic turns off onto highway 33 while you continue along the now considerably quieter highway 2. Here you wind your way a further 20 or so kilometres through farm land till you reach the coast. There are several camping options along the coast, at Pikowai, Matatā (store, café) and Thornton.

Whakatāne is a large-ish town and has everything you need. The campground here (there is only one) is very pleasant indeed - set in a reserve along the banks of the Whakatāne River and just a few minutes from town.

About 50 km off-shore from Whakatāne is [Whakaari / White Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whakaari_-_White_Island)<sup>1</sup> one of New Zealand's most active volcanos and the scene of a devastating 2019 eruption which tragically claimed 22 lives. The island is visible right along the cape, often covered in a plume of smoke.

<sup>1</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whakaari\\_-\\_White\\_Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whakaari_-_White_Island)

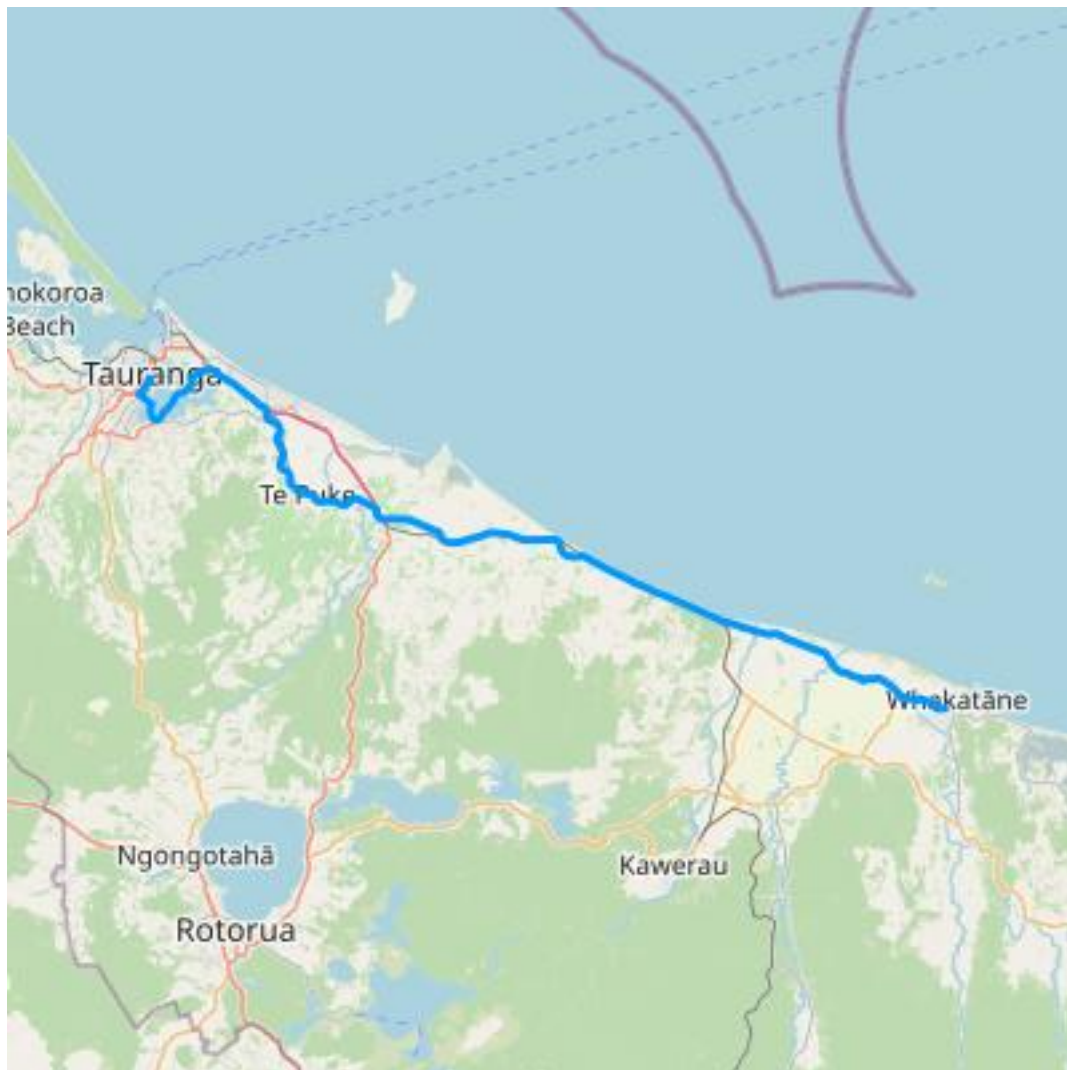
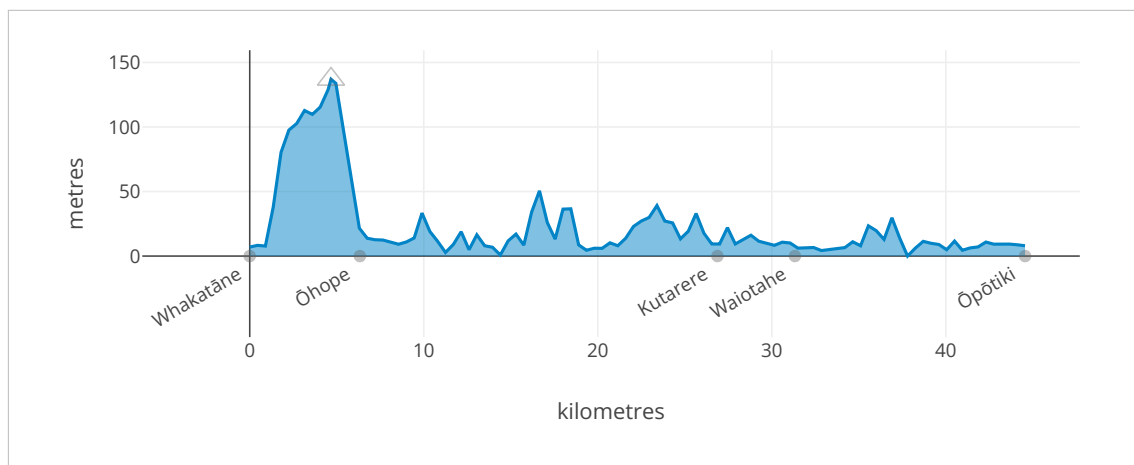


Figure 18.1: Tauranga to Whakatāne

## 18.2 Whakatāne to Ōpōtiki

Distance: 45 km Ascent: 288 m Descent: 287 m



This day starts with a climb over the hill to Ōhope. The main road over is fairly steep and busy, so instead take the river cycleway as far as the Information Centre and from there find your way to Hillcrest Road. This quieter, suburban street winds slowly up, eventually joining the main road just before the summit.

Ōhope (camping, stores, cafés) is a long, white-sand beach and a popular holiday destination in its own right. Once through Ōhope you follow the scenic Pacific Coast Highway, joining SH2 just before Kutarere, then through Waiotahe (service station) to Ōpōtiki.

Just past Kutarere there is the option to take a left into Ruatuna Road and follow the slightly longer but more scenic loop road towards Ohiwa Beach (campground), rejoining the main road at the delta of the Waiotahe River. This will add about 5 km to the trip.



On the Pacific Coast Highway

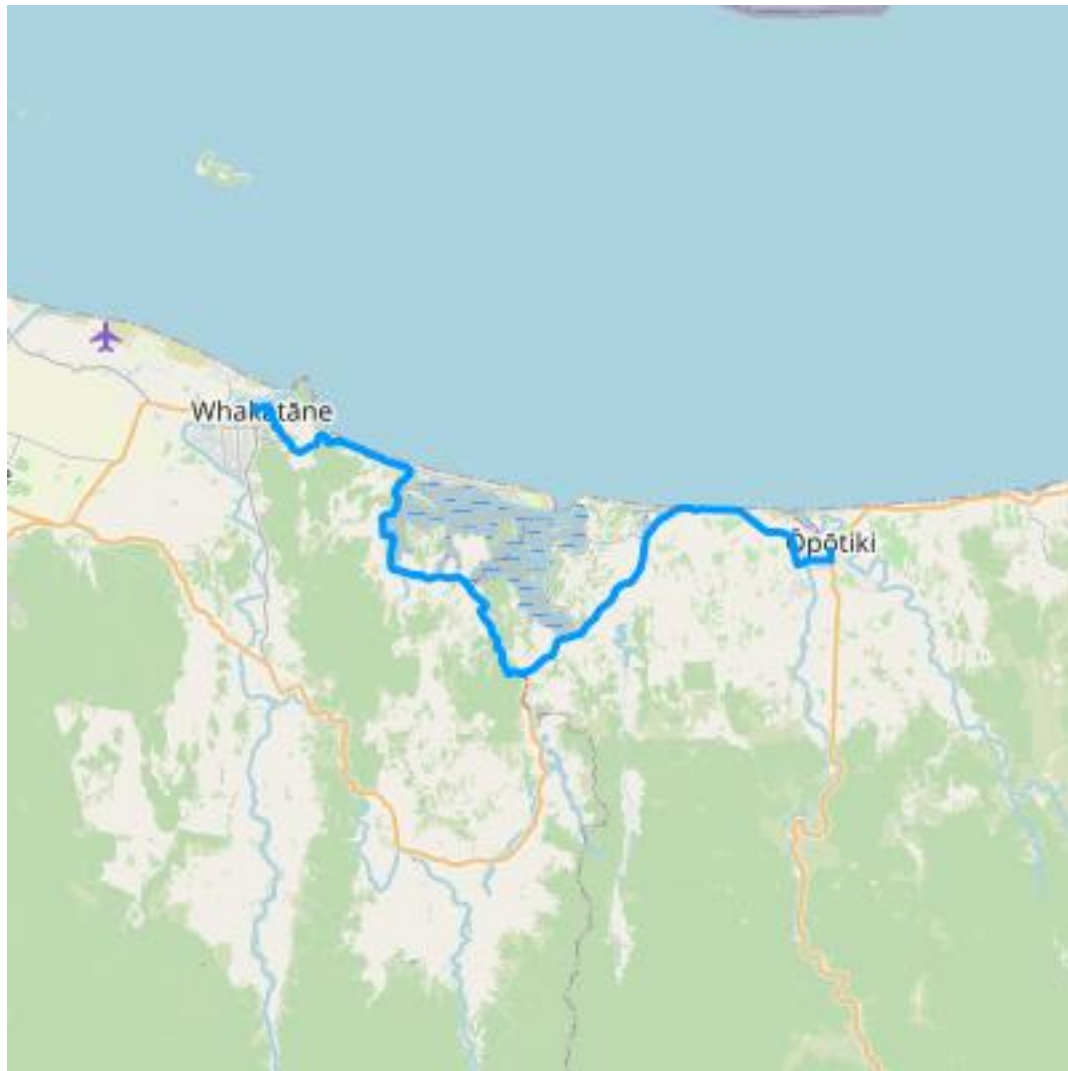


Figure 18.2: Whakatāne to Ōpōtiki

# Introduction to the East Cape

## Why the East Cape?

There are certainly aspects of outstanding beauty on this road; magnificent, empty beaches and small hamlets. The sealed road is relatively isolated and generally quiet and some cycle tourists claim this tour as one of their high points cycling around New Zealand. The scenery and quietude are profoundly appealing and the area is rich in Māori history, culture and early whaling. While there is a good deal of wonderful coastline, almost half of the journey will be through farmland and pretty bush valleys with occasional challenging hills.



Bay views from the road

There are a good number of hostels and motor camps and while free-camping is possible it pays to check first before you put up your tent. Much of East Cape is owned by local Māori and indiscriminate camping may transgress local *tapu* (sacred land) and offend the local *iwi* (sub-tribe).

Be aware there are no banking facilities (or bank machines) and no bike shops and little in the way of substantial facilities until you reach Gisborne. Local and camp shops sell basic goods but don't expect a wide range of fresh vegetables. There is the odd take-away shop and a scattering of coffee bars. By far the best spots are those you discover by accident. New Zealand is notable for small, beautiful isolated beaches at the end of no-exit roads off the more main highways. There is something rather lovely about camping on an empty beach and watching the sun set and worth a detour of 10-20 ks occasionally along unsealed stretches of road. Ask locally as these are too numerous to mention individually.

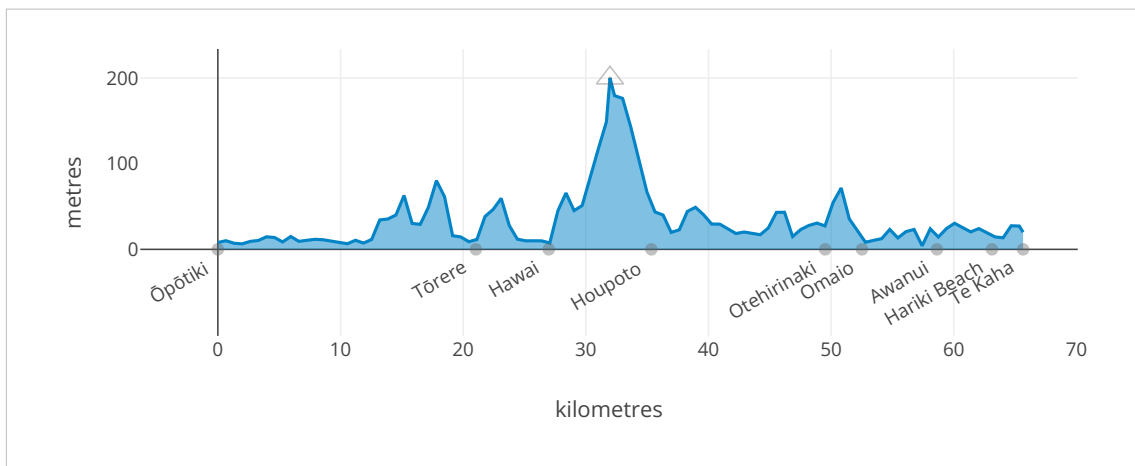


Coastline

# Ōpōtiki to Te Araroa

## 20.1 Ōpōtiki to Te Kaha

Distance: 66 km Ascent: 584 m Descent: 572 m



This is generally flat with one steepish hill (218 metres) at about 30 km at Hawai Bay. Te Kaha has a store, takeaways, café and campground and is just across the road from a lovely bay and headland. There is a fairly flash beach resort that does an elaborate breakfast if you want to splash out. It also displays some early photos of whaling in the area.

If you want something a bit closer to Ōpōtiki, try Hawai a pretty bay with access to the river but not suitable for sea swimming (30 km). Omaio (57 km) has a shingle surf beach and a reserve (Hoana Waititi) with basic camping facilities (toilets/water) and a store and café close by.



Out of Ōpōtiki toward Te Kaha

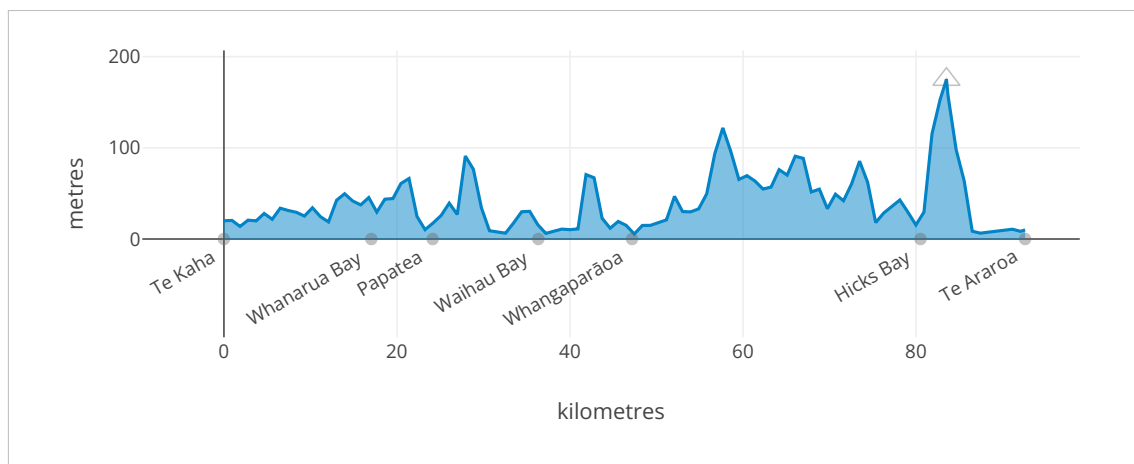




Figure 20.1: Ōpōtiki to Te Kaha

## 20.2 Te Kaha to Te Araroa

Distance: 93 km   Ascent: 842 m   Descent: 852 m



This is a relatively easy gradient alongside the coast for about 50 km and then the road turns inland just past Whangaparāoa (Cape Runaway) and you encounter a few hills before Hicks Bay (store, takeaways, hostel). Hicks Bay is lovely, but the main beach is some distance off the main highway and you may wish to continue over the hill for about 9 km to Te Araroa (campground, store, takeaways, gas station, pie-cart café). There is a nice café at the Visitors Centre just this side of Te Araroa.



Te Kaha

If 90 km is a bit long for a day's cycle you can stop at Maraehako (20 km from Te Kaha, campground, backpackers). Waihou (campground, store and café 30 km from Te Kaha). Oruaiti Bay (40 km from Te Kaha, campground).

At Te Araroa you have the option to cycle to the most easterly part of the world (apparently) and visit the lighthouse. Arrive at dawn and be the first in the world to see the sun rise. A 40 km round trip.

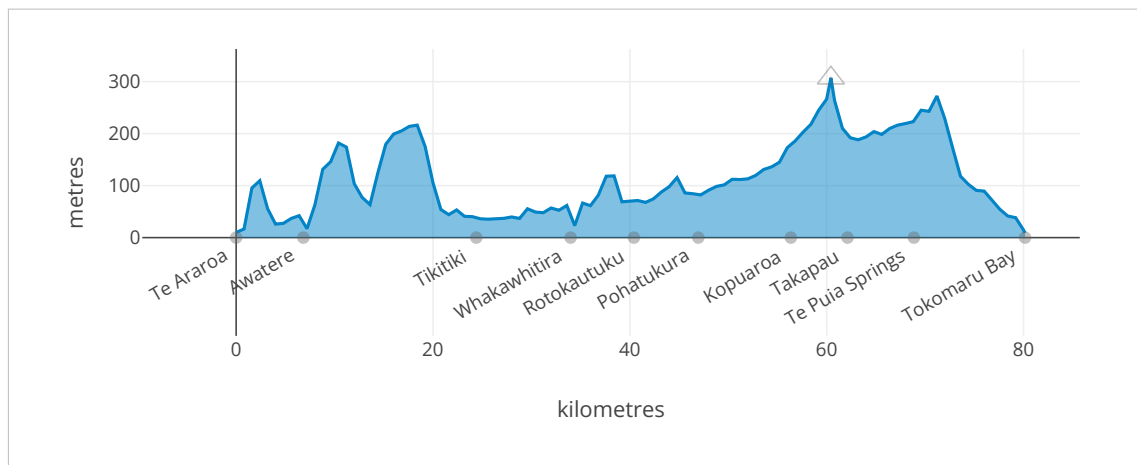


Figure 20.2: Te Kaha to Te Araroa

# Te Araroa to Gisborne

## 21.1 Te Araroa to Tokomaru Bay

Distance: 80 km Ascent: 1046 m Descent: 1047 m



This is a fairly taxing day with three sizeable hills through mostly pleasant farmland. At Tikitiki (27 km) there is a café and backpackers. Tikitiki is noted for St Mary's Church and its Māori woven panels and carvings.

Ruatoria (20 km) has a small supermarket and some interesting old buildings but no campground. Like many north island small communities Ruatoria has seen more prosperous days.

Just inland from Ruatoria you pass Mt. Hikurangi on your right, apparently the first place in New Zealand to see the sun each morning. Another 26 ks will bring you to Te Puia Springs (thermal pools, store, takeaways and hotel... possible camping if you ask).

A further 11 km will take you downhill into Tokomaru Bay. This was indeed a more prosperous settlement with extensive ruins of the abandoned freezing works and cargo store now being overtaken by scrub. There is a store, basic backpackers, hotel and camping. Tokomaru Bay has a substantial wharf and seafront all of which give the area a sense of interesting but sad decay.



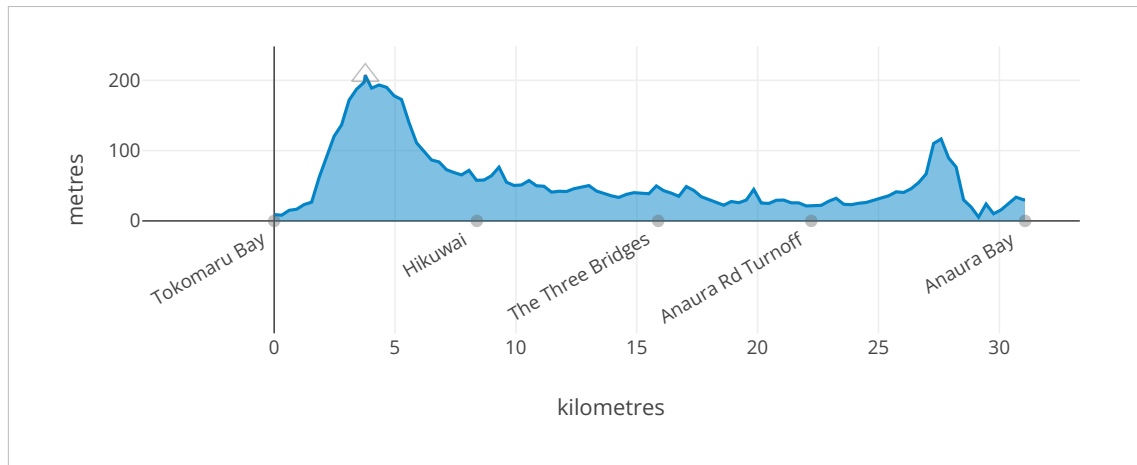
Tokomaru Wharf



Figure 21.1: Te Araroa to Tokomaru Bay

## 21.2 Tokomaru Bay to Anaura Bay

Distance: 31 km   Ascent: 317 m   Descent: 296 m



This side-trip wanders off the highway (7 km out and 7 km back) to Anaura Bay (motor camp/camping). A bit of an excursion but well worth the effort. Anaura Bay is a beautiful spot to camp.

Depending on your legs you may choose to carry on directly to Gisborne (about 77 km from Anaura Bay). Perhaps by now though you're in the mood for an easy day and are happy just to saunter along to Tologa Bay (22 km from Anaura Bay).



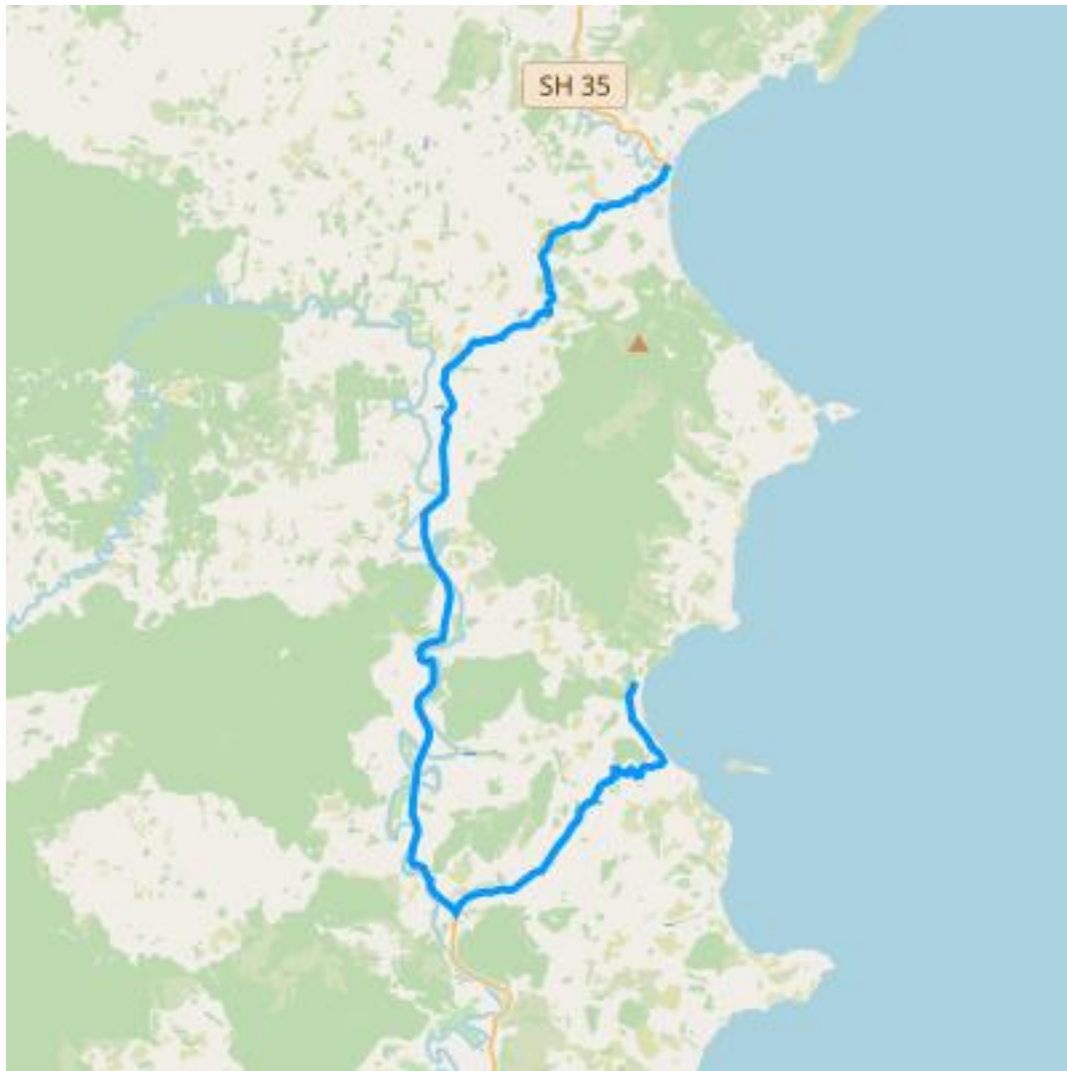
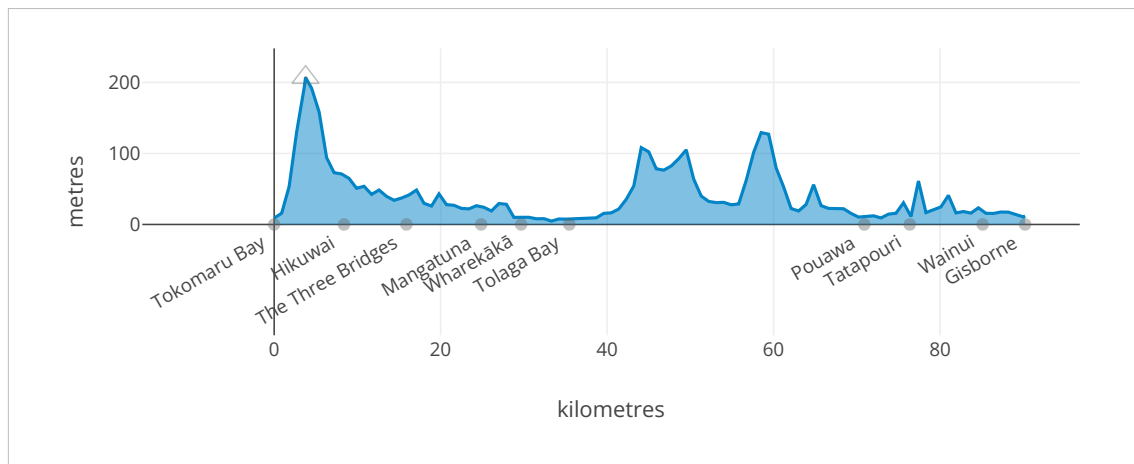


Figure 21.2: Tokomaru Bay to Anaura Bay

## 21.3 Tokomaru Bay to Gisborne

Distance: 90 km   Ascent: 675 m   Descent: 672 m



### Tokomaru Bay to Tologa Bay

After the initial climb out this is all generally downhill with only minor rises and falls in the road. Tologa Bay is a well established settlement and known for the longest wharf in New Zealand. It has a pub, camping (3ks out of town) and store. Highlights are Captain Cooks Cove... a longish walk (2.5 hours return, 5ks) from the wharf.

### Tologa Bay to Gisborne

A rise in the road takes you out of Tologa Bay and then the road declines in gentle rises and falls into Gisborne. There are several notable places to camp, most are informal. Some of the beaches are lovely; Waihou Beach (turn left down Waihou Rd, 18 km out of Tologa Bay) is beautiful with colonies of sea birds. You will pass Pouawa and Turihau Beach and there is informal camping just before Tatapouri (right on the beachfront, 44 km from Tologa Bay) and then Wauinui Beach which is practically in the outskirts of Gisborne.



Wharf at Tologa Bay

Gisborne is a substantially large town or small city - good for supplies and bits for the bike. Gisborne is a place where choices must be made. One possibility is to cycle back up highway 2 to Matawai. From here you can take the

Old Motu Coach Road<sup>1</sup> and make a loop back to Ōpōtiki. For those wanting to head south there are several options which I will describe next...

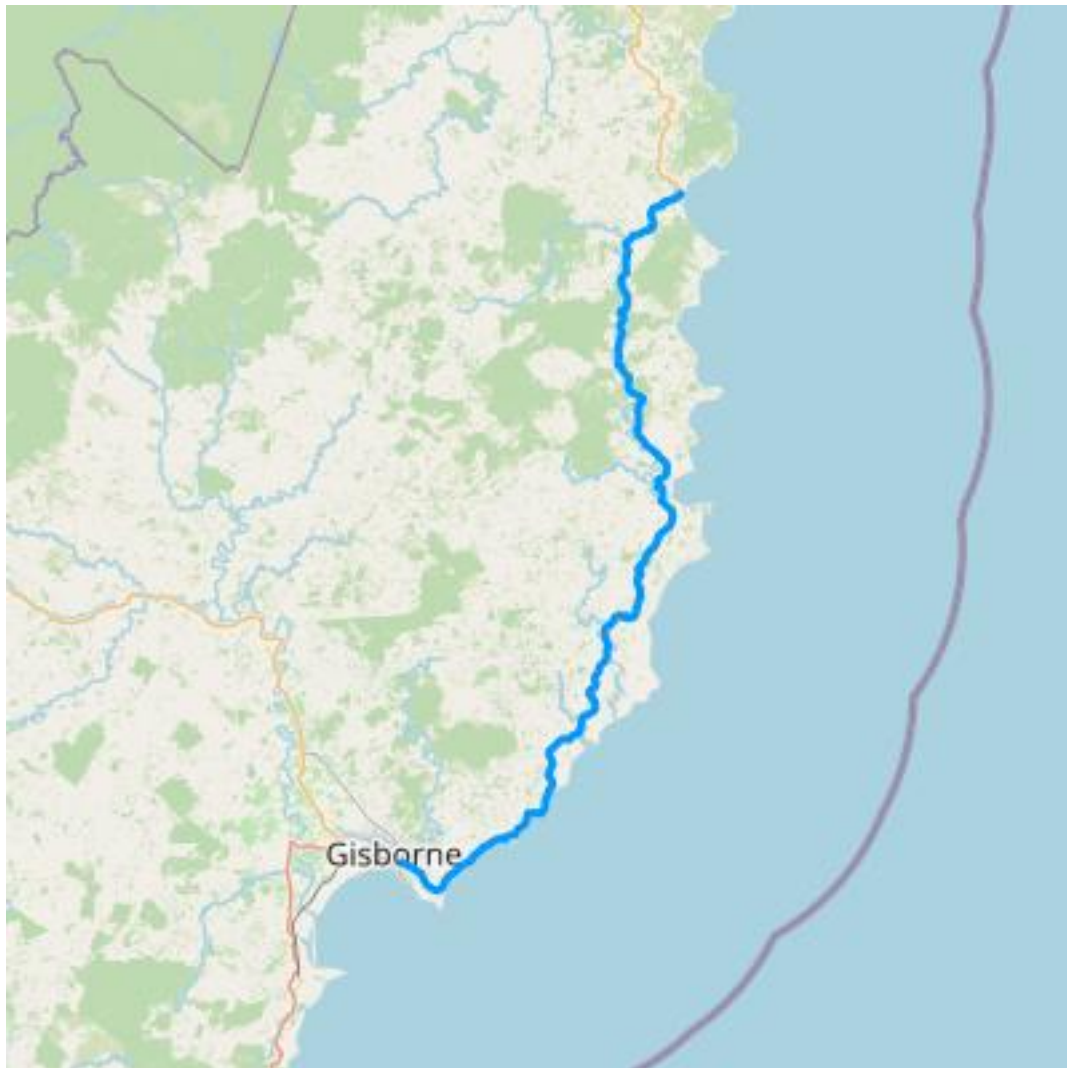


Figure 21.3: Tokomaru Bay to Gisborne

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<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/22-great-rides/motu-trails/>

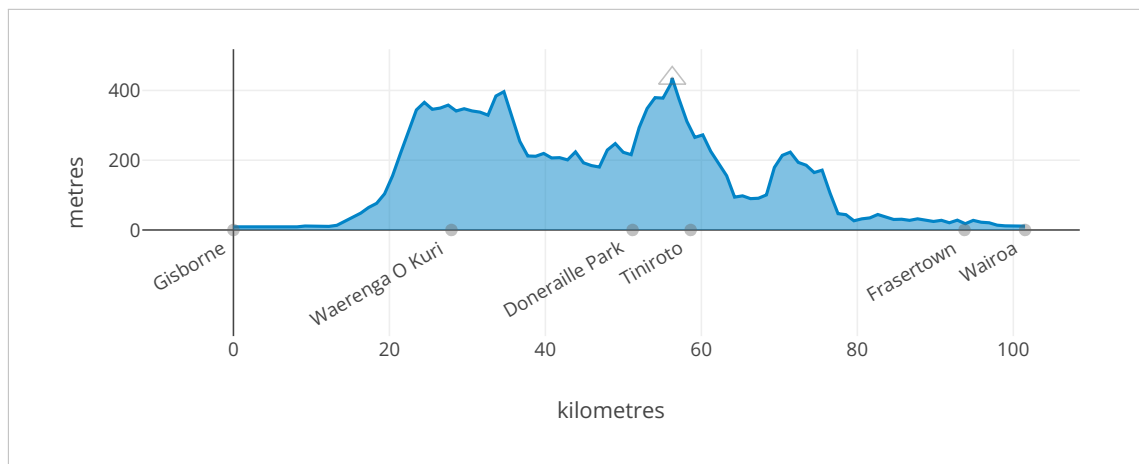
## Gisborne to Wairoa

Often it can be confusing trying to find the best way out of a large town or city. Leaving Gisborne is simplicity itself - follow the main drag, Gladstone Road, out of town for about 10 km, eventually crossing the Waipaoa River. Directly after the bridge you come to a round-about. Turning left takes you south to Mōrere & Nūhaka via SH2; right takes you through back country roads via Rere to Matawai and the start of the Motu Trails; straight ahead takes you through Tiniroto to Wairoa.

Whichever way you decide to head out of Gisborne there is one thing you cannot avoid: hills...

### 22.1 Gisborne to Wairoa via Tiniroto

Distance: 102 km    Ascent: 1048 m    Descent: 1046 m



Tinitoto Road is well known to Gisborne cyclists, being the return stage of the annual Gwaloop Cycle Challenge. There is certainly much to recommend this ride: it is very scenic with mature trees lining much of the road and providing good shade; there are great views; and opportunities for river swimming. But perhaps the best thing about this ride is that you will have the road almost entirely to yourself.

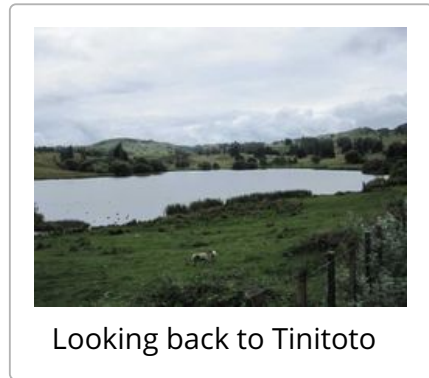
This day starts out flat enough through farmland and vineyards but after about 15 km you begin to climb the first of several hills - the somewhat inappropriately named Gentle Annie, arriving at Waerenga O Kuri (no services -

the old store here is now closed) soon after the summit.

Another 20 or so kilometres brings you to [Donneraille Park](https://gdc.govt.nz/recreation/summer-camping/doneraille-park)<sup>1</sup>, a freedom camping area provided by the Gisborne District Council. This is a nice spot to stop for lunch and perhaps a swim in the Hangaroa River. Camping here is not really an option for cyclists though, since all campers are required to have their own chemical toilet.

Soon after, and conveniently situated at about the half way point, you arrive at Tiniroto where there is a great pub (meals, showers, and camping for a nominal fee).

Beyond Tiniroto there's one more small hill with the remainder of the way a generally downhill ride through Marumaru to Wairoa, a mid-sized town with supermarkets and cafés, but no cycle shop.



Looking back to Tinitoto

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<sup>1</sup><https://gdc.govt.nz/recreation/summer-camping/doneraille-park>

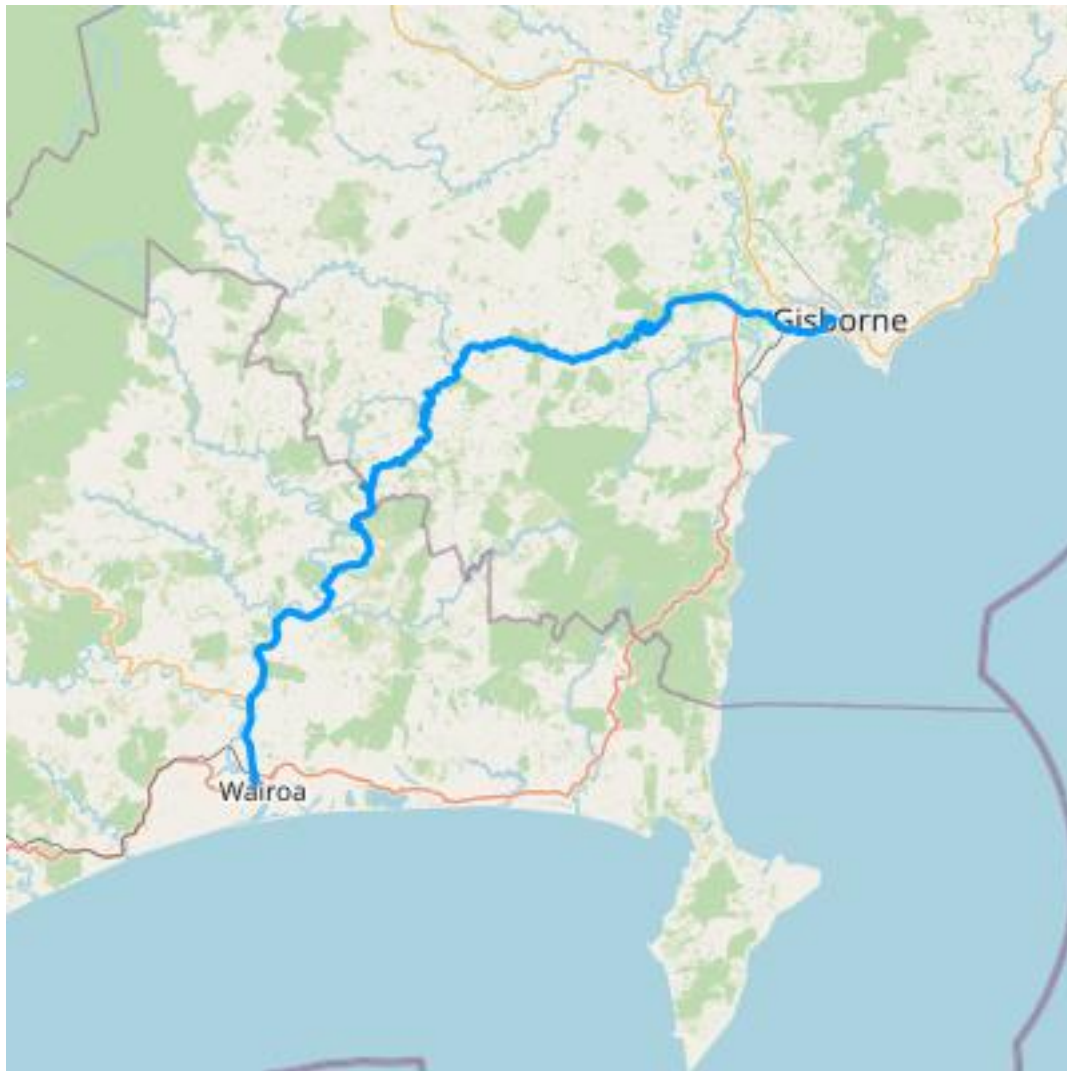
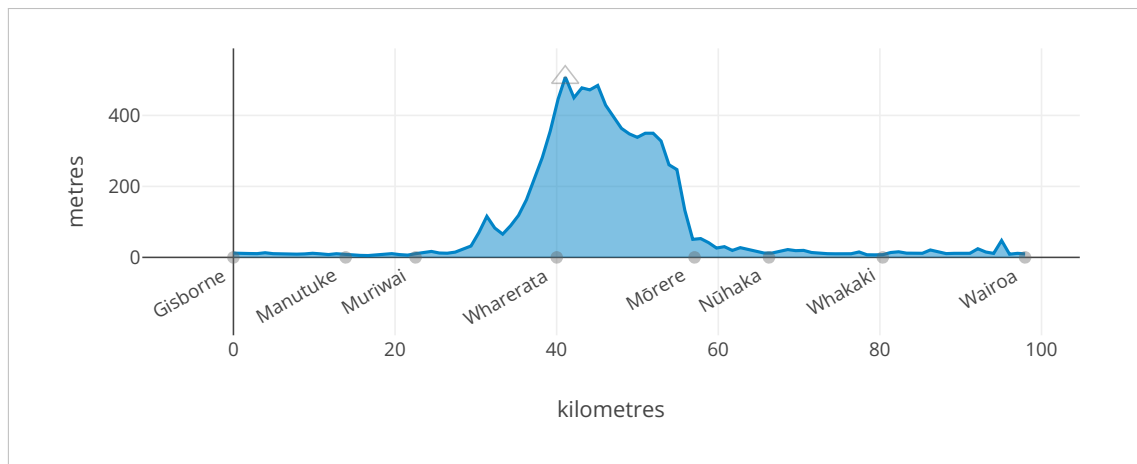


Figure 22.1: Gisborne to Wairoa via Tiniroto



## 22.2 Gisborne to Wairoa via Mōrere

Distance: 98 km   Ascent: 710 m   Descent: 712 m



**Alert:** State Highway 2 between Gisborne and Napier can be heavily trafficked, is often narrow, and has many blind corners. Keep yourself highly visible and ride defensively!

Many cyclists choose to continue through to Wairoa along SH2. The drawcard here is a stopover at Mōrere (campground, store/tearooms) and the wonderful [Mōrere Hot Springs](https://morerehotsprings.co.nz)<sup>2</sup>. This is a natural thermal spa set in a conservation reserve. The perfect way to unwind after a day tackling the 507m Wharerata Hill.

Day two takes you through Nūhaka (store, service station) and onward along generally flat roads through Whakaki to Wairoa.

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<sup>2</sup><https://morerehotsprings.co.nz>

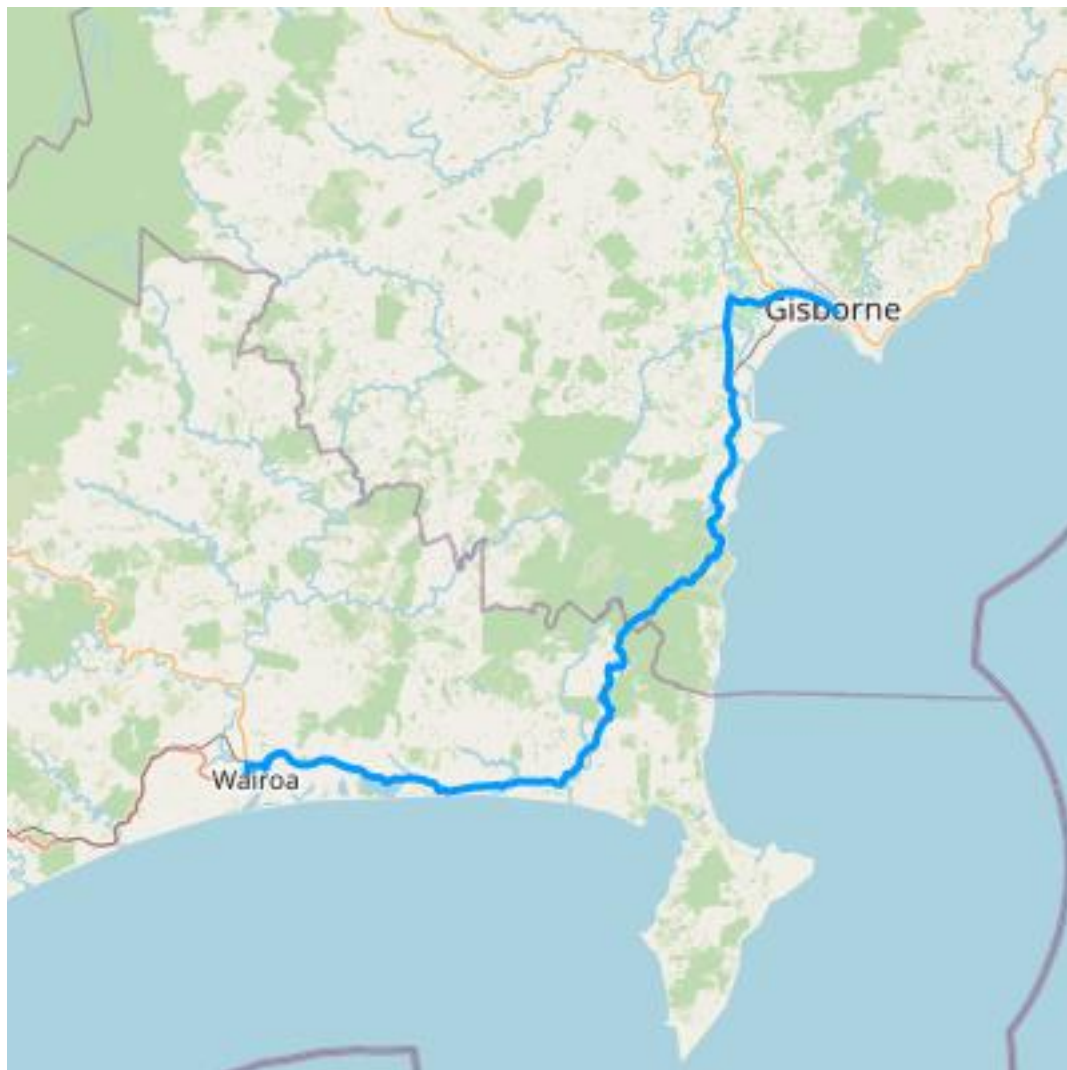
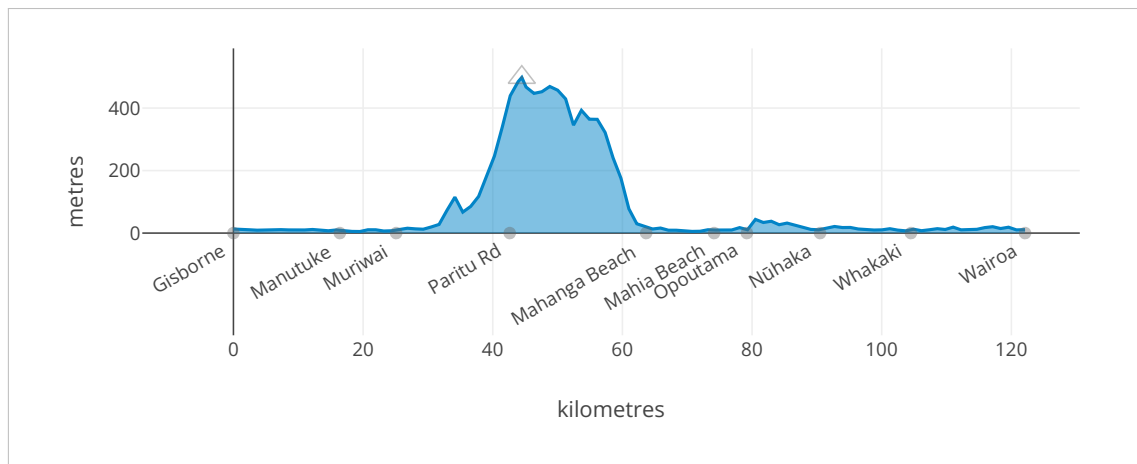


Figure 22.2: Gisborne to Wairoa via Mōrere

## 22.3 Gisborne to Wairoa via Mahia

Distance: 122 km    Ascent: 861 m    Descent: 863 m



**Alert:** Part of this route follows a paper road through forestry and farmland. It is rough in places and best avoided after rain when muddy surfaces will make it tough going.

There is one further option which takes you through a little-known forestry road to Mahia Peninsula. This route follows highway 2 as far as the summit of Wharerata Hill. But now, rather than continue along the highway, turn left into Paritu Road, which winds its way down through forestry and farmland to Mahanga Bay. Often rough and occasionally little more than a track it is none-the-less rideable, though muddy and best avoided if wet. There are several gates to go through before the road once more returns to gravel as it winds into Mahanga Bay.



The beach at Mahanga

Mahanga Bay (toilets) is a broad and beautiful swimming/surfing beach. A lovely place to stop, but with no shops, no campground and no fresh water supply, camping is not an option.

Follow the now flat, sealed road out of Mahanga and after crossing the bridge turn left into Kaiwaitau Road, riding along the picturesque Maungawhio Lagoon to Mahia Beach where there is a campground, store and pub. It was at Mahia Beach that [\*\*Moko\*\*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moko_(dolphin))<sup>3</sup> the dolphin first made his appearance, where he would seek out and swim with people in the bay. For my money, though, the

<sup>3</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moko\\_\(dolphin\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moko_(dolphin))

best beaches are found further round the peninsula along Mahia East Coast Rd (café just past Mahia). A great day-trip if you have the time.

Day 2 takes you out along the beach through Opoutama, eventually turning inland to rejoin highway 2 at Nūhaka.

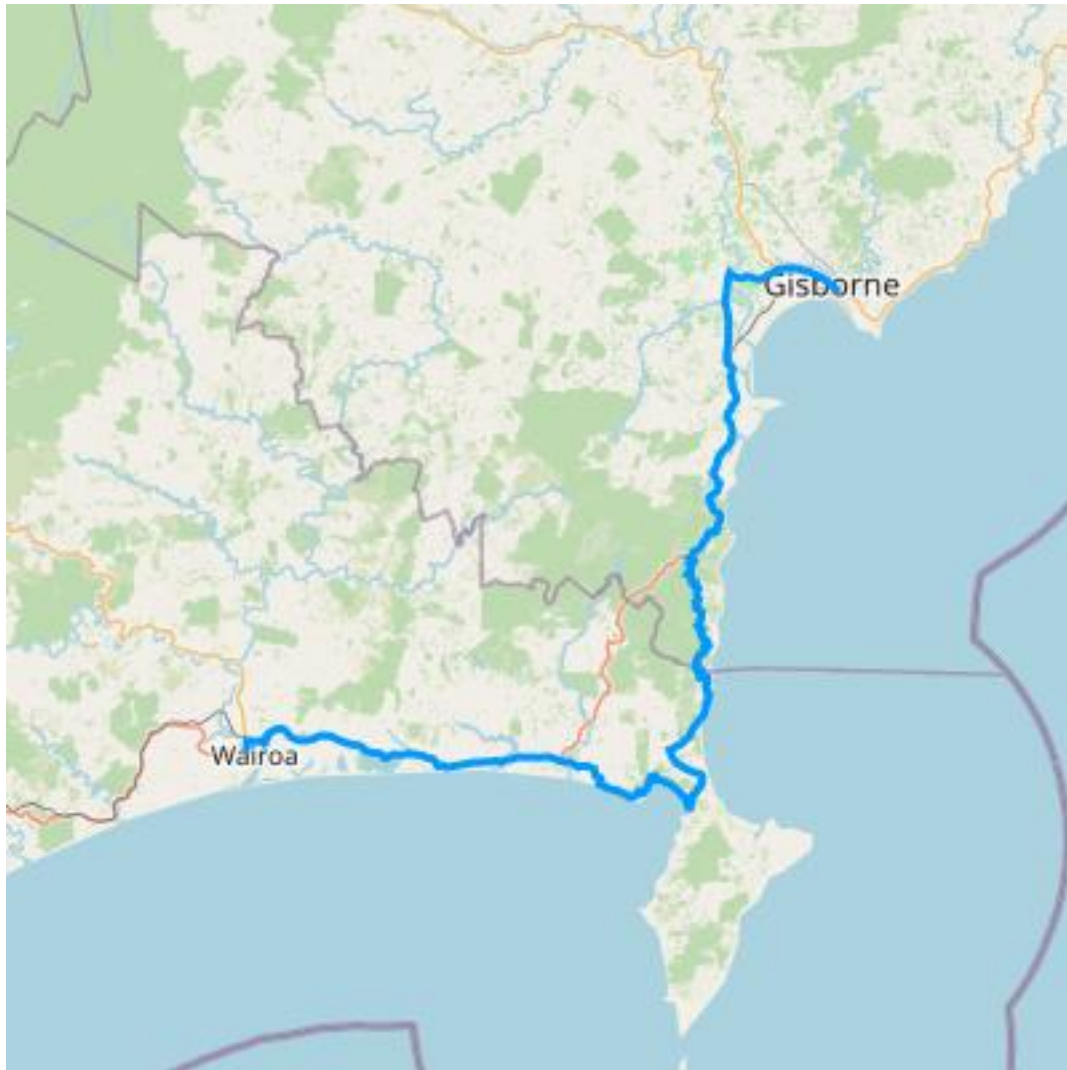
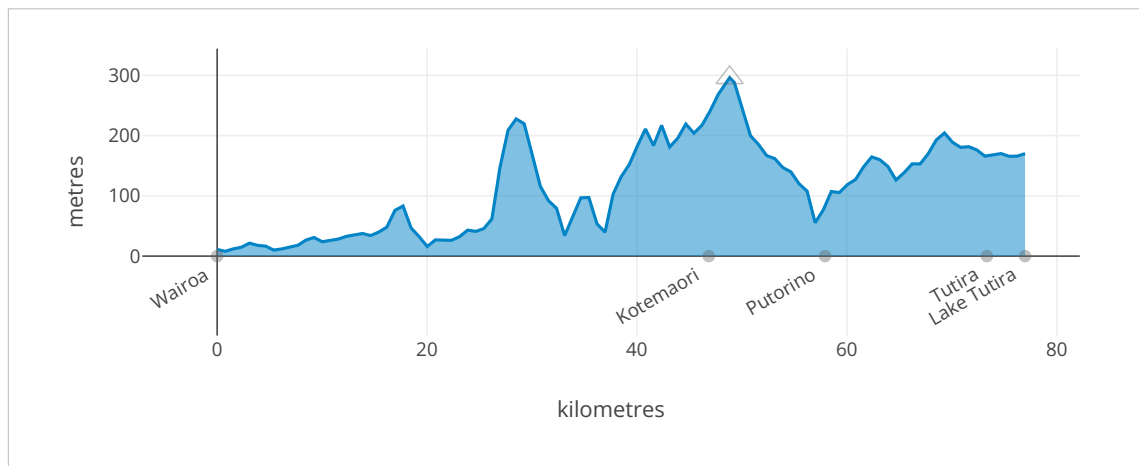


Figure 22.3: Gisborne to Wairoa via Mahia

# Wairoa to Napier

## 23.1 Wairoa to Lake Tutira

Distance: 77 km Ascent: 933 m Descent: 774 m



Gradients are gentle for the first 25 km, but then there's a steepish climb over Tau-matataua Hill (250 m). The descent into the Mohaka river valley offers good views both to the sea and inland up the valley. After crossing the river, the road climbs up the side of the valley, passing under the impressive railway bridge which towers 100 m over the river below. After this climb to 200 m is over, the road undulates a bit and then descends gradually to Putorino, which consists of a few farms and a popular café. After the steepish 100 m climb out of Putorino the road rolls easily all the way to Lake Tutira. You can stock up with provisions at a small shop/café at Tutira village, just before you get to the lake.



Wairoa River

There's a idyllically-situated [DOC camp site](https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/hawkes-bay/places/tutira-area/things-to-do/lake-tutira-campsite/)<sup>1</sup> at the southern end of Lake Tutira. Turn off the highway and continue for 1 km past the rest area with shelter near the main road, to the camping area. Facilities are very basic (toilets

<sup>1</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/hawkes-bay/places/tutira-area/things-to-do/lake-tutira-campsite/>

and water taps) but the site is far enough away from the main road to be quiet and restful, and there are various wild-life to look at. Unfortunately, the lake is not always suitable for swimming, see signs at the lakeside. A walking track (unsigned) leads up the hill above the camp site to a small shelter, from which there are superb views out over the lake.

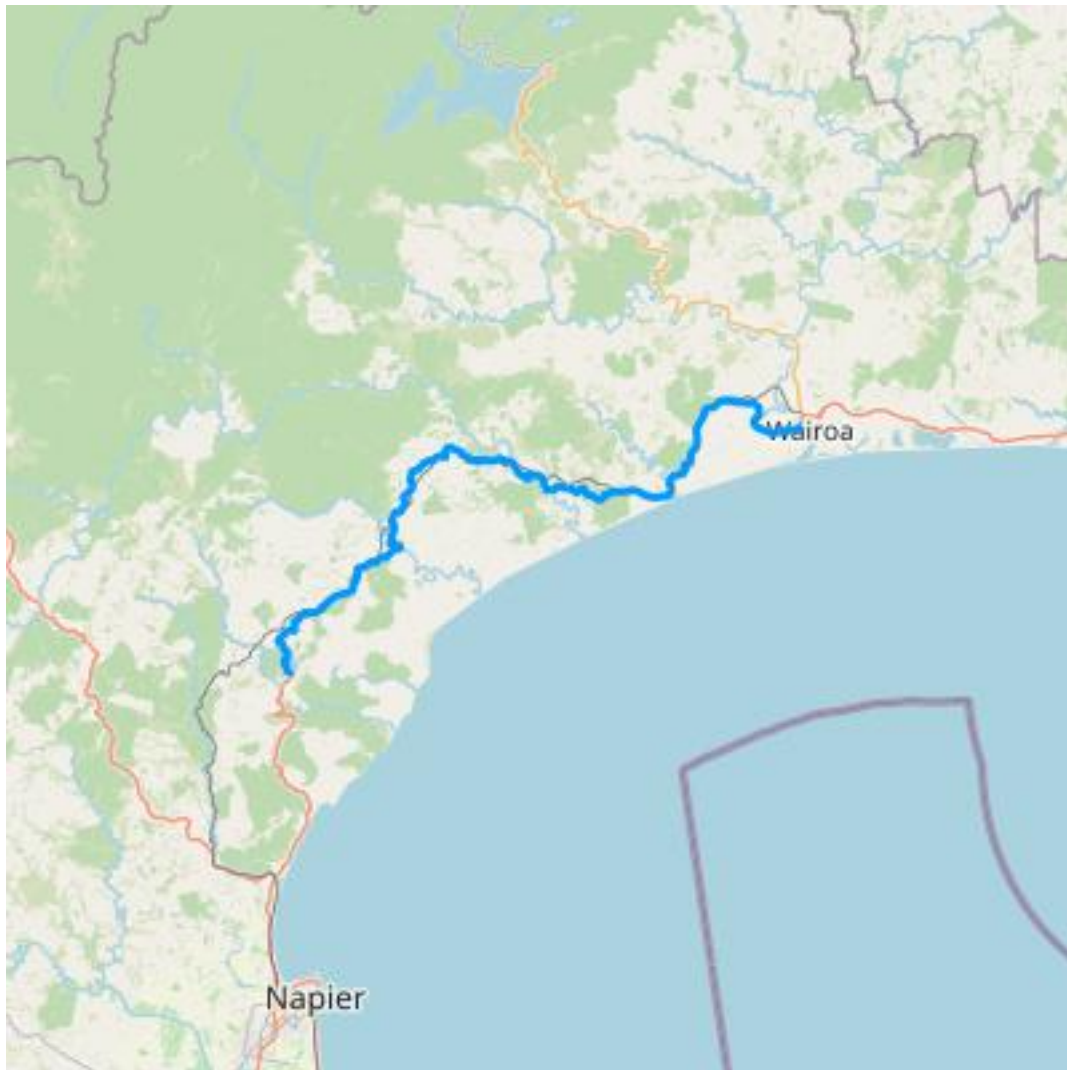
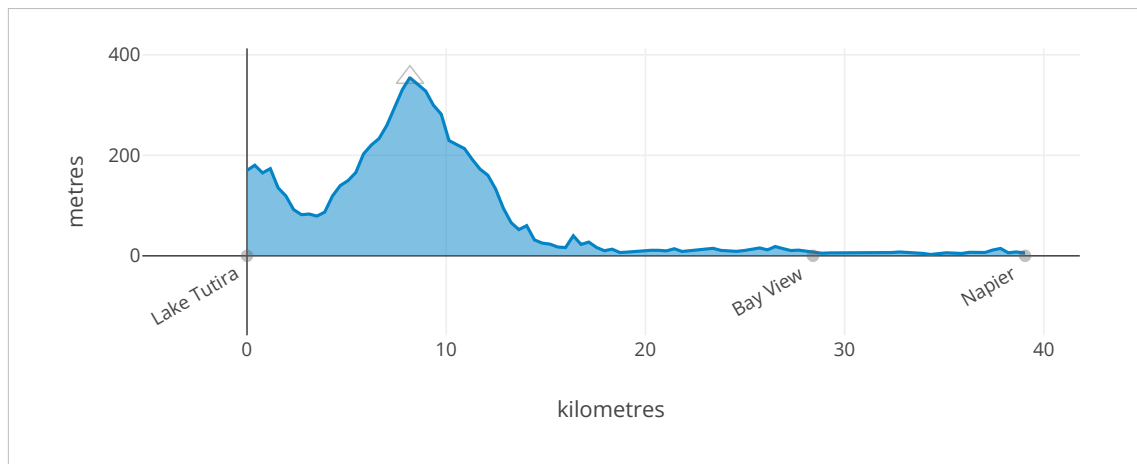


Figure 23.1: Wairoa to Lake Tutira



## 23.2 Lake Tutira to Napier

Distance: 39 km   Ascent: 291 m   Descent: 455 m



From Lake Tutira SH2 rises gently at first, followed by a steep descent that loses 125 m of elevation, down to the Waikoau river. Almost immediately starts a long climb that gains over 250 m of elevation over 8 km, but after that it's all downhill to the coast just past Tangoio. After that, SH2 follows the coast of Hawkes Bay and is flat the rest of the way to Napier, with its characteristic Art Deco architecture, numerous public gardens and friendly, relaxed seaside ambiance. There are numerous hostels including YHA along the sea-front, and there's a well-equipped though rather expensive camp site at Kennedy Park.



The beach just north of Napier

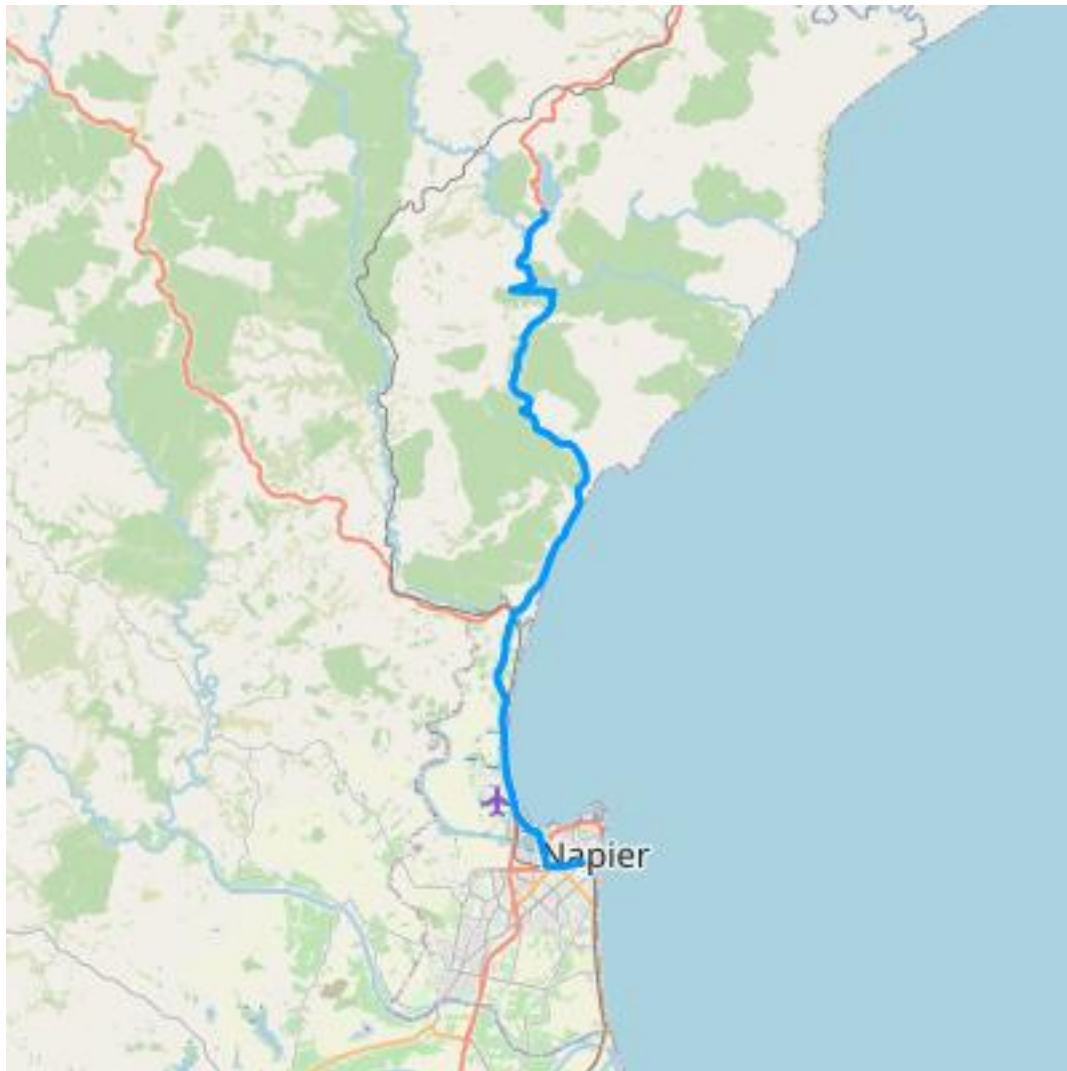
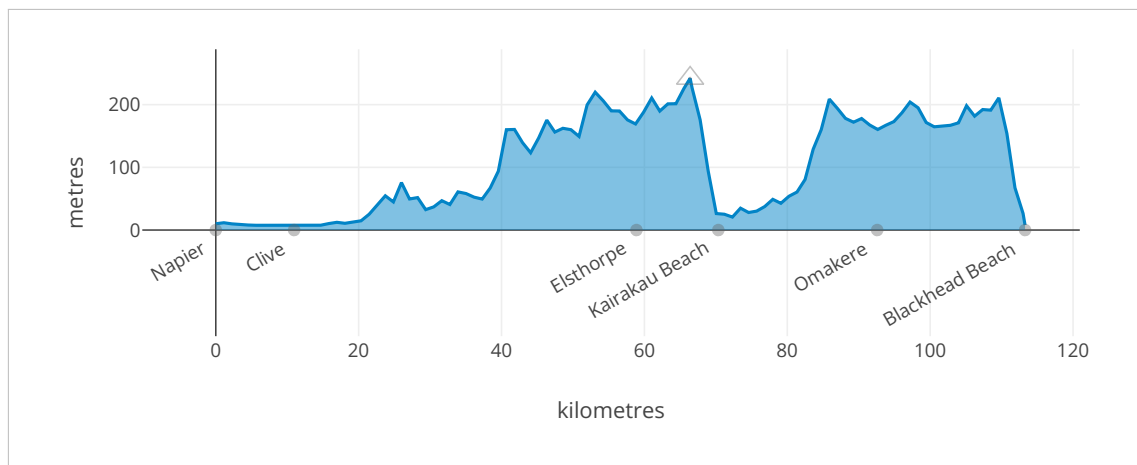


Figure 23.2: Lake Tutira to Napier

# Napier to Herbertville

## 24.1 Napier to Blackhead Beach

Distance: 113 km Ascent: 829 m Descent: 831 m



Southern Hawkes Bays is blessed with a great network of quiet, back-country roads. There are many options for heading south, most of which will lead you through quiet, rural settlements, generally ending the day at a stunning east-coast beach. This route suggestion is just that - a suggestion. There is plenty of scope to do your own thing. But whichever way you go, make sure that you leave Napier with enough supplies to last for at least 3 days. The next supermarket isn't until Masterton and you will encounter only a few stores offering basic supplies.



Art-Deco city

Napier itself has a great network of cycle trails. It's a good idea to have a map at the ready just to keep you heading in the right direction. The Hawkes Bay Regional Council has a map [online](https://hbtrails.nz/)<sup>1</sup> although you should also be able to pick up a copy from the information centre.

To head out of Napier follow the coastal cycleway as far as Clive, then take a left onto Mill Rd, continuing onto the lightly trafficked Waimarama Rd.

<sup>1</sup><https://hbtrails.nz/>

You will pass the wine growing region of Te Mata, continuing on a generally quiet, rolling road for the next 50 or so kilometres as far as Elsthorpe. Here you have the choice to follow the smoother, fully sealed, inland road through Patangata (pub) or instead take the more scenic, but slightly longer and more undulating route through Kairakau Beach and Omakere, which is unsealed in parts.

At Omakere you may be lucky with the tides. At low tide you can ride along the hard sand directly to Blackhead Beach.

Blackhead Beach offers beach-side camping with safe swimming at the edge of a marine reserve. A beautiful spot but there is no store and you will also need your own cooker as the campground here does not offer cooking facilities.



Ocean Beach

You may wish to break up this trip with a stopover en route. There are plenty of options available, with camping at Clive, Haumoana Domain, Te Awanga and Clifton. Informal camping is also available further down the coast at Ocean Beach, but *informal* in this case means *solely at the discretion of the Ocean Beach surf club*. The camping area is on private land adjoining the club house and the owner has given permission for the club to use it. Ask and it shouldn't be a problem.

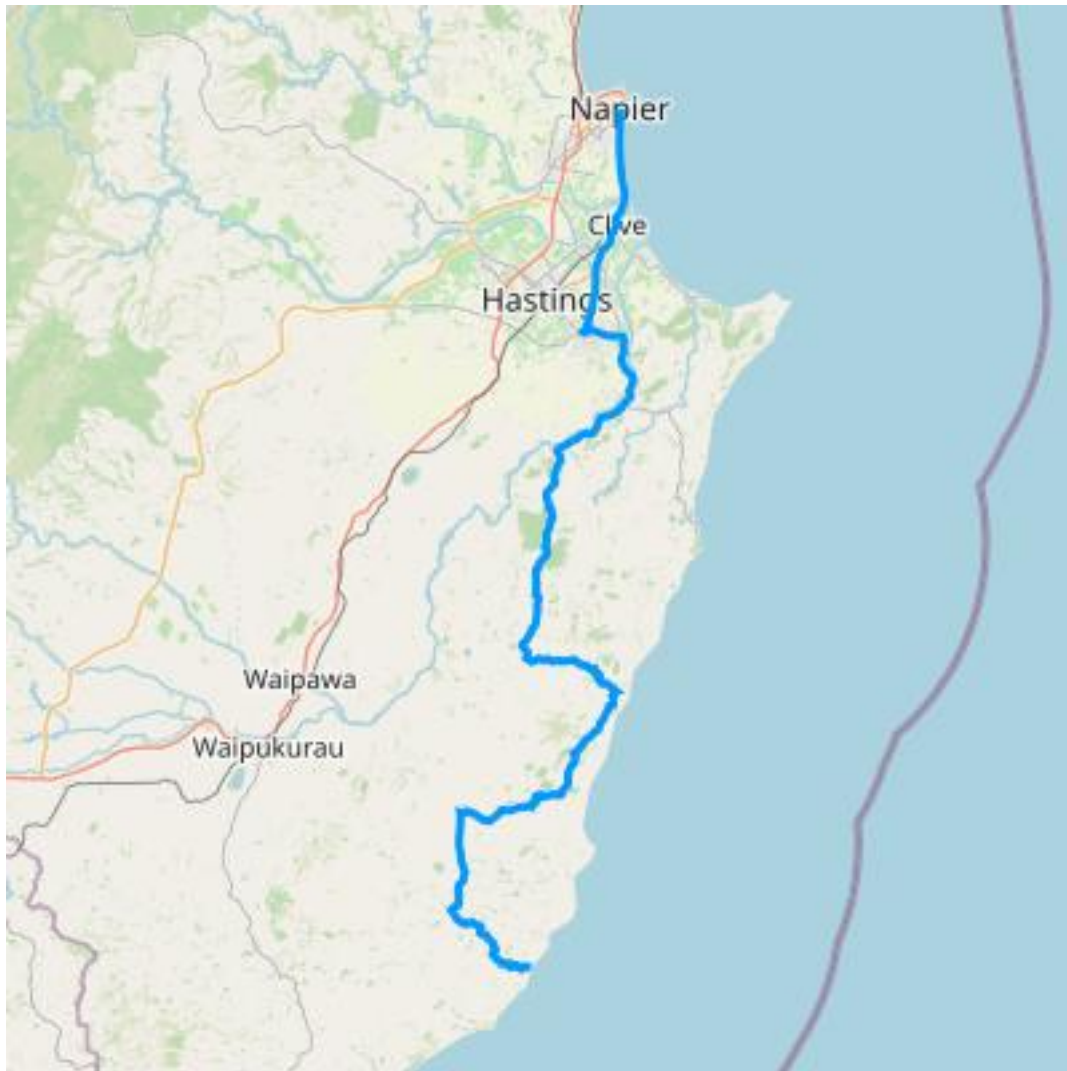
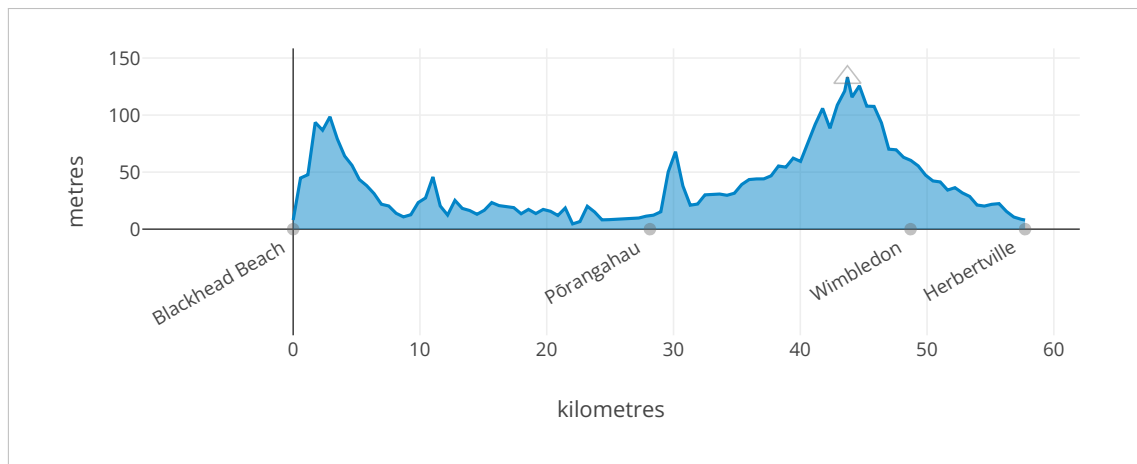


Figure 24.1: Napier to Blackhead Beach

## 24.2 Blackhead Beach to Herbertville

Distance: 58 km Ascent: 323 m Descent: 323 m



The next day's ride starts with a short, sharp climb back up the hill to Blackhead Rd. This road is gravel for the next 15 or so kilometres but is well graded, fairly level and easily rideable with great views out to the coast.

Tar seal returns when you rejoin the main road, then it's an easy ride for the remaining 10 kilometres through to Pōrangahau where you will find a pub (closed Mondays) and store. About 5 km before Pōrangahau you pass the turnoff to Pōrangahau Beach where there is a campground and also the option to freedom camp at the domain.



Shadows on Blackhead Road

As you leave Pōrangahau take the turnoff left onto Wimbledon Rd. There is a small climb, then another 5 km brings you to reputedly the world's longest place name: *Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauo-tamateapokaiwhenuakitanatahu*.

This name commemorates a battle known as *Matanui* in which the brother of Māori chief, explorer and warrior *Tamatea* was killed. The name roughly translates as:

*The hill at which Tamatea, the chief of great physical stature and renown, played a lament on his flute to the memory of his brother.*

The day ends with a not-too-strenuous climb into Wimbledon (pub, closed Mondays) where you turnoff for the last 8 km into Herbertville. Herbertville has a campground and pub, but no shops.



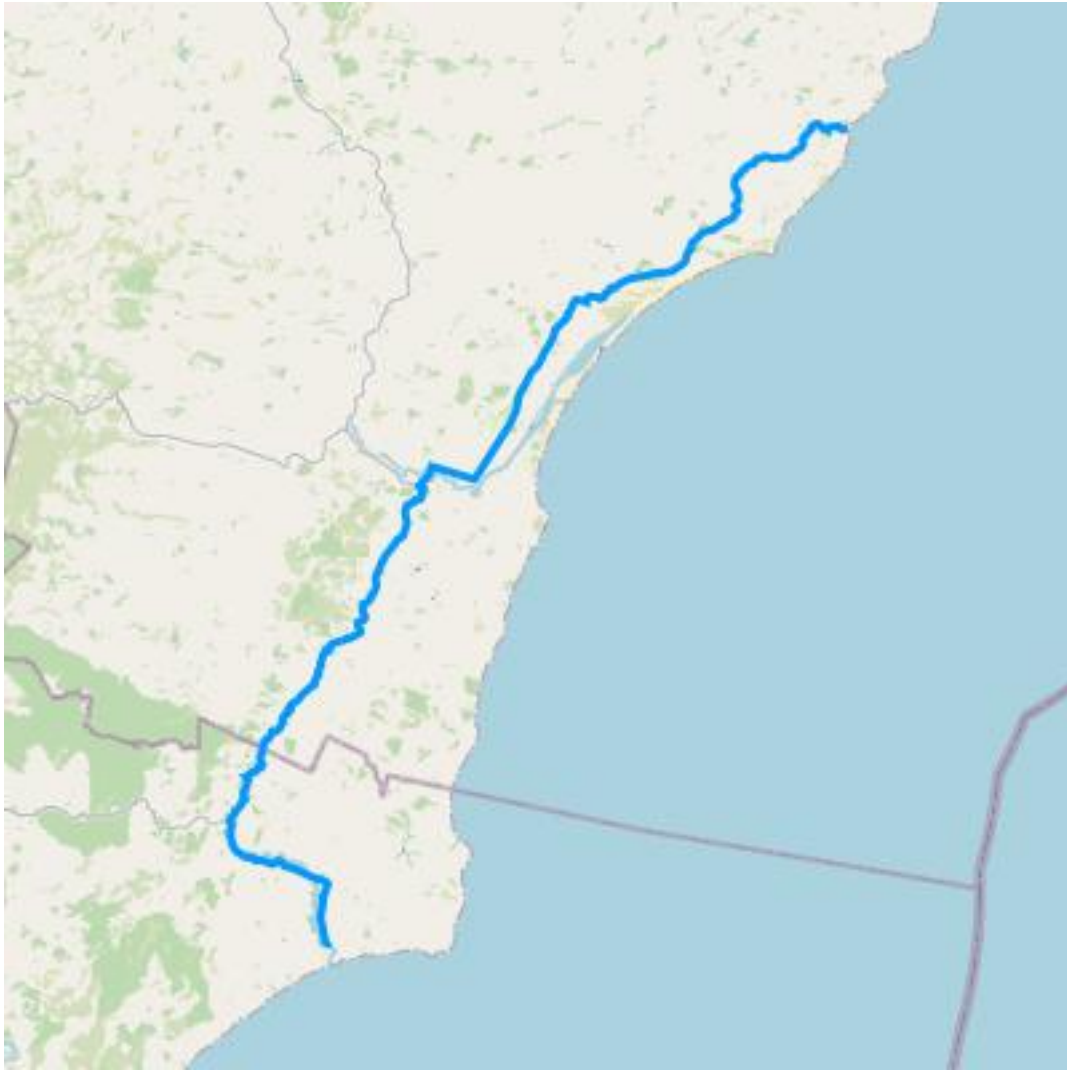
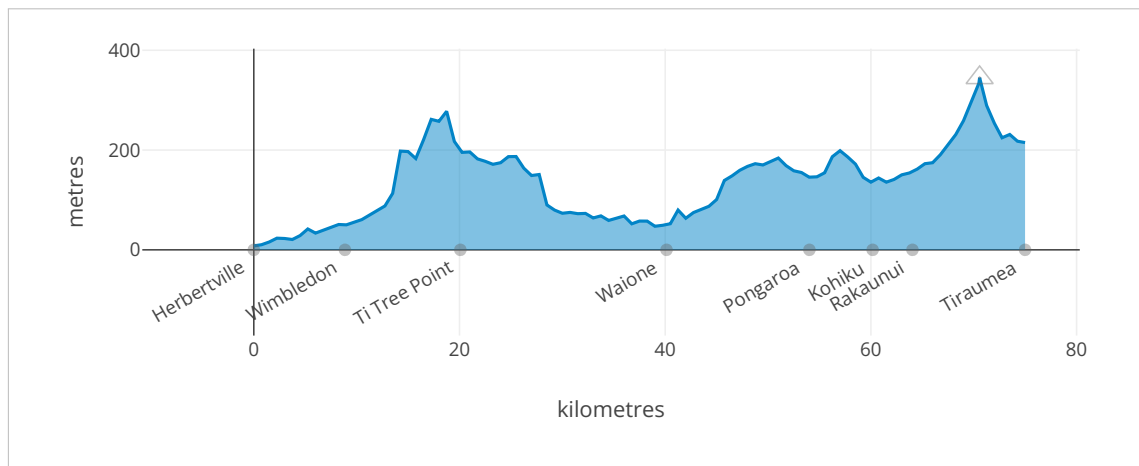


Figure 24.2: Blackhead Beach to Herbertville

# Herbertville to Featherston

## 25.1 Herbertville to Tiraumea

Distance: 75 km   Ascent: 810 m   Descent: 603 m



You start this day by heading back up the road 8 km to rejoin Route 52 at Wimbledon. Soon after Wimbledon the real work of the day begins as you ascend the steep incline to Ti Tree Point. It can be hard to tell from the elevation charts, in which every hill looks steep; this hill really is steep.

At around the 30 km mark take the turnoff left to stay on Route 52 heading towards Pongaroa (if you get to Weber then you've overshoot the turnoff). Here the road becomes more scenic as it flattens out and follows the Akitio River down to Waione, slowly ascending again into Pongaroa (store/tearooms, pub, backpackers, camping at the domain). This is a pleasant, small, rural town; a nice spot to stop for lunch and stock up on food. The store here is the last you'll see till Masterton.

After you leave Pongaroa the road once again begins to climb, but here the gradient is gentler compared to the morning's efforts. Then it's a glorious 5 km descent into Tiraumea. Tiraumea is just a dot on the map; little more than a few houses and a community hall. Here you can camp or backpack



Herbertville beach

at [Otapawa Backpacker Lodge](https://otapawa.co.nz/farmstay)<sup>1</sup>, a few kilometres to the right along Haunui Road. Ask locally and you may be allowed to freecamp for the night in the field adjoining the local hall, where there is a toilet and water.

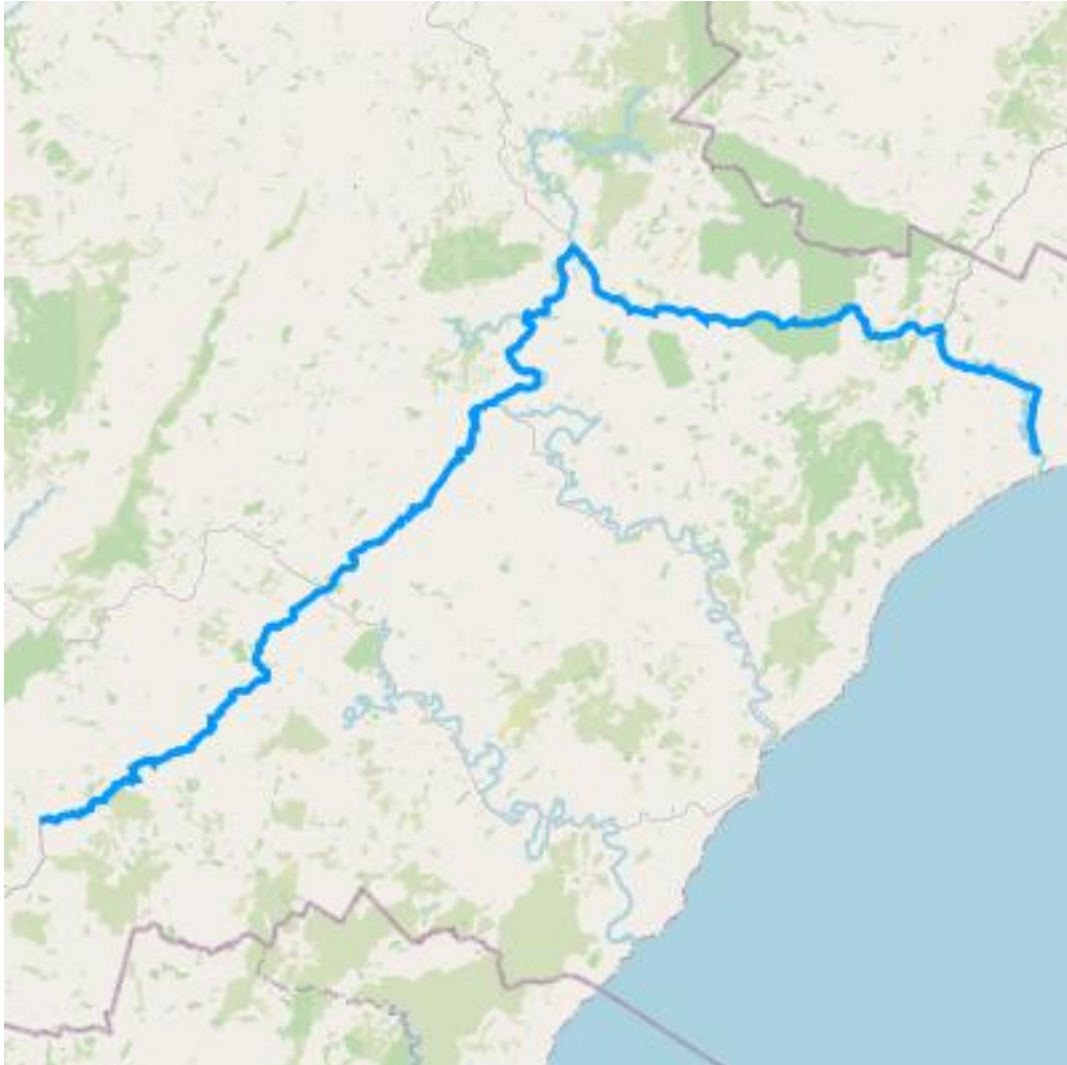


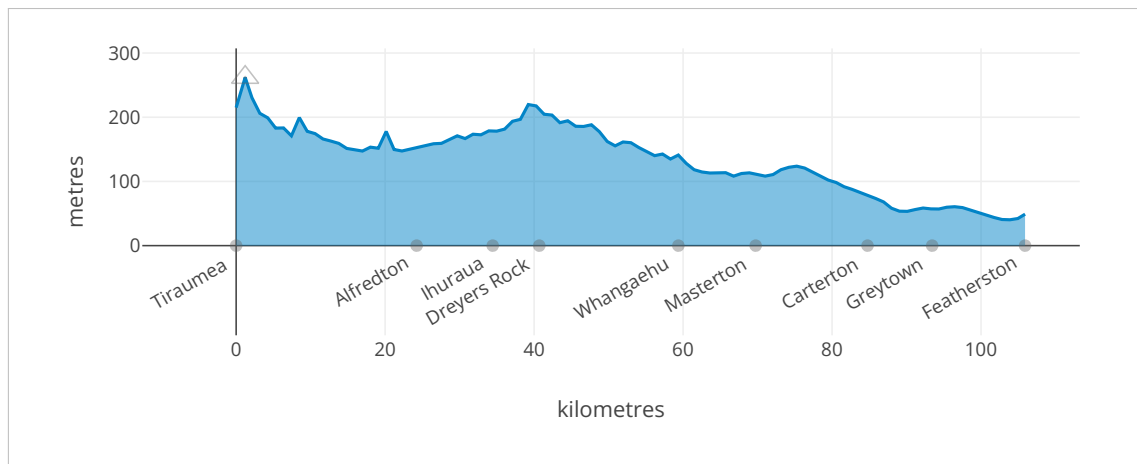
Figure 25.1: Herbertville to Tiraumea

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<sup>1</sup><https://otapawa.co.nz/farmstay>

## 25.2 Tiraumea to Featherston

Distance: 106 km    Ascent: 238 m    Descent: 404 m



Today you reap the rewards from all of yesterday's climbing. This ride is generally downhill through pleasant farmland. Although 106 km may seem like a stretch you can make very good time along this road, especially if the prevailing northerly wind is behind you.

At Alfredton (camping at the domain) turn left to remain on Route 52, taking you through the Whangaehu Valley into Masterton. Masterton is a large town and has cafés, bike shops, supermarkets and everything else you might need. A good opportunity to replenish your by now dwindling supplies. There are many places to stay within the Wairarapa district, with campgrounds in Masterton, Clareville, Carterton, Greytown, Martinborough, several [DOC camps](https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wairarapa)<sup>2</sup> close by, plus some free-camping options (at Lake Wairarapa Reserve just out of Featherston and on the [Remutaka Rail Trail](https://gw.govt.nz/parks/pakuratahi-forest/)<sup>3</sup>). Stop in at the Masterton information office and see what suits you.



Dusk, Lake Wairarapa

Many cyclists choose to head south to the wine growing region of Martinborough, using this as the kick-off point for a tour around the rugged and beautiful [Cape Palliser](#).

At Masterton the road joins up once more with state highway 2. Pleasant rid-

<sup>2</sup><https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wairarapa>

<sup>3</sup><https://gw.govt.nz/parks/pakuratahi-forest/>

ing can be found on the myriad of quiet back-country roads, via which you can dog-leg your way south. The main road between Masterton and Featherston, though, while busy, is safe, being straight, broad, and having ample margin for cyclists.

You should definitely **not** attempt to cycle highway 2 beyond Featherston over the Remutaka incline. Here the road is narrow, winding and busy. Fortunately there is a great alternative that takes you south into Wellington via the [Remutaka Rail Trail](#)...

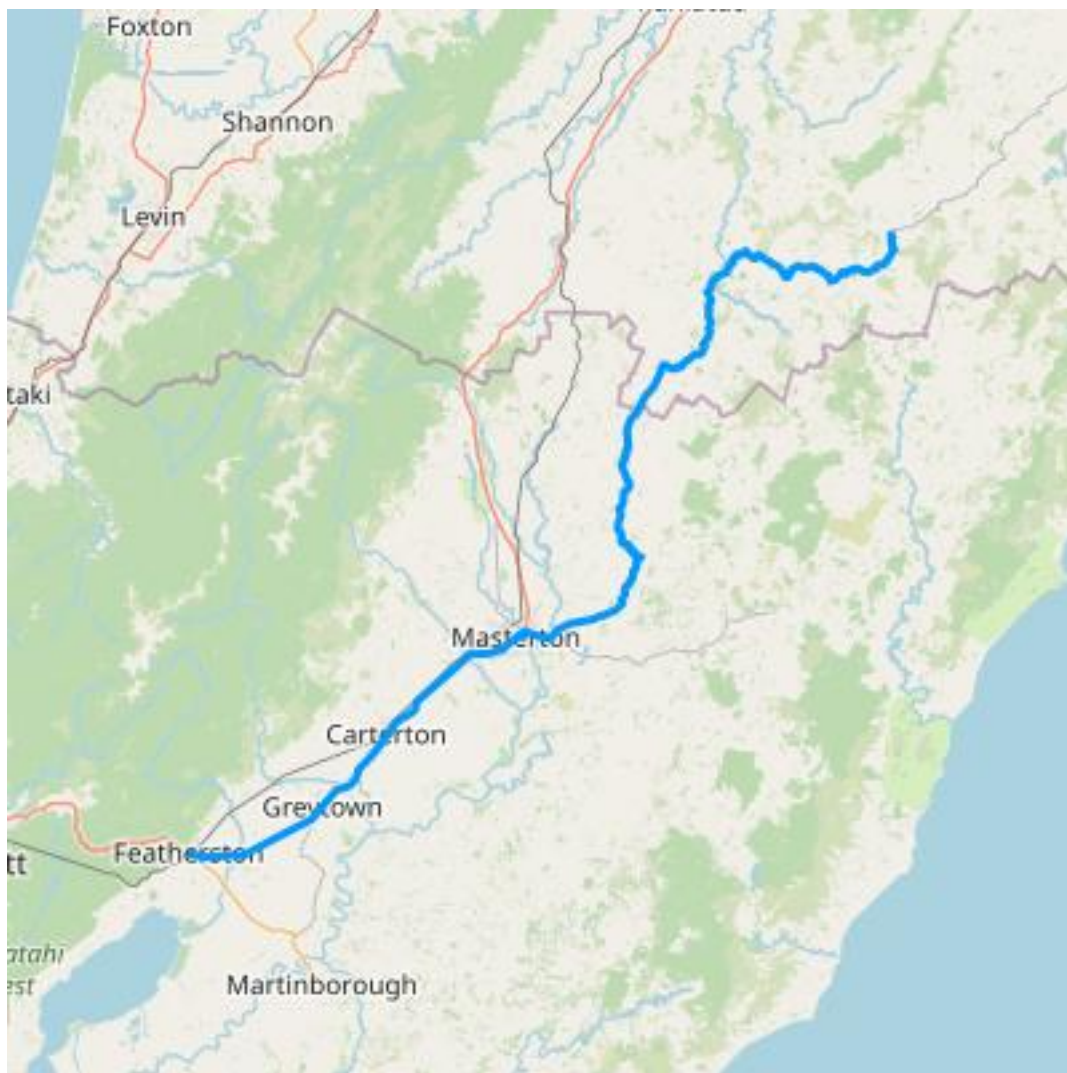
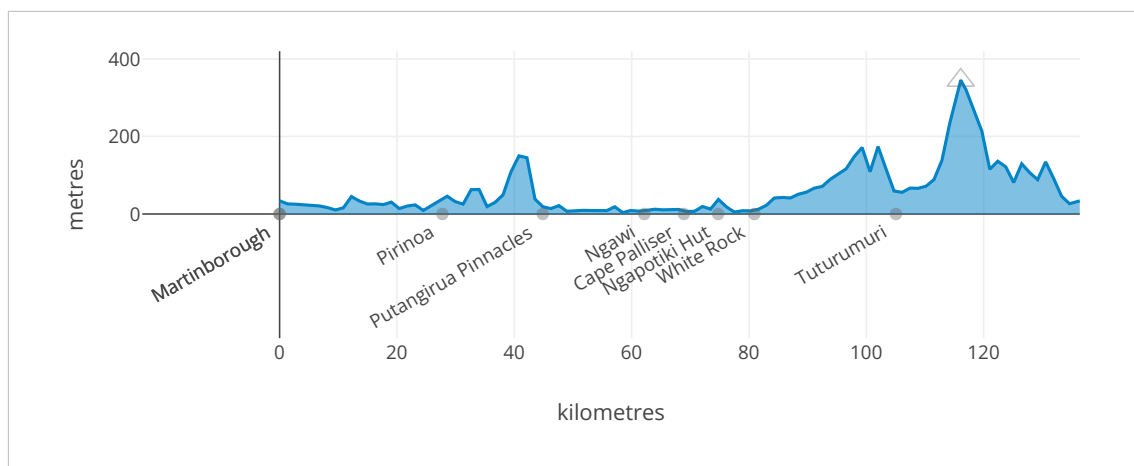


Figure 25.2: Tiraumea to Featherston

# Cape Palliser

Distance: 136 km   Ascent: 1164 m   Descent: 1164 m



The Wairarapa district has undergone something of a renaissance over the last few decades, with the burgeoning wine industry attracting weekenders from nearby Wellington. Nowadays farm supply stores jostle for main street position with boutique eateries and designer stores. Perhaps nowhere is this transformation more evident than at its viticultural epicentre, Martinborough, whose main street is now almost entirely given over to fine dining. You are now in one of New Zealand's premiere wine growing regions - enjoy!



Martinborough Hotel

This trip starts and ends in Martinborough, exploring some of the more rugged and remote parts of the Wairarapa coastline and taking in some iconic sights along the way. At times challenging, but infinitely rewarding. Leave all but the essentials at the campground in Martinborough (you'll be thankful for the lighter load once you hit the hills on the return leg). But don't skimp on warm-weather gear - the weather here gets wild and the coast is very exposed.

Most of this route can be ridden on a standard touring bike, but to do the complete loop you will need to ride the 10 or so km of 4WD track between



Cape Palliser and White Rock, and for this you're really better off with the fatter tyres of a mountain bike. But don't let that put you off - we're not talking full-on knobbly tyres here; I've ridden the route comfortably with slicks (and well-laden panniers).

From the main square in Martinborough head out along Jellicoe Street, which soon turns into Lake Ferry Road. The riding is nice and flat with only minor rises and falls as you pass through farmland and vineyards. At around 28 km you come to Pirinoa where there is a general store, then a further 4 km brings you to the Cape Palliser Road turnoff. If you want a very short first day then instead of taking the turnoff you can continue a further 4 km down to the end of Lake Ferry Road and the Lake Ferry Hotel with a campground set on the banks of Lake Onoke.



Approaching the  
Putangirua Pinnacles

Soon after the turnoff the road rises to about 150 metres, offering excellent views out to Cape Palliser before descending down to the coast and the [Putangirua Pinnacles](https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wairarapa/places/putangirua-pinnacles-scenic-reserve/things-to-do/putangirua-pinnacles-campsite/)<sup>1</sup> DOC campground. Here there is a 2 hour bush-walk to a series of pillars (or hoodoos) caused by erosion over millions of years. An interesting excursion and well worth the effort.



Crossing the ford, Ngawi

Now that the Ngapotiki hut has closed (see below) this is probably the best camping option for the night. This campground is popular though, so be prepared for noise and perhaps take some earplugs.

From the Pinnacles campground the road carries on a further 17 km around the coastline, passing through a few small settlements before reaching the beautiful fishing village of Ngawi, noted for the bulldozers which line its shore front.

After Ngawi the tarmac gives way to gravel. A little way out there is a ford to cross and soon after you come to a seal colony (one of several along this coast), then 7 km from Ngawi you reach Cape Palliser and its iconic light-

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<sup>1</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wairarapa/places/putangirua-pinnacles-scenic-reserve/things-to-do/putangirua-pinnacles-campsite/>

house. This is as far as cars can go because here the road turns into a 4WD track.

The 4WD track follows the coastline east from Cape Palliser, passing through a surprising variety of terrain, ranging from grassy flats to boulder fields to tussocky sand. There's one stream to cross (the Waitetuna Stream) and a few sections of the track are a bit rough or pass over soft sand, but mostly the track is navigable. Towards the White Rock end you come to the site of the old DOC-run Ngapotiki Hut. Alas, the hut has been taken down al-

though DOC still allow camping on site, albeit with the warning to take extreme care with gas cookers. There are some good spots here to pitch a tent, but with no water or amenities this option is not for everyone. It's at this point though that this trip really comes alive for me. Yes, Ngawi and Cape Palliser alone make the trip worthwhile, but there is something magical about spending a night in this remote spot. Lonely, dramatic and starkly beautiful.

This part of the coast gets some great sea swells so is popular with surfies, and you're likely to encounter one or two out to spend a day in the water. The 4WD track used to be open to all traffic but now there are a couple of big metal gates at the White Rock end, apparently put up because some surfies were causing a bit of strife for the local farmer. Apart from the informal DOC campground at Ngapotiki most of the track from Cape Palliser to White Rock runs through private land. Be respectful of this and especially careful around any livestock.

At White Rock you rejoin the main road again - gravel, but well graded. Here you turn inland to follow the braided Opouawe River upstream as you head the remaining 50 km along quiet country roads through to Martinborough. At Tukurumuri the road returns to tar seal. There are a couple of fairly taxing hills to climb before you reach Martinborough again. At the top of the highest there is the option to take a small detour along Range Road and see the Haunui wind farm.



Bulldozers line the shore  
at Ngawi



Opouawe River

This is a wonderful ride. Challenging in parts - especially if the wind is up - but also rugged, beautiful and rewarding.

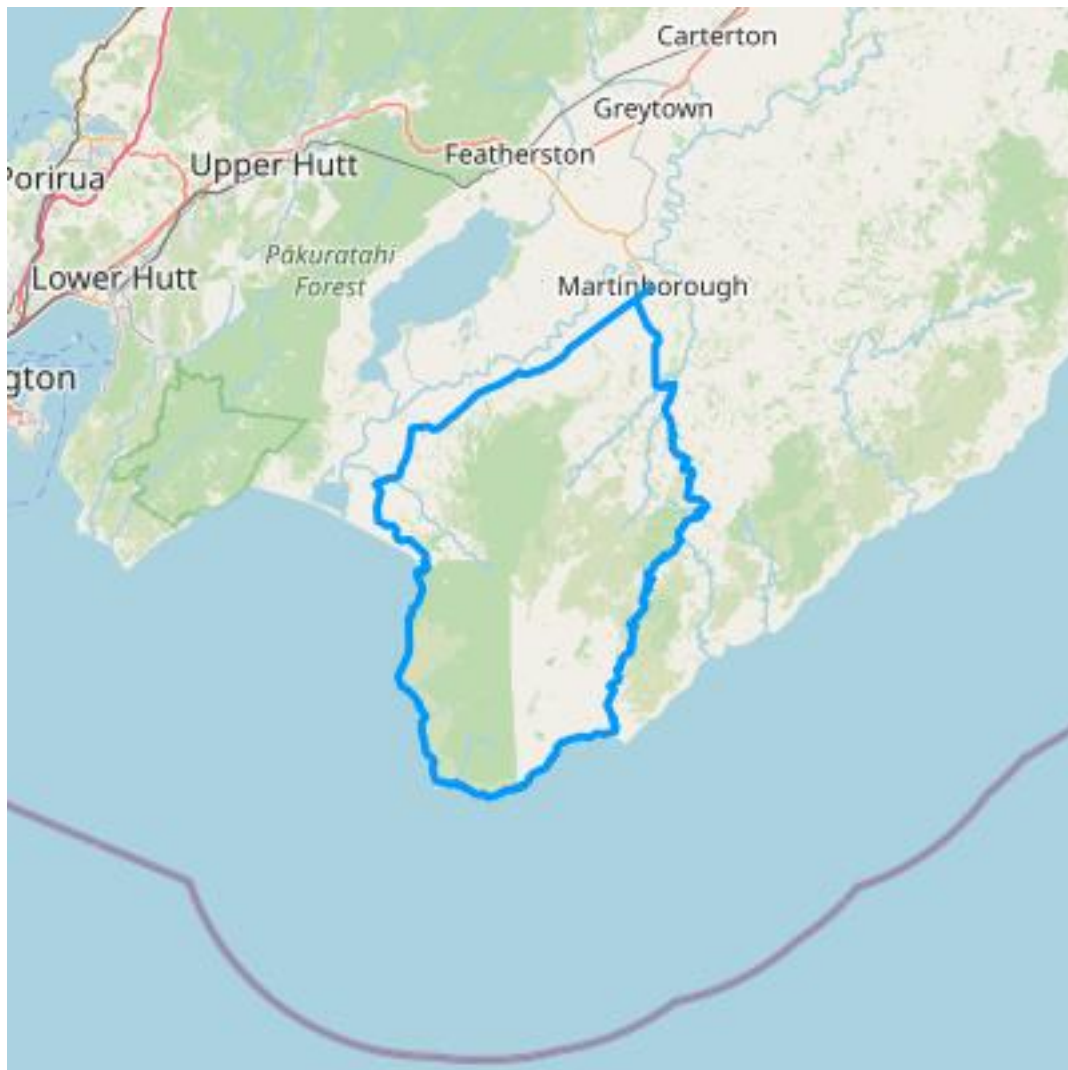


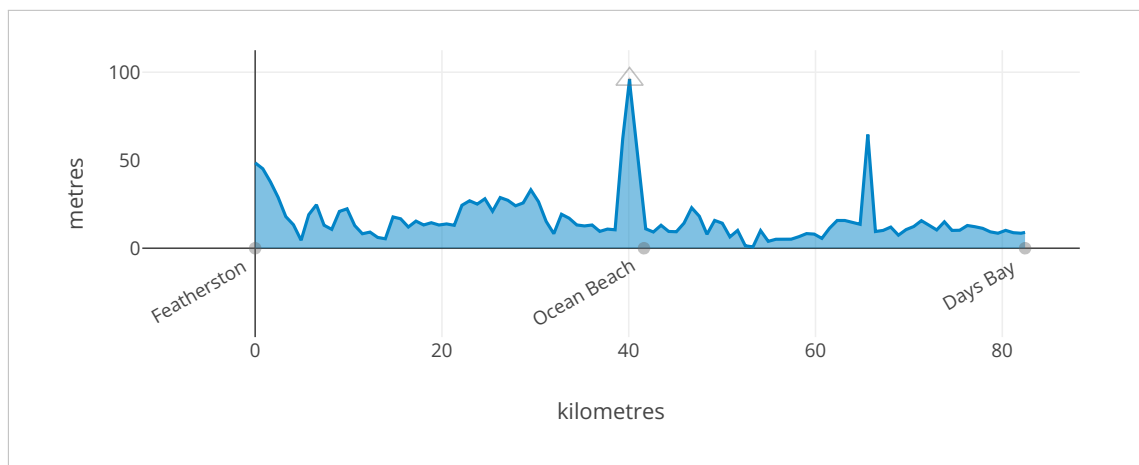
Figure 26.1: Cape Palliser

## Featherston to Wellington

The [Remutaka Cycle Trail](#)<sup>1</sup> is justifiably heralded as one of the great New Zealand rides. It offers two ways into Wellington: around the rough southern coast; or via the comparatively sedate Remutaka Rail Trail and Hutt River Trail. Alternatively both sections can be ridden as a single loop.

### 27.1 Featherston to Wellington via Ōrongorongo Station

Distance: 82 km   Ascent: 220 m   Descent: 260 m



For those set up to ride over a bit of rough this is a great way to cycle into Wellington. Start the day by heading out along the Western Lake Road. To your left is Lake Wairarapa, contoured by the mountain ranges of Aorangi Forest Park. To your right the Remutaka Forest Park rises above you. At about the 20 km mark you leave the lake behind as you pass through farmland, with the road rising after about 15 more km to reveal views over Lake Onoke and out to Cape Palliser. The road turns to gravel as it descends into Ocean Beach where a few baches dot the coastline.

A few kilometres along the coast you arrive at the [Corner Creek](#)<sup>2</sup> DOC campground. Ocean Beach Road continues right around the coast over a rough

<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/22-great-rides/remutaka-cycle-trail/>

<sup>2</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wellington-kapiti/places/remutaka-forest-park/things-to-do/campsites/corner-creek-campsite/>

4WD track. While much has been done to improve the track since its adoption as a New Zealand Cycle Trail ride, it is still pretty rough, with sections immediately after Camp Creek too sandy to ride.

Ōrongorongo Station, at the mouth of the Ōrongorongo River, is the official end of the Remutaka Cycle Trail. From the river mouth it's a further 21 km to Wainuiomata along the quiet, rural, and fully sealed Wainuiomata Coast Road. There is the option to camp at the [Catchpool Valley](https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wellington-kapiti/places/remutaka-forest-park/things-to-do/campsites/catchpool-valley-campsite/)<sup>3</sup> DOC campground in the Remutaka Forest Park (about 9 km up the coast road). From Wainuiomata a cycle lane follows the single link road down into Seaview on the outskirts of Petone (campground).



Corner Creek Campsite

Most people, though, continue along the coast. From the Ōrongorongo river mouth, continue up Wainuiomata Coast Road for about 4 km until you see signage on your left for the [East Harbour Regional Park](https://google.com/maps/@-41.3943763,174.8831371,3a,75y,314.75h,91.44t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sTUhrdR2dG5NDpBEBSZb3GA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656)<sup>4</sup> (link opens in Google Street View). Cross over the bridge then turn right and follow the road over the hill to the quiet, gravel, Pencarrow Coast Road into Eastbourne. From Days Bay you can either [catch a ferry](https://eastbywest.co.nz/)<sup>5</sup> into Wellington or continue the further 20 km around the harbour.



The trees tell the story

Note that a section of Pencarrow Coast Road is privately owned and continued access is at the discretion of the owners. Be respectful of this.

Choose your time and keep an eye on the weather. This coastline can clearly get pretty rough. But if the weather Gods are smiling then this area of stark and rugged beauty is well worth the trip.

<sup>3</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wellington-kapiti/places/remutaka-forest-park/things-to-do/campsites/catchpool-valley-campsite/>

<sup>4</sup><https://google.com/maps/@-41.3943763,174.8831371,3a,75y,314.75h,91.44t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sTUhrdR2dG5NDpBEBSZb3GA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>

<sup>5</sup><https://eastbywest.co.nz/>



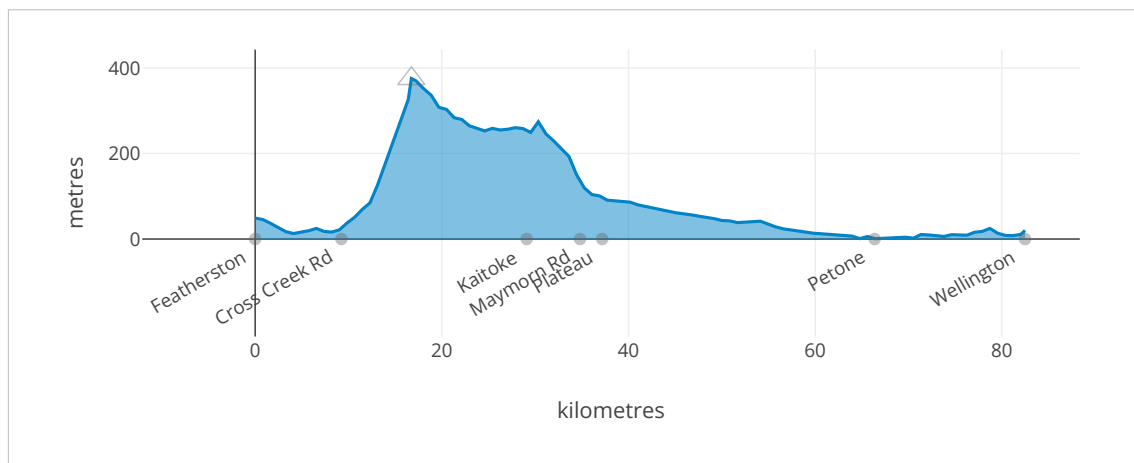


Figure 27.1: Featherston to Wellington via Ōrongorongo Station



## 27.2 Featherston to Wellington via the Remutaka Rail Trail

Distance: 82 km Ascent: 435 m Descent: 464 m



This is great riding with most of the day spent on dedicated walking/cycle tracks. Head out of Featherston along Western Lake Road. After about 10 km you come to a turnoff right into Cross Creek Road which takes you up and into [Pākuratahi Forest](#)<sup>6</sup> and the Remutaka Rail Trail, a walking/cycle trail following the original route of the Wairarapa line, with several historic tunnels and restored railway bridges.



Remutaka Summit

From the roadside a shortish section of easy single track takes you up to Cross Creek where there is the opportunity to camp. A well graded 4WD trail continues right through to Upper Hutt, with further camping available along the Summit and at Ladle Bend. The main track ends at the Kaitoke carpark where it meets up with SH2. Here though, rather than brave the highway traffic, signage directs you left onto Incline Road, turning off after a few hundred metres onto the Tunnel Gully track, finally terminating at Maymorm Station.

From Maymorm Station follow Maymorm Road down into Plateau. Just around the corner from the dairy a short connector track skirts the highway for a few km before joining up with the [Hutt River Trail](#)<sup>7</sup>, a dedicated walking/cycling

<sup>6</sup><https://gw.govt.nz/parks/pakuratahi-forest>

<sup>7</sup><https://gw.govt.nz/parks/hutt-river-trail>

track which follows the river to its mouth at Petone.

Petone, one of the oldest European settlements in the Wellington Region, has plenty of shops and cafés and is worth an explore. From here a well signposted network of cycle paths takes you the remaining 15 km into Wellington - not always the smoothest ride, but safely off the main highway. As an alternative you can ride to Days Bay in Eastbourne and [take the ferry](#)<sup>8</sup> into Wellington. For a camp with a difference catch the sailing which stops off at Somes (*Matiu*) Island, a scenic reserve in the middle of Wellington Harbour where there is a [DOC campsite](#)<sup>9</sup>.



On the Remutaka Rail Trail

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<sup>8</sup><https://eastbywest.co.nz/>

<sup>9</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wellington-kapiti/places/matiu-somes-island/things-to-do/matiu-somes-island-campsite/>

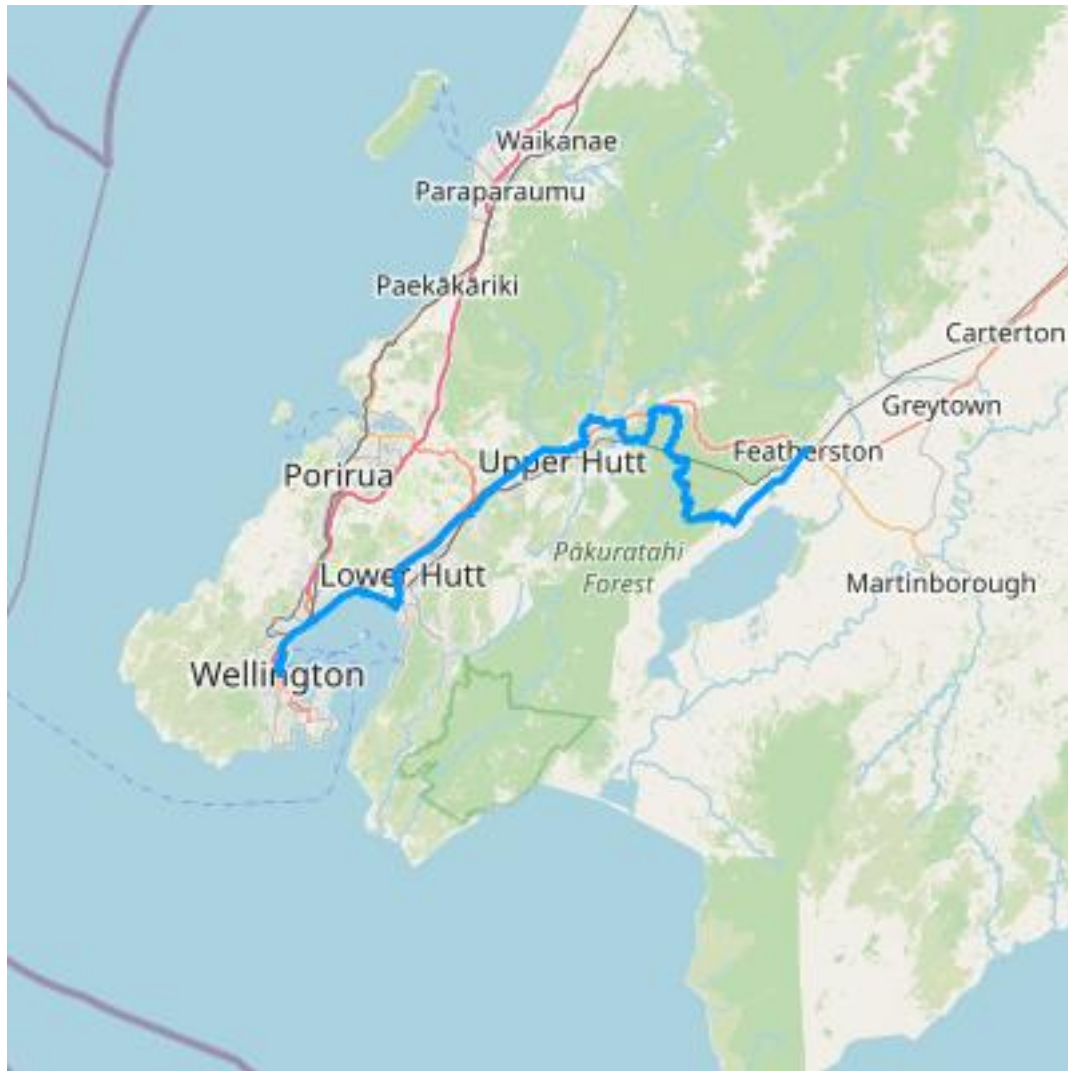


Figure 27.2: Featherston to Wellington via the Remutaka Rail Trail

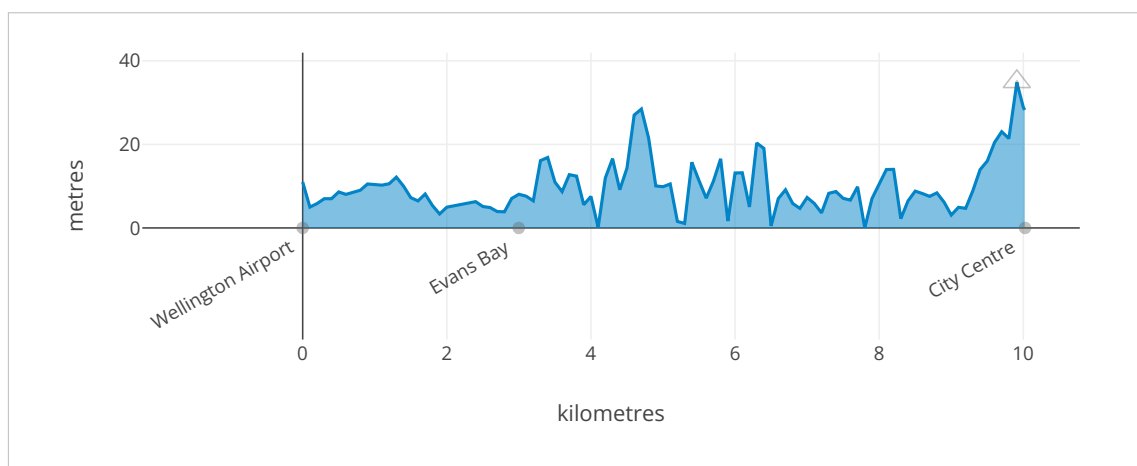
# Wellington

Wellington is the departure point for ferries to the south island, but for those staying a while the city has much to offer. Popular activities include *Te Papa* (the national museum), the cable car, theatre, art galleries, parliament, Weta Workshop, Zealandia wildlife sanctuary, ...

Known colloquially as "Windy Wellington" the city is often buffeted by strong winds, funnelled through the Cook Strait by surrounding mountain ranges. But on a good day Wellington is hard to beat. One great thing about this city is that it is quite compact. Hemmed in as it is by the surrounding hills and harbour, urban sprawl has been unable to take hold. Consequently you can visit *Te Papa*, take swim at Oriental Bay, dine at one of the many restaurants (according to *Lonely Planet* there are "more bars, cafés and restaurants per capita than New York") and then go out for a movie or show - all within easy walking distance.

## 28.1 Wellington Airport to the City Centre

Distance: 10 km    Ascent: a few m    Descent: a few m



This is an easy bike ride along a signposted route which tunnels under the airport then wends its way through quiet suburban streets to the giant Zephyrometer (wind-wand sculpture) at Evans Bay. From here it follows the coast-line over a dedicated cycle path into the central city. In Wellington you'll find

several hostels of reasonable quality and reasonable prices, including an excellent Youth Hostel.

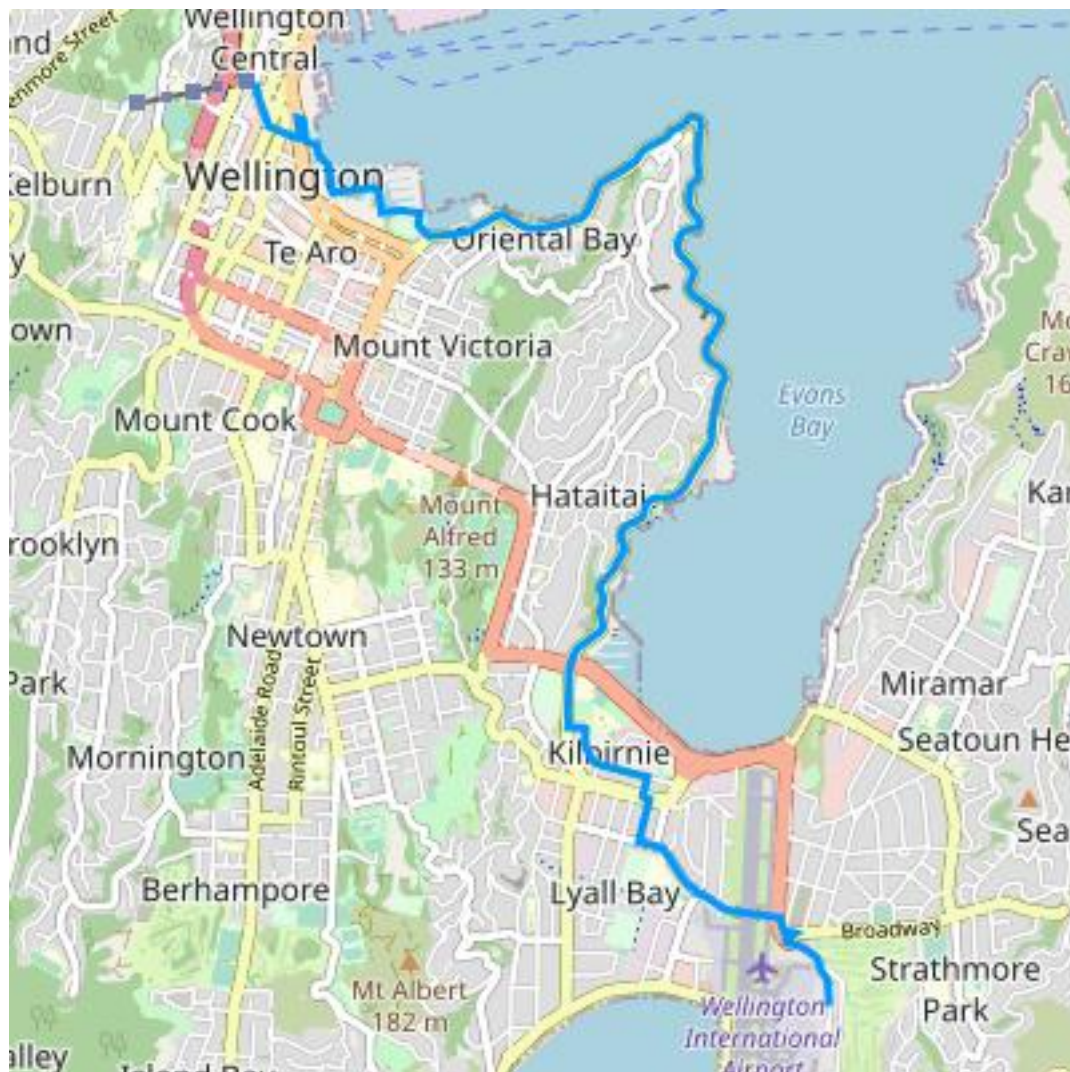
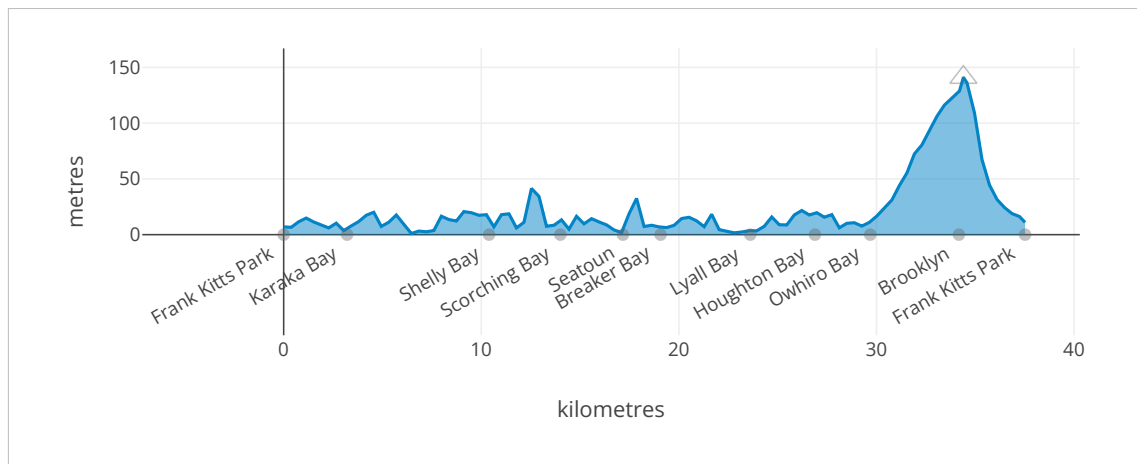


Figure 28.1: Wellington Airport to the City Centre

## 28.2 Wellington "Round the Bays" Loop

Distance: 38 km   Ascent: 246 m   Descent: 242 m



If you have time to explore Wellington then this is an easy, mostly flat ride and makes great day trip, passing through plenty of swimming bays, with cafés dotted around the coast. The round-the-bays loop is popular with Wellingtonians and if the weather is fine you're bound encounter locals out for a lunchtime jaunt or perhaps taking the long way home.

The great thing about this route is that - even if you're a stranger to the city - it's virtually impossible to get lost. Just keep following the coastline until Owhiro Bay, where you turn inland and cycle up the valley through Brooklyn and back down to the city. If you're keen, you can continue around the coast from Owhiro Bay for about 5 km along a 4WD track which takes you to a seal colony at [Red Rocks](https://wellington.govt.nz/recreation/enjoy-the-outdoors/beaches-and-coast/southern-suburbs/red-rocks-pariwhero)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup><https://wellington.govt.nz/recreation/enjoy-the-outdoors/beaches-and-coast/southern-suburbs/red-rocks-pariwhero>





Figure 28.2: Wellington "Round the Bays" Loop

## **Part II**

# **The South Island**

## Picton

### 29.1 Arriving at Picton by Ferry from Wellington

Brilliant morning sunshine. I am eating a pumpkin and blue cheese panini and drinking an excellent café latte outside a café in Picton's main street. If I look down toward the Queen Charlotte Sound, past the Gate of Remembrance, I can see the gentle passage of white and blue ferries in and out of the harbour and the blue haze of hills beyond. Cycle tourists of every nationality meander past. They mostly sport blue, black, red or sometimes bright yellow Ortlieb panniers. I personally love Ortliebs. They are strong, waterproof and easy to clip on and clip off your carrier. Although expensive, they are generally the hallmark of an experienced and serious cycle tourist.

Picton is a small pretty town where most cyclists start their tour of the South Island. It has several campgrounds and hostels, a good supermarket and a variety of internet facilities. In addition there are several restaurants, cafés and bars including a small, decent Irish bar that knows how to serve a Guinness. At present, there is no bike shop. The nearest is in Blenheim (two) some thirty kilometres to the south, or Nelson (several), a good one to two days cycle to the west.

If you decide to stay in Picton for a day or so, my personal recommendation is the *Blue Anchor* campground about a kilometre out of town. The campground designates a specific area for cyclists and it is often a regular United Nations of every nationality you might encounter cycle touring. I always enjoy the variety of tents and cycles and various trailers and tandems, not to mention the variety of accents and backgrounds. Everyone has a story for cycling in New Zealand and everyone has their own traveller's tale. You can do worse than spend an evening drinking wine into the late mild evening at the Blue Anchor campground swapping yarns with Germans, Canadians, Swiss and English etc. and learning the pitfalls and joys of global cycle-touring.

### 29.2 Where to go from Picton

In general, you have three possibilities:

1. *Nelson* (109 kilometres via Highway 6 to the west, and probably down the west coast heading south).
2. *Blenheim* (28 kilometres via Highway 1 due south toward Christchurch and then, inland to Lake Tekapo, Otago and up the west coast to Nelson).
3. *Blenheim* via the Port Underwood Road (a rugged day to day and a half ride on a largely metal undulating road used by logging trucks. Beautiful, no shops, two DOC campgrounds, recommended only for the stubbornly adventurous).

If you head toward Nelson, you have about 109 kilometres of mostly uphill riding through beautiful bush clad valleys with impressive views over the Marlborough Sounds. Most cut this trip into two days. Head to Havelock first, about thirty five kilometres from Picton. This is a winding, scenic road that undulates in and out of various bays with safe swimming and the occasional camp store that sells ice-creams. It is pretty enough with good views over the Sounds but the road is narrow and you should keep an eye out for traffic particularly on the bends. Havelock has a number of Backpackers and a good camping ground. The best value is the hostel with a campground attached situated on the right just as you enter the township. This is the old Havelock school and the one that taught the young Ernest Rutherford to split the atom, or at least set him off on the right track. The hostel used to belong to the YHA and although the facilities in part can be a bit creaky (the building is after all over a hundred years old) it is nonetheless cozy and good value with a well equipped kitchen and a friendly host.

As far as Havelock goes, the mussels at the local restaurant are worth a look, or you can just meander around the township. There is a small supermarket, email facilities, coffee bars and two decent pubs and even a second hand bookshop. Many people use Havelock as a base to begin the [Queen Charlotte Track](#)<sup>1</sup>, a walkway/mountain bike path. A very worthwhile diversion. A French couple I encountered in Havelock once told me of their adventures cycling up the various isolated roads toward French Pass and assured me it was a memorable and beautiful trip. I cannot comment personally on this except to add that it is a rugged road you have to come out the same way you go in.

From Havelock you can head through the mostly flat Highway 6 to the Rai Valley, your last shops before Nelson. The next seventy four kilometres are a climb over two saddles. The first, the Rai Valley Saddle (250 metres) is easy

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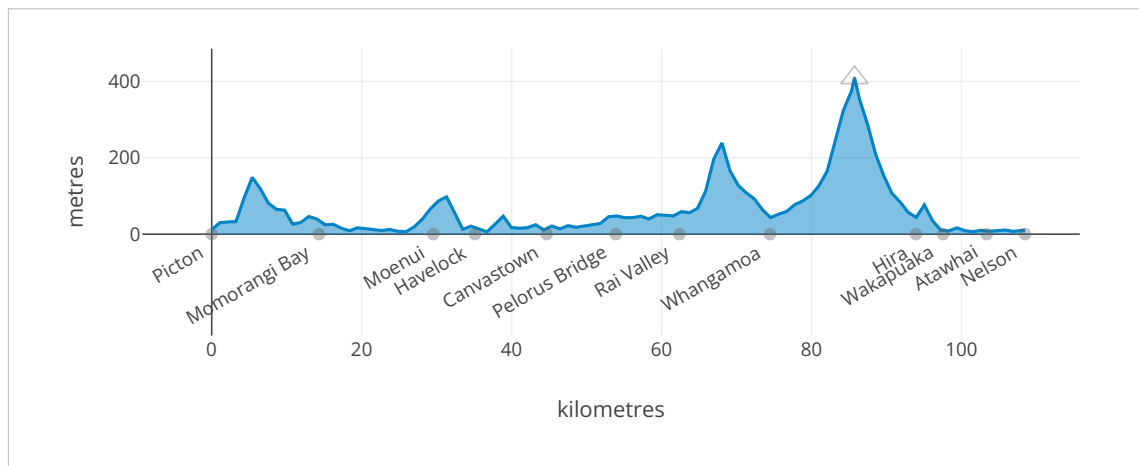
<sup>1</sup><https://qctrack.co.nz>

enough, but the second, the Whangamoia Saddle (400 metres) is a lot harder. On a hot day take plenty of water. Nelson is one of the South Island's larger towns and has just about everything you need. Check out the information centre. Use your BBH guide and you will find several hostels with camping facilities.

# Picton to Nelson

## 30.1 Picton to Nelson

Distance: 108 km   Ascent: 1108 m   Descent: 1109 m



Although the total distance to Nelson is only 109 kilometres, the road rises over two considerable saddles, the Rai Saddle (220 metres) and the Whangamoa Saddle (400 metres). Consequently many cyclists break this into a two day trip. Most choose to cycle directly from the ferry to Havelock (35 km from Picton, campground, backpackers, supermarket & mail), or continue on to Pelorus Bridge (around 55 km from Picton, campground, cabins, tearooms, no store).



Tuatara at Havelock

Just past the Rai Valley (store, pub, no campground) you can turn right over the bridge down a side road and camp by the stream if you are unobtrusive and tidy. One memorable night I was woken here by two stray dogs that had come tearing out of the hills attracted by the scent of my unwashed saucepans. It was a bit of a scare but they took off after a couple of yells. However, it was not the most pleasant way to wake up in the early hours. Remember to take insect repellent to fend off midges.

From Havelock to the Rai Valley the road is easygoing and generally flat or mildly undulating. From Rai Valley however, it begins to climb toward the



first saddle. Be aware that there is no store between the Rai Valley and Nelson.

The scenery between Picton and Nelson is magnificent. The Marlborough Sounds curve out into broad expanses of blue/green water studded with islands and maintain brilliant views to your right most of the way to Havelock and beyond. Once you pass the Rai Valley and start climbing the saddles you can look back down steeply sided valleys of bush and pine forests. Breathe the air...welcome to the South Island.

On a fine day this is what cycling is all about. If you find the second saddle difficult, don't be afraid to get off and walk and stop at the wide curves of the road and look back into the valleys occasionally, or muse at the wild hills to your left, or sigh a bit at the road winding up ahead of you. Even walking, the saddles only take two or three hours to get over. And then you have the glorious downhill stretch from the top of the Whangamoā. Ten kilometres of, winding descent over rushing streams with glimpses of rivers in the deep valleys to your left. This is exhilarating cycling. At the bottom there are still another fourteen kilometres to cover but this is generally straightforward and the last few kilometres into Nelson are flat with the serene, blue Tasman Bay on your right.

Nelson is a substantially large town in a beautiful setting. There are plenty of campgrounds, backpackers, bike shops, cafés etc. Nelson is a popular place for overseas travellers to either settle or base themselves. It has a strong mix of environmental concerns and arts and crafts. It welcomes cyclists, is one of the few New Zealand towns with a series of accessible bike paths, and offers a range of choices of what to do next. Many book to tramp the Heaphy Track, or plan to head down the central roads south via the beautiful Lewis Pass to Christchurch. But most want to meander a bit further west first. Toward Motueka, Tākaka and Collingwood.

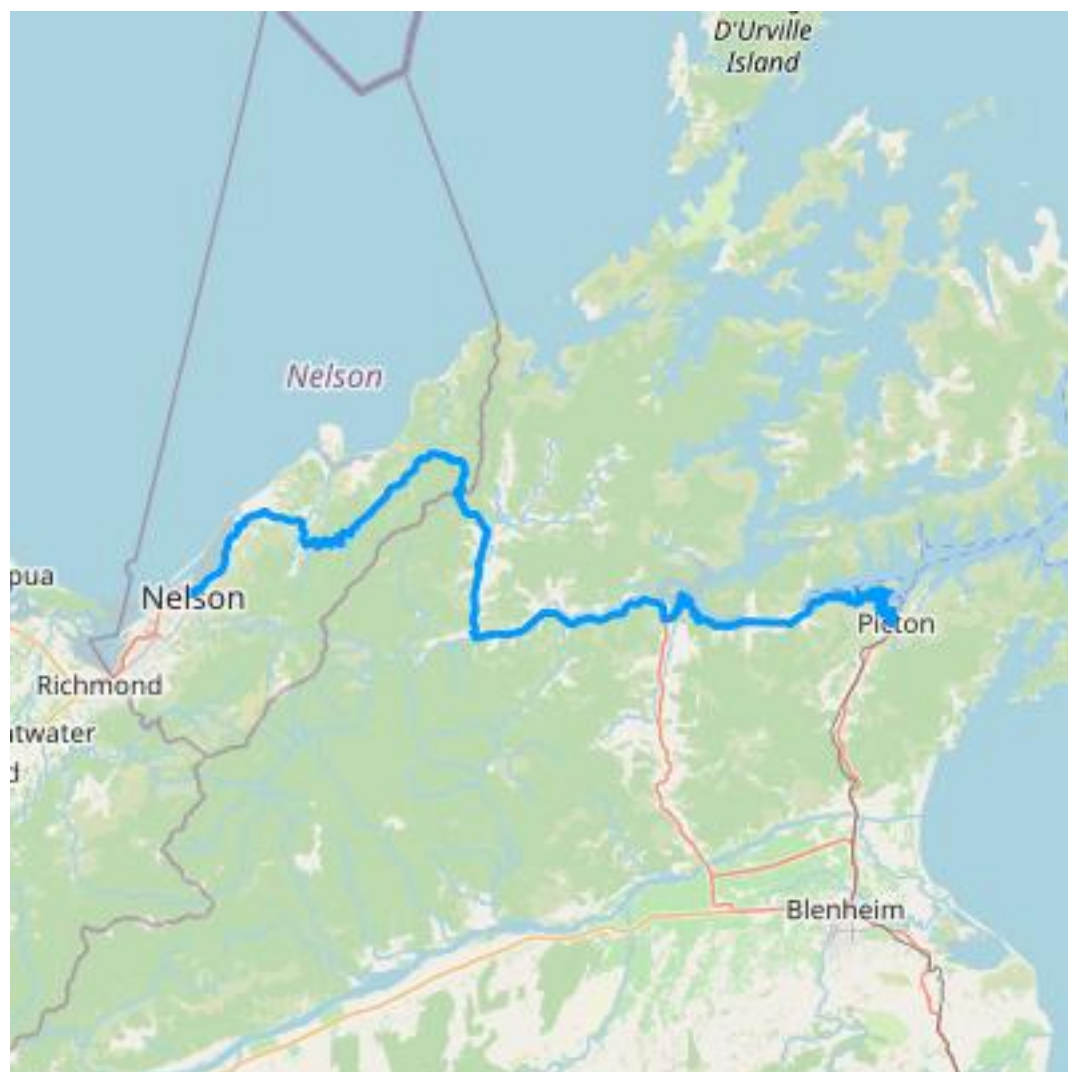
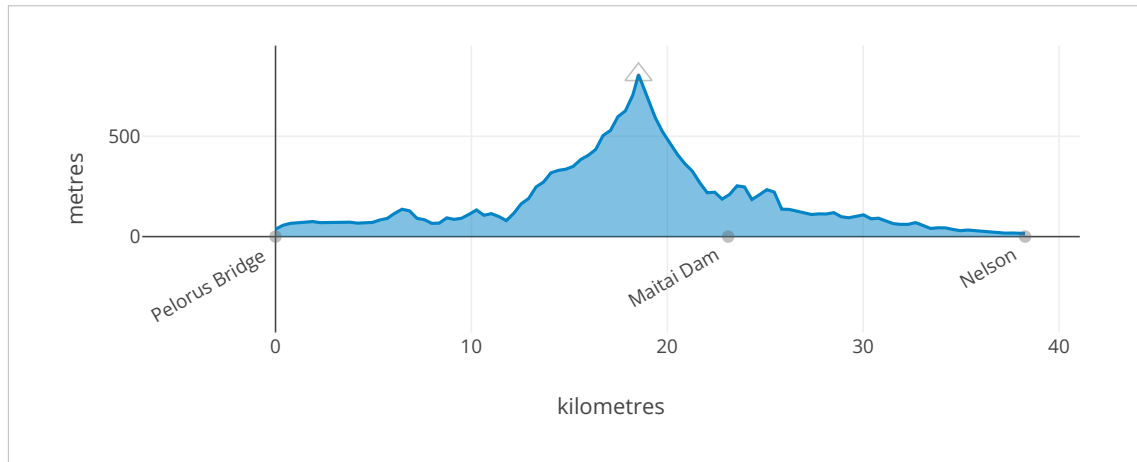


Figure 30.1: Picton to Nelson

## 30.2 Pelorus to Nelson via the Maungatapu Road

Distance: 38 km Ascent: 1005 m Descent: 1026 m



**Alert:** *Parts of this ride are very steep. Other parts are creek-bed rough. Tackle this ride only if you are very fit, are travelling very light, and are confident your gear can handle it.*

For those heading toward Nelson from Have-lock and feeling adventurous then the old road to Nelson known as the Maungatapu Road (leading off to the left directly after Pelorus Bridge), offers a scenic route that is shorter than the main road (only 35 k's from Pelorus to Nelson), with little traffic and the added interest of the notorious landmark known as Murderer's Rock.



Start of the Maungatapu Road

The disadvantage here is that the old Nelson road is steep and muddy in wet weather. It starts calmly enough as the tar-seal leads into a gentle wooded valley. The tar-seal gives way to gravel as the road begins to narrow, wind and slowly climb. At its steepest, it rises to 720 metres through rough bush and the last 4 kilometres to the top ascends 400 metres. We are looking at a climb that would pall all but the doughtiest riders, but having said that, this is a memorable road with the added attraction of being the scene of a dark event in local history.

At the peak of the road is a plaque marking Murderer's Rock where, in 1866, the Burgess Gang lay in wait to waylay and kill five local men for the cash

and gold dust they were carrying. Two of the victims were buried in shallow graves close by; the others were thrown into the stream. All four of the gang were later captured, but one, Sullivan, turned Queen's evidence and only three of the murderers went to the gallows in Nelson goal. Three grim relics of the executions remain. The plaster death masks were, until recently, displayed in the Nelson museum.

Once over the peak, the road descends 600 metres in 7 kilometres. After passing two dams, the road rises and falls and then flattens out into a pleasant, winding valley. There is a campground here and a very pleasant one too, but no store. You can continue along the generally flat and very scenic road bordering the river for another few kilometres and into Nelson.

The Maungatapu road is a scenic, quiet side road that is not to be taken lightly, but then, cycle touring is all about memorable experiences...



The view from Murderer's  
Rock

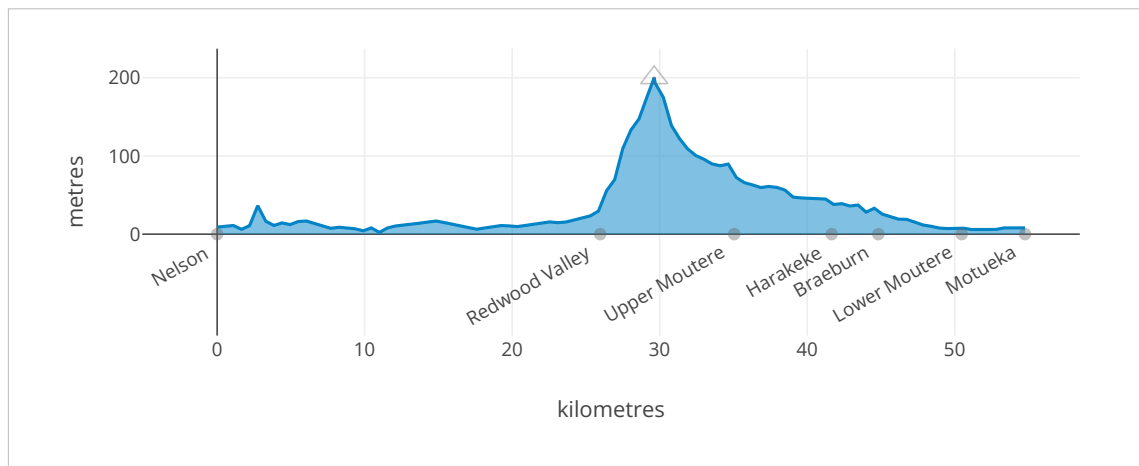


Figure 30.2: Pelorus to Nelson via the Maungatapu Road

# Nelson to Tākaka

## 31.1 Nelson to Motueka

Distance: 55 km   Ascent: 209 m   Descent: 210 m



From the Tourist Office in Nelson, obtain directions for the cycle path toward Motueka. This is a pleasant, flat cycle alongside the Tasman Bay and will cut out most of the urban streets as you leave the town. The road is generally flat and pleasant enough but at the end of the cycle path, you might like to break up the day by heading slightly inland and taking the country route through Upper Moutere. This is slightly further than the main road, but is pretty countryside along less busy roads. Another option is to turn off at Mapua and follow the quieter (since the completion of the Ruby Bay Bypass in 2010) coast road through Ruby Bay, rejoining the coastal highway just after Tasman.

Motueka is a much smaller version of Nelson in many ways. There are plenty of arts and crafts, a supermarket and two good camping grounds and hostels. It's a fine place, but I must admit to wanting more mileage out of my day and usually head a further thirteen kilometres to Kaiteriteri.

The campground here is right on the beach, and the beach is beautiful. It has safe swimming and fine sand. The short local coastal road here will take you up to Marahau, a lovely, tranquil ride with beach and bush views. Marahau has a good campground, store and a café and there is a side road (a fairly steep ride) to take you up onto the main road to Tākaka. If you are



feeling lazy, you can get a launch from Kaiteriteri all the way to Totaranui on the far side of the Abel Tasman National Park and avoid the Tākaka Hill altogether. Launches are also available from Marahau.

There is a campground at Totaranui and the road, though shingle, winding and undulating, will take you the last 32 kilometres through to Tākaka. The Abel Tasman National park is one of the most beautiful reserves in the country. You can store the bike for a few days and walk the blue bays around this magnificent coastline. There are campsites and a fine coffee bar/restaurant at the far end of your hike. However, if you want to cycle on, you can head west over the Tākaka Hill.

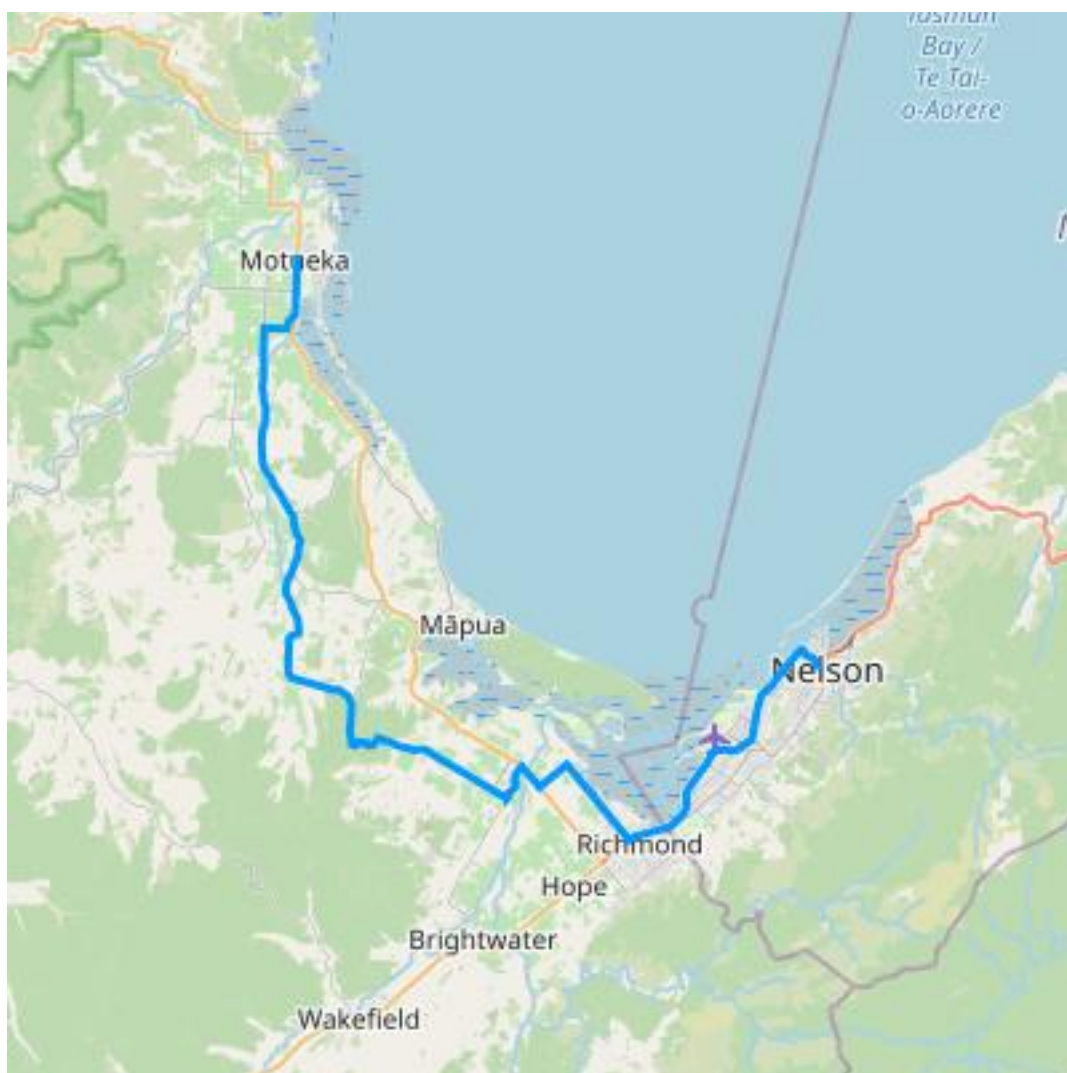
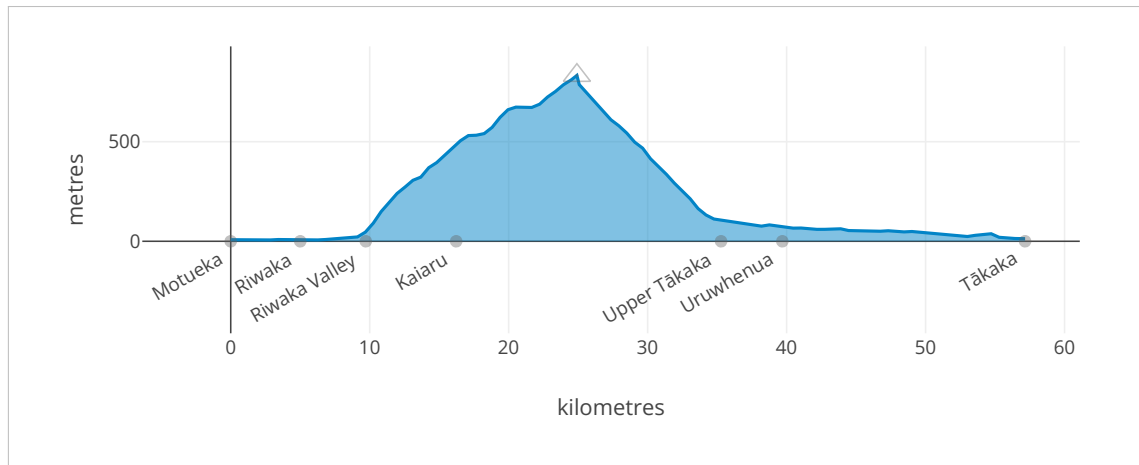


Figure 31.1: Nelson to Motueka

## 31.2 Motueka to Tākaka

Distance: 57 km    Ascent: 817 m    Descent: 812 m



The day starts out flat and ends flat. But in between you have to climb 800 metres over the Tākaka Hill. This is fairly steep and taxing as hills go, but you can walk the worst of the twelve kilometres up and enjoy the twenty or so kilometres down the other side. The scenery is great and you begin to feel a sense of isolation once you are over the top. There are a series of limestone caves on the summit which are worth exploring. This road meanders all the way to Farewell Spit eventually and even crosses over to the West Coast. It is strikingly lovely in parts with a gorgeous combination of sea and bush clad valleys. But again, this is no through road and though a campground exists as far up as Pakawau (a beautiful isolated place about 25 kilometres west from Collingwood), you will have to turn round and come back again.

A good alternative is to take the launch from Kaiteriteri around the Tākaka hill and then cycle back.

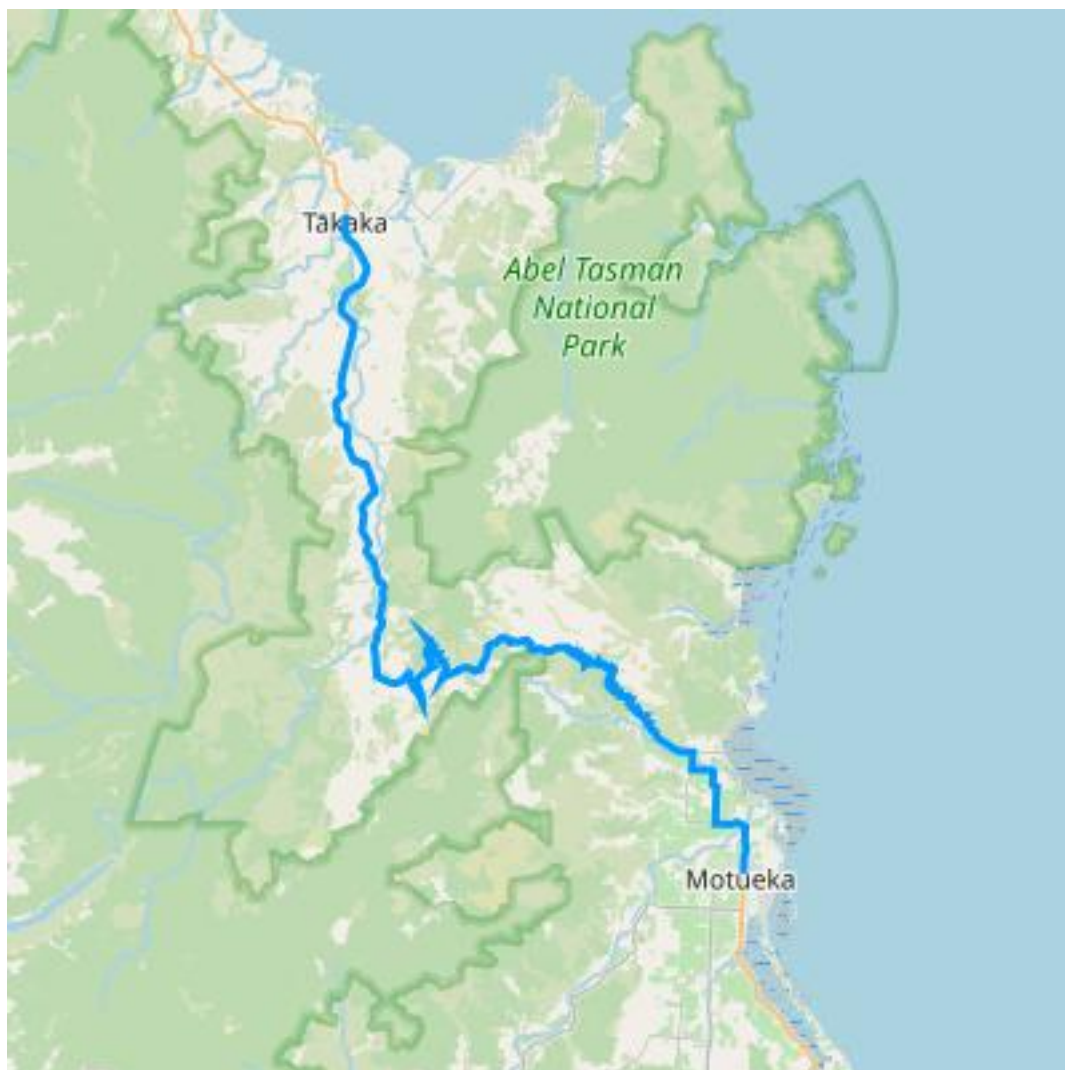
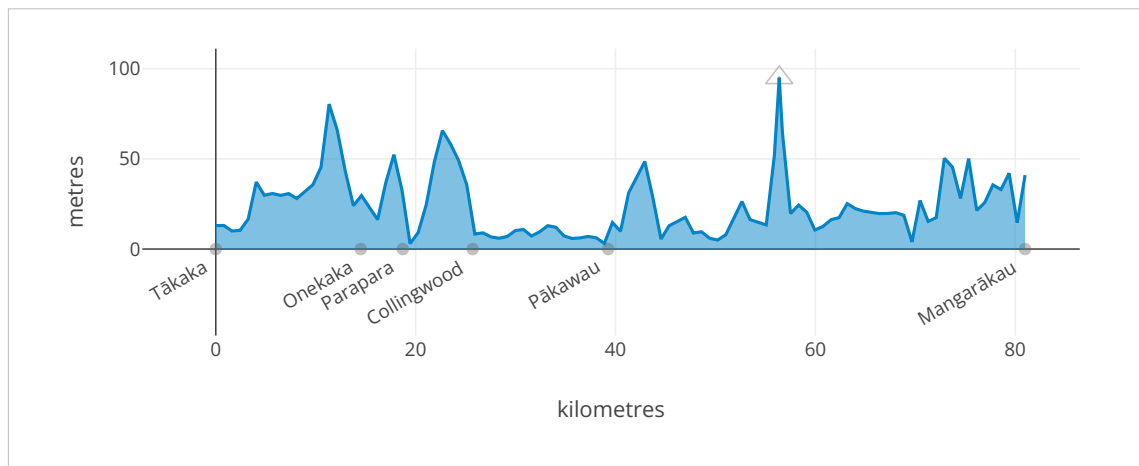


Figure 31.2: Motueka to Tākaka

## Golden Bay

### 32.1 Tākaka to Anatori

Distance: 81 km    Ascent: 558 m    Descent: 530 m



From Tākaka to Collingwood is around 25 km. This is a pleasant undulating road made interesting by the midway presence of a remote folksy coffee bar/tavern that is the haunt of many local musicians in the evenings. Directly opposite is the Shambhala hostel (takes tents), probably one of the most romantic hostels in New Zealand. The hostel looks out on panoramic views of Golden Bay and is notable as an eco-retreat with a wide range of activities. There is no store close by however and the driveway down to the hostel is a long one and a bit of a climb back.

Collingwood is a further 14 km on and the last substantial township at the top western point of the South Island. It sports a store, a pub, a motor camp, tea rooms and a tourist office. There is a good hostel here that provides free fresh bread for breakfast and also has spaces for tents. Few cyclists pedal beyond this point because there is no through road and you have to come back the same way. Sadly, cyclists often miss some real scenic gems because of this.

The top of the South Island beyond Collingwood is a lovely, generally flat coast road (22 km) to Puponga where there is a café and tourist center. Beyond this point is Farewell Spit (guided tours only) a vast, broad sandy point curling out into the Tasman Sea.

In between Collingwood and Puponga are three great motor camps with tent sites close to the beachfront of Golden Bay. There is something magical about camping on the edge of a huge bay with the curving arm of Farewell Spit to your left and the Abel Tasman National Park in the blue distance to your right. At night the stars are sharper and brighter away from the city and the sea laps gently along the sandy foreshore. Take a walk before retiring to your sleeping bag and listen to the waves. This is a rare experience.



Farewell Spit

If you want to explore a fairly remote part of New Zealand few tourists go to, then stock up with supplies at Collingwood and take the inland road left at Seaford (15 km approx from Collingwood). This is the sole, gravel road that leads over to the West Coast and the Whanganui Inlet (10 km approx). Once you reach the inlet, the road splits left and right at a T-junction. The right leads up to the Kaihoko Lakes (10 km approx); the second, longer route, heads left and around the inlet toward the lonely hamlet of Mangarākau to the south (25 km). This is an isolated winding gravel road that crosses several estuaries and touches on New Zealand's early native timber logging days. The frequent stumps of old jetties and the still visible remains of wharf piles in the bays indicate that at one time a good deal of industry occurred here.



Whanganui Inlet

But today, the road is mostly fringed with bush and, except for a few hardy homesteads, is largely empty. Surprisingly, Mangarākau, although it has no store, has a very good coffee bar that also offers breakfast and lunch. And better still, just opposite is a fine hostel (takes tents) converted from what was once the local school. These are great finds in an otherwise isolated place.

Around Mangarākau and the area generally, the landscape is heavy bush with large stands of red rata bordering steep limestone cliffs. To the left of the road is a great swamp and the atmosphere in the district is one of primeval forests. To walk in the evening here is to experience a slumbering landscape of enormous age and silence that is both majestic and, at times, a little eerie.



Beyond Mangarākau, the road continues ruggedly onward for another 20 or so kilometres along the coast and bordering farmland until it peters out at Anatori. You may wish to cycle further and visit the lighthouse at Kahurangi Point. If you do, there is yet another hostel out here. It has basic facilities and no store of course, but this is a 'Walden', a place for those seeking solitude and reflection. A wild and windswept west coast foreshore is close by and there are stretches of empty beach for miles in both directions. Write your novel, your poetry or just relax here, but bring supplies!



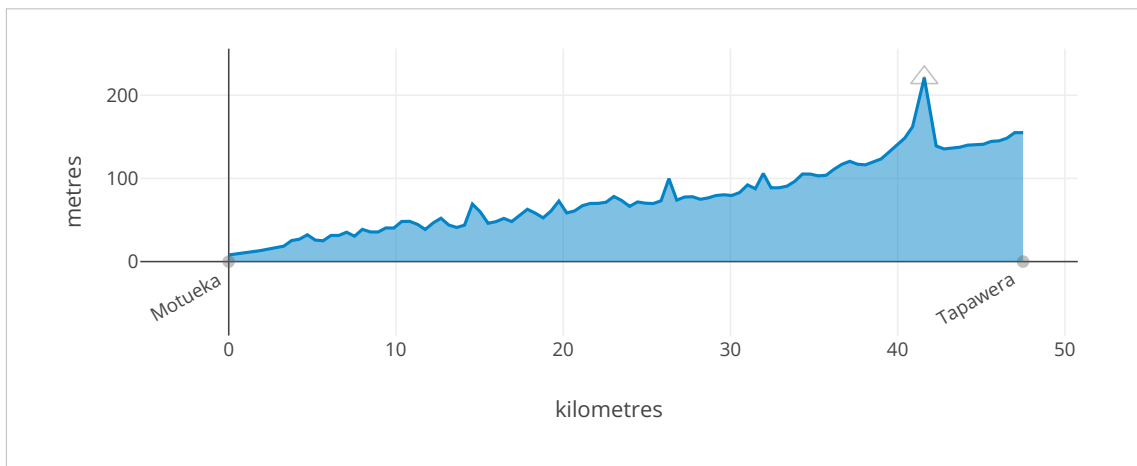
Figure 32.1: Tākaka to Anatori



# Motueka to Murchison

## 33.1 Motueka to Tapawera

Distance: 47 km   Ascent: 263 m   Descent: 116 m



This is one of my personal favourites and on this journey I will describe the route that will take you over the Lewis Pass to Christchurch. Highway 61 leaves Motueka and follows the Motueka river slowly inland. It is very slightly uphill but not so much as you would notice. It's a lovely day's cycle and passes through some remnants of old New Zealand. You will encounter several bridges on your right and if you take the one to Ngātīmoti you will find a pristine example of a well-preserved and clearly well-tended bowling green. A gem of a place in a lovely setting close to the river.

Further on is Stanley Brook, a deserted settlement with just the old school, church and war memorial to remind you of perhaps, more prosperous days. The day winds down to Tapawera, (campground, pub and store). The railway once ran through this town and the old embankments still survive to give us an idea of how important this hamlet once was. The campground still provides a mixed range of crockery, saucepans and cutlery for campers. A rare service these days...and again, the place has the feel of part of an era that is now, sadly, passing away. I was fortunate to catch the Tapawera Christmas Parade one year. The whole community turned out and put together a number of brilliant floats. The enthusiasm, warmth and good humour of local communities in New Zealand is something never to be underestimated.

As a stranger I wandered round and found myself engaged in conversations with large numbers of friendly locals... some of whom had farmed and lived in the area for generations. It was a grand, colourful and very memorable occasion.

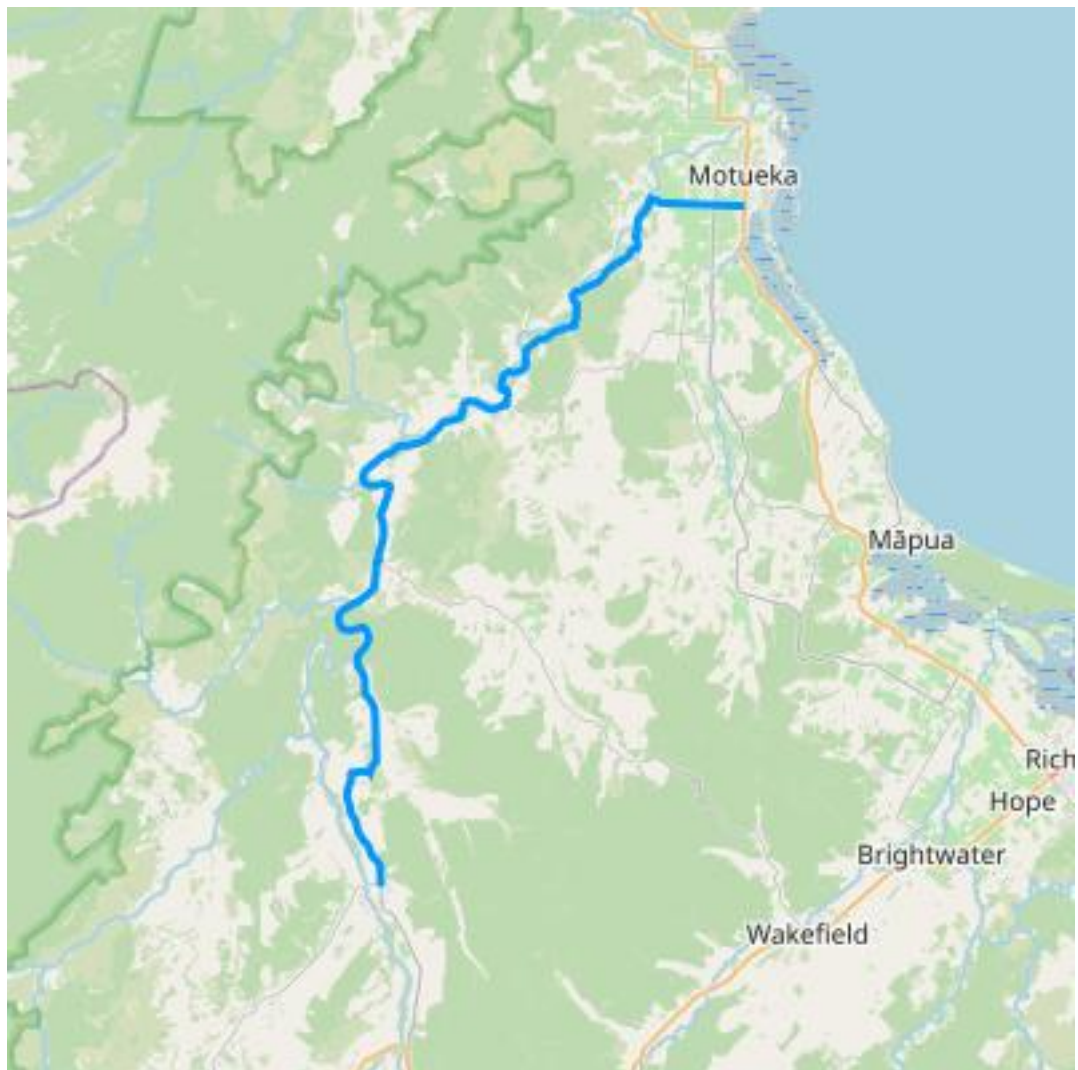
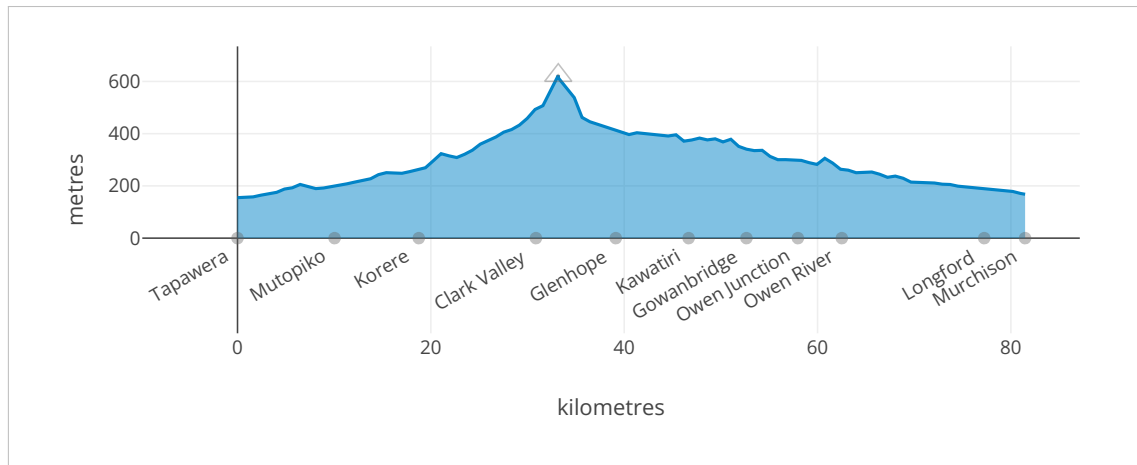


Figure 33.1: Motueka to Tapawera

## 33.2 Tapawera to Murchison

Distance: 81 km    Ascent: 622 m    Descent: 609 m



This can be a taxing day but the scenery is great. Most of the highway (highway 6) follows the course of fast moving rivers through steep ravines of bush and pine forest. Often you come across the remains of an old town, sometimes just an abandoned hall. Korere is still on the map, but little remains but the old Korere Valley Hall with a scattering of ancient tyres and long dead cars and tractors inside.

Remember to take water and supplies as there are almost no stores on this part of your journey. About 35 kilometres out from Tapawera the road climbs fairly steeply over the Kikiwa Hill and the Wairau Saddle to around 600 metres. Then it's all downhill to Murchison. Murchison I have described elsewhere and it's a good place to stop for the night.

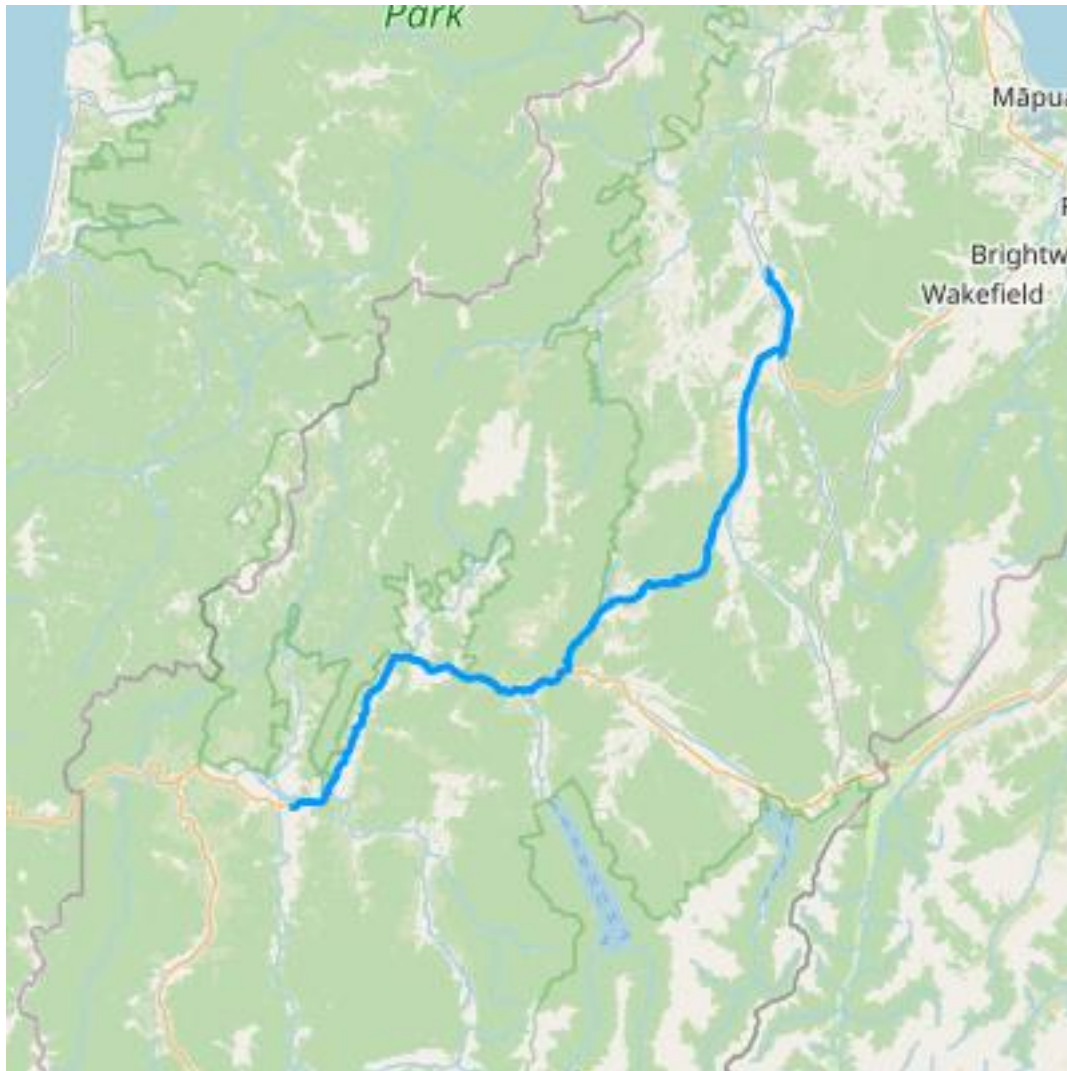
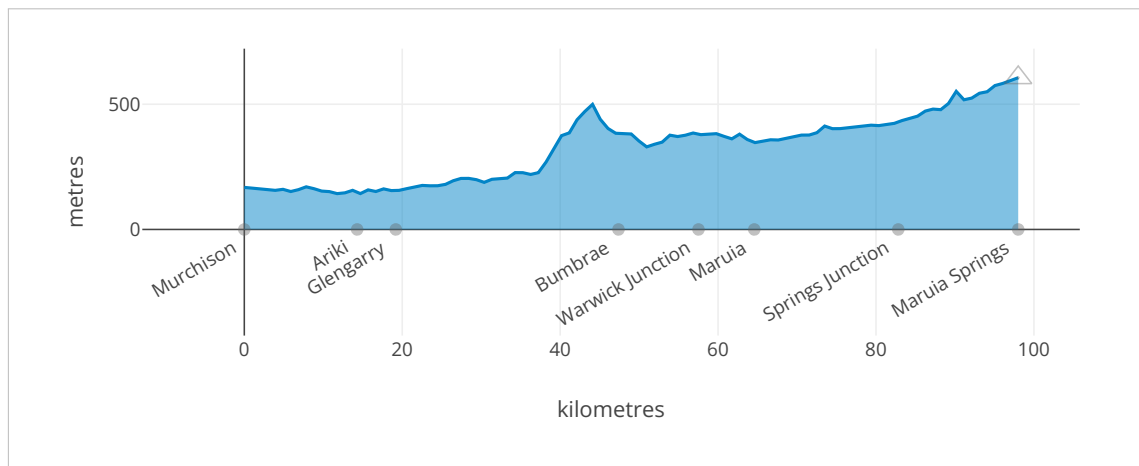


Figure 33.2: Tapawera to Murchison

# Murchison to Christchurch

## 34.1 Murchison to Maruia Springs

Distance: 98 km Ascent: 876 m Descent: 438 m



Ten or fifteen kilometres past Murchison heading south on HW6 you will come to the turn off to Springs Junction along HW65. A nice alternative is to follow the Matakita Valley Rd out of Murchison, rejoining HW65 after 43 km, roughly 17 km shy of Maruia. This mostly gravel back road adds about 3 km distance plus at least 100m of climbing, but it is pleasantly quiet and blissfully free of traffic.

There are no stores on either route, although there is a good café at Maruia (not to be confused with Maruia Springs). Some years ago this used to be a store run by a German couple and their small children. They were an exceptionally friendly family and I was grateful for a cold draught of home-brew they shared with me. I camped under the tree close to the store that evening and was allowed access to a small kitchen and shower in their backpackers. They clearly loved the place but were later deported for an old drugs offence they had failed to disclose when they entered the country from Germany. A sad end to a couple who were devoted to a place they had discovered far from home and who clearly wished to put the past behind them.

Take plenty of water with you. On a hot day you can be using a litre of water every ten kilometres on the steep bits. There are streams if you have a filter

and the odd farmhouse which will likely allow you to fill your water bottles, so no real problems providing you are prepared.

Once you reach Springs Junction (garage and store/tearooms), take a left hand turn and head along SH7. Fifteen or so kilometres past Springs Junction you will come to Maruia Springs. Maruia Springs has a pub but, more importantly, it has hot pools. This is a marvellous place to forego the camp stove for a night and shout yourself a meal. Camping is available on site, but limited to camper vans. The price of a room is a bit steep, but this is a wonderful way to soak off the weary kilometres, and the Japanese style bath house is spacious and relaxing with large windows that look out over the bushy neighbouring hillsides.



The old store at Maruia

If you prefer a cheaper option, there are DOC camps at [Marble Hill](#)<sup>1</sup>, 6.5 km east of Springs Junction, [Deer Valley](#)<sup>2</sup>, 20 km east of Springs Junction, and [Boyle Village](#)<sup>3</sup> over the pass.

If you are lucky, at this point you will start to come across Keas, very common in this area. Keas are colourful, native parrots and have a friendly and mischievous nature. Stories about their unclipping wing mirrors and taking apart tents are mostly exaggerated, but don't underestimate those sharp claws and tough little beaks... This picture shows a couple of Keas taking apart a friend's bike. The German cyclist in question wandered off to take photos and, looking back, wondered why a group of other tourists had gathered around her bike. She soon found out why!



Making a few adjustments

<sup>1</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/lewis-pass-scenic-reserve/things-to-do/campsites/marble-hill-campsite/>

<sup>2</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/lewis-pass-scenic-reserve/things-to-do/campsites/deer-valley-campsite/>

<sup>3</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/canterbury/places/st-james-conservation-area/things-to-do/campsites/boyle-campsite/>



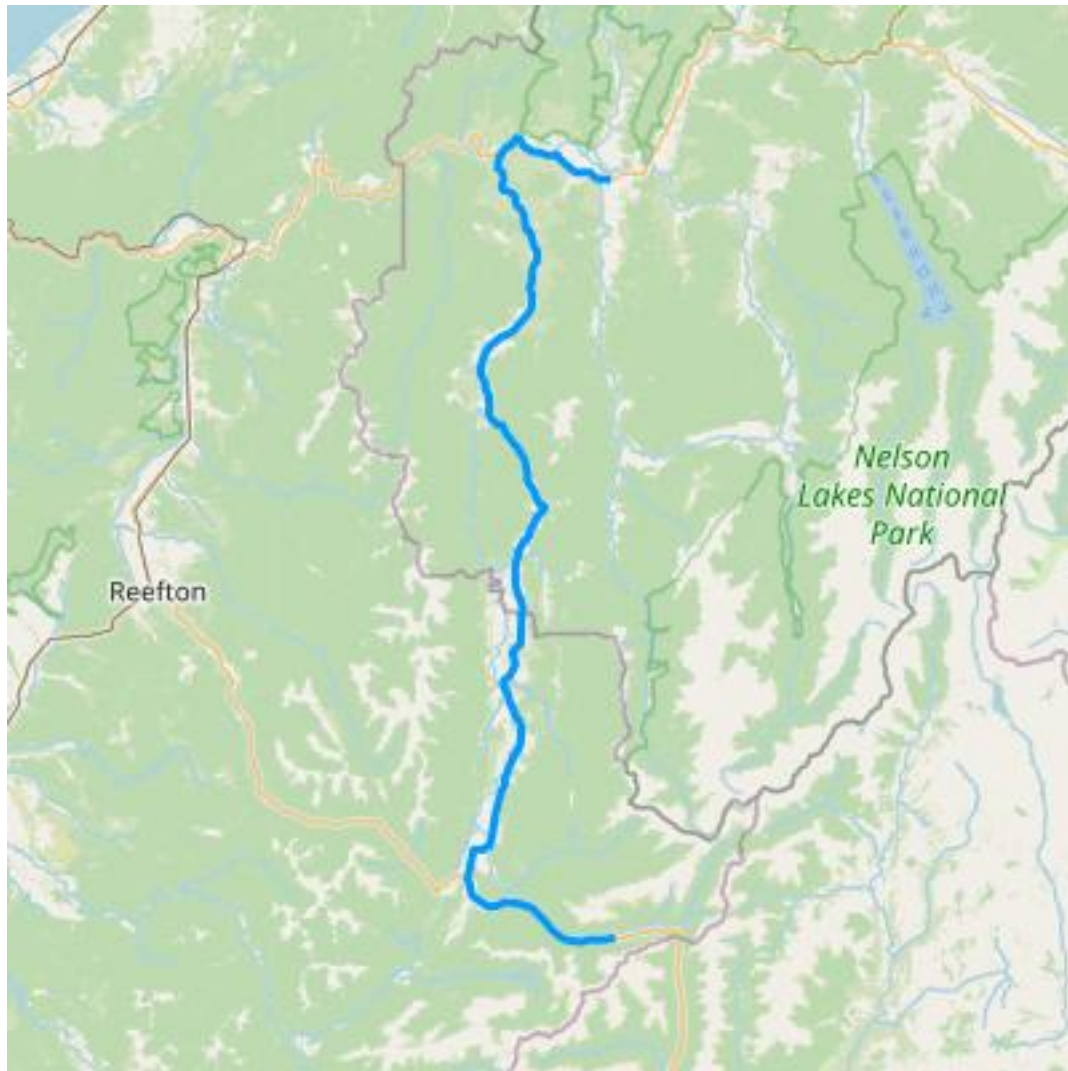
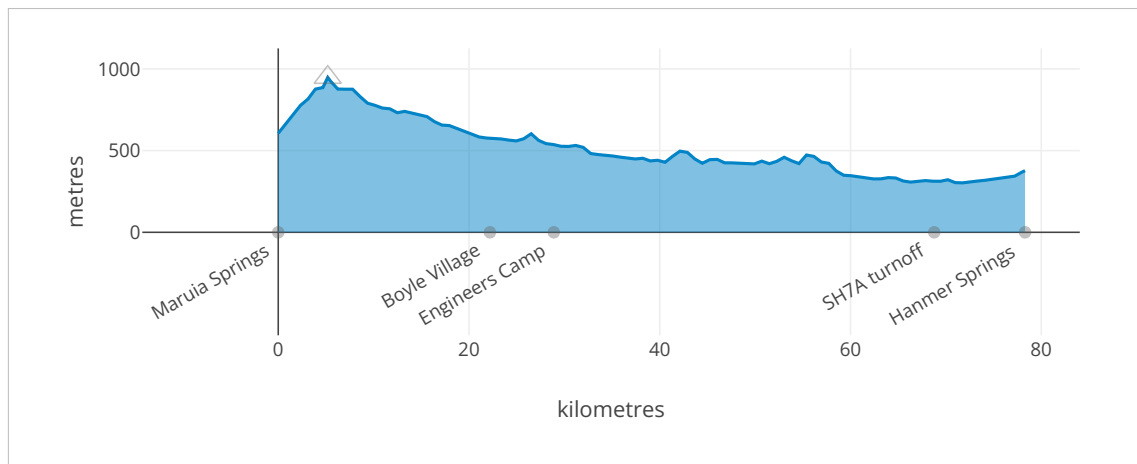


Figure 34.1: Murchison to Maruia Springs

## 34.2 Maruia Springs to Hanmer Springs

Distance: 78 km   Ascent: 863 m   Descent: 1092 m



After leaving Maruia Springs you are immediately faced with the steepest part of your trip, the Lewis Pass. However, you are likely fresh and although the road rises to over 900 metres, you have already climbed a considerable distance the day before. A further 300 metres over five kilometres will take you over and then it's a winding downhill stretch all the way to Hanmer Springs (ten kilometres off state highway 7 at Lochiel). Here are further hot pools and most of the facilities you require including a bike shop.



Lewis Pass Summit

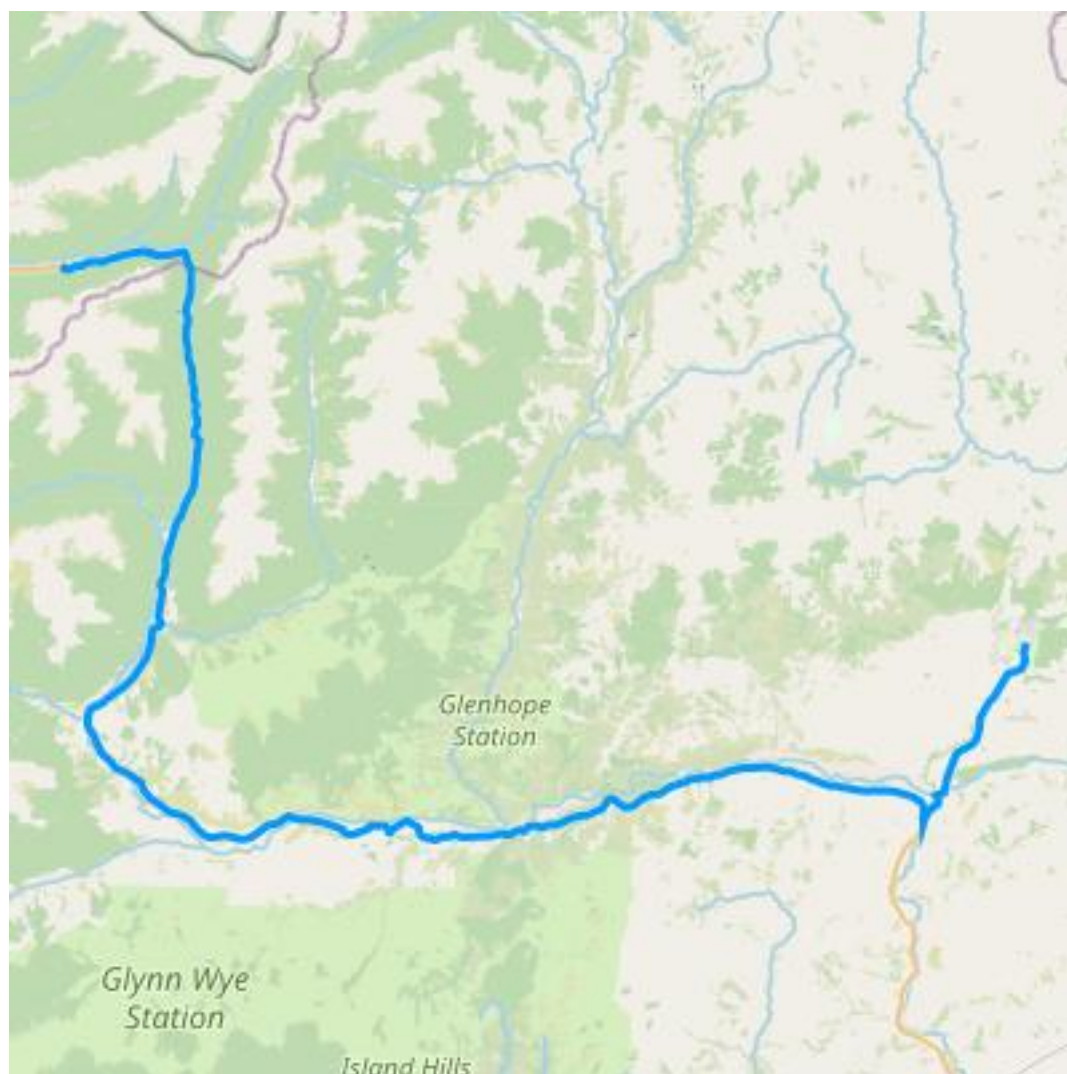
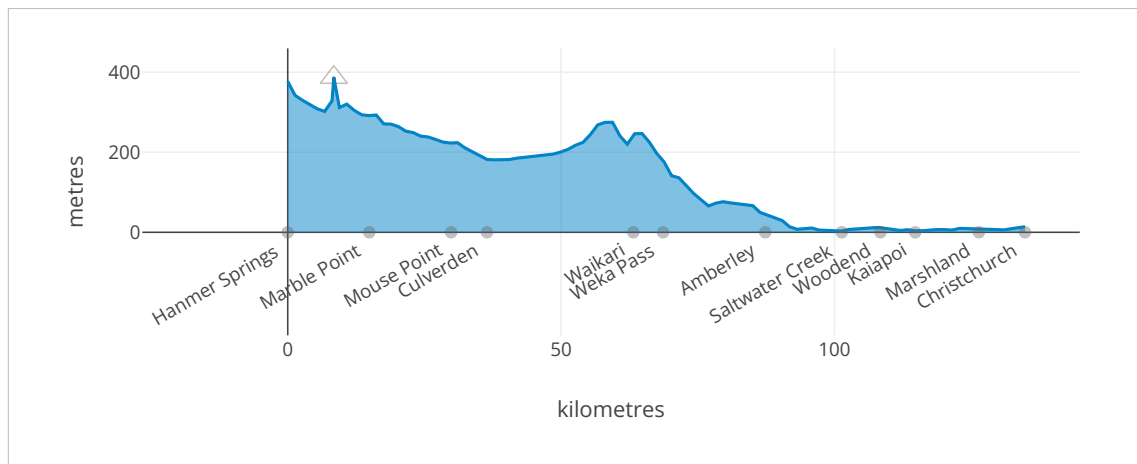


Figure 34.2: Maruia Springs to Hanmer Springs

### 34.3 Hanmer Springs to Christchurch

Distance: 135 km   Ascent: 247 m   Descent: 610 m



If you get the wind behind you this is an easy day's cycle through to Christchurch. It is mostly downhill or flat and winds down through the Hurunui Hills to the junction at Waipara where you turn right and head down state highway 1 to Christchurch. Take a close look at the map here. You can avoid the main road by turning inland, once you cross the Waipara river, and take the inland route known as state highway 72 through Balcairn, Sefton and Rangiora. Whichever way you turn it's a beautiful, generally even ride across the Canterbury Plains with the snow capped Southern Alps on your right all the way.

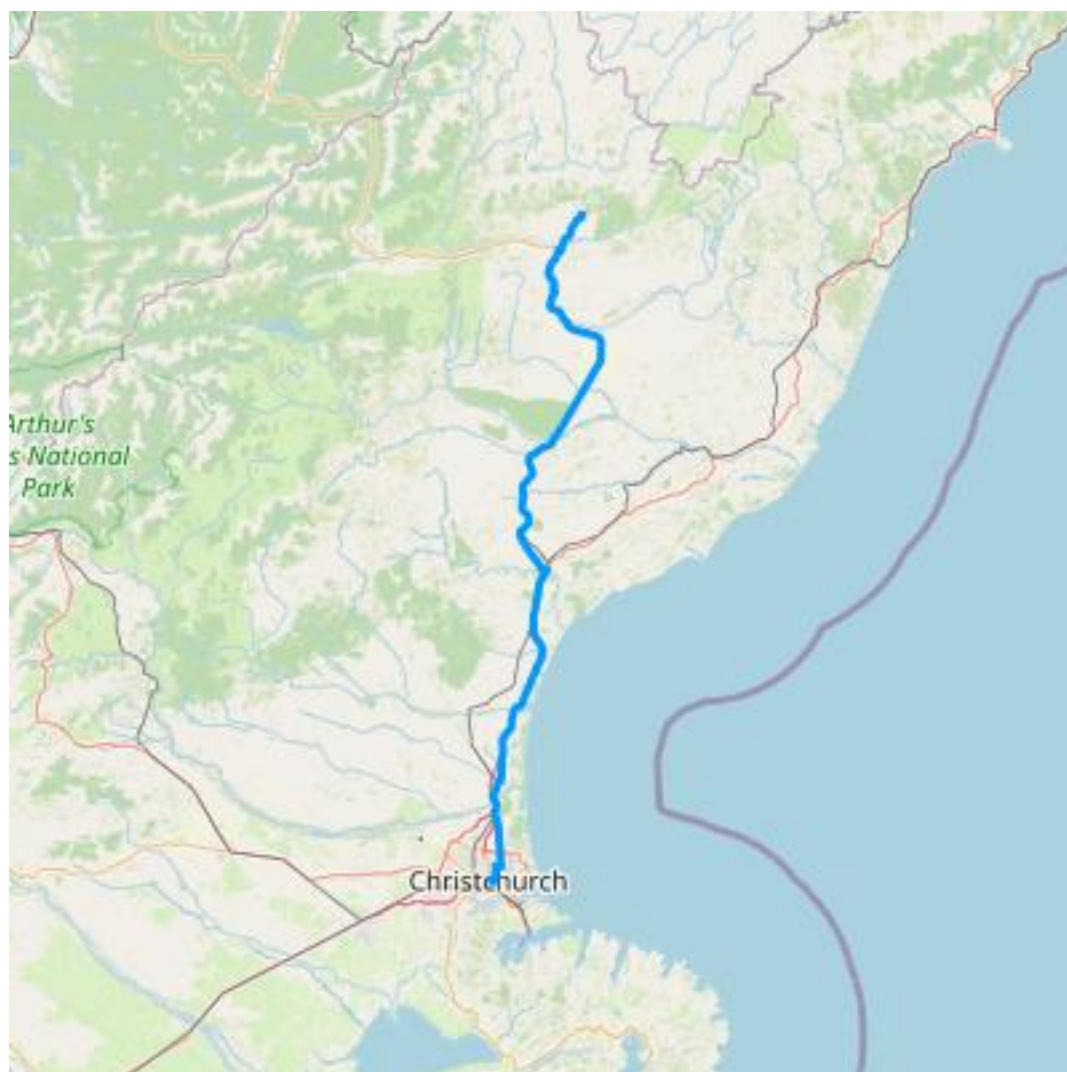
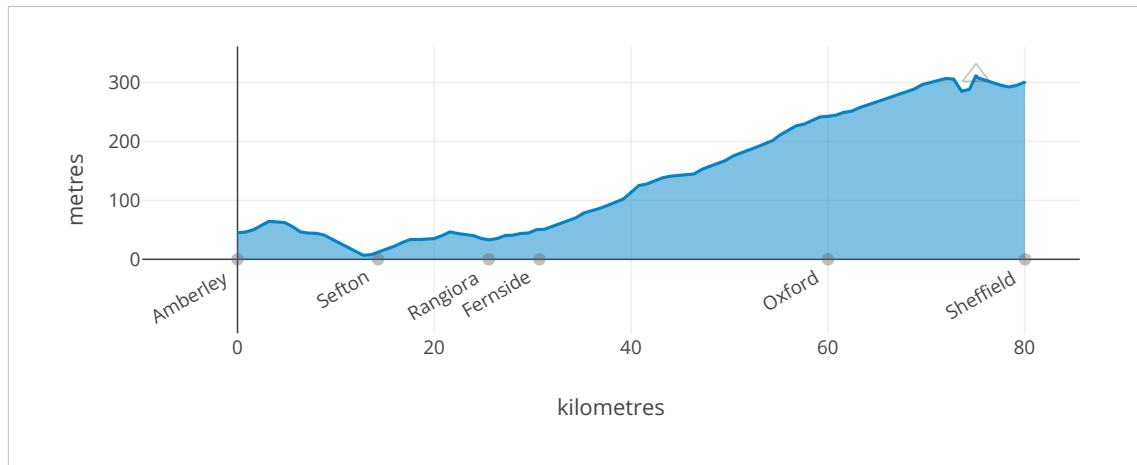


Figure 34.3: Hanmer Springs to Christchurch

## 34.4 Amberley to Sheffield via Route 72

Distance: 80 km   Ascent: 369 m   Descent: 112 m



Route 72 is a great alternative to the main highway, traversing the Canterbury Plains along straight-as-a-die roads and passing through quiet country towns with plenty of services and accommodation options. The road rises, but not perceptibly. And the scenery, though unwaveringly pastoral, is pleasant.

By taking this route you can avoid Christchurch altogether, continuing south to [Geraldine](#) or up into the alps over [Arthur's Pass](#).

You may also consider turning off before Rangiora to take the even-further-inland route through Ashley Gorge (campground), rejoining Route 72 at Oxford. At just 80 km this route is practically the same distance as Route 72 proper, but with the added bonus of being lightly trafficked.



Vanishing point on Route  
72



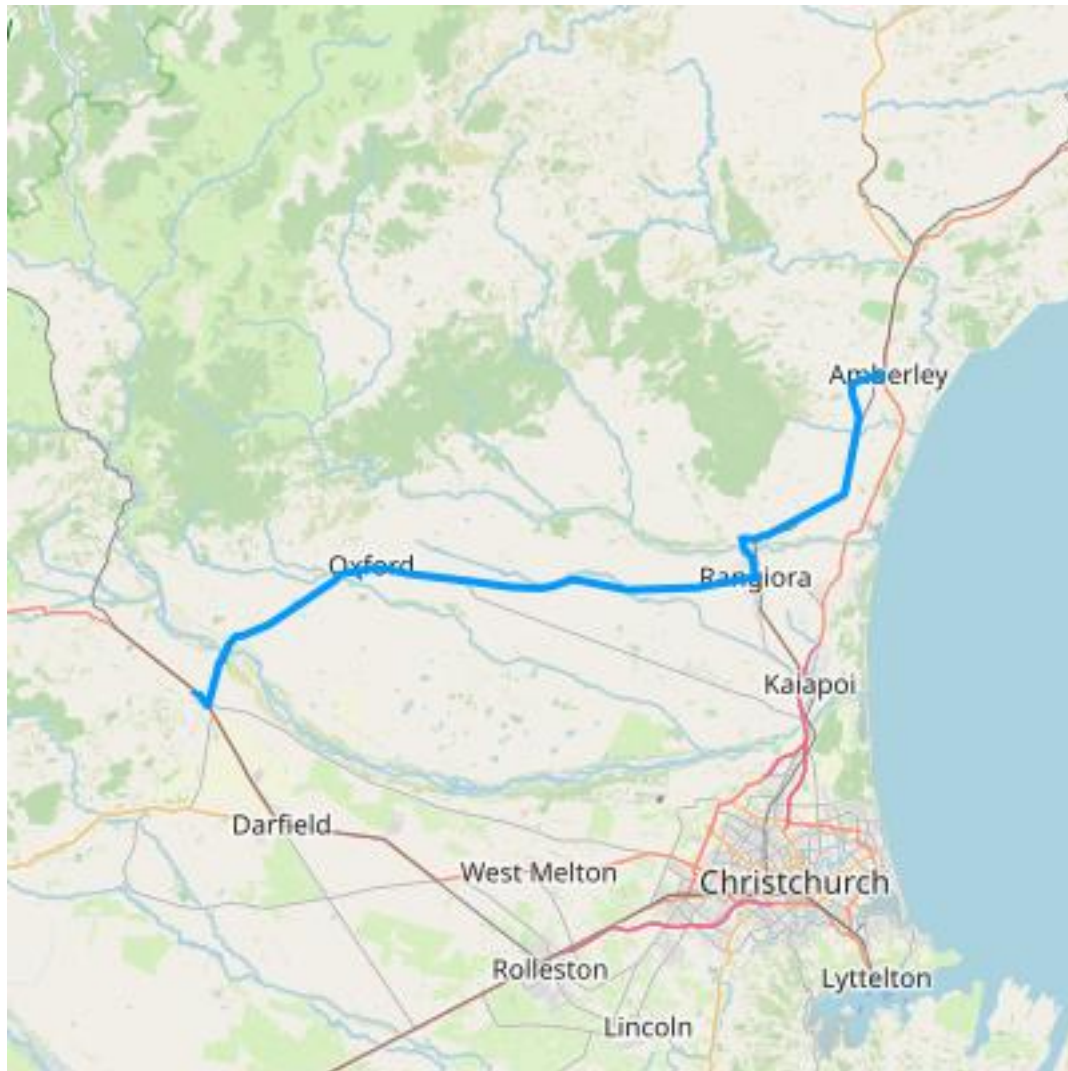
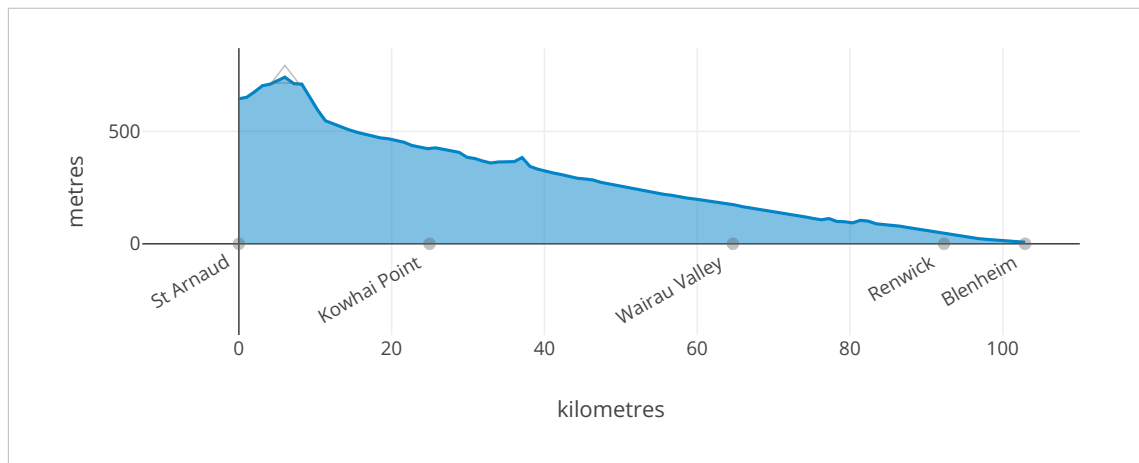


Figure 34.4: Amberley to Sheffield via Route 72

## St Arnaud to Blenheim

Distance: 103 km   Ascent: 152 m   Descent: 790 m



If you do not wish to travel the Rainbow Road, try this route east to Blenheim. It's a quiet, rolling day that rises briefly for a few kilometres out of St Arnaud and then strolls slightly downhill all the way to Blenheim. It's a good road with the wind behind you and the scenery is quiet and pastoral and there are a few interesting bridges and shingle streams. You can cover some long kilometres very quickly on this road and in good conditions you can make up to 25-26 kilometres an hour depending on your legs.

There are no stores until the pub at Wairau Valley, although there is a basic DOC camp at Kowhai Point (toilet and water tap, but water must be boiled). Stop at Renwick, 10 km this side of Blenheim and immerse yourself in the wine growing area of Marlborough. Enjoy yourself!

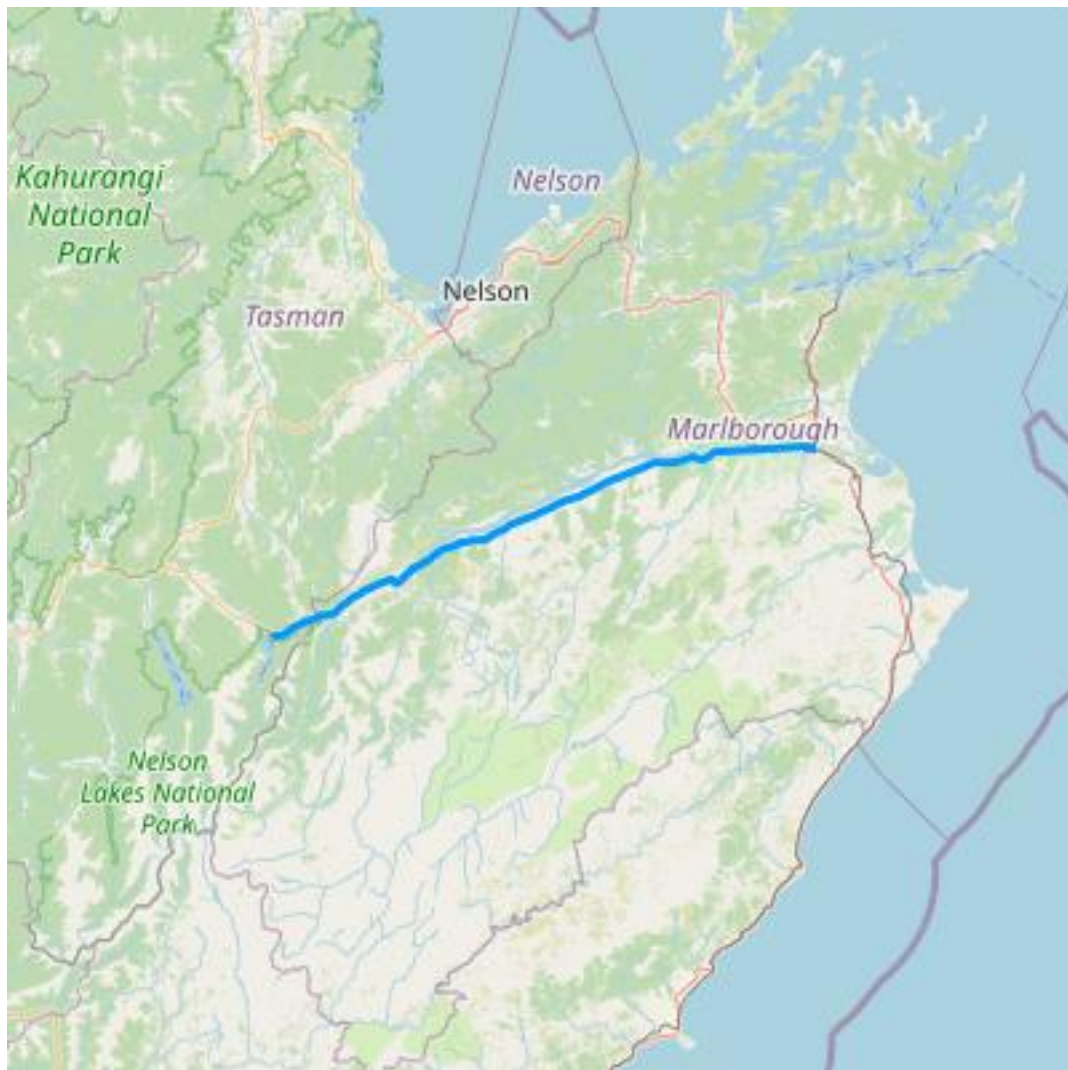
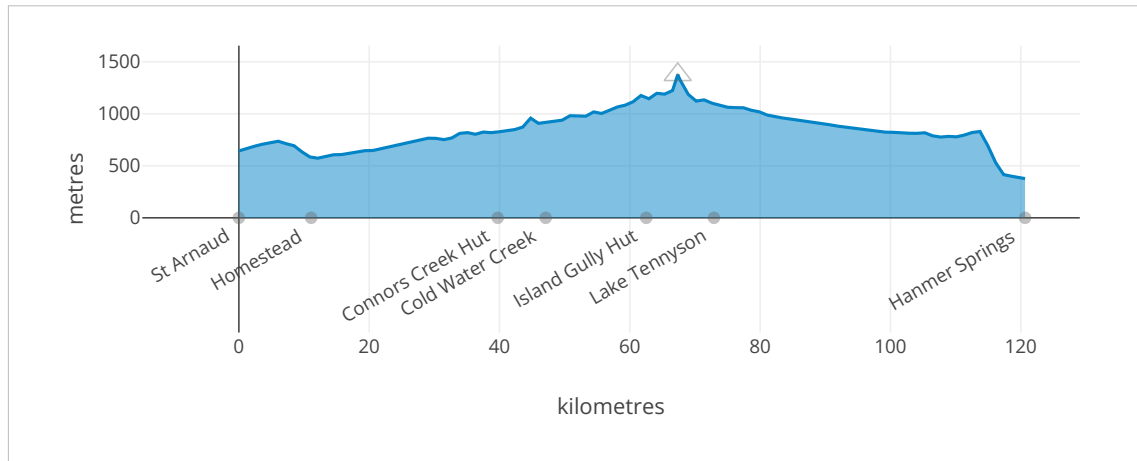


Figure 35.1: St Arnaud to Blenheim

## St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs

Distance: 121 km   Ascent: 1447 m   Descent: 1713 m



A long, beautiful, isolated gravel road through stunning semi-alpine country, clear rivers, bluffs and flat valleys. One to two days. This is one of New Zealand's great rides but empty of any stores or supplies. Take plenty of water and food and you will thoroughly enjoy this adventure.

Take State Highway 7 out of St Arnaud and follow the road to the Rainbow Ski field turn off on your right. The road dips and curves through a bush valley down to a river that runs along to your left. Don't head up to the ski field by mistake, but keep the river to your left hand side and follow it along a reasonably flat, metalled road with the occasional pylon on your right.

This is a rough track, but you can cover it reasonably well with a standard touring bike. Keep your tyres pumped up hard to prevent notorious 'snake bite' punctures as the river stones on the track frequently shatter into sharp edges. There are several places to camp along the way, most notably Cold-water Stream. You may be required to pay a nominal toll at the old coach house at the beginning of the track. Toward the end of the Rainbow Road the landscape opens up to reveal your first glimpse of the great Canterbury Plains. From here it is all downhill to Hanmer Springs. Take a rest here for a while, there are a number of hot springs in the area and a welcome place to bathe and soak any aching muscles.

Hanmer has campgrounds, backpackers, supermarkets, coffee bars, restau-

rants and a bike shop. It's a good place to relax and refresh yourself before tackling the longer, but equally stunning, Molesworth Road north to Seddon.

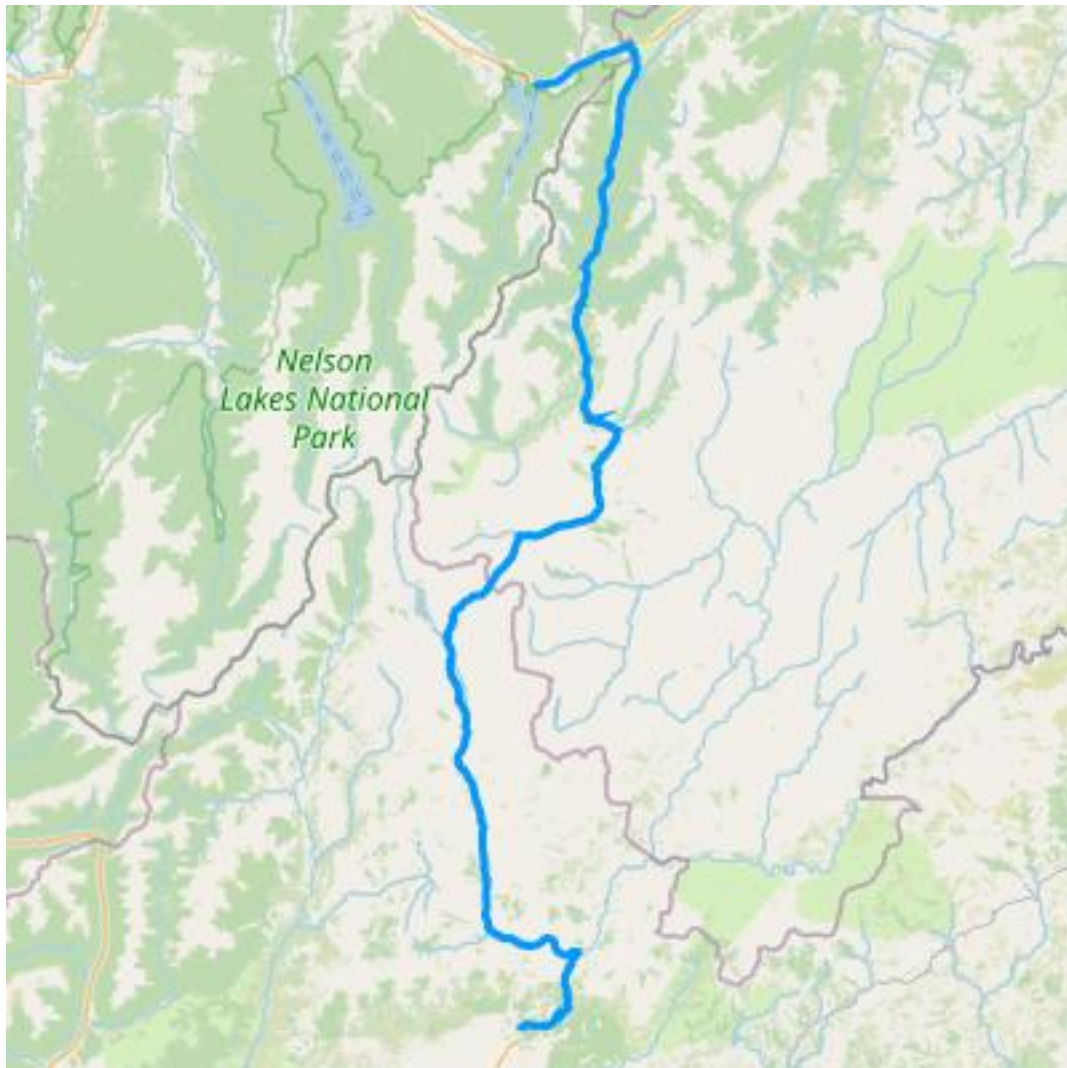
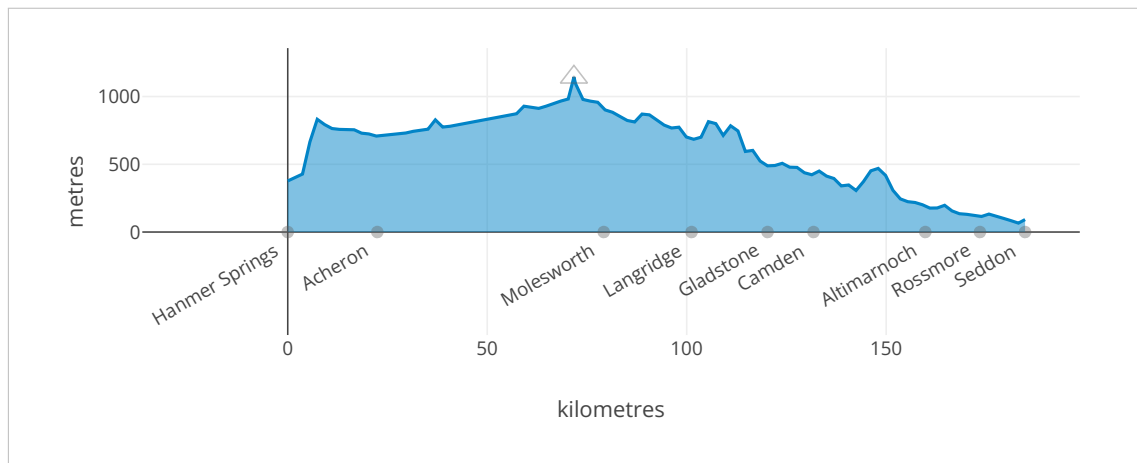


Figure 36.1: St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs

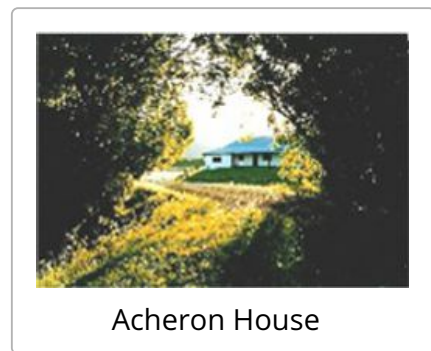


# Molesworth Road

Distance: 185 km   Ascent: 2001 m   Descent: 2286 m



This road is as rugged as the [Rainbow Road](#) and just as beautiful. However, it is a good deal longer and you will need adequate supplies to provide you for a good three days. The road follows an old coaching road once serviced by two accommodation houses. The boarding houses, Acheron and Molesworth, have been restored but are not lived in.



Acheron House

The first stage out of Hanmer is a long climb to the top of Jack's Pass and down into the valley to your first stop at the Acheron Accommodation House (about 25 km) where there is a basic DOC camp. This can be a fairly short day and consequently many riders decide to push on through to Molesworth. Consider lingering a while at Acheron though; it's a lovely place, and an early start the next morning leaves you plenty of time for a leisurely lunch and perhaps a swim in the Awatere River.

The following day is a good distance (60 km) over saddles and plains that generally follow the Awatere River. The road is at its roughest between Acheron and Molesworth and much of it is quite deeply corrugated. The scenery, though, is breathtaking. At Molesworth Accommodation House there is a basic DOC camp with water and a toilet. All water should be boiled however.



Across from the camp runs the Molesworth Stream, which boasts a perfectly formed plunge-pool (just upstream from the DOC Ranger's hut). This can make for a refreshing end to a long, hot day in the sun.

The following day is equally lovely but equally strenuous. The road rises and dips over 80 kilometres of gravel road before settling into a long, tarsealed straight toward the main highway (a further 20 km away). One option to break up this last stretch is to camp the night at Hodder Suspension Bridge (just before Camden). There is longdrop by the bridge; ask locally and the land-owner may let you set up tent for the night.

Once you reach the main highway, you can turn left to Blenheim (a main town, approx 23 km) or right to Seddon (4 km, campground, store, pub, backpackers). The Molesworth Road is well worth doing. It is rugged and taxing, yet it remains one of those great journeys that you exhilarate in once it's completed. Beautiful, lonely and memorable.

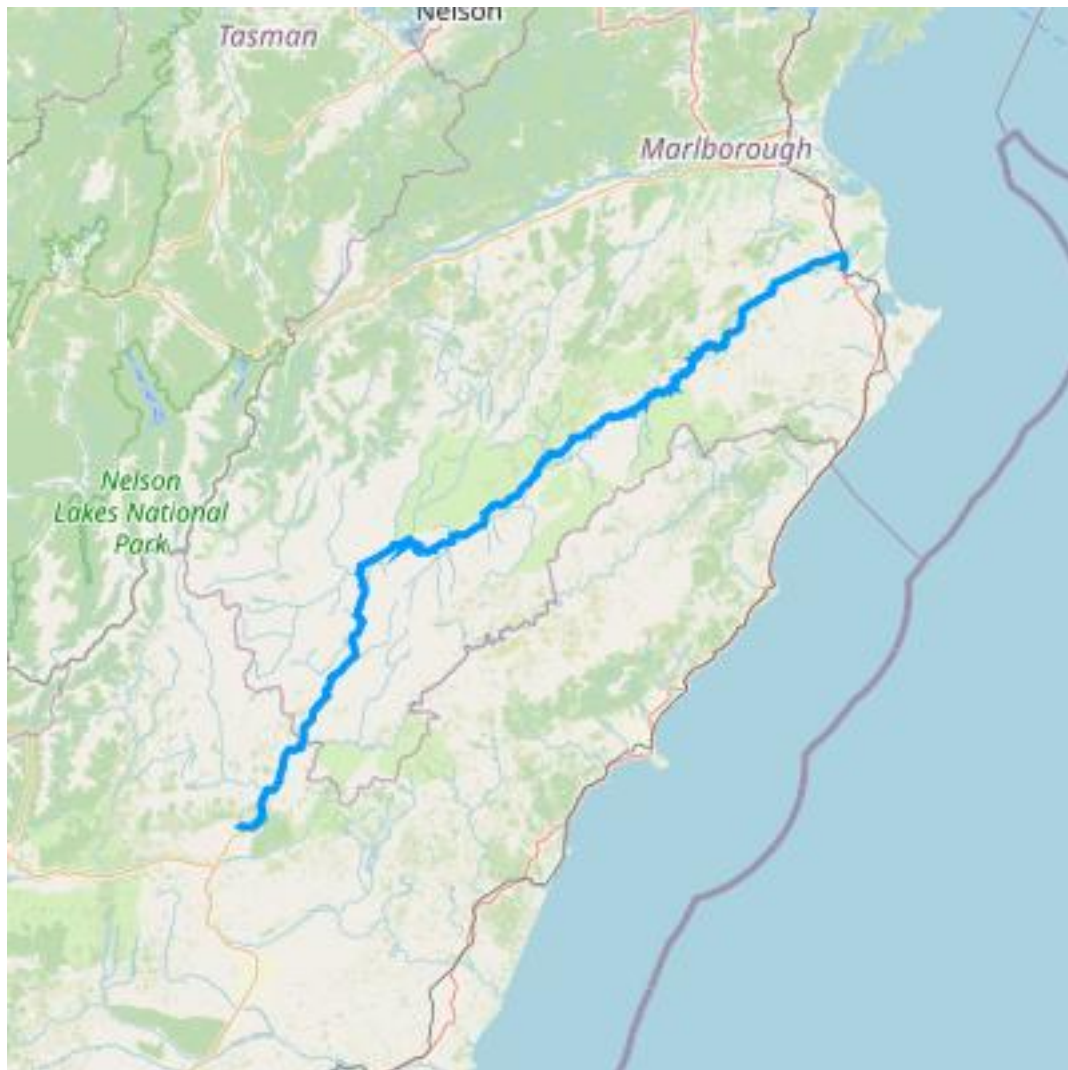


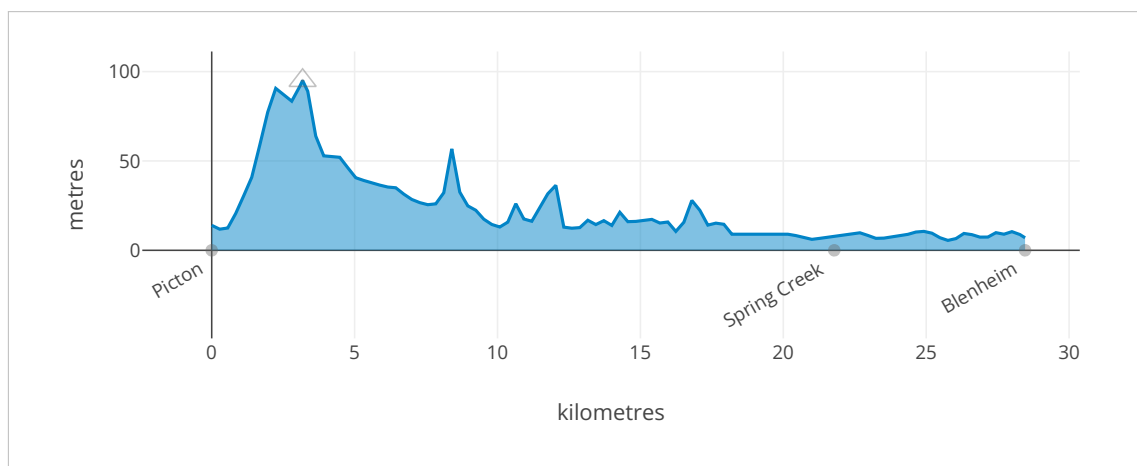
Figure 37.1: Molesworth Road

## Picton to Kaikōura

This is one of the loveliest cycle rides in the country. It begins by travelling through bush and valley views and ends in a coast road that offers gorgeous sea views and seal colonies. It is one of the few places in the world where you can see stunning summer seascapes and snow peaked mountains all in one vista.

### 38.1 Picton to Blenheim

Distance: 28 km   Ascent: 105 m   Descent: 112 m



If you head to Blenheim, you will travel down the main road south, (unless you take the Port Underwood road which is empty of traffic but winds up and down and in and out of a number of small, picturesque bays for fifty odd kilometres, pretty, but no shops and a single backpackers at Oyster Bay), Blenheim is only thirty odd kilometres from Picton by main road, but I recommend continuing on to Renwick, about 10 km west of Blenheim. It's a great spot in the middle of the scenic wine growing area and has access to a wonderful eatery called The Mudhouse Café.



Vineyards, Blenheim

There is an English style pub handy which brews its own beers... nice. Don't attempt to cycle up the Wairau valley to [St Arnaud](#) (90 km, no shops) to the west coast unless you have a strong south easterly behind you. Generally the wind blows down the valley from the North West and it is very slightly uphill. A good option only for those who love a challenge.

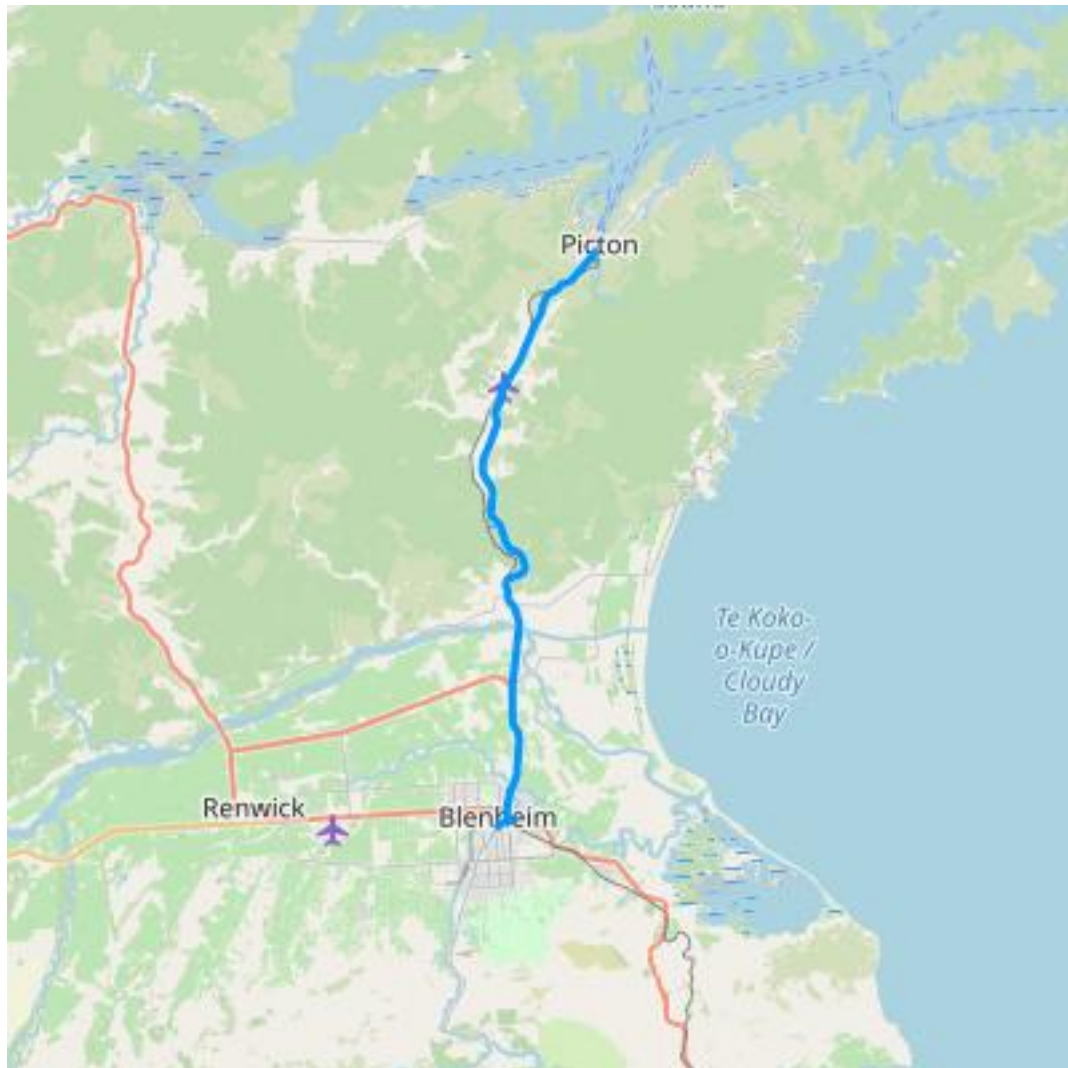
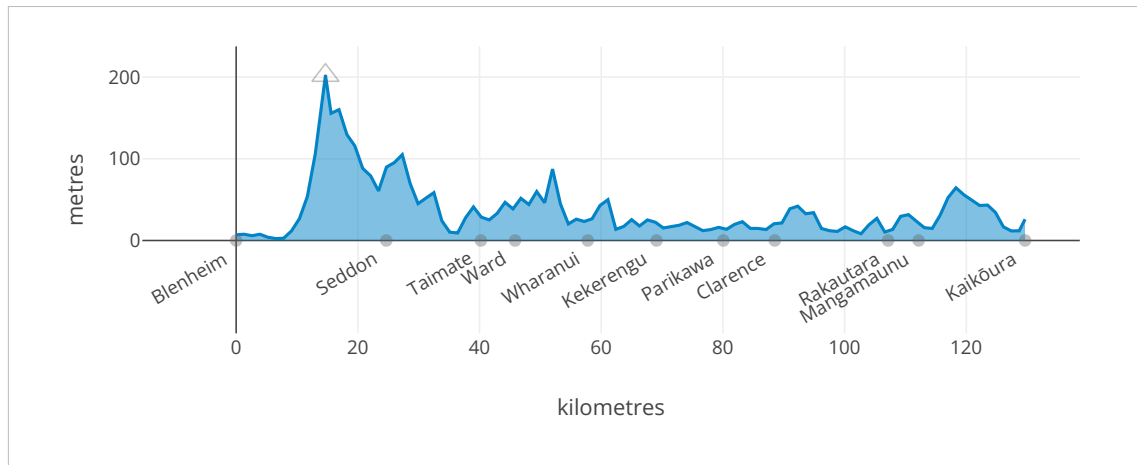


Figure 38.1: Picton to Blenheim

## 38.2 Blenheim to Kaikōura

Distance: 130 km   Ascent: 702 m   Descent: 683 m



The trip to Kaikōura can be completed in a day from Blenheim, but this is often a bit of a stretch for those who like meandering. Take a moment to have a break at The Store in Kekerengu (approx. 24 km from Ward). The Store has great food and very good coffee and a clear and stunning view over the Pacific. Ask locally and you may be allowed to camp among the pine trees to the north and the township close to the sea. The beach is notable for its long foreshore of flat, circular sea stones in grey, black and white.

Be wary of seals! They are easy to photograph and frequently appear to be posing for you. But in late December and January they come ashore to breed and the Hooker Sea Lion is particularly unpleasant if approached lightly.

Although this ride follows a relatively busy highway, the seaward side of the road generally has good visibility and an adequate margin. But riding the opposite direction from Kaikōura to Blenheim is a different story altogether. Sharp rises from the road create many blind corners and this, in combination with the traffic density, can make for an unpleasant experience. Avoid!

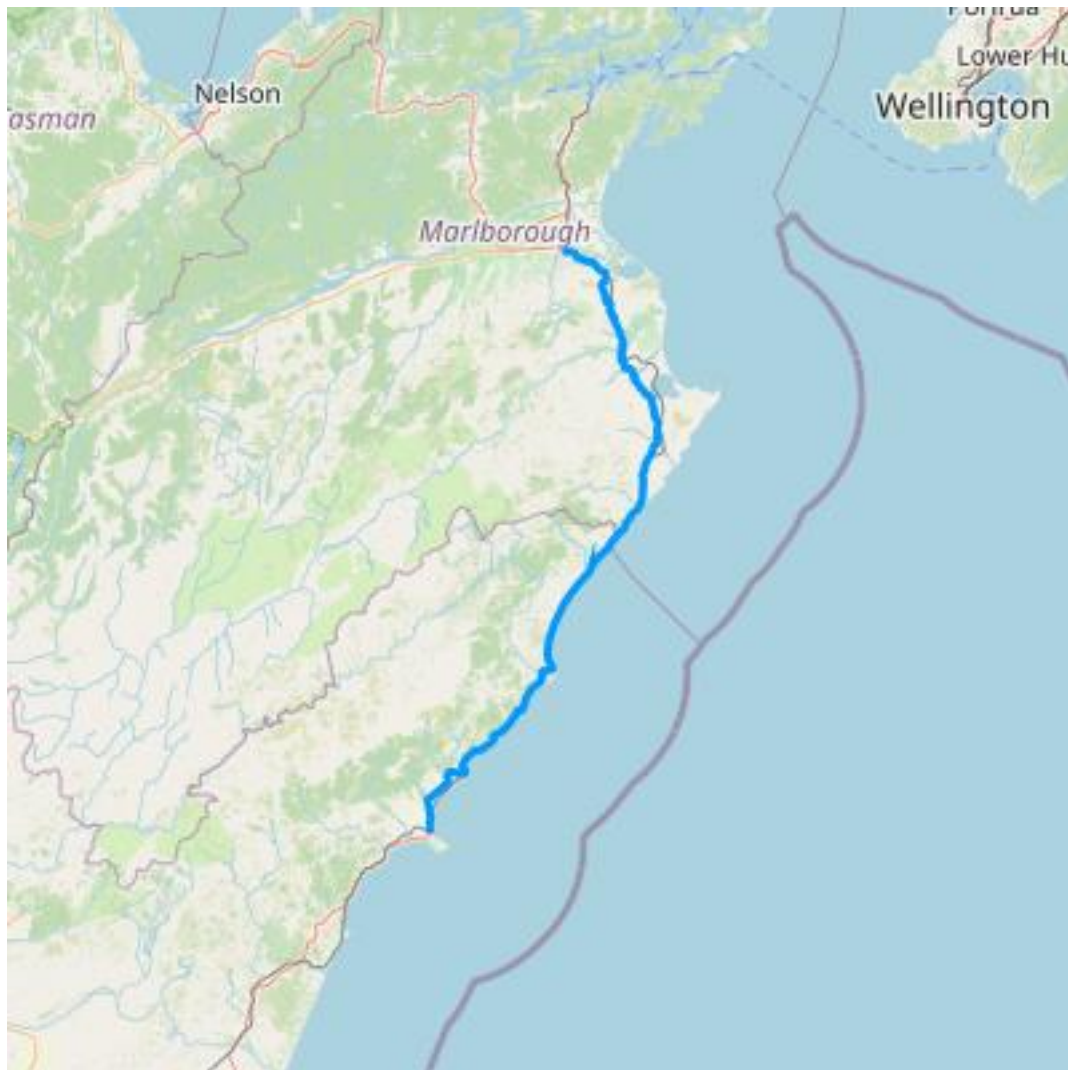


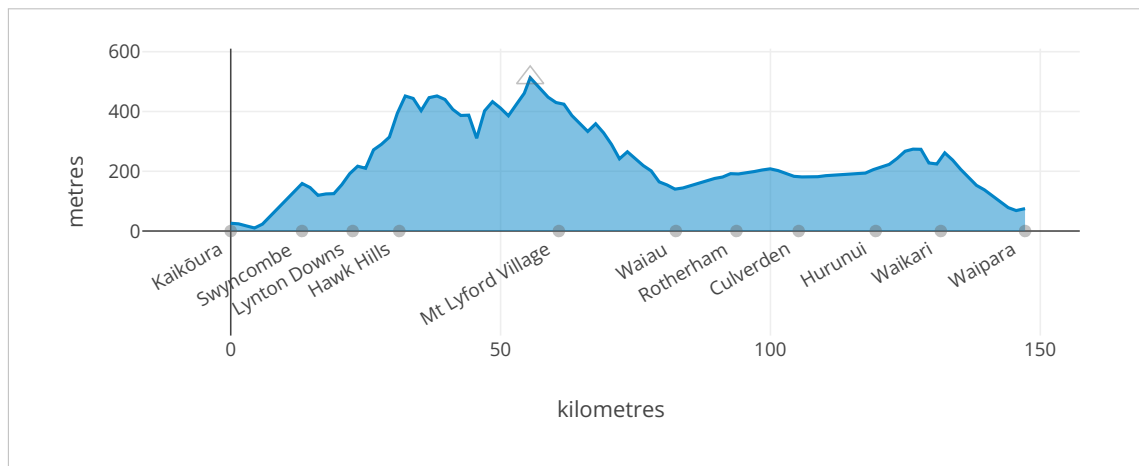
Figure 38.2: Blenheim to Kaikōura



# Kaikōura to Christchurch

## 39.1 Kaikōura to Waipara via the Inland Road

Distance: 147 km    Ascent: 1191 m    Descent: 1142 m



This is an excellent alternative to the main road south. It travels through a largely empty highway along the alpine foothills through valleys and across rivers. Its relative isolation and lack of traffic makes it a very attractive route. Yes, it is slightly hillier and longer; it misses the lovely sea road from Kaikōura to Goose Bay and the views over the Canterbury Plains as you head to Cheviot; and on leaving Kaikōura you will not see a store or pub or accommodation before Mt. Lyford. But it is beautiful and mercifully free from highway traffic.



On the Inland Road

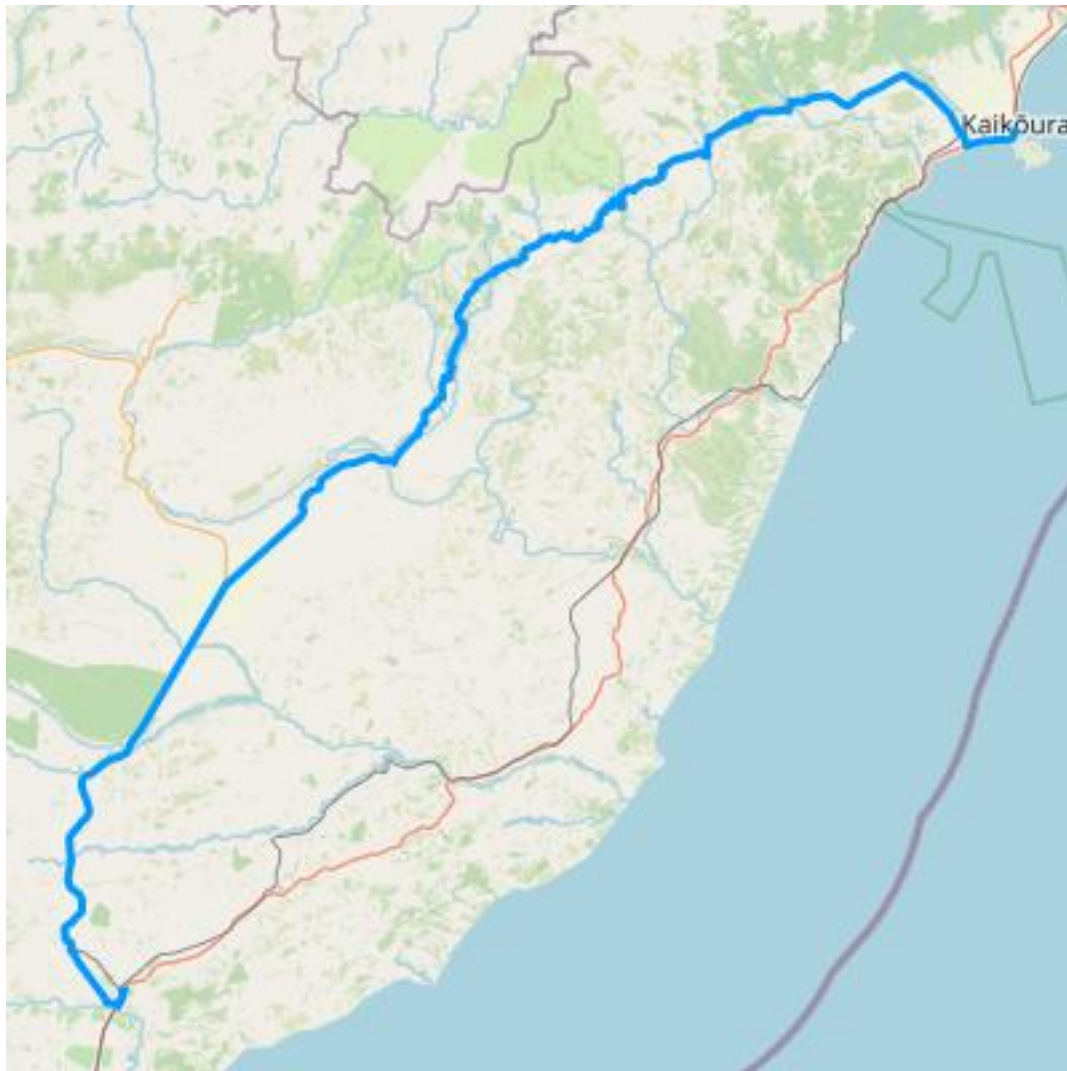
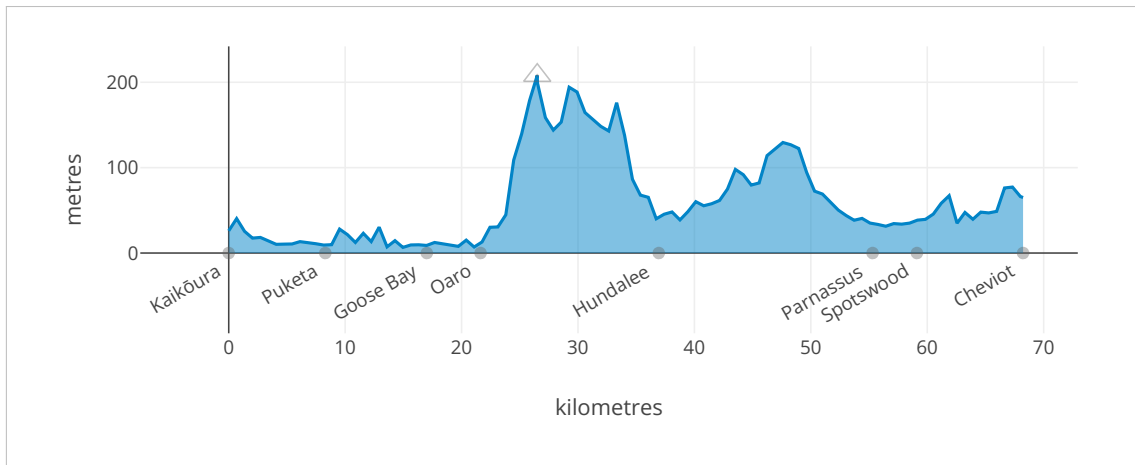


Figure 39.1: Kaikōura to Waipara via the Inland Road

## 39.2 Kaikōura to Cheviot

Distance: 68 km   Ascent: 614 m   Descent: 575 m



**Alert:** State Highway 1 south of Kaikōura is heavily trafficked, often narrow and has many blind corners. Keep yourself highly visible and ride defensively!

Kaikōura is a small, lively town with a number of good cafés, restaurants, campgrounds, Youth Hostel and backpackers. The setting is magnificent with great mountains in the background and a startlingly blue/green seafront. Kaikōura has an opportunity to swim with the dolphins or book a whale watching trip.

Once you leave Kaikōura heading south, you will enjoy a flat, rocky coastline for 20 km until the road curves inland and up the Hunderlees, a range of hills that rise and fall for forty or so kilometres before rolling into Cheviot. Much of the road is broad and sweeping with great views of the landscape and a number of small and dying towns between.

Cheviot is a good place to stay. It is a small, pleasant service town with a supermarket for supplies and a friendly camping ground. Alternately, you might like to stay at Gore Bay, approximately eight or so kilometres east on the coast.

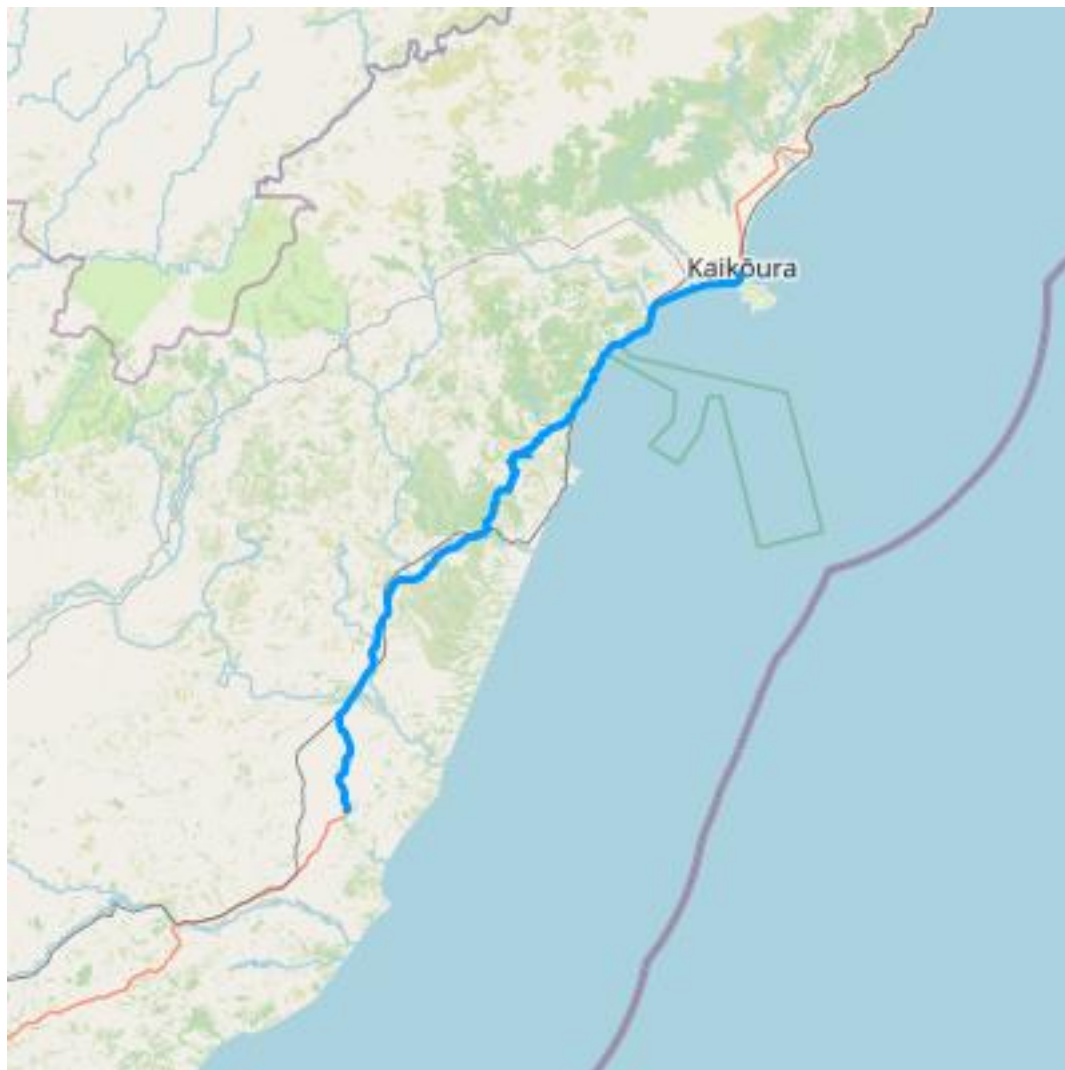
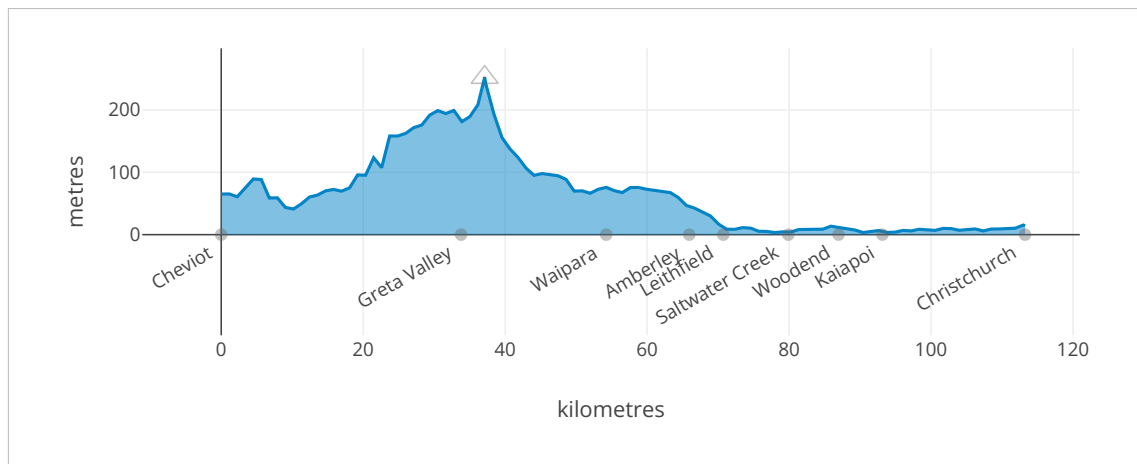


Figure 39.2: Kaikōura to Cheviot

### 39.3 Cheviot to Christchurch

Distance: 113 km   Ascent: 310 m   Descent: 361 m



From Cheviot begins more rolling hills (38 Km or so) followed by a downhill run of around 76 Km into Christchurch. (There is a campground, store and pub at Greta Valley, approximately 32 kilometres out from Cheviot, a pretty place). Although a main road, the cycling is generally relaxed and the fields, plains and mountains provide broad and picturesque views. There are a number of longer, quieter side routes open to you. Try the inland state highway 72 (check your map for this). Highway 72 is a beautiful, quiet and welcome change to the usual main south road (turn inland at Amberley and you can miss Christchurch altogether). By now you will have experienced some of the joys of South island cycling.

The long bridges that cross rivers coming from the Alps run swiftly down over light grey river stones to the sea. Bridges of course are notorious places for cyclists (few drivers appreciate either your slower pace or lack of space). Nonetheless, these broad, clear, blue and green alpine waterways are magnificent.

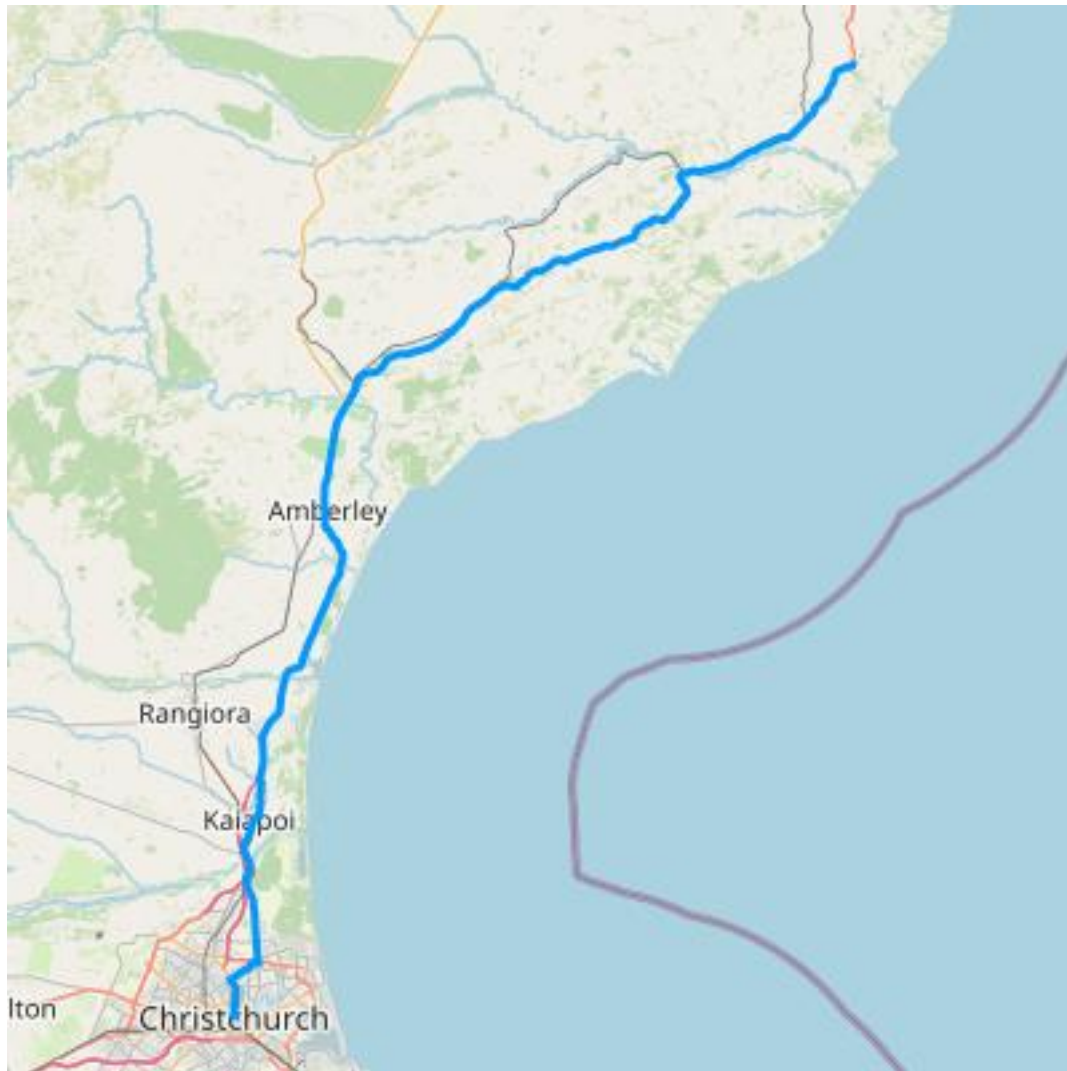


Figure 39.3: Cheviot to Christchurch



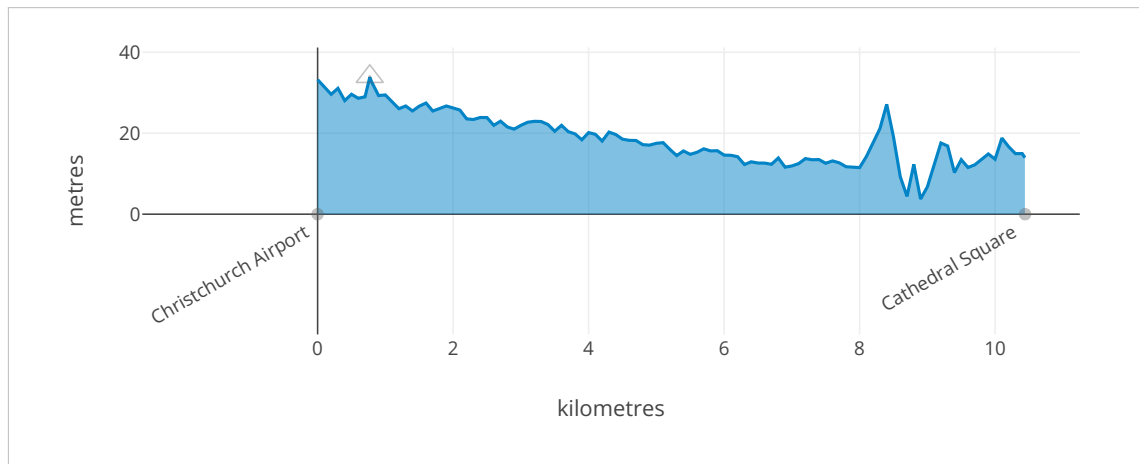
# Christchurch

Christchurch, a cyclist's city. Flat, friendly, and with a number of well planned and [mapped bike lanes](#)<sup>1</sup>. Christchurch has number of local attractions, check them out at the tourist bureau close to the main square in the city centre.

The city primarily provides a base to head east over the Banks Peninsula to Akaroa and various bays between. Lovely views, but often a cycling challenge. Head winds can be particularly cruel but the landscape is worth it. Allow three to four days for a reasonably good look circuit. Enjoy Christchurch, but the best, in my opinion, is to come. The southern route to Otago.

## 40.1 Christchurch Airport to the City Centre

Distance: 10 km    Ascent: a few m    Descent: a few m



Christchurch is a popular arrival point for cyclists starting their New Zealand adventure. Why? Because it lands you squarely in the south island, with easy access to some of the nicest riding in the country. In this cycle friendly city there is, alas, no dedicated cycleway from the airport to the city centre. This flat, easy, 10 km route weaves together what cycle tracks are available.

<sup>1</sup><https://ccc.govt.nz/transport/getting-around/cycling/cycling-maps>

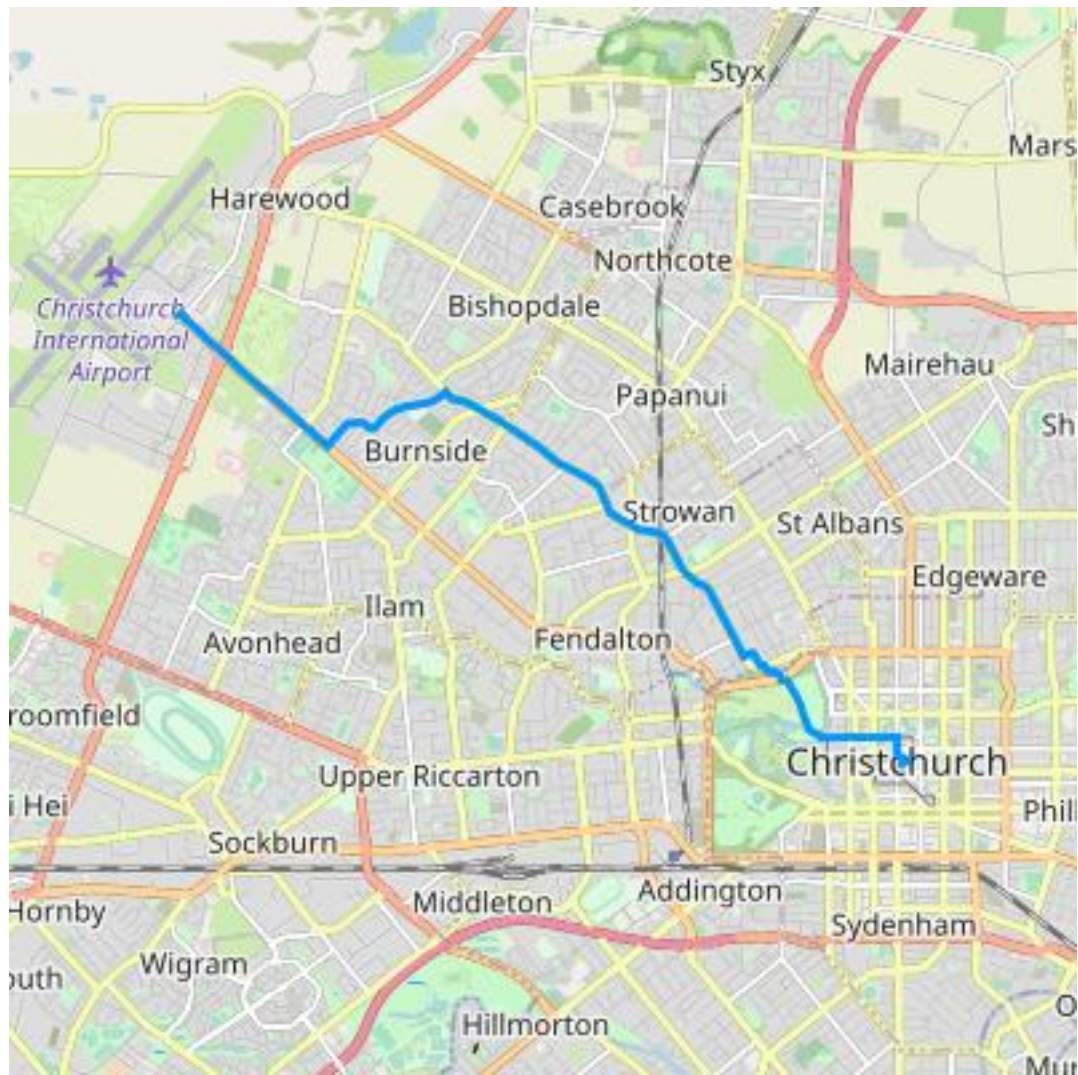
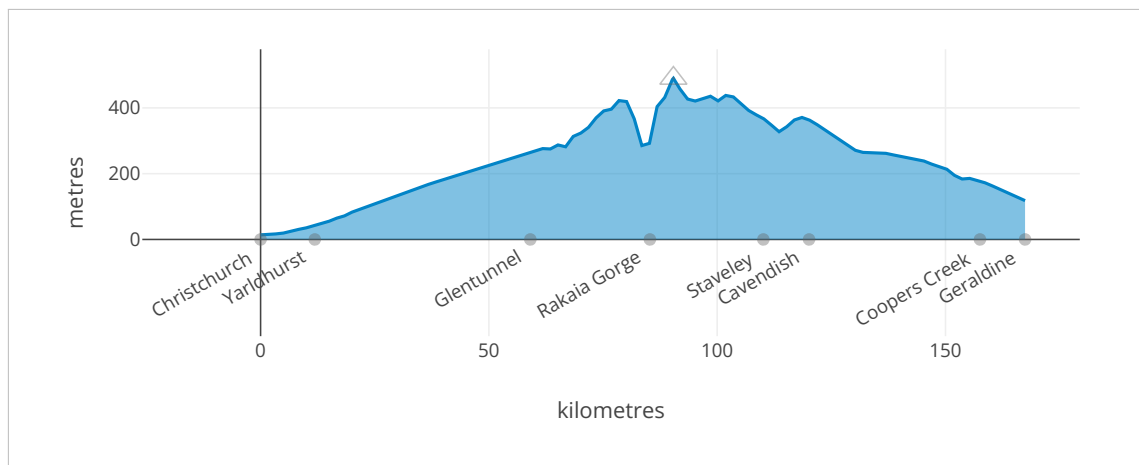


Figure 40.1: Christchurch Airport to the City Centre

# Christchurch to Lake Tekapo

## 41.1 Christchurch to Geraldine

Distance: 167 km   Ascent: 676 m   Descent: 572 m



You can take the main south road to Ashburton (small town campground, backpackers, most facilities), then carry on to Geraldine the following day. The more scenic route is to head west to Yaldhurst and then take the Old West Coast Road to Home Bush road and spend your first night at Glentunnel, a tiny hamlet with the Southern Alps for a backdrop. (approximately 65 km).

The following day, pedal south to Geraldine and enjoy the Rakaia river crossing (steep slope in, steep ride out), and the generally flat roads to Geraldine, a pretty town with a good campsite. The Canterbury Plains are a lovely cycle ride with gorgeous views on all sides. You can detour to Peel Forest, one of the last stands of native bush in the area. There is a store there and a DOC (Department Of Conservation) campsite. A particularly lovely place.

There are a large number of side trips along this route south which offer isolation and pristine views of lakes and mountains for the adventurous. Mostly on gravel roads, they nonetheless provide opportunities to see and experience a uniquely wonderful landscape. Think grassy, lonely, dry, rolling foothills and swimming in lakes and rivers with only birds for company. Consider the ride up to Lake Huron or Lake Clearwater in the cradle of the Southern Alps. (Check out the weather forecasts before attempting this).

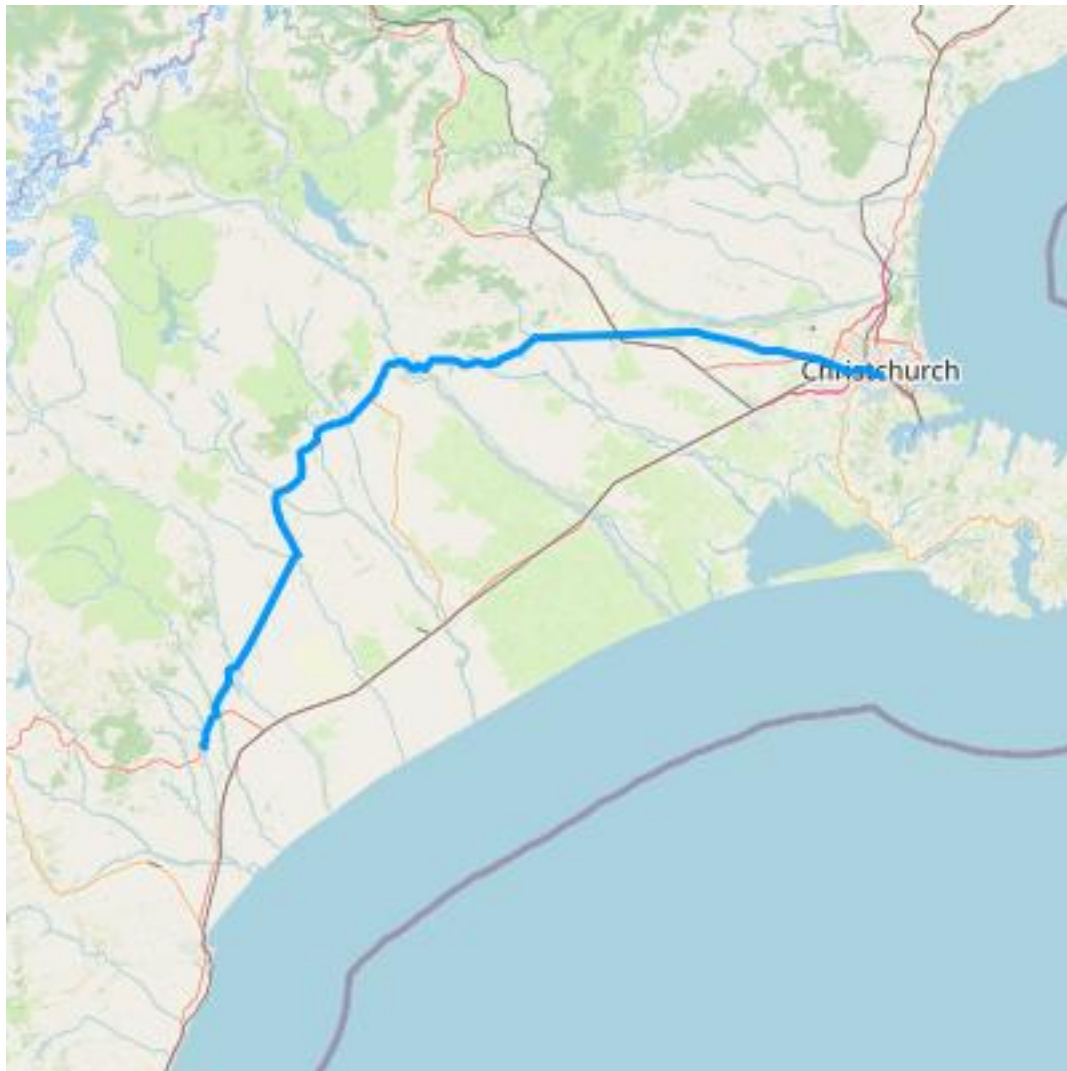
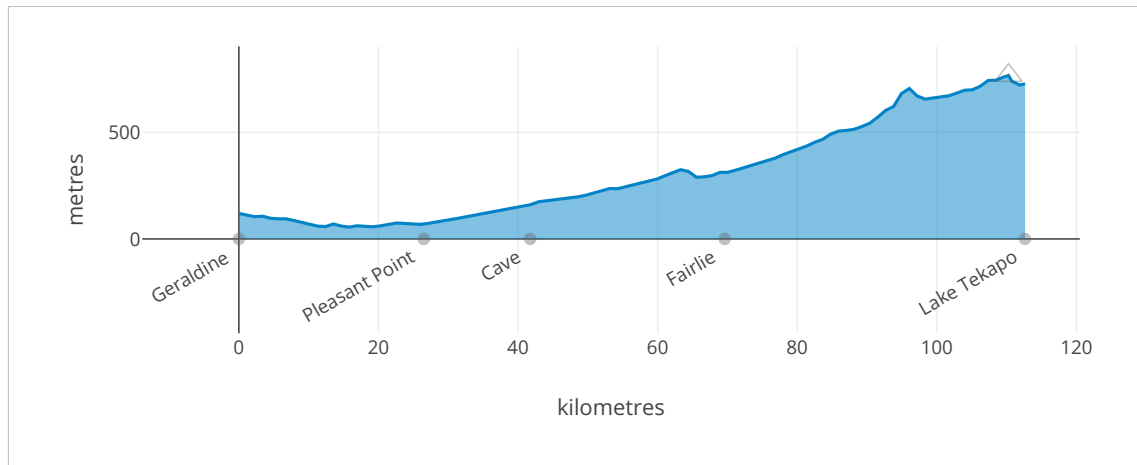


Figure 41.1: Christchurch to Geraldine

## 41.2 Geraldine to Lake Tekapo via Fairlie

Distance: 113 km   Ascent: 826 m   Descent: 218 m



Round about now you might be getting lazy. If you want an easy day, cycle to Fairlie and relax. It is approximately 46 km of rising road south of Geraldine along highway 79, but be prepared for plenty of tourist traffic along this route. If you have time to meander then arguably nicer is the 70 km route along quiet back-roads to Pleasant Point (camping at the domain), then following HW 8 through Cave and on to Fairlie (see other [South Canterbury cycle trails](#)<sup>1</sup>).

Fairlie is another pleasant, small service centre with one or two cafés and a good campsite. Sometimes it feels good to mosey around small towns, feel a bit of pioneer history and enjoy old trees and streets of cosy looking colonial homes. You might be lucky to catch a craft fair as I did and wonder at the intricate work of local craftspeople and the generally low prices. It's good to meet New Zealanders. They love showing off their part of the world and are recognised as genuinely friendly and generous people.

Fairlie to Lake Tekapo is only 44 km, but you will need to cross Burkes Pass. You are now heading into Mackenzie country, named for a local sheep rustler. This is a distinctively unpopulated, brown, hilly land of tussocks and sheep. It gives broad and breathtaking views south and west. Burkes Pass is a long, slow incline to a final steep kilometre to the top.

It is not as arduous as it looks and the views make up for any fatigue. Once through the pass, you have a marvellous, rolling ride through broad vistas of hills and roads fringed with brilliantly coloured lupins. The air is clear and the landscape gives you that feeling that you want to cycle forever.

<sup>1</sup><https://southcanterbury.org.nz/activity/bike-walk/>



Your first views of Lake Tekapo appear about now. A huge, wonderfully blue stretch of water lying in the Mackenzie Basin. This is magnificent lower alpine country with views of mountains that run almost to the far edge of the lake. South of Christchurch habitation dwindles. You become aware of a distinctly underpopulated landscape of incredible loveliness.

Lake Tekapo is an unashamed tourist town that caters to the coach trade. Numerous buses stop here for food and photographs. These tend to stick to the main area of town and the local lakeside motorcamp is quiet, pretty, relaxed and fairly well away from the road yet still allowing you an easy walk to the stores.

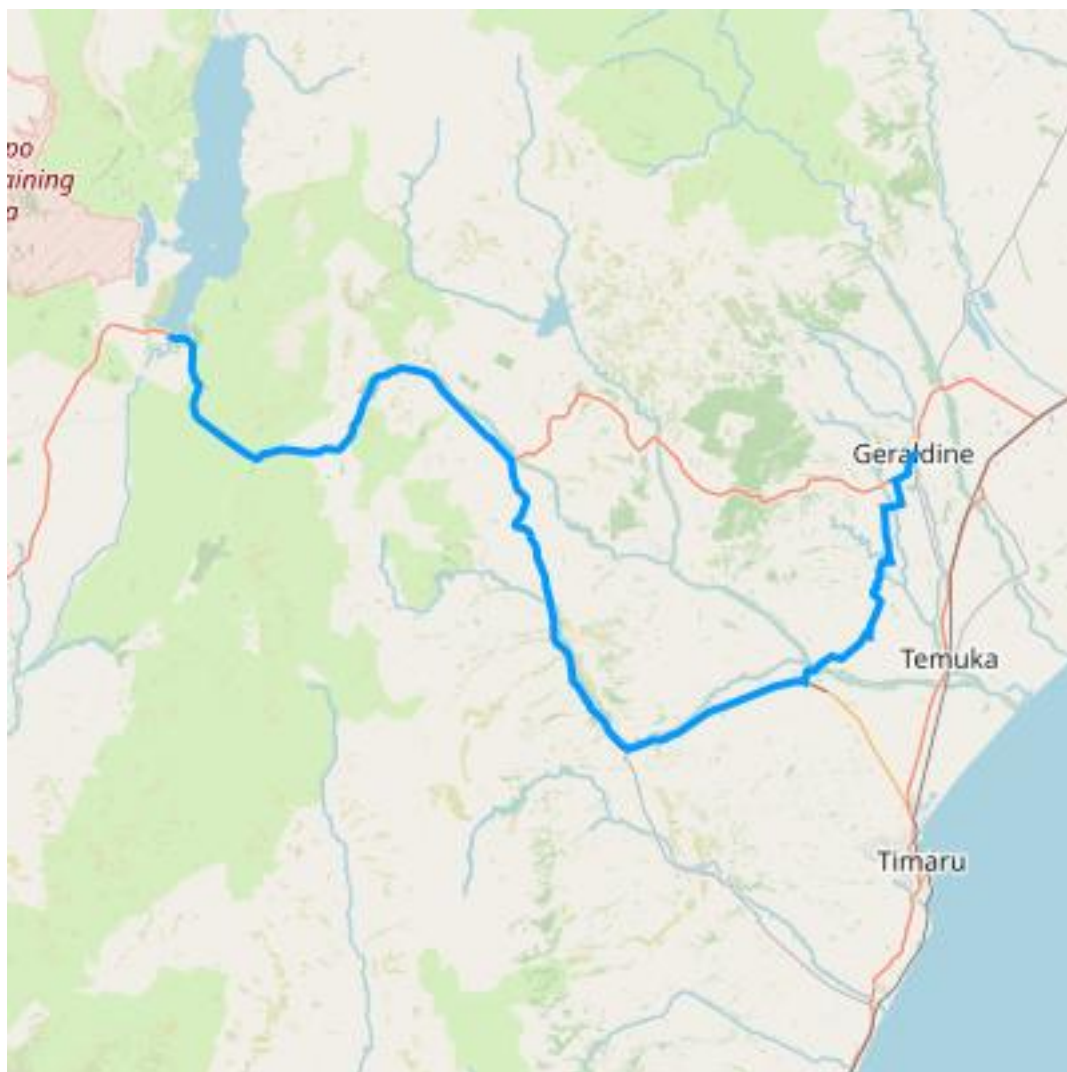


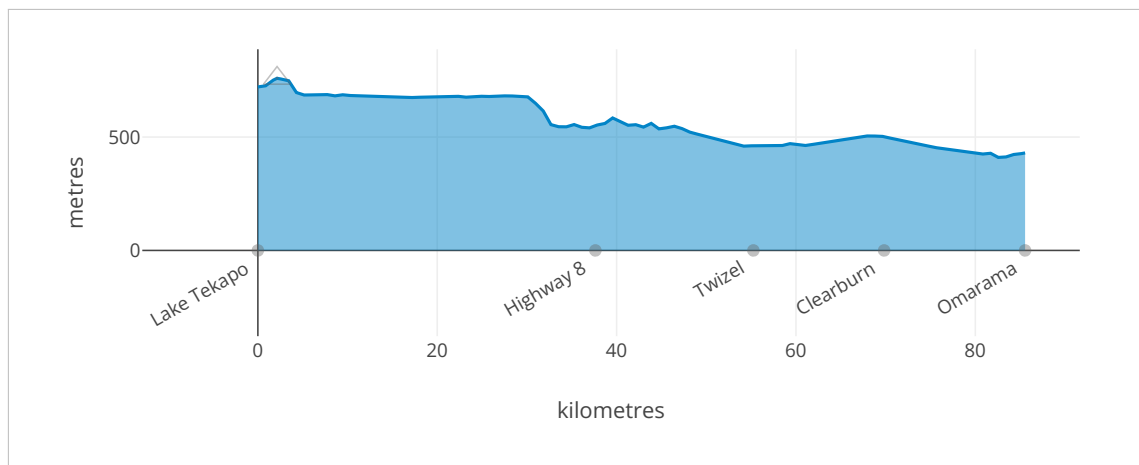
Figure 41.2: Geraldine to Lake Tekapo via Fairlie



# Lake Tekapo to Cromwell

## 42.1 Lake Tekapo to Omarama

Distance: 86 km Ascent: 153 m Descent: 444 m



Lake Tekapo has numerous tourist and sight-seeing activities (Church of Good Shepherd). But most of the best is free. Take a walk in the blue evening and see this glacial fed lake in the fading daylight; memorable.

When you leave Lake Tekapo, avoid the main road south and take the canal route to your left (best not into a headwind). This is a quiet, partly sealed route that runs alongside the blue canals south and gives you unbelievably beautiful views of Mt.Cook, New Zealand's largest peak. There is a [DOC camp](https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/canterbury/places/twizel-area/things-to-do/lake-poaka-campsite/)<sup>1</sup> en route with basic facilities. The canal road takes you within twenty or so kilometres of Twizel. Given the road is generally downhill, cyclists who stay at Lake Tekapo generally make their next campsite Omarama.

Omarama is at a main junction. There are tea rooms, bars, restaurants, store and campground. A pleasant spot, Omarama is a place where decisions



On the Canal Road

<sup>1</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/canterbury/places/twizel-area/things-to-do/lake-poaka-campsite/>

must be made. There are three ways you can go: Cromwell<sup>2</sup>, Oamaru, or St. Bathans...

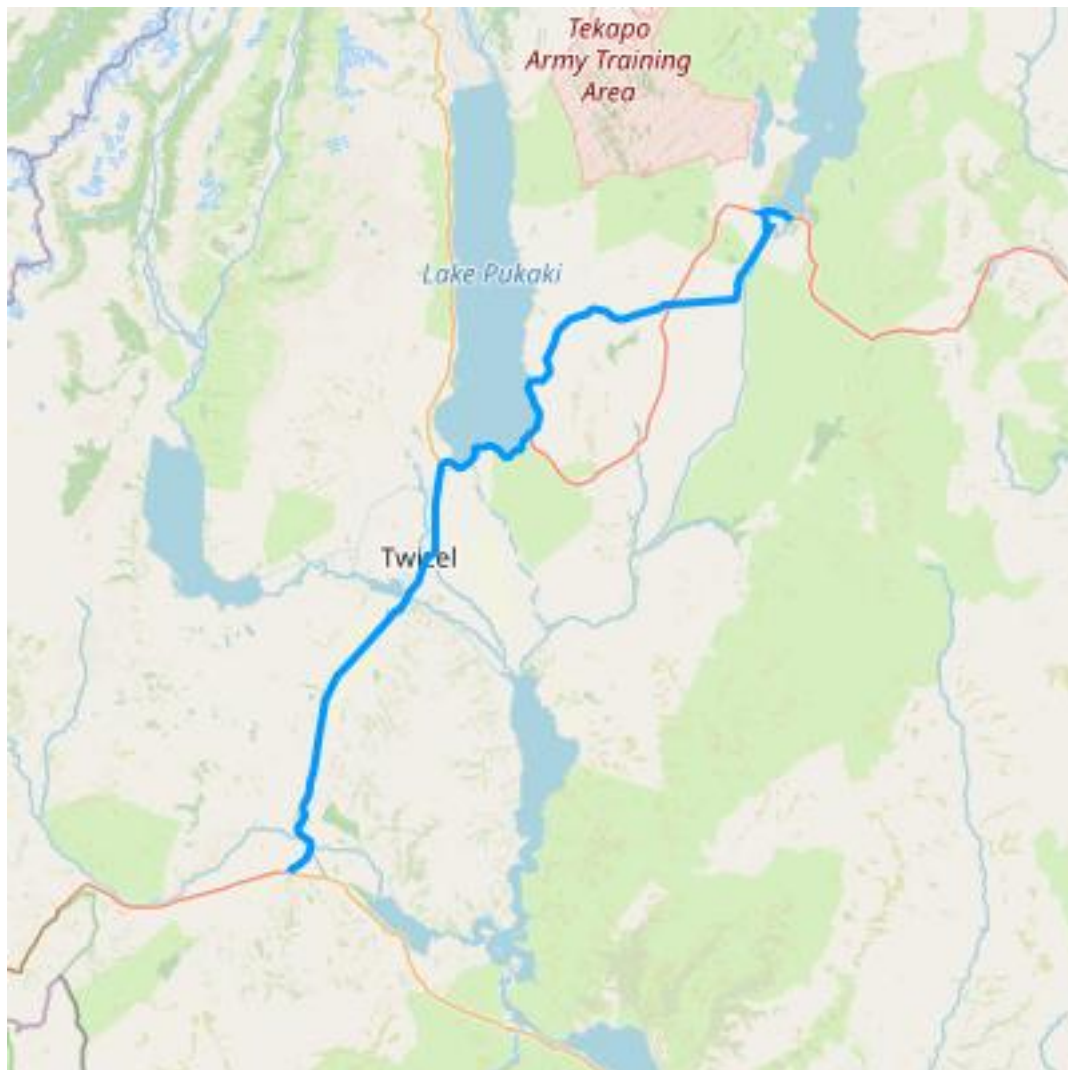


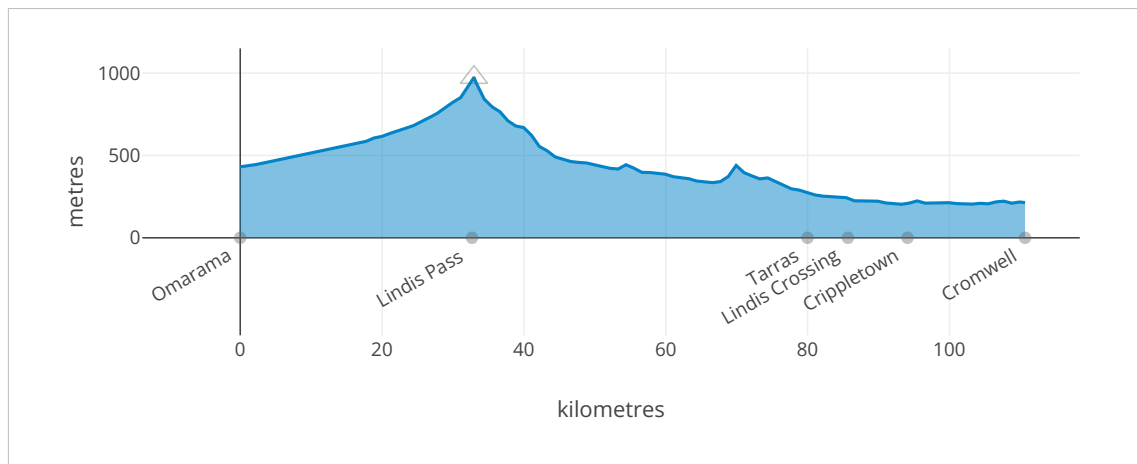
Figure 42.1: Lake Tekapo to Omarama

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<sup>2</sup>[#omarama-to-cromwell](#)

## 42.2 Omarama to Cromwell via the Lindis Pass

Distance: 111 km   Ascent: 766 m   Descent: 983 m



Once you get through the Lindis Pass, mostly downhill cycling through a long and lovely curving road that takes you up and through to Otago, you get your first glimpse of that loveliest of barren landscapes, the dry tussock land and brown hills. It's a magical country and has that semi-arid desert feel and clean air that makes you tingle. Get in closer and you will discover small lizards (harmless) and a large number of colourful alpine plants.

Take a side road into any unpeopled valley and you will always find traces of the pioneers and the gold diggers. Stone huts, mines and water races, all empty and abandoned for the most part. Iron pipes, once used to blast the hills apart to look for gold, lie rusting in the fields. But if you are feeling adventurous, try the following third route... over the Ewe Range and down the Hawkdun Runs road toward St Bathans.

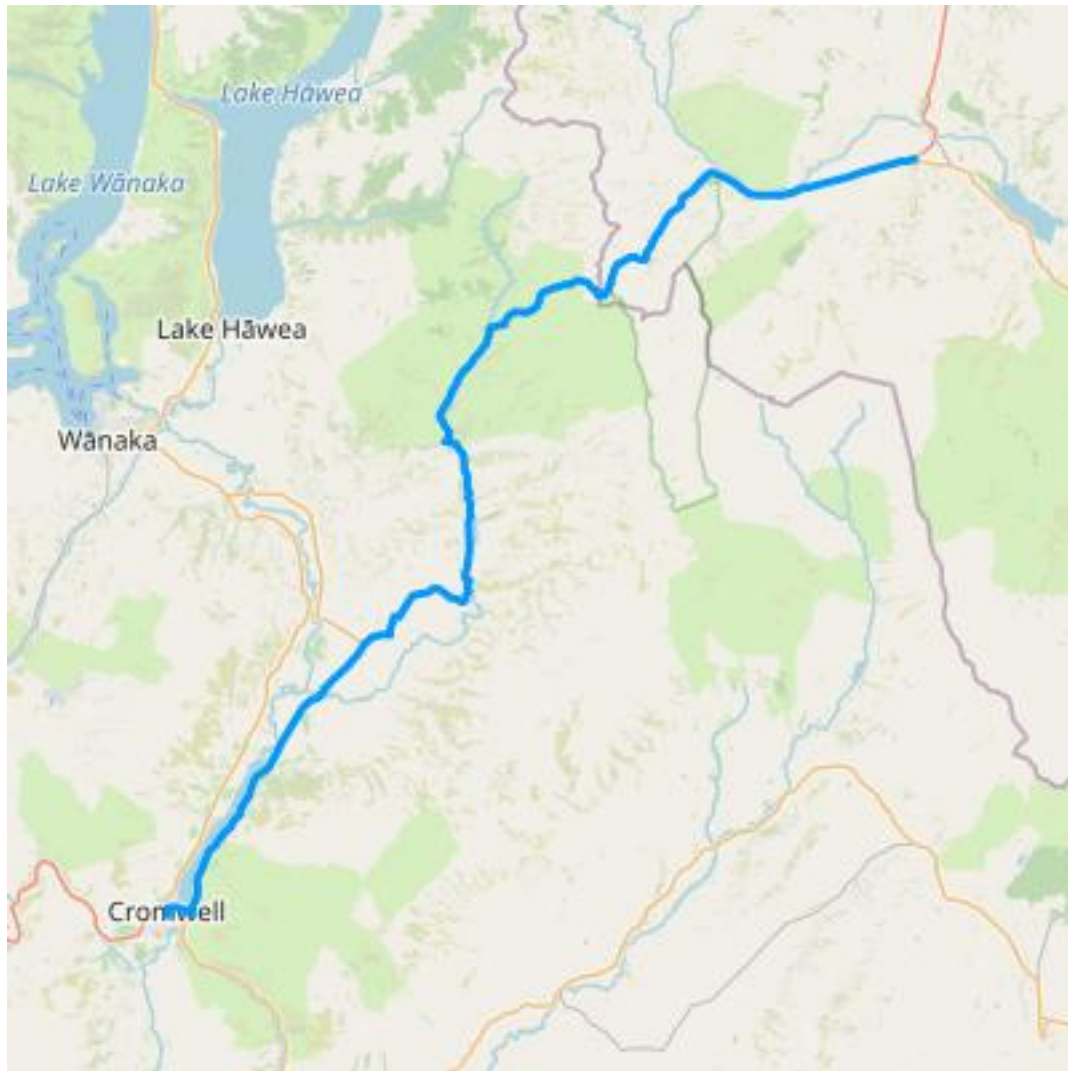
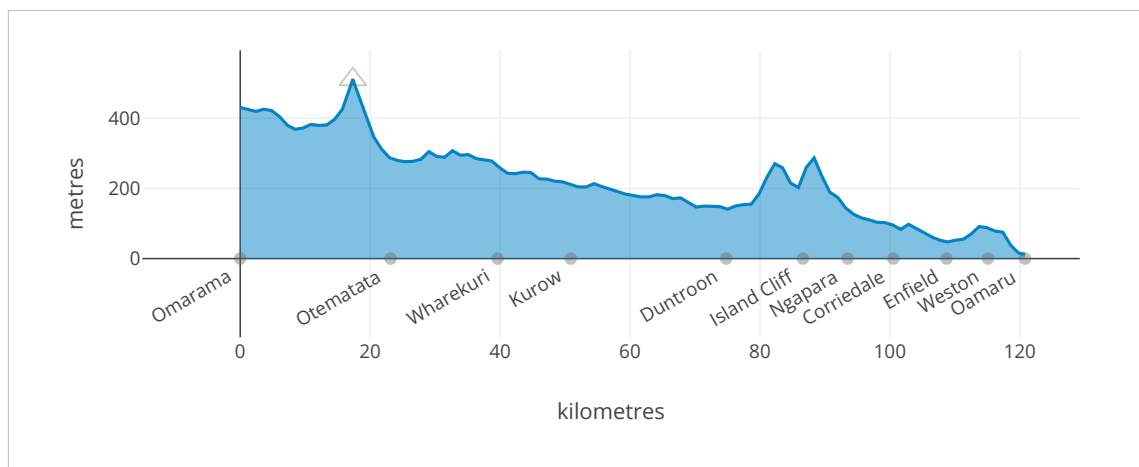


Figure 42.2: Omarama to Cromwell via the Lindis Pass

# Omarama to Oamaru and down to Otago

## 43.1 Omarama to Oamaru and the East Coast

Distance: 121 km Ascent: 487 m Descent: 906 m



This is generally downhill and an easy day through Kurow and Duntroon.

Oamaru is a lovely old town with many old white sandstone buildings and a nostalgic wharf area. The place is redolent with a colonial New Zealand atmosphere and something of an older, perhaps kinder age. The campground is alongside a stream and the town park has acres of trees, lawns and rose gardens. A pretty Victorian style place that echoes Katherine Mansfield short stories.

Oamaru has backpackers, supermarkets and bike shops. It is also close to a wonderful sweeping coastline road that will take you south toward Dunedin. If you do decide to head toward Oamaru, take a right hand side route at Duntroon and mosey through the sealed roads past Tokarahi, Ngapara and Enfield. These largely empty towns show something of the old abandoned roller mills that used to service the grain industry during Oamaru's heydays (no pun intended). They died away once the railway was torn up. Small remnants of stone culverts and raised embankments remain to remind us of once thriving and wealthy communities linked by rail. Now and again you glimpse a grand colonial homestead, a reminder of the early settlers who

found wealth in sheep farming and grain. Quiet winding, rural roads take you through an older, gentler age of sad, abandoned stores, old schools and shepherd's huts.

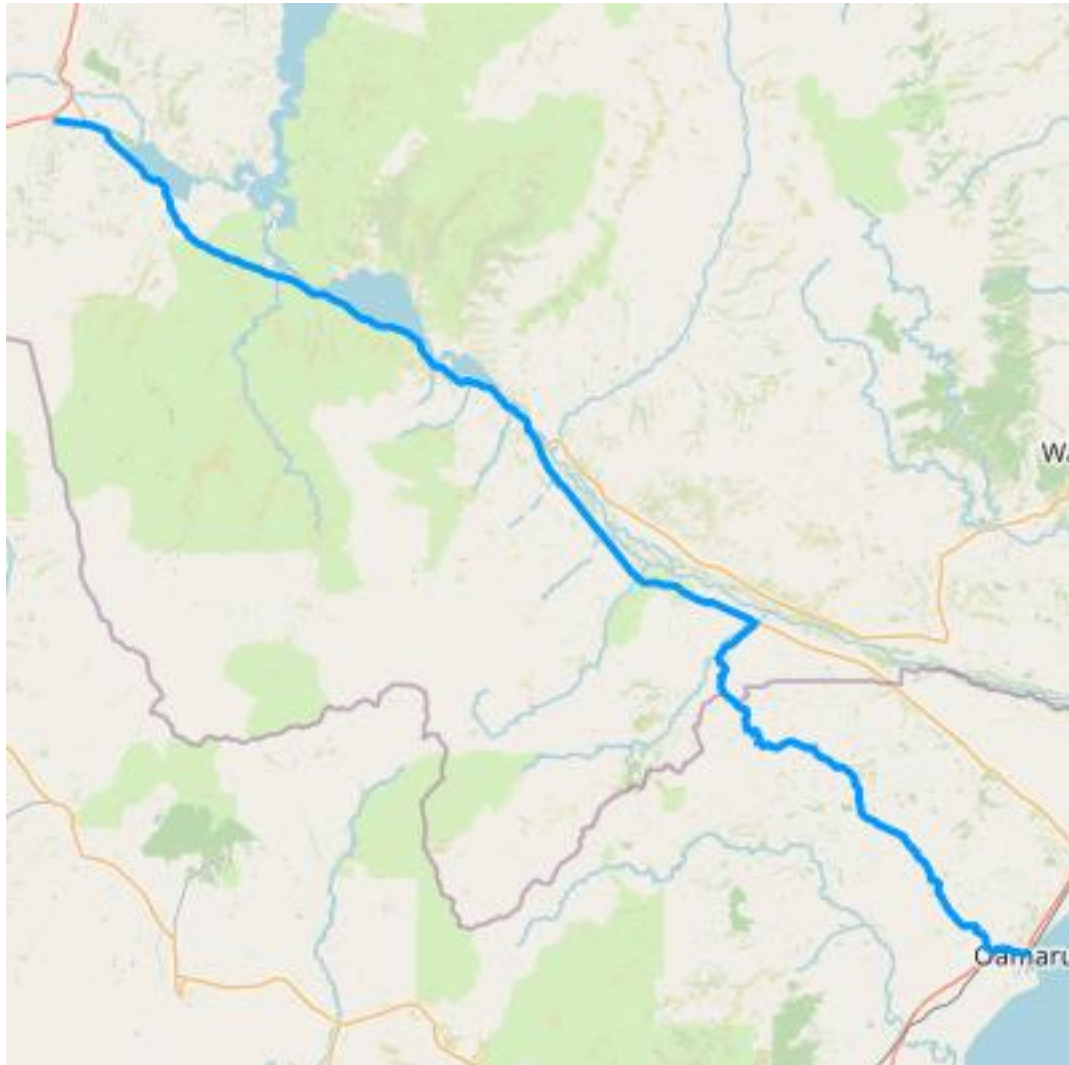
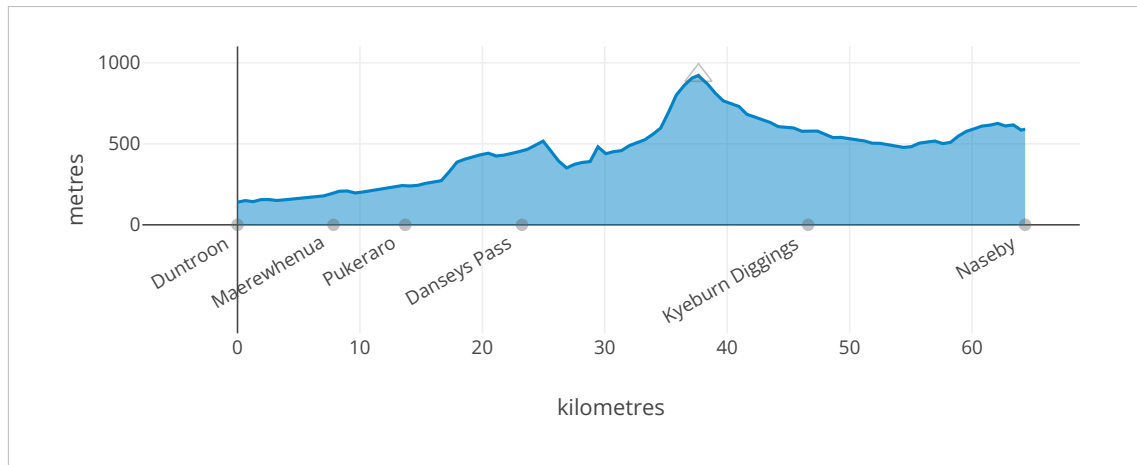


Figure 43.1: Omarama to Oamaru and the East Coast



## 43.2 Duntroon to Naseby via Danseys Pass

Distance: 64 km    Ascent: 1200 m    Descent: 750 m



You may decide, if you head toward Livingstone (another quiet and largely uninhabited old township), to head over the Dansey Pass to Naseby (a days ride) and into North Otago. There is a motor camp south of Livingstone as the road climbs toward the pass. A longish, steep and isolated highway along a mostly gravel road. You can stop for a break at the old Danseys Pass Hotel in Kyeburn Diggings, a former goldmining settlement. There is a simple but nice DOC camping with potable water at the nearby *Danseys Pass Recreational Reserve*. Further towards Naseby the road splits. Turning left takes you to the smooth, if undulating, tarmac of "The Pigroot" (Highway 85), else you can continue straight to Naseby, a beautiful old historic gold town with a good store, campground and back packers.



Above the clouds on  
Danseys Pass

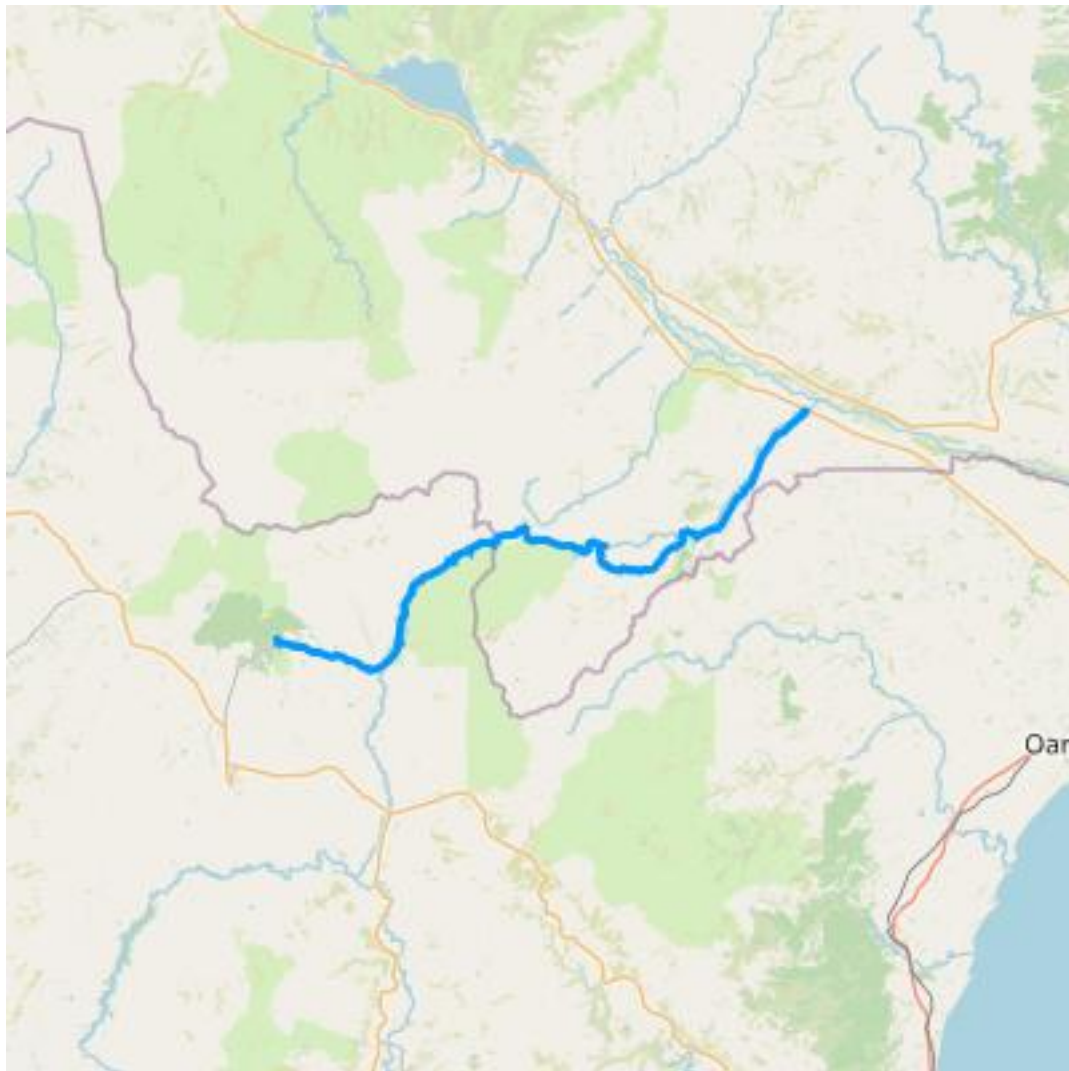
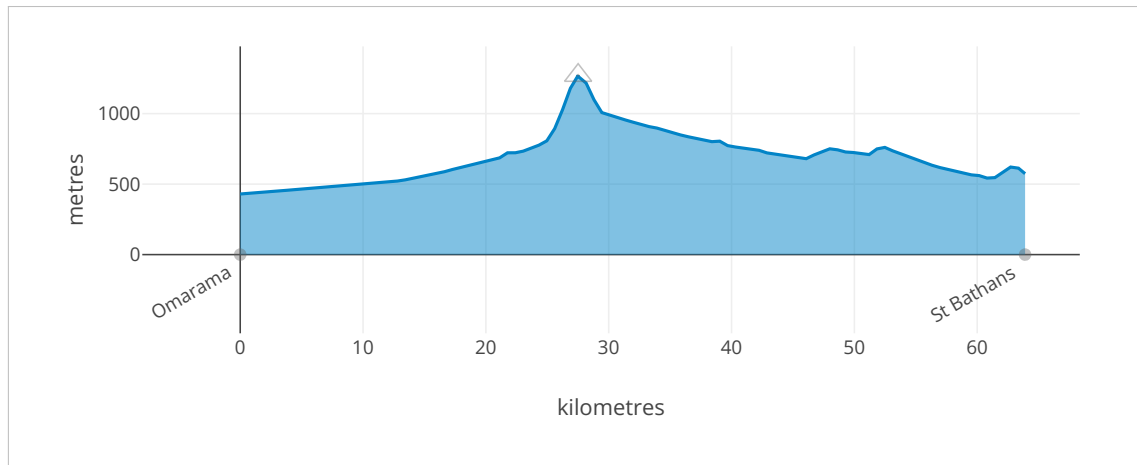


Figure 43.2: Duntroon to Naseby via Danseys Pass

### 43.3 Omarama to St Bathans

Distance: 64 km Ascent: 1061 m Descent: 917 m



This isolated, rural route is a steep uphill track through private property. Ask at the pub for the local farmer and, providing you ask politely and promise to close all gates securely, you will likely be let you through. The views back to Omarama are magnificent and after a long uphill push over the Ewe Range with Mt. St Cuthbert to your left, and a bit of uphill cycle, you make a sudden turn around a curve that abruptly opens up to views south and east across the Hawkdun Range with the Southern Alps to your right and rear and the high ridges and flat valleys of the Maniototo before you.

You will be lucky to see another vehicle, and the downhill trail to St Bathans is a glorious adventure of crossing crystal streams, long valleys and grasslands into what will probably be the deep shadows of the afternoon hedging toward evening. This is a sweet moment. I crossed this on a hybrid bike with panniers and my companion on a mountain bike with panniers. Neither of us are young and both of us were set up for touring rather than mountain biking, but some roads are made more beautiful by a bit of effort.

As the day ends you will find yourself at The Vulcan Hotel, a sod brick pub creaking with character, low beams and a warm welcome. St Bathans is a grand place. Ask nicely and they may let you camp, (for a small fee) in the field beside the pub. They serve meals and there is access to a shower etc. Negotiate with the landlord and see what a good heart and a bit of diplomacy can get you.

Don't leave St Bathans too quickly! The town is small and folksy with a large blue lake that is good for swimming. Small paths lead you to the abandoned school house and various historic places. This is an old gold town founded

by Irishmen in the 1860's and it still has some of that Irish magic in it. Ghosts and odd coincidences they reckon...

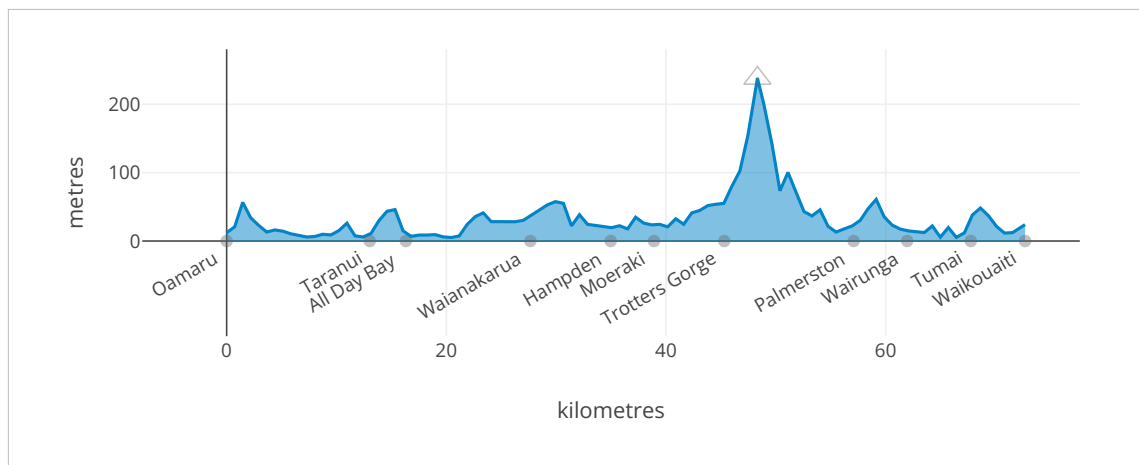


Figure 43.3: Omarama to St Bathans

# Oamaru to Dunedin

## 44.1 Oamaru to Waikouaiti

Distance: 73 km   Ascent: 496 m   Descent: 484 m



The coast road is just outside of Oamaru. Ask locally for directions. This is a steady ride with the sea on your left. The traffic is light and on a good day you can likely spot a few seals or just enjoy long views of sea and sandy beaches. The coast road ends at Herbert so from here the main road takes over heading south. You may want to look at the Moeraki Boulders, these are large, round rock concretions in the sand - they are scattered all down the coast to Katiki Beach.

There is a great tearoom at Moeraki with good coffee and food, souvenirs, and a campground. But Waikouaiti, a small town with campground, pub, and store, is a better place to stop. Why? Because you might want an adventurous overland trip to Middlemarch, the beginning of the [Otago Central Rail Trail](#). However, if you want a city break, head toward Dunedin, 32 km further on.

If you're keen to avoid the main highway you might want to try the inland route from Moeraki to Palmerston. Just out of Moeraki, take a right along Horse Range Road. This is a quiet, scenic, tar sealed route that takes you through farm land and forestry, although it does miss the lovely stretch of coastline between Katiki and Shag Point.

At Palmerston you have the choice to either continue down the coast to

Waikouaiti, or alternatively head inland along Highway 85 ("The Pigroot"<sup>1</sup>) which rises up the Inch Valley through Kyeburn, meeting the rail trail at Ranfurly and shadowing its progress through to Alexandra.

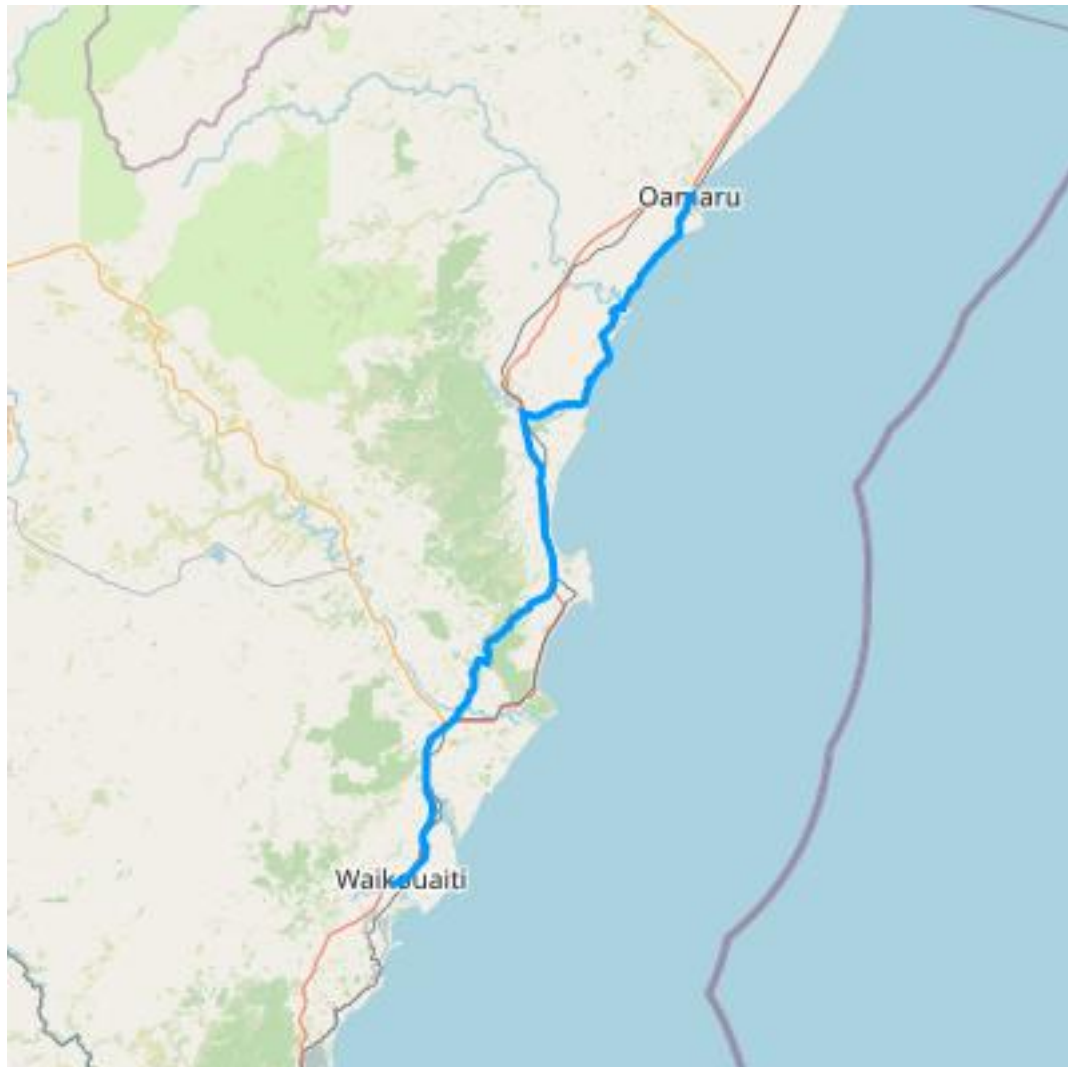


Figure 44.1: Oamaru to Waikouaiti

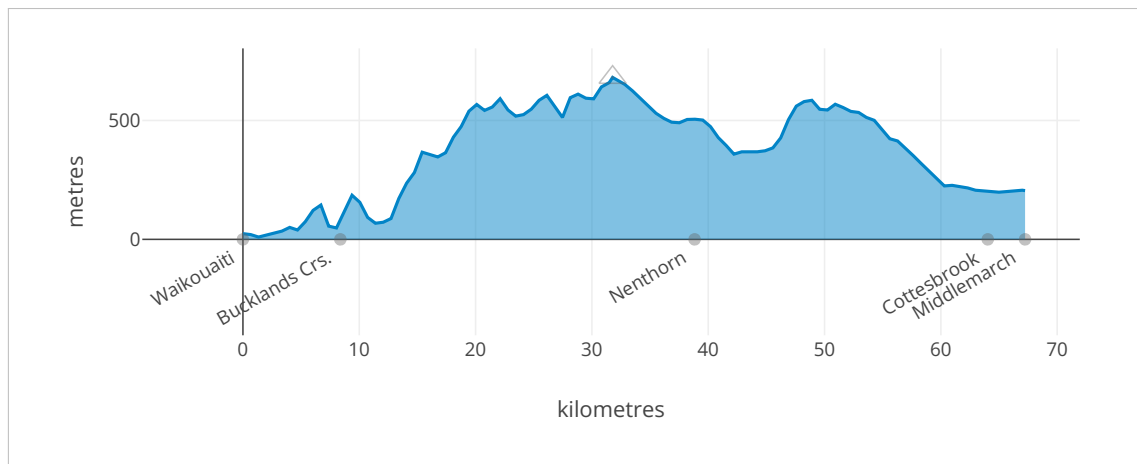
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<sup>1</sup>[https://crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page\\_id=141699](https://crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page_id=141699)



## 44.2 Waikouaiti to Middlemarch

Distance: 67 km   Ascent: 1377 m   Descent: 1196 m



I love this road, if only because you get a tremendous sense of exhilaration when you get out the other end. It is beautiful, empty, rugged, historic and exhausting. Mostly, you are either pushing uphill or braking down, but the rewards of the landscape - particularly if you reach Middlemarch toward evening - are absolutely magical.

The road is called Ram Rock Road and it runs to the right off the main road just outside of Waikouiti heading south. The gravel road starts out pleasantly enough through farmland but gradually begins to climb steeply before dropping down into a river valley called Buckland's Crossing. It climbs and dips over the Taieri Ridge before coming to Nenthorn, an isolated remnant of old gold towns. Nenthorn once sported several pubs and banks and a population of over two thousand, but is now a forlorn scattering of stone walls and collapsed mineshafts.

If you have time, take a walk down toward the stream and look at the stonework the miners constructed as a foundation for their stamping batteries. A land now given back to hawks, harriers and that immense peace that the Otago landscape seems to breathe in its most isolated moments.

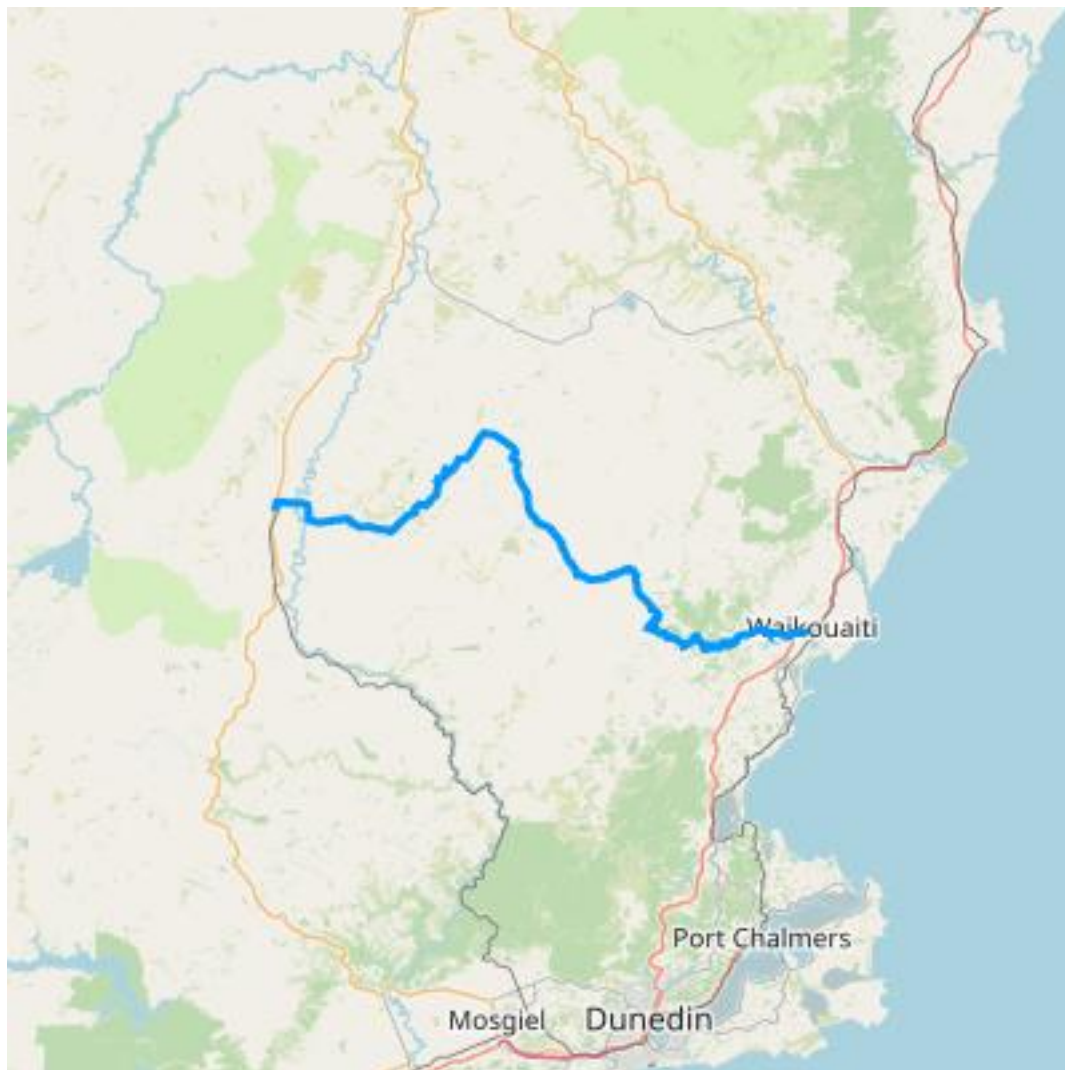
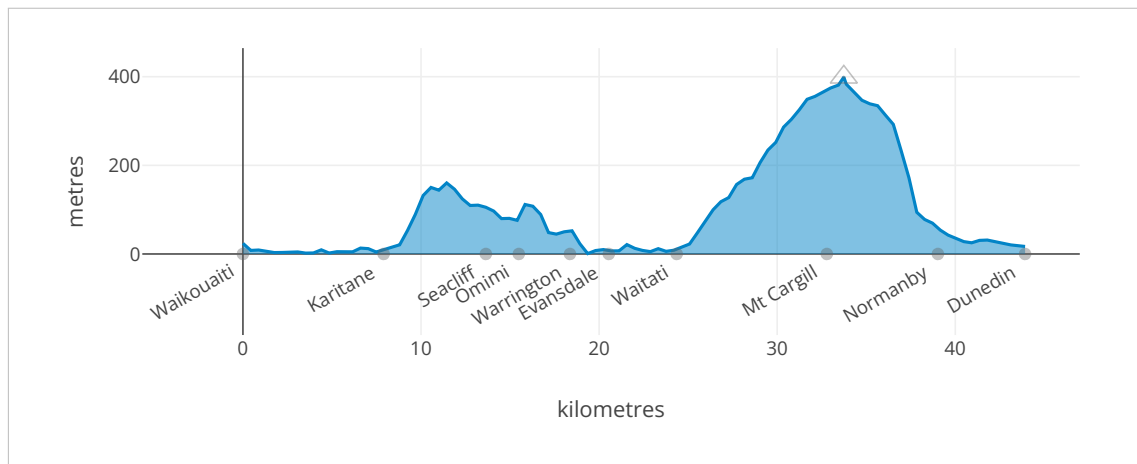


Figure 44.2: Waikouaiti to Middelmarsh

## 44.3 Waikouaiti to Dunedin via Karitane

Distance: 44 km   Ascent: 614 m   Descent: 621 m



This is a nice alternative if you're heading to Dunedin and want to avoid the main highway. Take a left turn about 3 km out of Waikouaiti and follow the Coast Road through Karitane, continuing on through the sleepy settlements of Seacliff and Omimi and eventually winding your way back to State Highway 1 at Evansdale. This road follows the main trunk line south, with several rail crossings along the way. Once you leave Karitane the road rises sharply and there's a fair bit of up and down, but this is a small price for the magnificent views out to sea and the quiet country roads.

Whether you take the coast road or brave the main highway, there's no avoiding what comes next. Cycle traffic is prohibited on the motorway between Waitati and Dunedin, and the detour takes you up and over Mt Cargill (400m). The gradient is not too bad; find a low gear and the 8 km climb is over before you know it. Once at the top the views over the Otago peninsula are breathtaking and from here on it's all downhill to Dunedin...

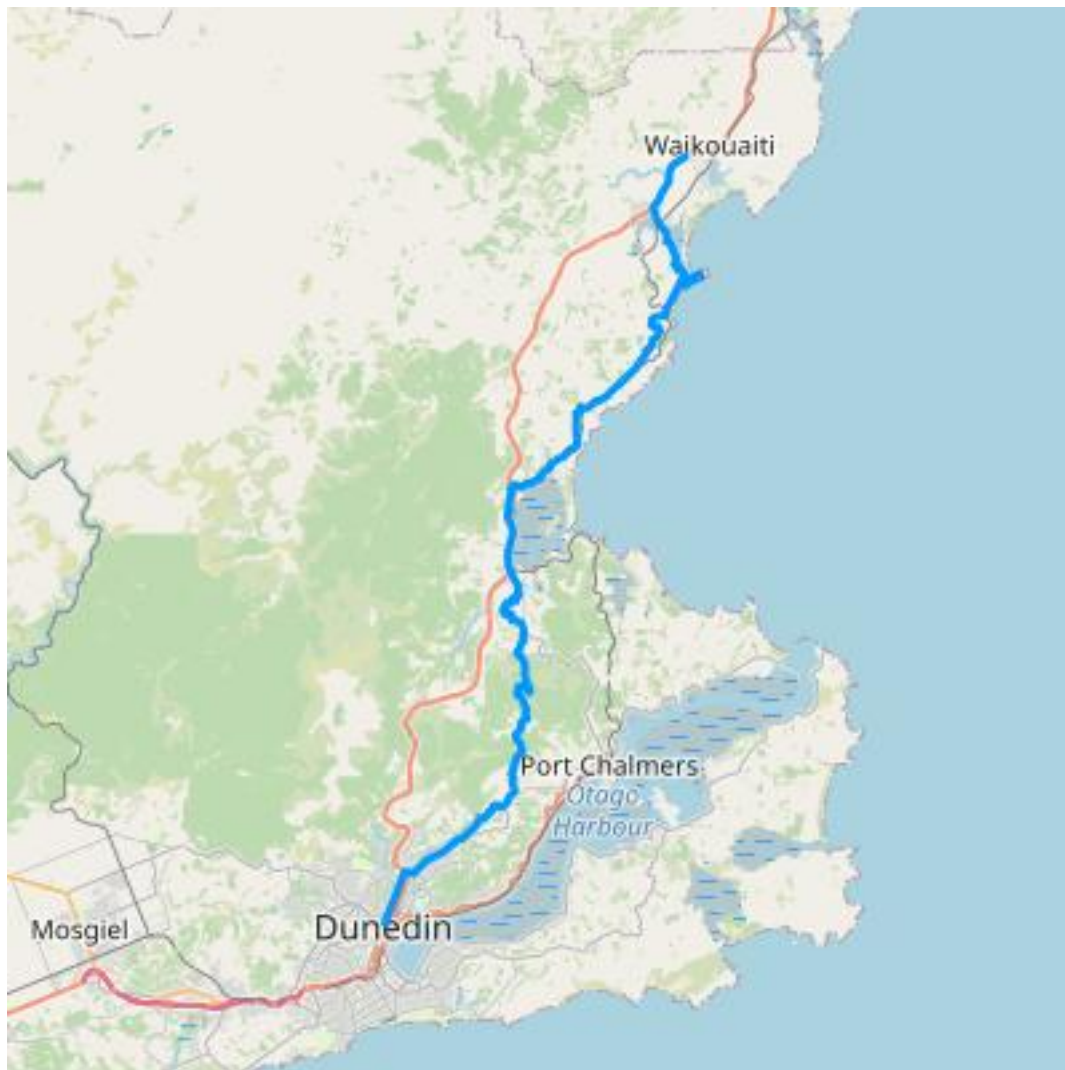


Figure 44.3: Waikouaiti to Dunedin via Karitane

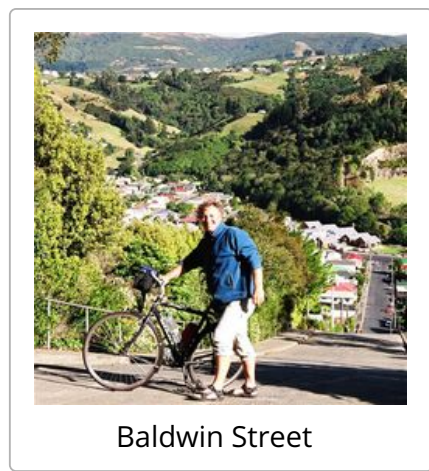
## Dunedin

Dunedin was mostly founded by Scottish Presbyterian settlers and the flavour of Scotland is still very evident in the city. A statue of Robert Burns presides over the main area known as The Octagon which is surrounded by some great old buildings and impressive churches. All the services you require are close by; hostels, campground, supermarkets, tourist information, pubs, cafés and restaurants. There are several hostels close to the city centre, but I suggest you check them out carefully before you pay for your room. One Dunedin hostel I stayed at was run by students for an absentee owner. The place lacked basic hygiene and the rooms smelled of flea powder and disinfectant. I should add that I have only had two experiences with badly run hostels in New Zealand.

If in doubt, use the [YHA](#)<sup>1</sup> (The Gables) at 71 Stafford Street. A lovely old building with all the facilities you need. YHA's in New Zealand are consistently clean and well organised, if lacking the occasional personal touch (like free breakfast or evening soup and bread) that makes some of the private hostels memorable, hospitable and very good value.

There is a [campground](#)<sup>2</sup> in the Leith Valley about 3 kilometres from the city centre. It has good, clean facilities including a pleasant eating and cooking area, T.V. room and laundry etc.

Getting into Dunedin is tricky. Coming from the north, cyclists are not allowed to use the main highway into the city and are diverted over the Mount Cargill road; a long and arduous 400m climb at the end of the day. Coming in from the south you will encounter a motorway with few signs showing alternate routes or cycle-paths. Once you have arrived however, the city has a great deal to offer. A day trip out to Taiaroa Heads and back is worthwhile, mostly for the albatross colony, but also for the great scenery of the Otago



Baldwin Street

<sup>1</sup><https://yha.co.nz>

<sup>2</sup><http://leithvalleytouringpark.co.nz/>

Peninsula and little towns like Portobello. The peninsula also sports Larnach's Castle, not a real castle relative to its Medieval European counterparts, but a pleasant grand manor with extensive gardens.

While in Dunedin, you may also wish to tackle the reputedly steepest street in New Zealand. Baldwin Street has a gradient of 35% which means that every metre you travel horizontally, you travel 2.86 metres up. A local man bet me a dollar I couldn't cycle to the top. When I got home, I drilled a hole in that dollar and hung it over my bed. In truth, it may not be possible to cycle directly up this road, but you can zigzag up it providing you take a break now and then...

If you come into Dunedin from the north, then heading out again provides three options:

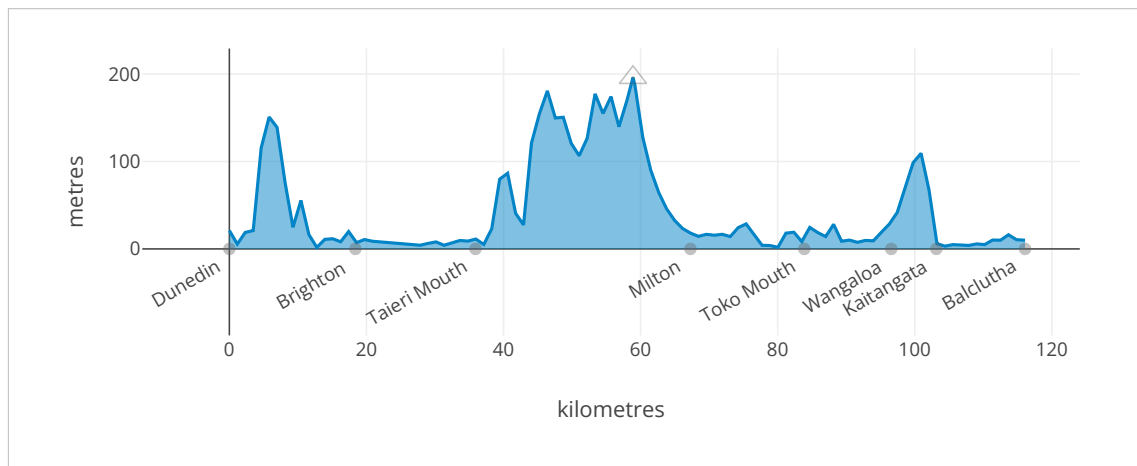
- The beautiful [Caitlins](#) to the south and then on to Invercargill.
- The [Otago Central Rail Trail](#) to the west.
- The main [road to Alexandra](#) through Milton and Lawrence.



# Dunedin to Invergargill

## 46.1 Dunedin to Balclutha via the Coast Road

Distance: 116 km Ascent: 876 m Descent: 887 m



Rather than cycle out and criss-crossing the motorway heading south and down the main highway, I suggest you head out through the suburbs of Dunedin and follow the coast road south. This is gravel and rough in parts but often very scenic and without heavy traffic.

Taieri Mouth (about 40 km from Dunedin, campground) is a beautiful spot with a great coastline. Carry on along the Milton Taieri Mouth road (another 30 km or so) and camp in Milton. The following day, cycle out along the Milton-Toko Mouth Road to Toko Mouth (about 20 km), another lovely spot, and then head along the Wangaloa-Toko Mouth road to Kaitangata (another 25 km or so). This is a sweet old New Zealand town with the remains of the old railway line and ornate villas on large sections. The store has great ice creams but alas, no accommodation. Follow the sealed road inland (another 25 km) through Stirling and camp at Balclutha (supermarket, hostel, campground).

Overall, this is a taxing trail in parts, not for the hills, but for the stretches



Gravel Road on the Coast

of gravel roads. However, in my opinion, it beats heading down the main highway and introduces you to some of the lesser known and very lovely parts of this country.

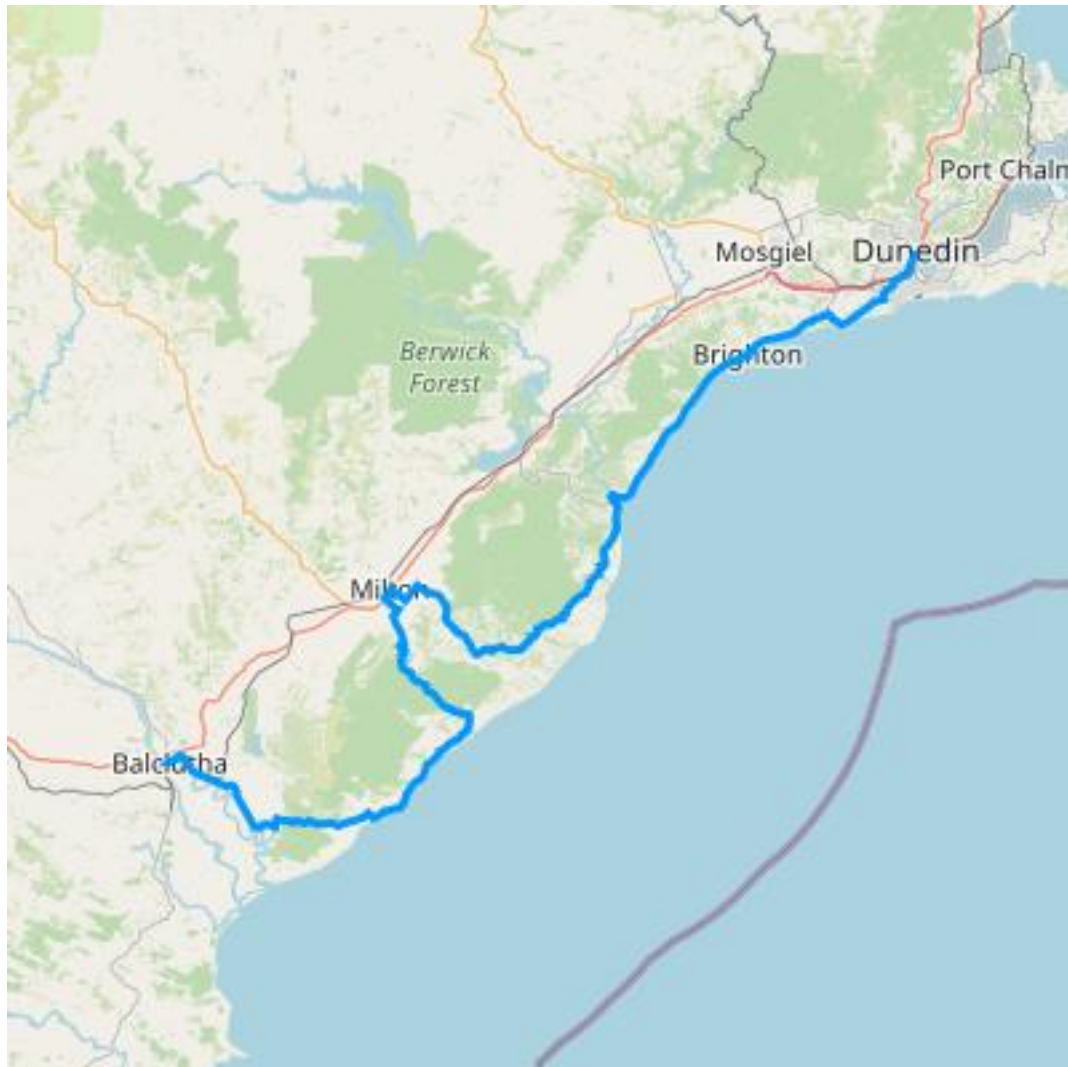
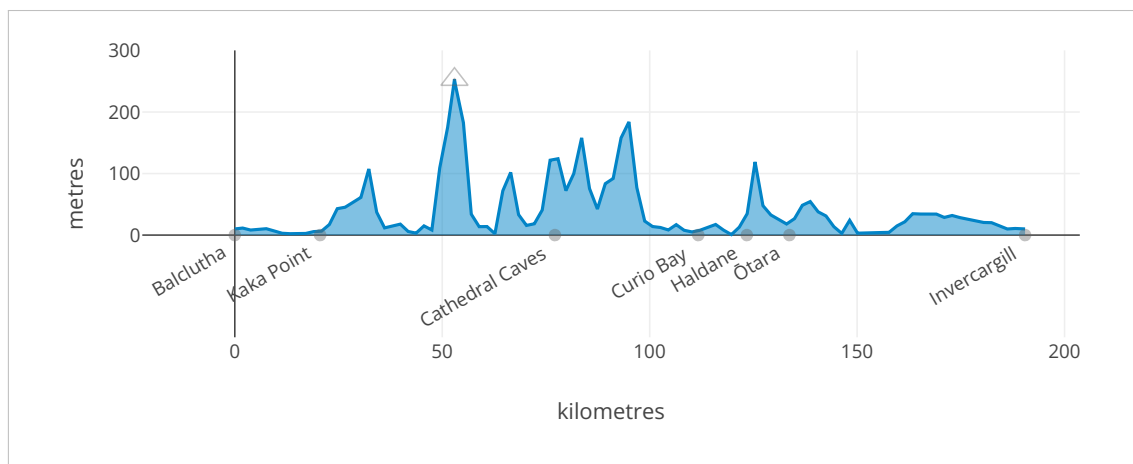


Figure 46.1: Dunedin to Balclutha via the Coast Road

## 46.2 Balclutha to the Caitlins and Invercargill

Distance: 190 km Ascent: 1252 m Descent: 1252 m



The Caitlins is one of New Zealand's great beauty spots. There are a number of lovely beaches to explore and this trip covers just a few of them. A few hills rise sharply to 200 m but the road is generally rolling and not too strenuous. The road geography of the Caitlins allows many options. Generally the sealed main road winds its way just inland from the coast. There are a number of roads (often gravel) leading out from the main road to the beaches and campgrounds, but mostly you have to come back the same way.

One option I suggest is that you take the road to Kaka Point and spend the night there (about 30 km campsite, pub and store). The same day you can take a trip out to Nugget Point and the lighthouse and back (about 18 km). Then carry on through Owaka (about 15 km) and follow Highway 38 to Papatowai (25 km, campsite and store). Another 50 or so kilometres will take you through Waikawa to Curio Bay and this is a gem of a place. The campground, albeit a little primitive, has marvellous views, but the great thing is that you can swim with the dolphins on one side of the hill, or walk over to the other side and explore the petri-



Small Village on the Coast Road



Looking Toward Kaka Point

fied remains of prehistoric forests in the foreshore. The following day, head out along mostly flat roads through Haldane and Fortrose (about 30 km, no stores) and then Invercargill (a further 45 km).

This is only one option. I suggest you get a map of the Caitlins in Balclutha and check out other great side trips including sights like the Cathedral Caves. There are several impressive waterfalls and a number of DOC campsites, but the shops are few and often far between so take supplies. The coastline in this area is long and empty with a turquoise sea and breakers of intense whiteness breaking onto a broad foreshore of white sand.

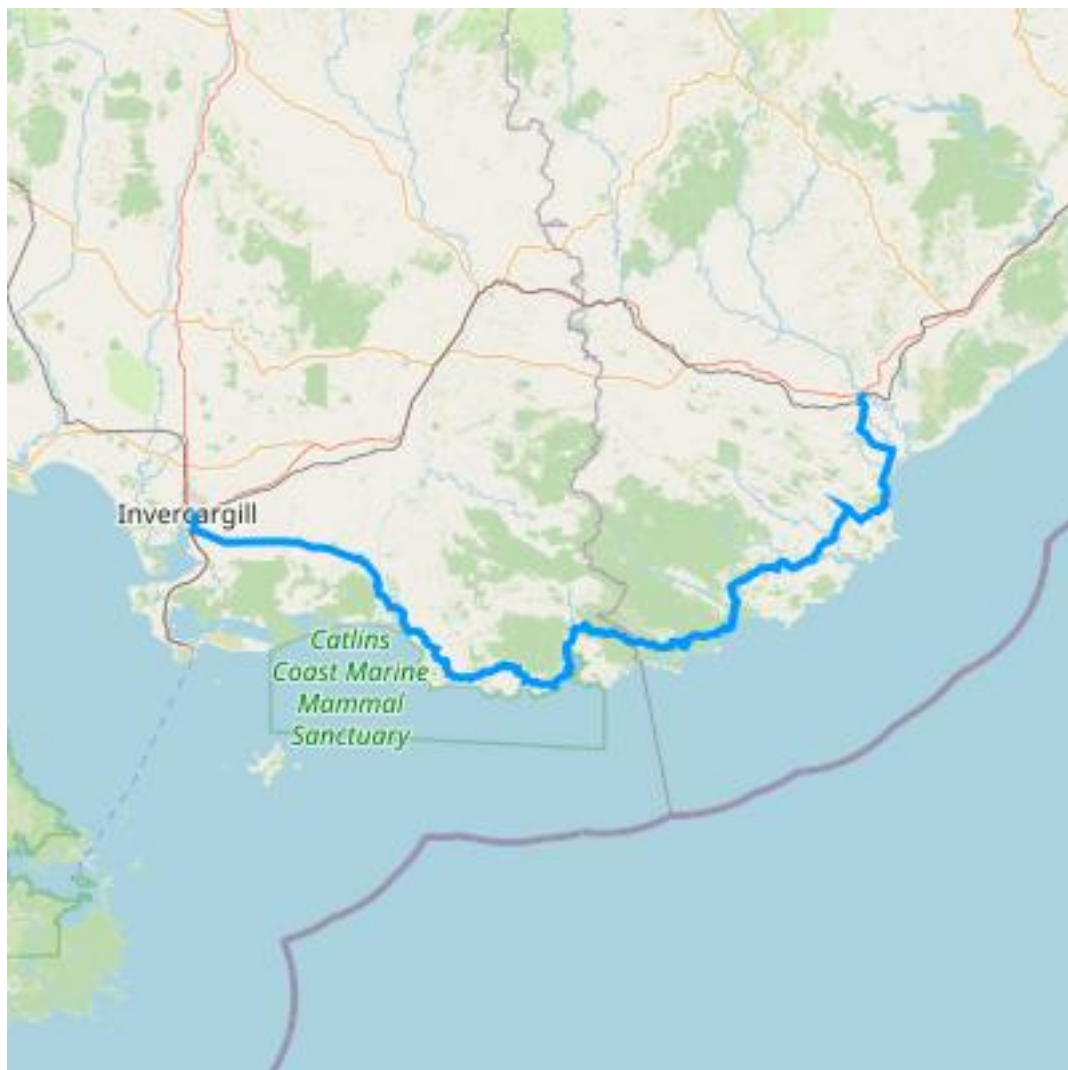
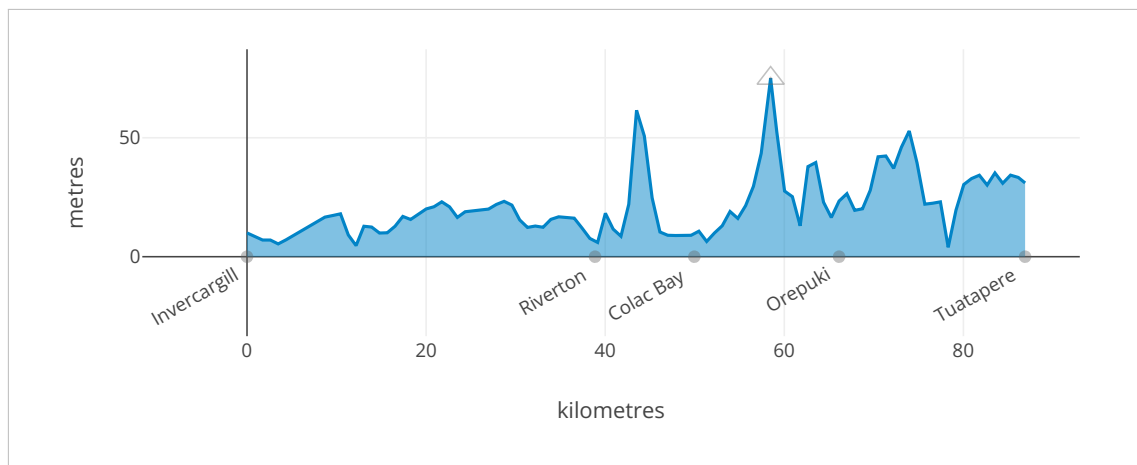


Figure 46.2: Balclutha to the Caitlins and Invercargill

# Invercargill to Te Anau

## 47.1 Invercargill to Tuatapere

Distance: 87 km   Ascent: 215 m   Descent: 194 m



Invercargill is New Zealand's southernmost city with pleasant folk, campsites, hostels, a fine museum, bike shops and a place to catch the ferry to Stewart Island. Stewart Island is indeed a real beauty spot and visitors love its isolation, beaches and pristine bush. It is not a great place for cycling, but if you are willing to swap your pedals for tramping boots for a bit, then this is a rewarding and worthwhile destination. Most cyclists however, head from Invercargill up toward Lake Manapouri and Lake Te Anau and the possibility of a trip to Milford Sound.



Remote southland beach

From Invercargill, pedal west to Riverton (38 km) a sweet old New Zealand town with a folksy atmosphere and a touch of the alternatives. There is a camp site here, supermarket, tearooms etc. This is a good spot for lunch, ice cream or to just mosey around a bit and imagine a bit of the history of the place. The following extract is from the Cyclopedia of New Zealand.

*In the earlier times the streets of Riverton were frequently crowded with bullock-drays laden with wool, grain and other produce, which was shipped from the*



*port. The scenery seen from South Riverton is very fine, and includes the waters of the estuary, with green hills relieved with small patches of pines and smiling homesteads, and, in the background, the timber-clad Longwood ranges, with the rugged ramparts of remoter mountains.*

Further on, there are campsites at Colac Bay (10 km out from Riverton, tea rooms, dairy, pub and hostel) and at Orepuki (28 km out from Riverton, pub, camping in the domain). Tuatapere (47 km out from Riverton) has a motor camp, store and tearooms.

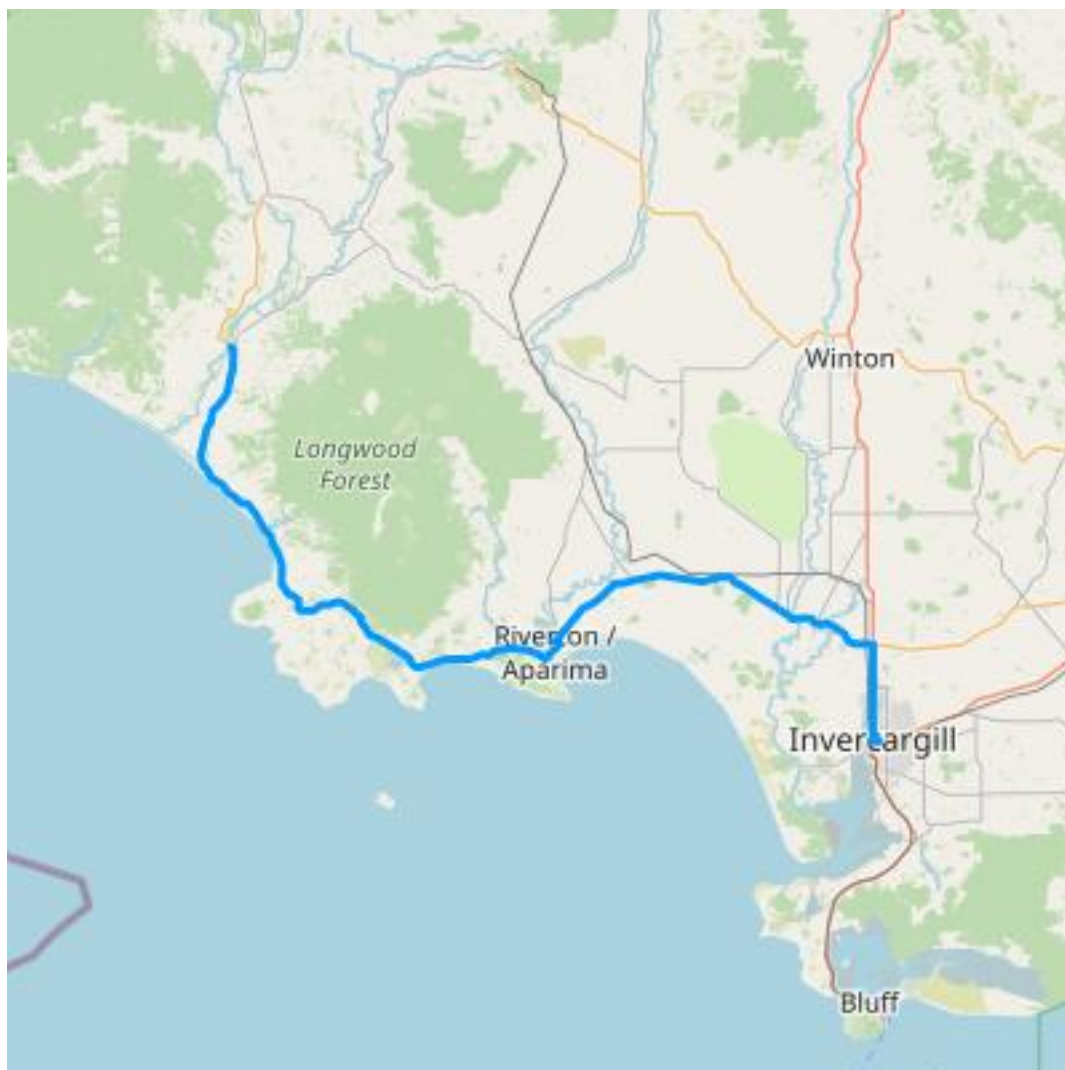
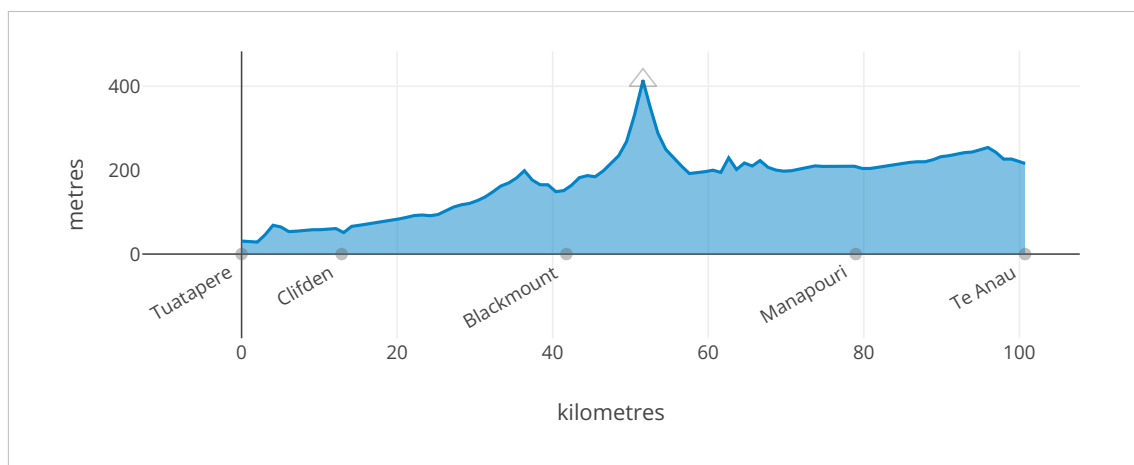


Figure 47.1: Invercargill to Tuatapere



## 47.2 Tuatapere to Te Anau

Distance: 101 km   Ascent: 577 m   Descent: 392 m



The road so far has been fairly flat, but from Tuatapere it begins to rise steeply over Jericho Hill (400 metres). It's a good 80 km from Tuatapere to Manapouri so, depending on your fitness and commitment, you will want to break this journey up at some point.

The best thing about this route is that the road is fairly quiet, rural and scenic with a long stretch of road beside the coast. There are occasional interesting historic spots like the bridge at Clifden (60 km from Riverton, DOC camping ground) and interesting side/return routes to remoter and beautiful areas like Lake Monowai (DOC camping, no store, hostel) or a fairly long side route (32 km) to Lake Hautoko (basic camping, no store). Lake Hautoko is notably New Zealand's deepest lake. Be warned! You are now in sandfly country and will need insect repellent. Also take note that that Fjordland, beautiful as it is, has the highest rainfall in New Zealand. Hence the term 'rainforest'. Keep a weather eye on forecasts.



Historic bridge at Clifden

Most cyclists continue on to Lake Manapouri, a quiet and beautiful lake with a small township that has campsites and a store/tea rooms and a few tourist amenities. The more curious among you may wish to take a cruise out to the Power Station on the far side of the lake and take the road (or catch the bus) to Deep Cove. From here you can catch the launch and explore one of the remotest fjords in the world. This is a tranquil, isolated and magnificent reach that stretches out toward the Tasman Sea through the great primeval

forests of the Fjordland National Park.

A further flat 21 km on from Lake Manapouri will see you in Te Anau, a recognizable tourist town with all amenities and plenty of hostels and campgrounds. The lake is pretty enough, but most cyclists regard Te Anau as the spot to consider the long road out to Milford Sound.

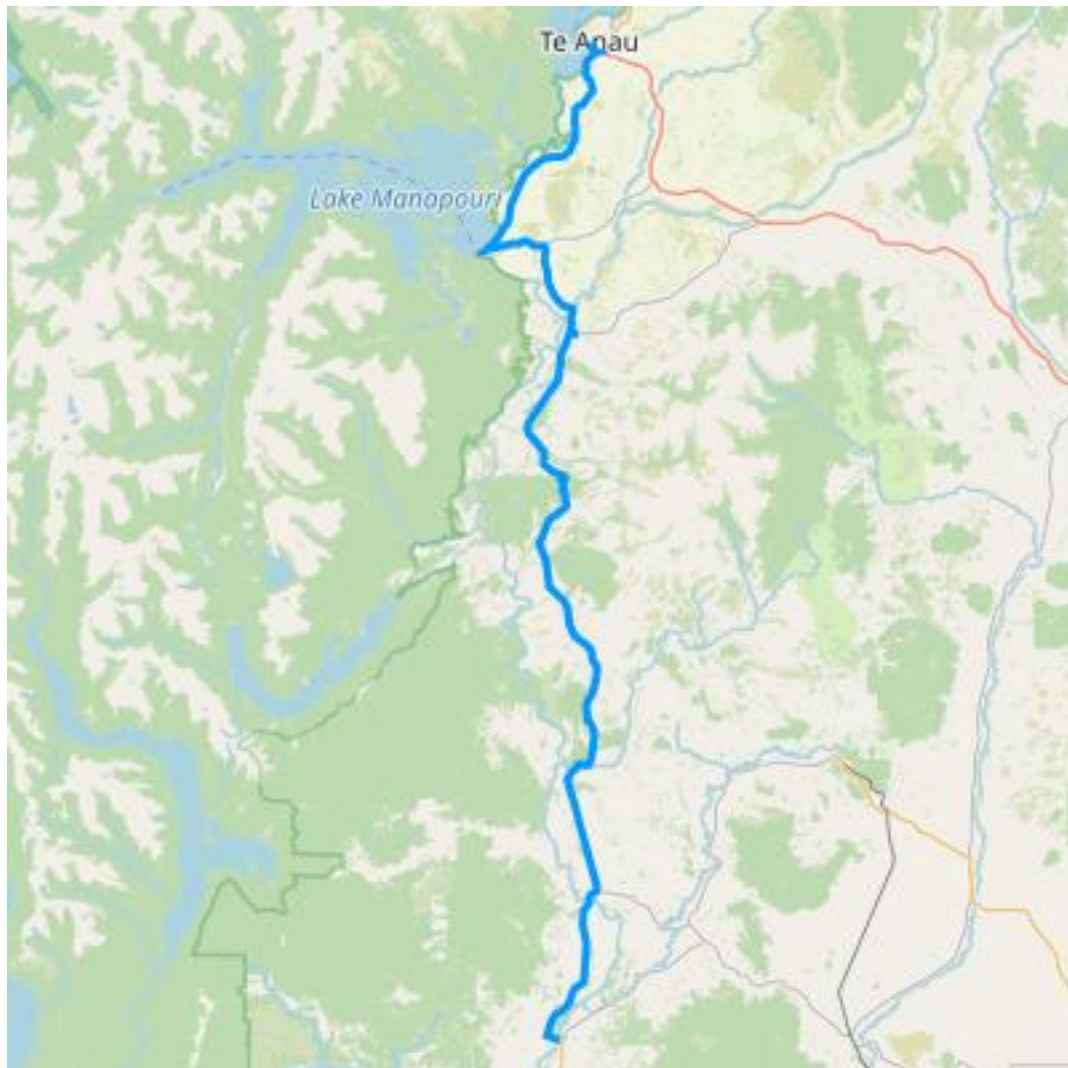
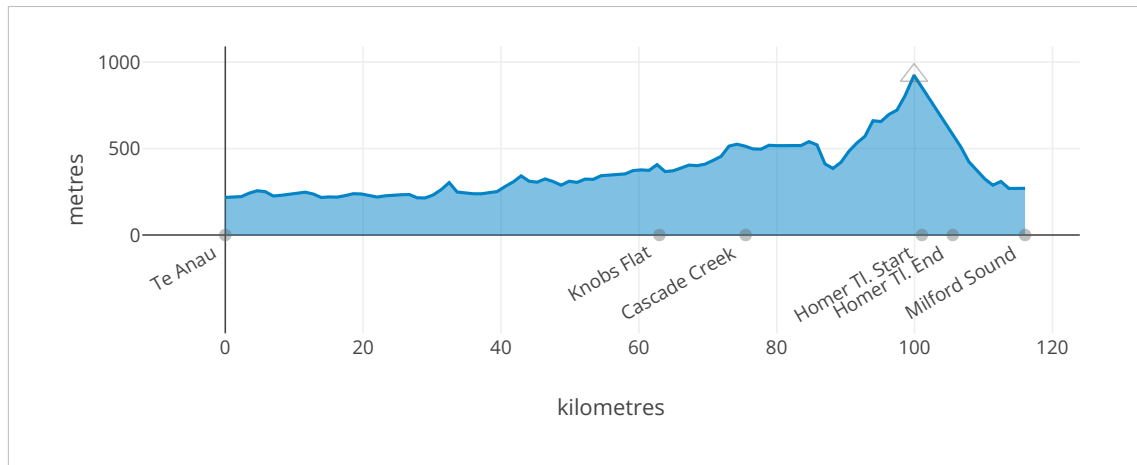


Figure 47.2: Tuatapere to Te Anau

## 47.3 Te Anau to Milford Sound

Distance: 116 km    Ascent: 1317 m    Descent: 1265 m



Whether you cycle this road or secure your bike at the hostel/campground at Te Anau and catch a bus, is a matter of personal choice. You have to travel the same route twice, in and out again, and it can be arduous in parts, particularly the steep (900 metre) climb to the Homer Tunnel. The narrowness of the road, the frequent tour buses and the length and darkness of the long Homer Tunnel can be a bit daunting, although some touring cyclists have found this road particularly beautiful and worthwhile. There is a scattering of DOC campsites along the way, but no stores. Milford Sound itself has a hostel, campground and store. The Sounds themselves are however, spectacular.



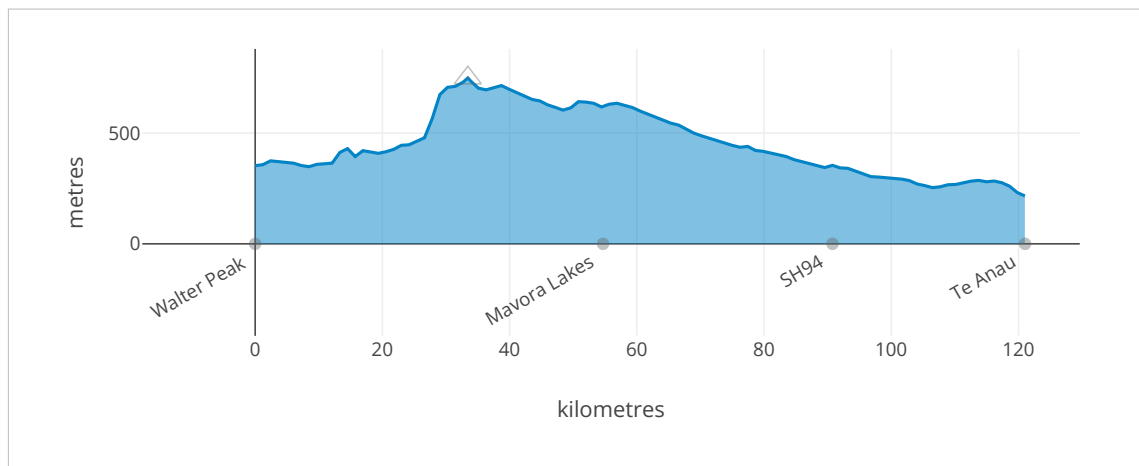
Milford Sound



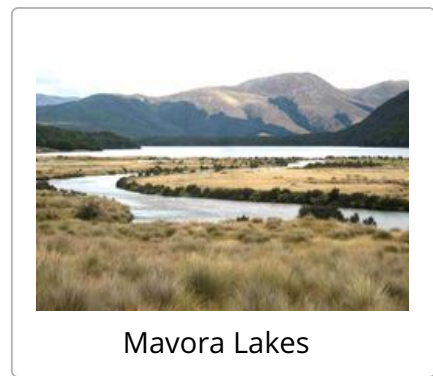
Figure 47.3: Te Anau to Milford Sound

# Queenstown to Te Anau via the Mavora Lakes

Distance: 121 km Ascent: 597 m Descent: 734 m



On the first night you will be camping in the isolated and very beautiful area known as the Mavora Lakes. These are two beautiful and remote stretches of water in the Snowdon Forest Conservation Area. On a good day, the lakes are glassy, blue and clear enough to see trout cruising the many bush clad bays and inlets. Thick beech forests fringe the lakes and in the distance are the snow capped peaks of the Livingstone Mountains. The area is also famous for its tramping tracks.



Mavora Lakes

The route is unsealed but with a good surface and will easily take hybrid bikes. It is quiet and scenic with the added delight of a ferry ride across Lake Whakatipu in a vintage steamer. This is a good alternative route to Te Anau from Queenstown, but take note; there are no stores between Queenstown and Te Anau on this road. Stock up on supplies including water for two days. You'll need it as you tackle the Vonn Saddle heading up to the lakes.

## Queenstown to Mavora Lakes



Take the ferry T.S.S. Earnslaw from Queenstown to Walter Peak and start cycling from this point. The Earnslaw is a great experience, being a restored vessel with all the brass-work and varnished timber you associate with a ship nearly a century old. The engine room is visible with all the pistons and valves chugging away amidships. Lake Whakatipu itself is arguably the most beautiful lake in New Zealand with its blue waters and perfect backdrop of mountains frosted with snow and rugged hinterlands.



Leaving the Ferry at  
Walter Peak

Disembark at Walter Peak and start cycling from this point. The road undulates and then climbs gradually to 700 metres passing a restored settler cottage. This is a remote spot even today, but you can imagine life here a hundred years ago... beautiful, even idyllic, but isolated and cold in winter. At the end of the day there is a right hand turn (clearly signposted) leading to a pretty side road through beech forests to the lakeside camp-sites. This road stretches for about ten kilometres and there are several DOC camping spots along the way with toilets available. There are also several water tanks although you will have to boil or filter your drinking water. (Do take insect repellent).

### Mavora Lakes to Te Anau

After your previous day's climb this day is relatively easy. The road gradually descends through the hills and across plains. It forks before the main highway (94) to Te Anau. Take the right hand fork for Te Anau, or the left to continue [Around the Mountains](#)<sup>1</sup> through Mossburn and Lumsden.

Te Anau is a pretty tourist town set on the edge of a lake. From here you can consider a trip to Milford Sound.



The Road to Te Anau

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<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/23-great-rides/around-the-mountains-cycle-trail>



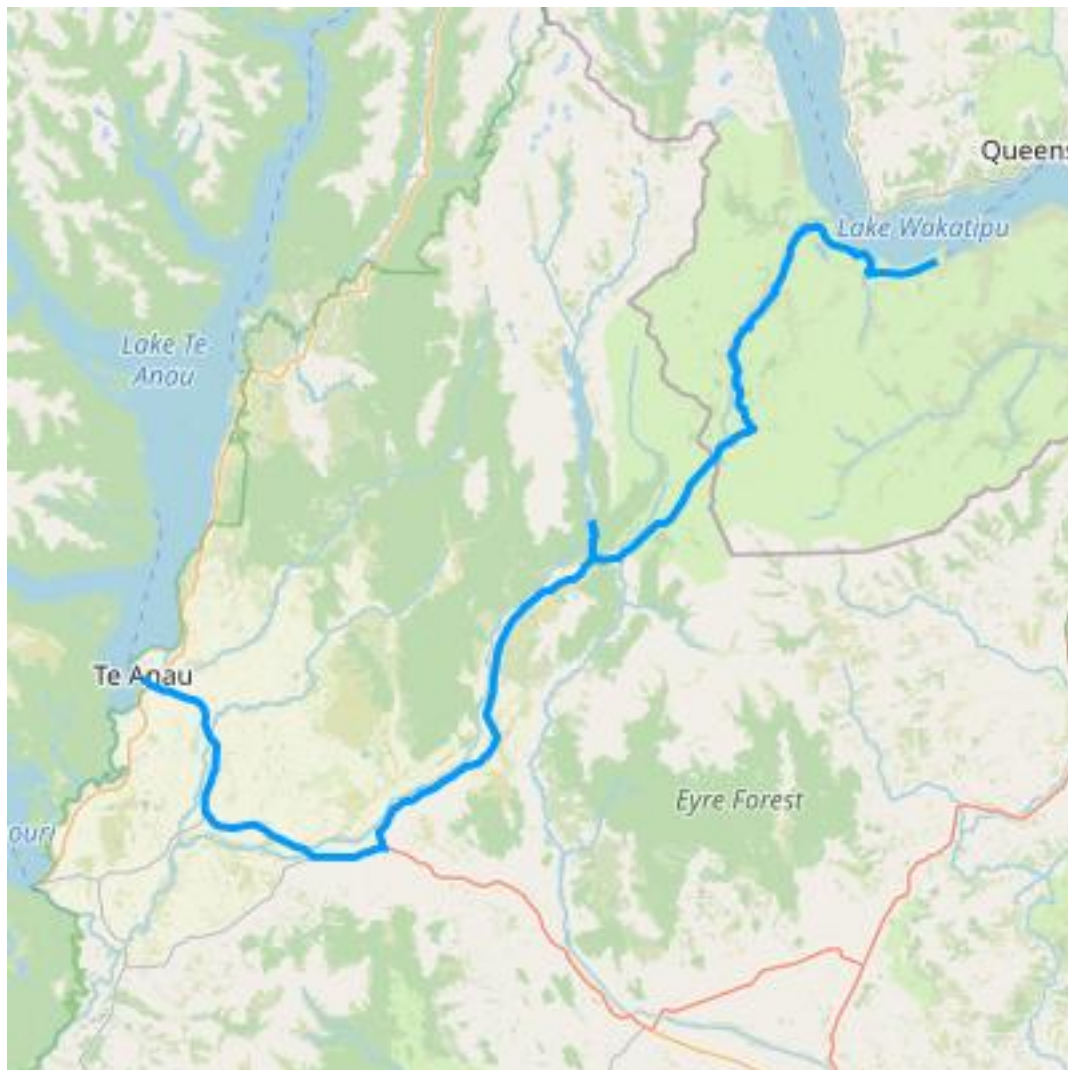
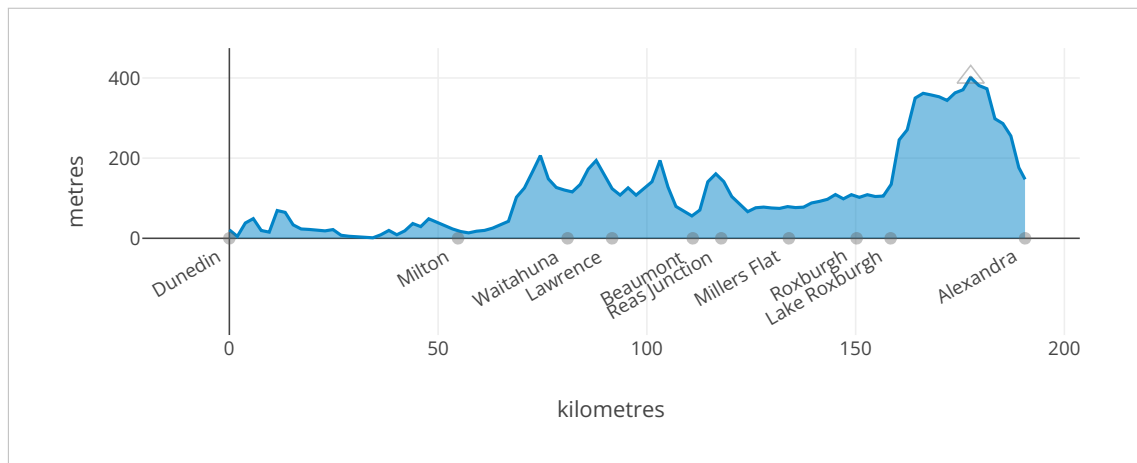


Figure 48.1: Queenstown to Te Anau via the Mavora Lakes

## Dunedin to Alexandra

Distance: 191 km   Ascent: 1482 m   Descent: 1356 m



This is a grand trip but conducted mostly on a main highway albeit through some great countryside. Take the main road south (Highway 1) out of Dunedin and pass through Milton (59 kilometres out from Dunedin). You might like to spend the first night here as the road rises to 250 metres after this point and the next campground is a further 37 kilometres. A few kilometres out of Milton, turn right onto Highway 8 to Alexandra. The intersection is marked by the remains of the old railway station you can see on your right just past the turnoff.

Most of the towns on this route have links to the goldfields of the 1860's; including the small hamlets of Round Hill and Waitahuna. But the most rustic is perhaps Lawrence. Lawrence (96 kilometres from Dunedin) is a lovely old town with all the facilities you need and a good deal of local history thrown in. Close by is Gabriel's Gully where the gold rushes of Otago ostensibly began. There are also the remains of gold towns like Wetherstons.

Twenty kilometres further on, you can link onto a minor rail trail from Beaumont to Miller's Flat, approximately 20 kilometres of rough trail travelling through some great country winding alongside the mighty Clutha River. Little remains of the homesteads that once graced this area, but oddly, the old swing bridge, built to service them, is still in good shape. The proliferation of wild, gnarled fruit trees in this area is caused, so I am told, by early locals throwing their stone fruit pips out of the train windows.

The trail passes by the famous 'Lonely Graves', a romantic and much disputed story of the grave of an anonymous young man whose drowned body was washed up by the Clutha River in 1865. A sympathetic local man, William Rigney, struck by the deceased's handsome features, buried him with the epitaph 'Somebody's Darling Lies Buried Here'. Years later, when Rigney died, he was buried next door with the words, 'The Man Who buried Somebody's Darling Lies Buried Here'. So the legend goes.



The swing bridge at  
Beaumont

There is a further 100 kilometres or so from here to Alexandra and you may wish to break up the journey by staying at Miller's Flat or Ettrick or the more substantial town of Roxburgh (also has Backpackers). There is an alternative minor road paralleling the main road from Rae's Junction (includes the Beaumont rail trail) right through to the Roxburgh hydro village.



Wild country, Alexandra

Roxburgh is about 41 kilometres from Alexandra. There is one additional stop you might be interested in. At a midway point between here and Alexandra is Fruitlands, where a hotel and coffee bar has been established in the old stone pub, the last remaining substantial building in this old town.

There is a side road along and opposite that leads up a winding track to the top of the Old man Range (a day return trip). On the top of the range is a great tor, a natural obelisk, rising 24 metres above the bleak ridgeline. This is a haunting, desolate and memorable place with a magnificent view. Be warned, the road rises to 1600 metres. Those keen enough can continue on a rough track down past the Fraser dam (20k's of downhill) and take the river road to Alexandra. Check this out with the locals. It is not a track to take lightly.

And welcome to Alexandra. A good sized town with all you need in the way of bike shops, supermarket, e-mail, backpackers and campgrounds etc.

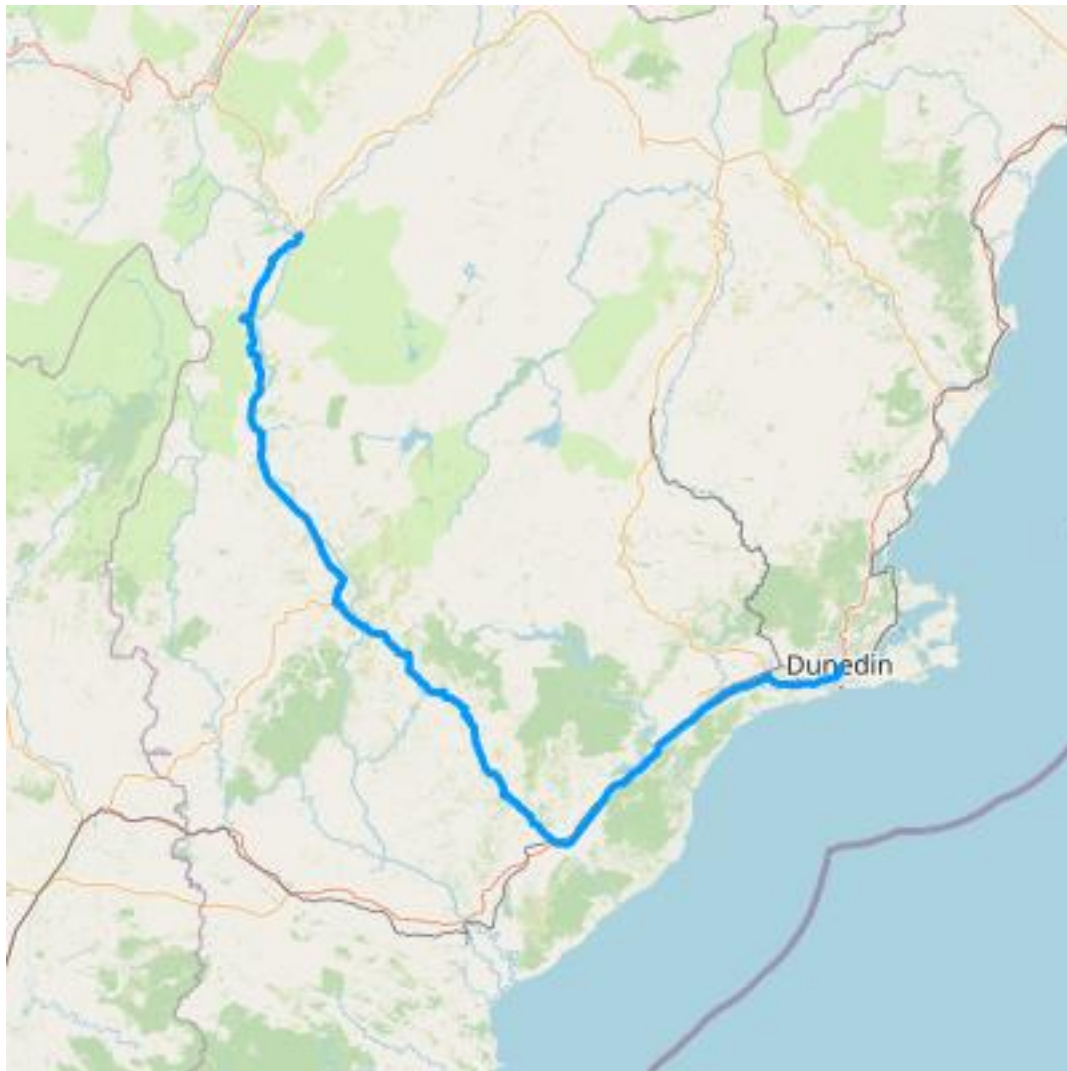


Figure 49.1: Dunedin to Alexandra

## Dunedin to Middlemarch

### 50.1 Dunedin to Middlemarch by Train

My first suggestion is that you [take the train](#)<sup>1</sup>.

The old Dunedin railway station is a gem of Victorian architecture and the tourist board runs a regular service out towards the beginning of the Rail Trail in Middlemarch. The train has an historical commentary and stops en route so you can take photographs. Be warned, some days the train only goes as far as Pukerangi or Hindon, leaving you in a bleak, if beautiful barren landscape, and you

have to cycle the remaining 25 or so kilometres to Middlemarch. But there is something isolating and memorable about being dropped off alongside an empty railway line in the middle of nowhere and seeing the road snake away over the small hills into the empty distance while the train chugs off back to civilisation.

The cycle purist will, however, take the high road to Middlemarch, and I mean the high road, for this highway is a long climb...



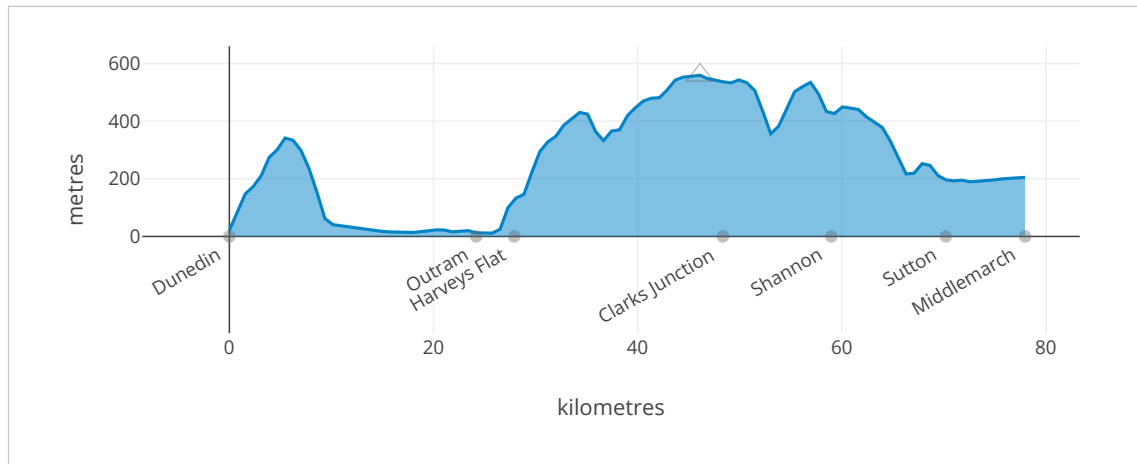
Pukerangi to Middlemarch

### 50.2 Dunedin to Middlemarch by Bike

Distance: 78 km   Ascent: 1284 m   Descent: 1100 m

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<sup>1</sup><https://dunedinrailways.co.nz/>



Prepare for an interesting day as the road climbs up out of the Octagon past Robert Burns on your right via Stuart Street. Dunedin is known for its hills and this is a great one to start the day. The main hill is called Three Mile Hill (380 metres) and drops you down into the town of Mosgiel (15 km out). The road is then fairly flat to the smaller town of Outram (another 10 km), but from here the road starts to climb. No shops after this point although the scenery is lovely. The old coach road can be spied off to the left in parts and you can glimpse the antique bridge and stables now on private property near Lee Stream.

The oasis in the offing is Clarks Junction (about 50 km from Dunedin) on the junction leading to the Old Dunstan road. There is a pub here, but drink deep because there is still one more climb to go. The road winds down through Deep Stream, a steep gorge that drops from around 550 to 400 metres and then climbs back up again. After this you coast down to Sutton where the old railway sleepers and tracks removed for the Rail Trail are still piled up on either side of the old Sutton railway station. The road from here to Middlemarch is flat and simple, providing there is no head wind.

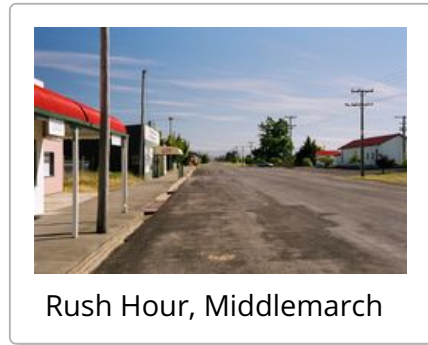
By about now the beauty of this place starts to become apparent. Central Otago is a fascinating landscape of schist outcrops and long, hazy distances. A semi-desert that, on hot still days, carries a magic quality of its own. Artists, writers and poets find this country fascinating. Noted artist Graham Sydney bases much of his work on this area and lives in the north-west of Otago in what is left of the old gold town of Cambrians. In 1865 the area was over-run by gold-miners. They dug for gold, formed small shanty towns, and departed leaving most of the settlements to wax briefly and then fade gently into the wilderness. The sheep farmers lasted much longer and the occasional grand settler homestead among established trees still graces the roadside as you cycle past.



Middlemarch was once a bleak town on the Taieri Plain and at the mercy of the great winds that blow through this part of the world occasionally. I once camped here—abouts and listened to the wind grow in force in the early morning hours. The noise was like a jet engine and I lay in the darkness with my feet braced against the tent poles as the wind, tried to press the tent flat. I escaped with a bent tent pole. The more elaborate tent of the Belgians camped next to me split apart and their belongings were hurled into the darkness. The winds are rare however and in summer you have little to worry about.

Middlemarch has prospered because of the Rail Trail and has at least two good hostels, a campground and a swept-up coffee bar just out of town called 'The Kissing Gate Café' (Good coffee, good food). The town closes at five and the locals, including shepherds and local businessmen often gravitate to the pub.

The Taieri Tavern was one of the most reluctant in New Zealand to cede to the non-smoking ban that was legislated in 2004. The constable was one of the local patrons apparently. Today however, the tavern, like all pubs in New Zealand, is smoke-free. The place is noteworthy for the large and very fascinating narrative painting that graces the wall of the lounge bar. It was painted many years ago and includes sympathetic vaguely seventeenth century caricatures of then, local community members engaged in, unsurprisingly, drinking in a tavern. What is odd is that it is painted in a European style of uncertain origins that includes traces of Hogarth, Vermeer, and even a bit of Breughel the Elder. Fascinating in that its narrative is clearly significant for its local context, yet the details of its history is fast becoming lost as local memories fade.



Rush Hour, Middlemarch

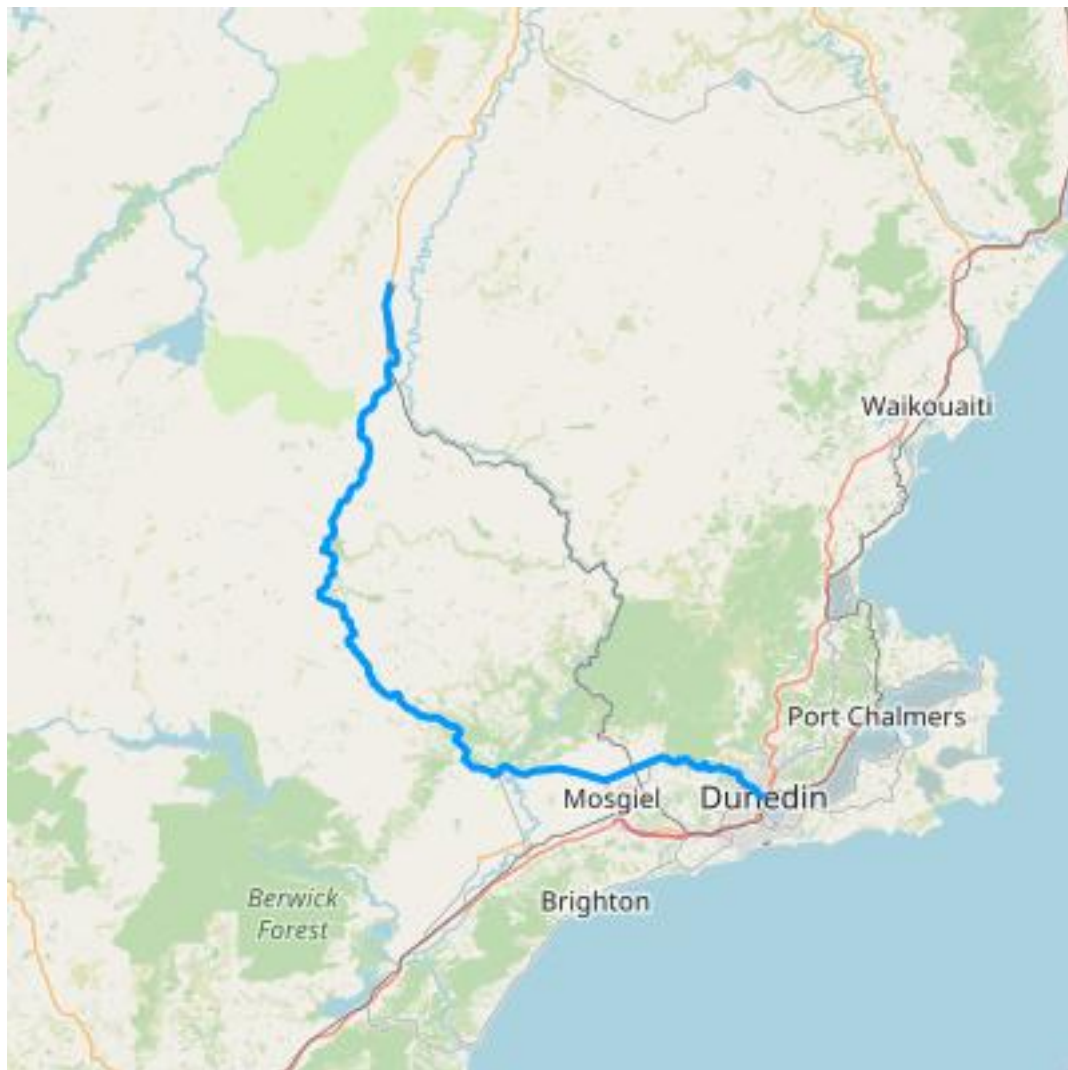
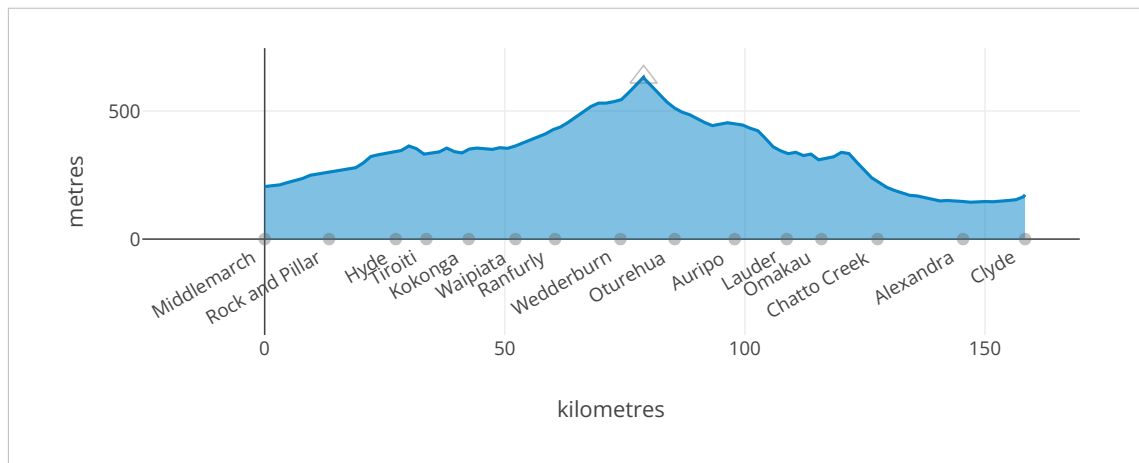


Figure 50.1: Dunedin to Middlemarch by Bike

# The Otago Central Rail Trail

Distance: 158 km   Ascent: 587 m   Descent: 619 m



The rail trail is one of New Zealand's great bike rides. The route is based on the old railway that once looped around the great plain of the Maniototo. No traffic, no hills to speak of, three (dark) tunnels and a number of great trestle bridges and stone cuttings. This trail takes approximately three days and follows through some of Otago's best and least populated country.

The views are outstanding and the night sky, unpolluted by street lights, gives a fresh intensity to stars, satellites, meteors and planets. Geographically, this area was formed by the floor of a prehistoric sea, and you still get that awed sense of walking in an ancient cathedral when you step out into this landscape.



Cottage at Golden Progress Mine

## Middlemarch

Occasionally a tourist train comes in from Dunedin and drops cyclists off, but this is the end of the line. What is left of the rails and sleepers is stacked at Sutton, a few kilometres south. From Middlemarch the bedded gravel trail is devoted to pedestrians, cyclists, sheep and the occasional horse. There are several gates which may require opening and relatching, but the way is

generally uninterrupted all the way to Clyde a further 150-ish km away (pick up a rail trail brochure from the local store).

Middlemarch appears to have closed its old campground (Blind Billy's) although locals assure me that there is free camping on the local Domain with limited facilities, but this is something I would check before I put up my tent. There are however a number of backpackers and coffee bars. A good idea for cycle campers is to arrive by train and spend an hour in Middlemarch having food or sight-seeing, and then cycle the 30 kms to Hyde (no store, but an interesting old cemetery).

Although you can camp (boutique accommodation and coffee bar) at Hyde, I suggest a lovely spot is the DOC camp at Tiroiti (Daisybank) 7 kms further on through the tunnel and beyond. There is legal camping on flat ground next to a narrow, fast-river running through a shallow ravine lined with willows. You can swim too, if you are cautious and pick your site carefully. Evening here brings the rabbits and the faint twilight and stillness that make the trail magical. Highly recommended.



Camping under willows

Leave a little late and enjoy cycling in the cool afternoon and early evening. An Otago summer day is often the hottest in the country, but the sun sets late and you can easily cycle to Daisybank without running out of daylight.

A word on tunnels. They are neither lit nor straight. While only a few hundred metres long they can appear quite grim. Take out your torch and walk or cycle carefully using lights. By the time you get to the third tunnel you will be quite blasé about them. You can make Middlemarch to Ranfurly easily in a day if you wish (59 kms), but remember the surface is not sealed and the gravel, while fairly even for the most part, limits you to around 8 - 10 kph with panniers.

## Ranfurly

Ranfurly is a good sized town and has everything you need for a night's rest. Store, backpackers, pub, campground and restaurant. It has an interesting tourist display which focuses on the history of the now absent railway, but altogether the town is a bit dull. When I passed through I found the banking facilities very limited for a largish town and the coffee bar did not take Visa... a bit odd. The people are friendly enough but you get the feel the

place needs a bit of energy and imagination.

From here the rail trail becomes even more interesting. More bridges, tunnels and wide landscape views of mountains and plains and glimpses of isolated gold trails stretching into the brown hills. This is wonderful semi-desert country. Hot and still in summer, it freezes in winter.

The rocks are a mixture of schist and granite and are formed into odd and often grotesque shapes by ice and freezing winter winds. The miners built their huts of schist, splitting it off and creating drystone walls that still form barns and sheep enclosures for local farmers.

Ranfurly is only 40 km or so from St Bathans and fifteen from Naseby, two old gold towns that have survived the decline of gold to become small, sleepy settlements.



The store at Ranfurly

### Wedderburn

Wedderburn (great sod brick pub with meals available, no store) has a new addition, The Red Shed. This is a campground with good facilities on the hill next to the trail with fine views. It has chalets and backpacker rooms as well. The Shed is unattended but provides a large area with displays and shelter and a coffee machine.

Although not generally noticeable, the rail trail runs slightly uphill to this point and downhill, mostly, from this point on. Being a railway, the inclines are so gradual as to not be overly onerous.

### Oturehua

Oturehua is a good place to stop for an ice cream or coffee. It has most facilities (a pub/store/tearoom and camping at the local Backpacker) plus the addition of a fantastic coffee bar just out of town called *The Ida Valley Kitchen*. The township has the old General Store and the Hayes Engineering Works as attractions, but one of the great free side trips are the remains of *The Golden Progress* mining site just before you reach the township (sign-posted). This is a pleasant walk into the dry hills past old cottages, tailings, the remnants of rusting boilers and gold-seeking industries including a 'pop-

pet head' mine with an impressive wooden tower constructed over a 45 metre shaft.

Camping in the local Domain is allowed apparently, but it pays to ask the locals, politely, first. Oturehua has an interesting local museum based on the history of engineering in the area. After passing through two tunnels and over a massive and impressive trestle bridge, you arrive at Lauder (coffee bar, pub and accommodation/backpackers. No camping that I could see and no store but meals at the pub).



Poppet Head Shaft at  
Golden Progress

You can stop here or head the odd 10 km further on to Omakau (pub, store, tearooms, Backpackers). I generally stop here because of a small hamlet called Ophir.

## Ophir

Ophir is off the main trail, about 2 km down a side road from Omakau heading east. This beautiful hamlet maintains that old gold mine town charm. There are no shops but at the time of writing an elaborate coffee bar was being constructed out of the old General Store. Pub meals and basic accommodation are available at Flannery's Backpackers/camping just off the main street. Further on out of town is a beautiful example of 19th century suspension bridge. Barely a hundred metres across it is nonetheless quite lovely in its quiet surroundings of river and trees.

Look out for fish sunning themselves in the warm shallows. This place is so relaxing you might want to spend days here. There are numerous small side trips to other old gold towns including Matakanui or you might just fossick around the dry, tussocky hills and streams and wonder at the remains of tiny, isolated stone huts and the stamina and dreams of the miners who built them.

It is an easy day past Chatto's Creek (great pub) with the trail winding down past paddocks of Bugloss flowers (used for honey manufacture) to Alexandra, a large town with a couple of bike shops, camping grounds and Backpackers. Alexandra is a place to catch up on movies or broken spokes, e-mail or whatever.



**Alexandra**

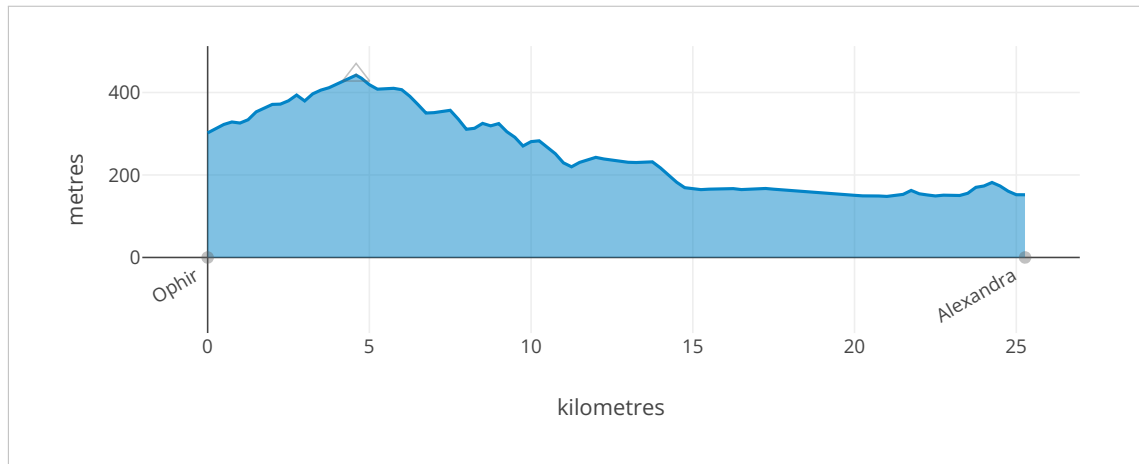
Alexandra is a pleasant town full of old pubs and the odd historic building. Sadly little remains of the great suspension bridge that once crossed the Clutha River at this point, but the stone pillars remain to give you an idea of the endeavour of engineers in what must have been one of the globe's more inaccessible places in the late nineteenth century. From Alexandra you can cycle easily into Clyde eight or so kilometres further on and celebrate journey's end. Better still, the trail is extending as I write toward Roxburgh, not exclusively along old railway lines, but through rolling countryside that is occasionally more challenging to cycle but no less beautiful.



Figure 51.1: The Otago Central Rail Trail

## Ophir to Alexandra

Distance: 25 km   Ascent: 203 m   Descent: 353 m



I love this road, but it is not a road to be found on any map. Ophir is two kilometres from Omakau and not far from the rail-trail. The back road from Ophir to Alexandra is one best pointed out by locals who will direct you out of the township via farm gates and barely discernable tractor-tracks. Once you get going the way becomes clear enough. The road rises and you will probably push a bit at first, but the scenery and the clarity of the air will almost certainly take your full attention.



Schist rock and tussock

Alongside views of the far hills and their frosting of snow, there is the immediate proximity of isolate schist rock breaking jaggedly through the tussock. There is no traffic of course and the way is strewn with giant mushrooms and the smell of wild thyme. The sheer quantity of the mushrooms astounds you as much as their size. Every time you think you could not see a bigger one there it is, huge and white growing out of the hillside. The thyme was purportedly sown by gold miners and together the two items provided a subtle alternative to the miner's usual rough tucker.

The track gradually enters a small valley and there is a derelict shepherd's hut and, further on, the remains of what appears to have been a homestead

or small settlement beside a stream. The history of this spot is difficult to unearth, but it certainly had a very beautiful setting. Little remains today but a few toppled stones and parts of a cast iron stove. A little exploration reveals various broken implements and the carious bones of cattle, likely slaughtered for food or perhaps drowned in the winter floods. Further out up the valleys are disused gold mines and shafts.

The track eventually descends past rusting sluicing pipes and onto a sealed back road into Alexandra past the old Galloway rail stop. Not an easy route and definitely not a short cut into Alexandra from Ophir, but a worthwhile trip if only to evoke and glimpse something close to a gentler, slower era that died out only just beyond living memory.

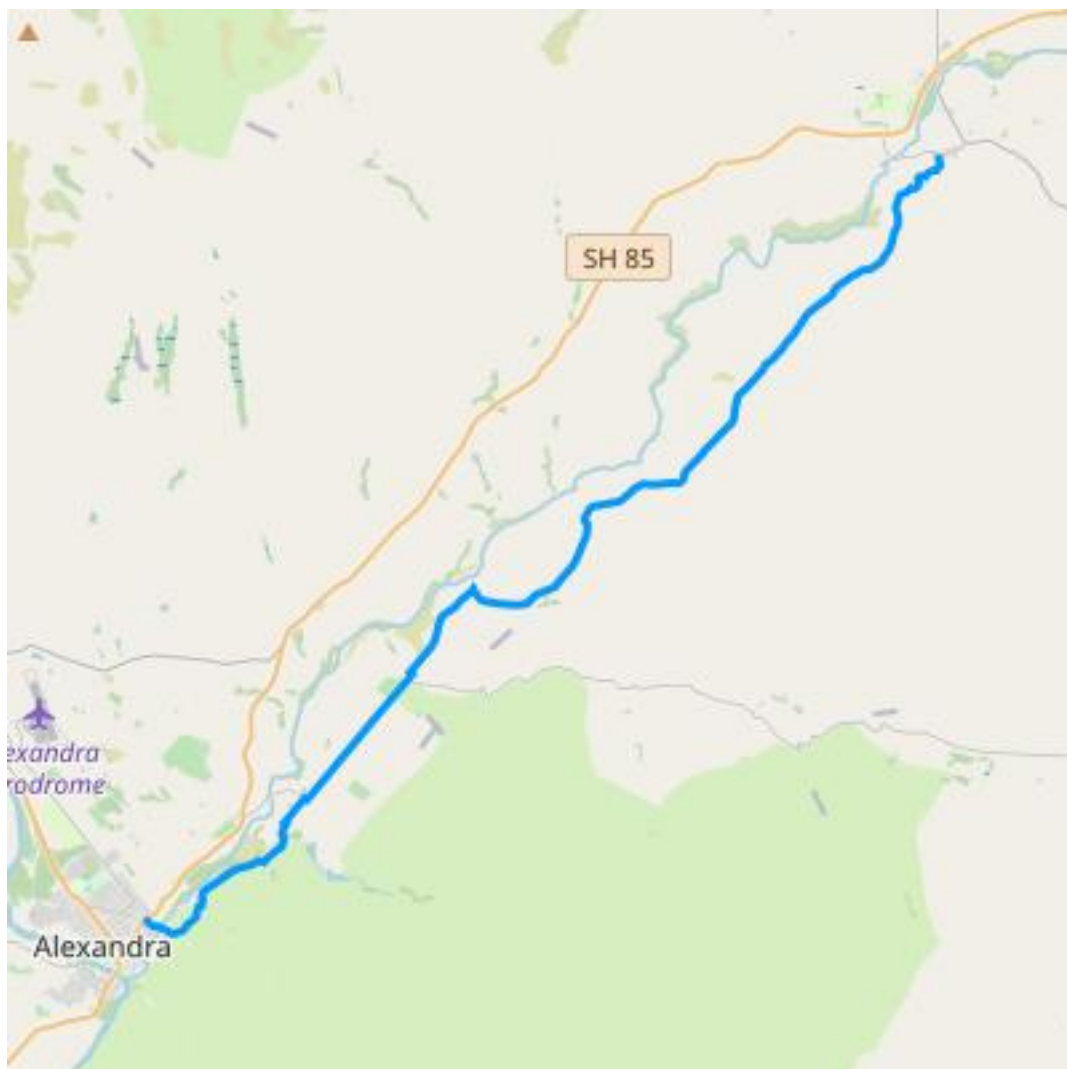
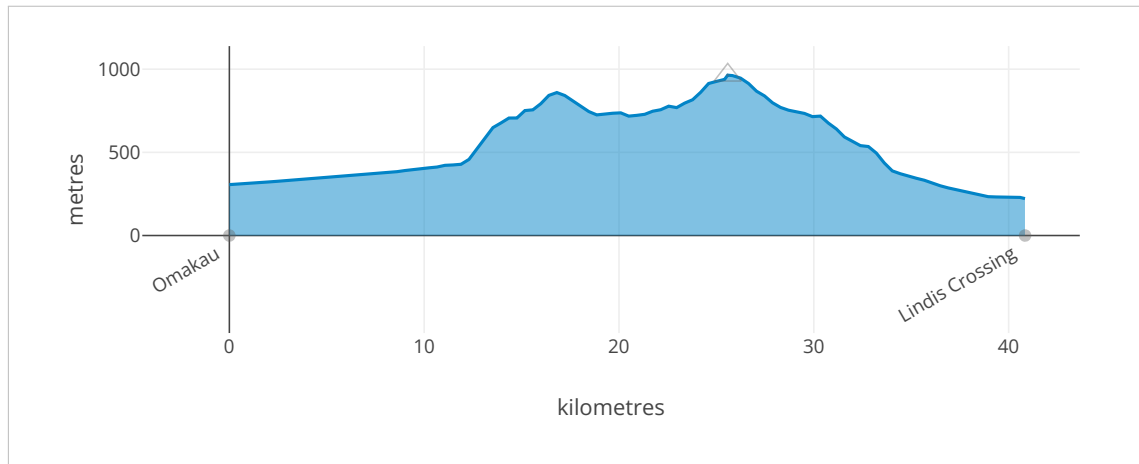


Figure 52.1: Ophir to Alexandra

## Omakau to Lindis Crossing

Distance: 41 km   Ascent: 801 m   Descent: 885 m



The Thompson Track is a little known but worthwhile old gold road from Omakau (on the rail trail) to Wānaka. It is also known as the 'Rise and Shine Road' or 'Back of Beyond' by locals in an obscure reference to its historic past. There are several old gold town relics on this route. There are the historic remains of the town of Bendigo, various abandoned mine shafts, the remains of sod brick cottages and an impressive 'battery' or 'stamper'. These were generally cast iron banks of water or steam driven hammers used to crush gold-bearing quartz.



Beginning of the Thompson Track

So, where to start from? My favourite campsite in this area is at Ophir (2 km from Omakau) a campsite attached to the Backpackers currently owned by Bill and Lois Galler, although rumours are that it is to be sold. Ophir is one of my favourite old gold towns and a quiet spot redolent of other eras and other lives.

Let me add a small piece of local drama regarding Ophir. There was once a murder in the Ophir hotel (otherwise known as Blacks Hotel) and a woman was shot dead just by the hearth in the public bar. A bullet hole in the hearth is still visible. The murder was apparently, the result of a tragic love triangle.

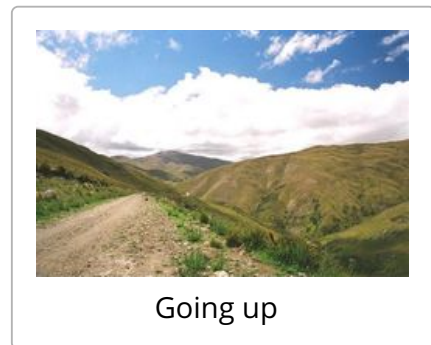
It is unwise to inquire too loudly of the event however as it occurred relatively recently rather than being part of Ophir's more distant and colourful past. Those associated with the event are liable to be leaning on the bar or possibly serving behind it.

On the way you might like to take in Matakanui, or Tinkers, a 3 km diversion. This is an established old gold town with a few, still lived-in, substantial sod brick buildings including the old Tinker's hotel which is now, sadly, a privately owned residence and very dry. Further on, the first sign of the Thompson Track appears as a hand painted notice warning of the number of gates to be opened and closed.



Matakanui

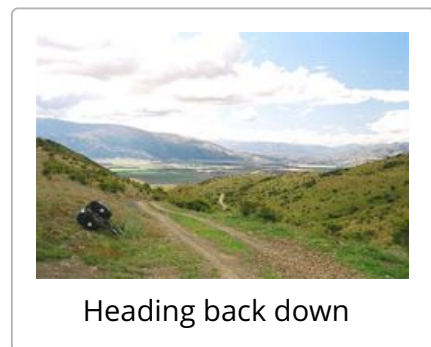
The track is well formed and about 37 km long initially winding up through hills and over streams and small valleys. The first section affords great views back toward the flat plain and the Raggedy Range in the distance.



Going up

While the surface is good you may be pushing a good part of the way as the road climbs steeply at first and then becomes a little easier as the incline lessens. The Stamper Battery is located near the top of the range. On the day I visited the site, there were a number of geckos sunning themselves on the rocks. They scattered as I approached. These are small and harmless lizards but they give you a start when you are not ready for them.

The view from the top over the valley towards Lake Dunstan is impressive, as is the view toward the great Pisa Range in the far distance toward Wānaka. The descent is gradual enough. If you want to visit the ruined gold town of Bendigo, take the left hand side track directly at the bottom of the hill (there will be a restored miner's hut a hundred metres or so to your right in a walled paddock). This detour will add some ten or so kilometres to your journey overall but is worth it if you have an interest in historic ruins.



Heading back down



You can turn right as you come off the track onto Highway 8 and stop at Tararua (15 km from turn-off) where there is a store and camping at the local school. There is a hostel a few kilometres out of the township. Or you can head left on Highway 8 to Cromwell (25 km from turn-off approx, all facilities). Or you can push on to Wānaka a further (50 km approx all facilities). If you take a day's supplies, you can camp discreetly on the track itself.

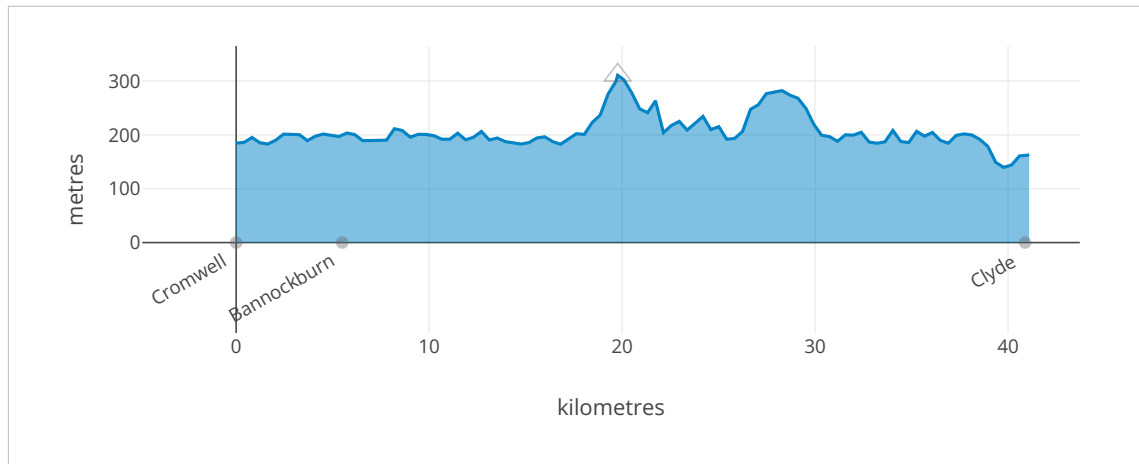


Figure 53.1: Omakau to Lindis Crossing



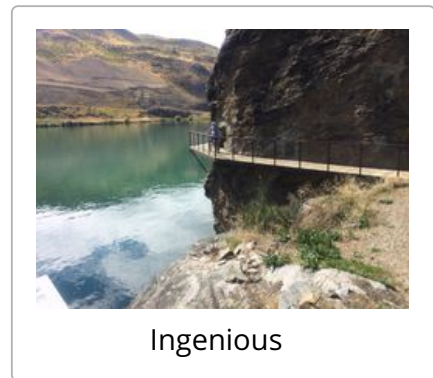
## Cromwell to Clyde

Distance: 41 km   Ascent: 354 m   Descent: 375 m



The main road from Cromwell to Clyde (23 kilometres or so) is a pretty stretch of highway running alongside the Cromwell Gorge Dam, but sadly it is often busy, with occasional pinch points.

However, there is a fine bike trail on the far side of the lake. One of the best, with cycle suspension bridges and ingenious board walks suspended over the blue-green water. This is the [Lake Dunstan Trail](#)<sup>1</sup> and it is pure Otago; a trail bordered by a clear, still, blue-green lake on one side and craggy knuckles of schist on the other. Be prepared for two staircases that zigzag up and over two promontories, but the rest is simple enough. A meandering, scenic track safely all the way from Cromwell to Clyde via the hamlet of Bannockburn. Your only possible hazard are pensioners on electric bikes... this trail is a magnet for superannuated adventurers drawn by what is spectacular Otago landscape. And spectacular it certainly is.



Ingenious

The Dunstan Trail is 41 kilometres, each indicated by a blue marker. And there is the bonus of a coffee launch (also ice-creams, soft drinks and snacks)

<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/23-great-rides/lake-dunstan-trail>

strategically moored halfway between Clyde and Bannockburn on the lake water's edge.

The scenery is stunning and the trail is redolent with the scent of thyme. It grows in wild, straggly patches planted by gold miners (so the story goes) and is a feature of much of Central Otago. It was reputedly an accompaniment to the giant field mushrooms that you can also find scattered round the hillsides.

You might pause and camp at Bannockburn. This is an old gold hamlet with a pub, cafe and campground. Bannockburn is a good jumping off place to explore vineyards... Mt Difficulty pinot noir is a world class wine and the vineyard is close by. There is also the opportunity to do cycle day trips into the hills and explore the remnants of gold towns like Carricktown and Quartsville up on the ridge with wide views over the valleys. Little is left up here but stone walls and mud-brick remains of cottages. There is nonetheless an impressive stamper battery and a large, restored waterwheel.

Like much of Otago's settler history it is a touch melancholy and testament to stalwart men and women that were drawn here from all over the world in the nineteenth century to escape poverty and chance making a fortune.

Bannockburn is also an opportunity for a further adventure. You can head south over the [Nevis Road](#)... a personal favourite of mine and a memorable one. A safe-cycling, old gold road crossing the Nevis valley to Garston.

A route, albeit a very roundabout one, to Queenstown.

Bannockburn to Cromwell is easy enough. Again, the meandering, leisurely trail alongside the Kawerau river.

The original Cromwell was sunk under the waters of the Clutha river. It was sunk to establish the dam at Clyde. Cromwell today is a modern thriving town centre and pleasant enough with just a smidgeon of the old Cromwell's main street which descends gently and disappears into the river's edge. Far below under the peaceful waters is an impressive box girder bridge and the remains of small cottages of Chinese gold miners and the railway which



Suspension bridge



At the summit

once linked Cromwell to Clyde.

A cycle trail linking Cromwell to Queenstown is currently in the planning stage.

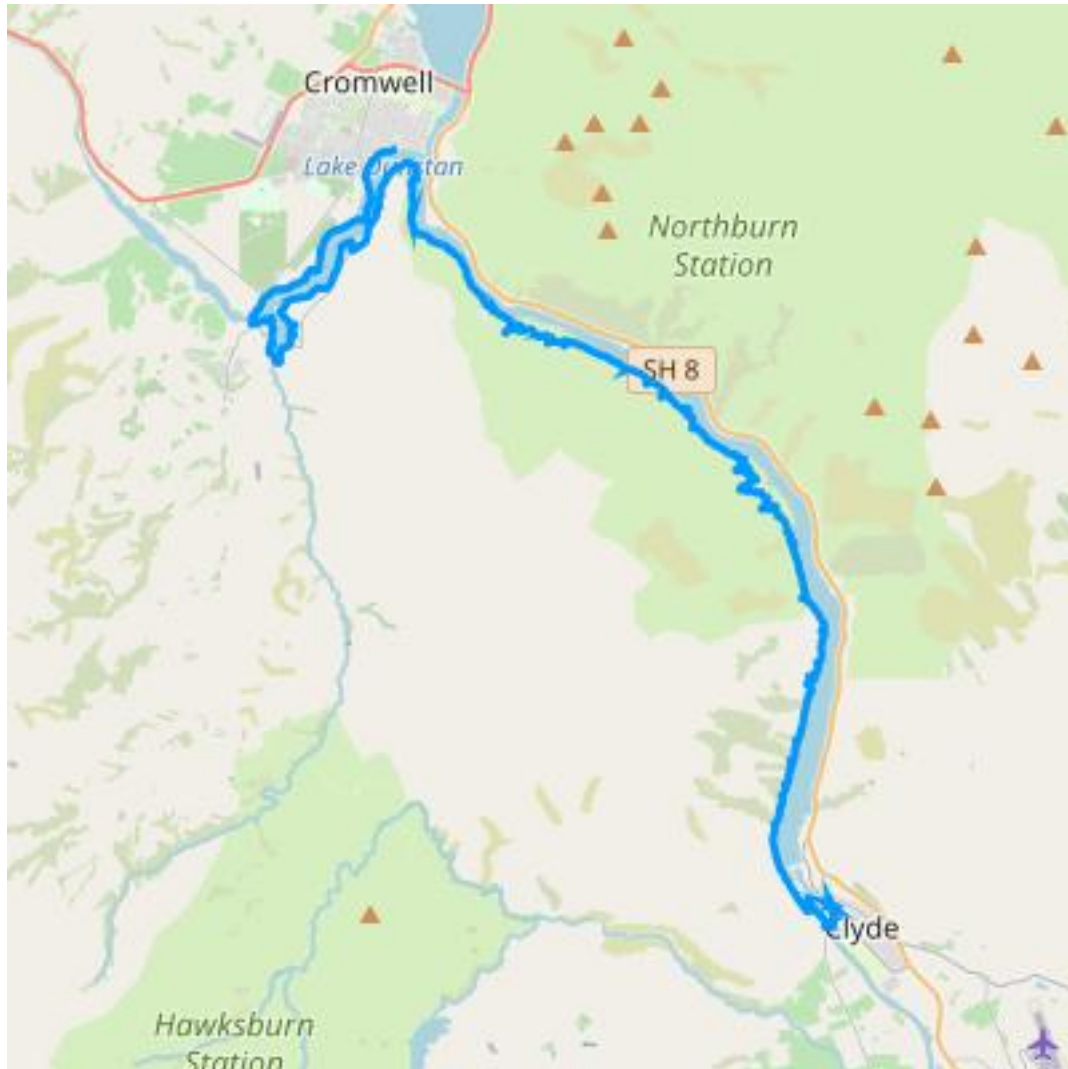
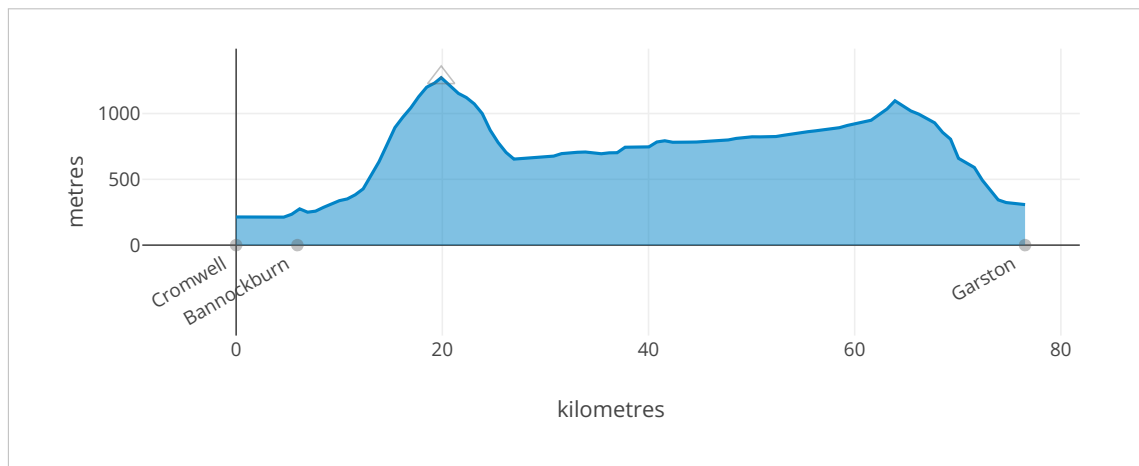


Figure 54.1: Cromwell to Clyde

## Cromwell to Queenstown

### 55.1 Cromwell to Garston via the Nevis Road

Distance: 77 km Ascent: 1537 m Descent: 1443 m



The Nevis road is reputedly the highest road in New Zealand. The best way to tackle this is to first cycle the easy few kilometres from Cromwell to Bannockburn, heading south and to pitch camp in the campground there. Bannockburn is a tiny hamlet sporting little more than a good pub, fine old church, and a number of old, abandoned stores and defunct post office. Bannockburn has slept out the last hundred and thirty odd years since 1867 when it had a population of over 2000, and now appears more than a little bewildered by the onset of enthusiastic wine growers fresh to the area.



Nevis Road

However, if you want an idea of early New Zealand gold towns, fossick around the hills and explore the remote remains of Carricktown and the scatterings of stone huts that once signalled a lonely digger's dream of prosperity. (The pub is a fascinating place for old local stories, ask the publican about one of New Zealand's oldest murder cases.) Don't forget to stock up on water for the next section. Most of the land today is given over to sheep farming and, on day two, as you wend your way through the foothills toward the Nevis

Road proper, you will come across an impressive old woolshed built from brake stones once used to slow the descent of wagons down the steep road you are about to ascend.

The road climbs 1,265 metres and can take a good four hours, mostly pushing up steep gravelly roads. But like most tough routes, the rewards are brilliant and unforgettable. Vehicles are rare here. At the top of the Nevis hill you can look back toward Bannockburn and further on across the great Nevis Valley. This is broad, beautiful country with a fast clear river running the length of the track. Be warned, you have to ford the tributaries of this river 24 times. Not dangerous and all part of the fun.

You might like to camp somewhere along the valley or in the lee of ruins of an old homestead. This is a country of settler dreams that never eventuated. The winters are harsh and even in summer you might wake with a little ice on the awning until the sun chases the shadows away. A word on water. New Zealand was once safe from Giardiasis, sadly, today it is not. If the streams are clear and fast running from the mountains then you might take your chances.



Remains of old homestead, Nevis Road

Across the Nevis plateau on a clear, sunny day the clouds appear to hang motionless on the hillsides, almost never changing shape in the still air. There is a great peace in this country. A sense of majesty and landscape like walking through the remains of ancient cathedrals. It is the geology you connect with mostly, for whatever sparse human habitation has struggled here the land almost appears indifferent. It is an honest place, unwritten and, as yet, unsigned.

Cycle on and out of the valley and climb again to the hills overlooking the Southern Alps north and west toward Queenstown. The road down to the main highway is fringed with purple bugloss flowers and slowly, old isolated stone farm buildings begin to appear again. You look out over square fields of hay in the plains and great ridges of mountains beyond. Grand country! At the end of the road turn left and head a few kilometres to Garston, there is a pub there.

If you turn right as you come out of the Nevis Road then it is a pleasant ten kilometre cycle to Kingston where you will find a store, campground and pub. Kingston is famous as the home of the steam train The Kingston Flier,



a beautifully restored engine that runs a popular tourist route through the alpine foothills.

Turning left takes you along an older section of the Flier tracks, now pressed into service as part of the [Around the Mountains](https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/23-great-rides/around-the-mountains-cycle-trail)<sup>1</sup> cycle trail.

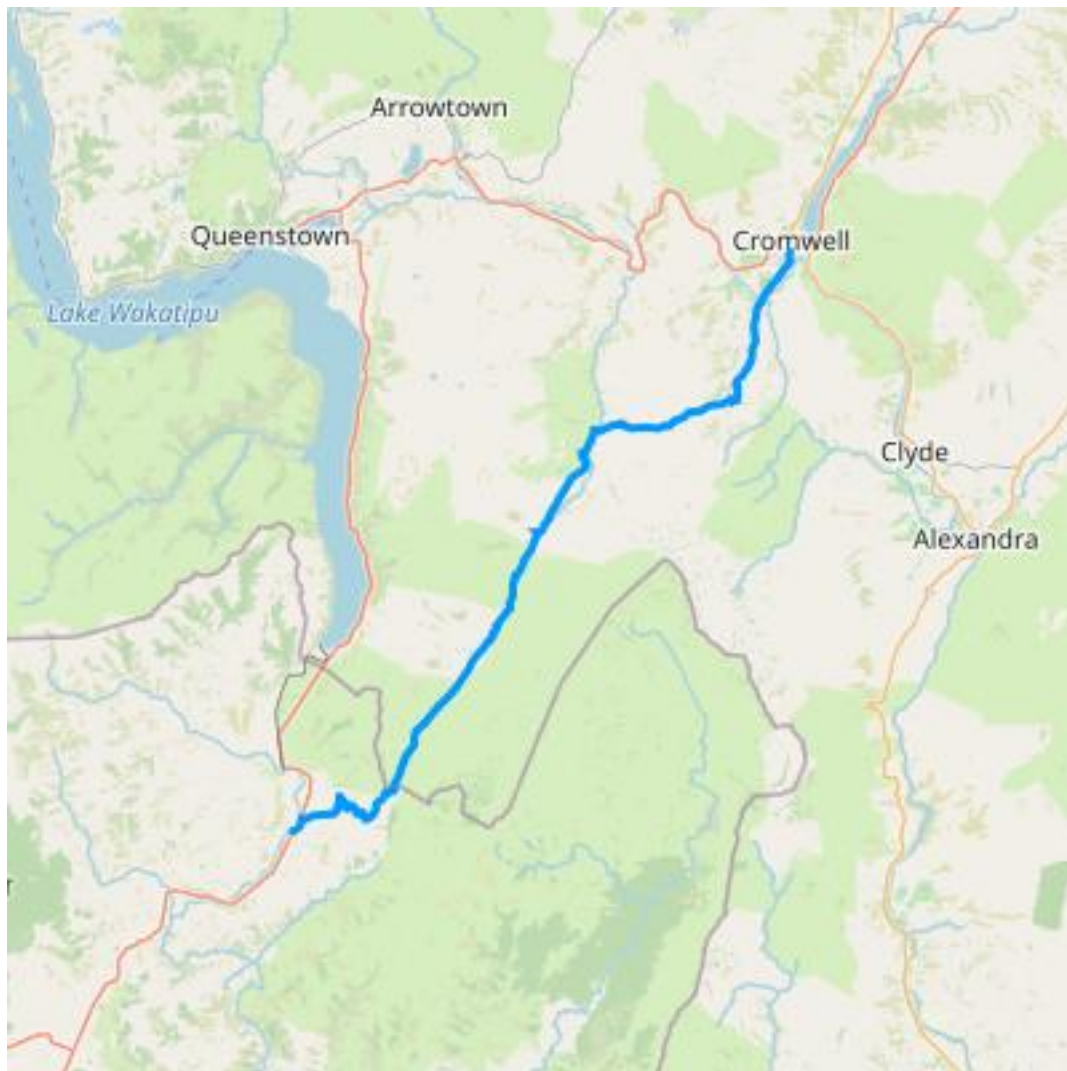


Figure 55.1: Cromwell to Garston via the Nevis Road

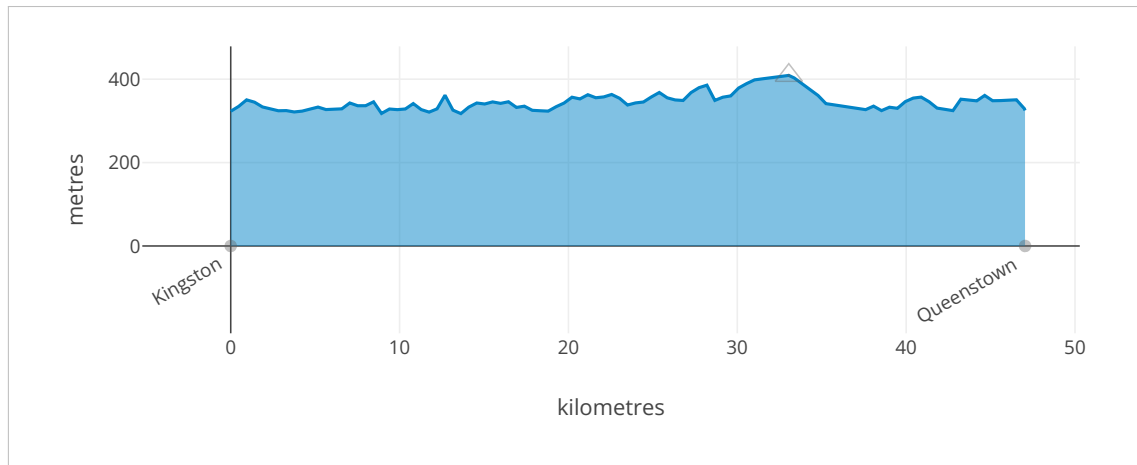
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<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/23-great-rides/around-the-mountains-cycle-trail>



## 55.2 Kingston to Queenstown

Distance: 47 km   Ascent: 427 m   Descent: 425 m



This is an easy lakeside cycle with the gorgeous expanse of Lake Wakatipu to your left. A few minor rises and falls and you reach Queenstown. No shortage of accommodation and facilities here including bike shops. You either love Queenstown or you hate it. It bustles with youth and a party, adventure atmosphere. Not that it isn't beautiful... but it is known as a tourist mecca. Well worth a day's sightseeing and relaxation.

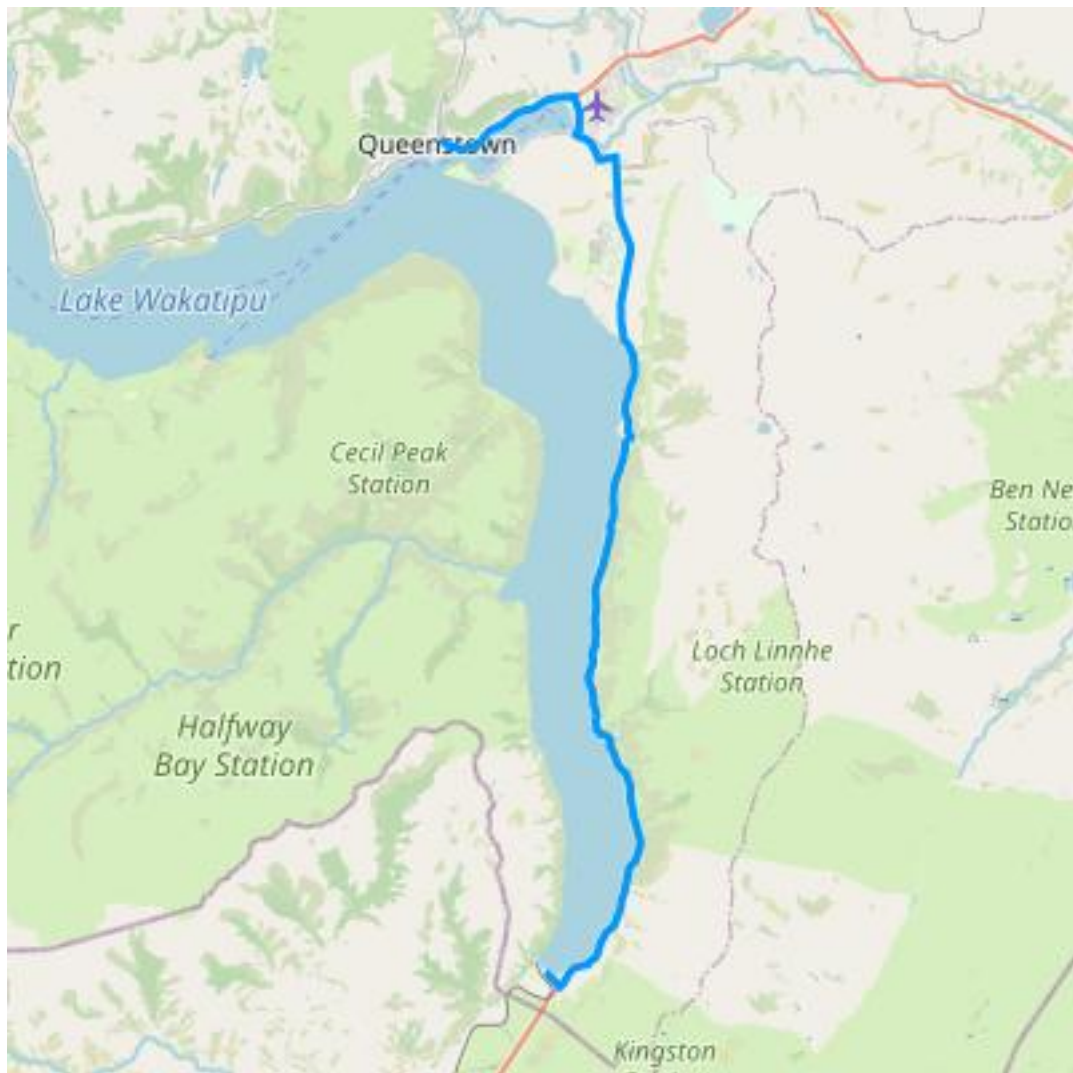
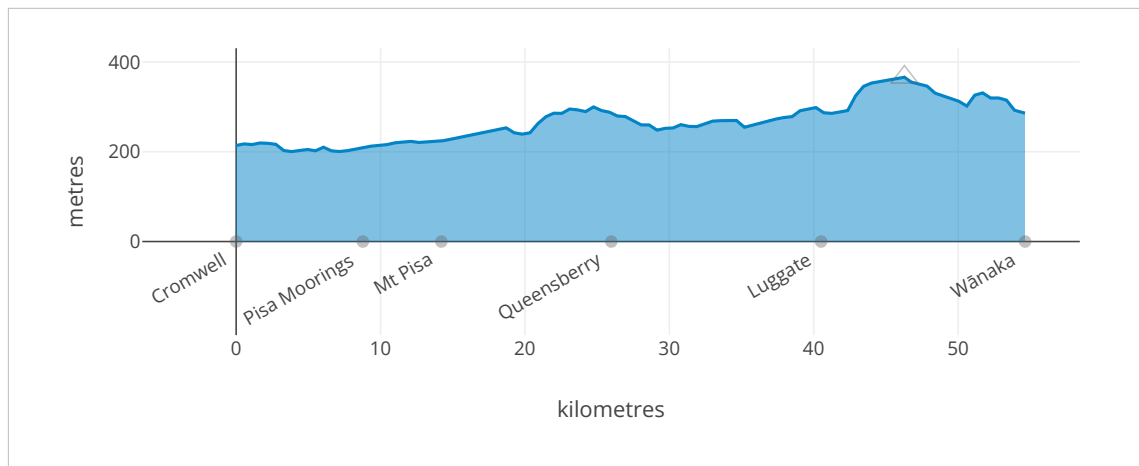


Figure 55.2: Kingston to Queenstown

## The Southern Lakes

### 56.1 Cromwell to Wānaka

Distance: 55 km Ascent: 254 m Descent: 182 m



This is a rolling ride through some great Otago country. Valleys, fields and fringes of snow capped mountain ranges. You have a choice of highways either travelling along the slightly less busy Highway 6 or Highway 8 which follows the west bank of the Clutha River. The route is slightly uphill but not so as you would notice it. Wānaka is a large, newish tourist town with a good deal of new money in a landscape that is almost unbelievable in its postcard purity.

Blue/green lake surrounded by mountains. A photographer's paradise and one that you can happily explore by bicycle. Wānaka has all the essentials; bike shop, supermarket, backpackers and campgrounds.

Wānaka has a laid back feel to it that, consciously or unconsciously, has more than a little of the Boulder Colorado feel about it. It is wealthy and picturesque. What you cannot ignore about Wānaka is the sheer loveliness of the place. Try some of the local bike trails around the lake and take plenty of film. Swim in the tributaries and relax. From here you can travel to Queenstown via the Cardrona Range, or head north up the West Coast Highway 6, reputedly the favourite road for cycle tourists in this country.

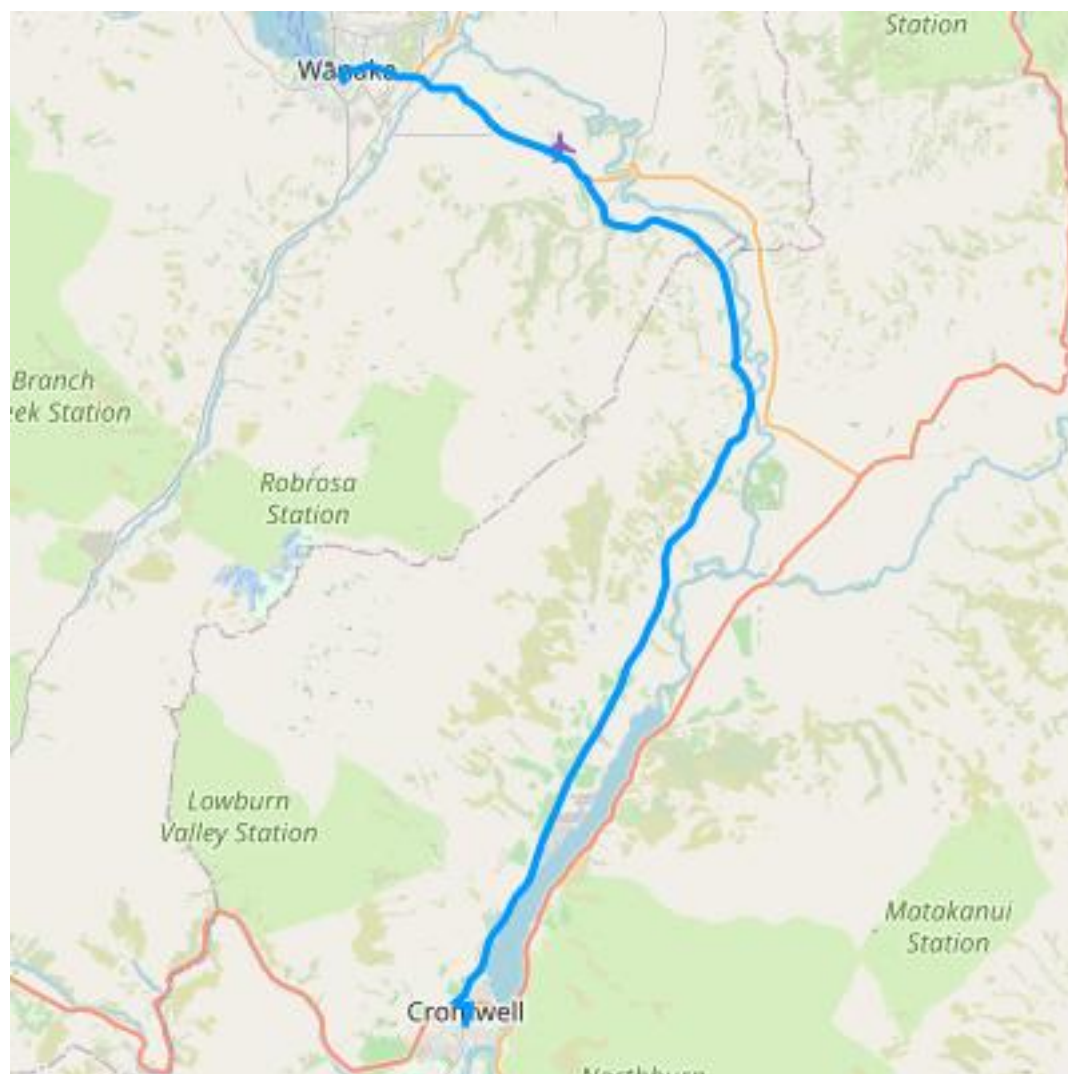
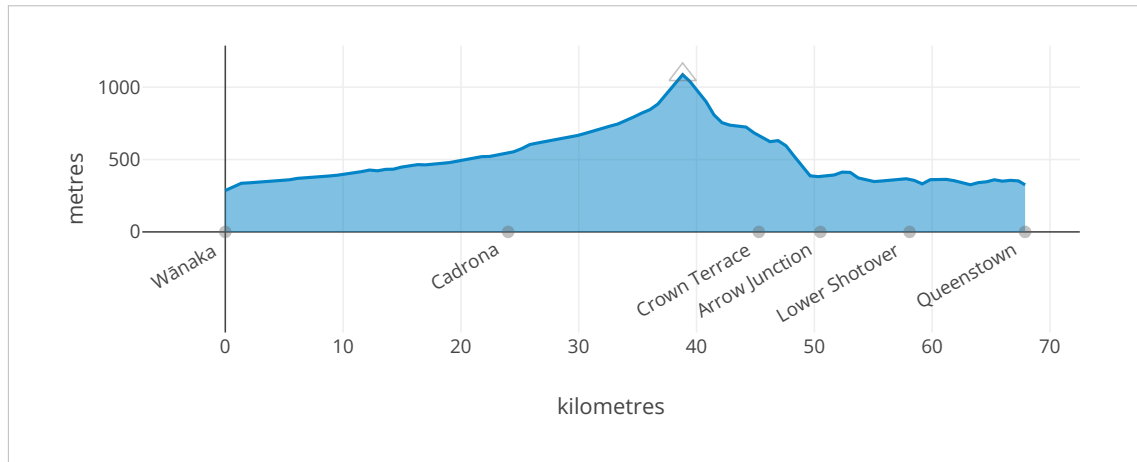


Figure 56.1: Cromwell to Wānaka

## 56.2 Wānaka to Queenstown via the Crown Range

Distance: 68 km   Ascent: 949 m   Descent: 910 m



The Crown Range is another steep climb and memorable day. The road climbs steadily to 1100 metres (reputedly New Zealand's highest road) before zig-zagging down into Queenstown. The historic Cardrona pub is on the Wānaka end and not a place to visit before you hit the hill. However, it's a grand spot and another remnant of the gold towns. A cemetery and a few stone outbuildings are sadly all that remain. The views from the top of the Crown saddle are well worth the effort. A small warning. There are no banks between Wānaka and Hokitika.



Cardrona Hotel

Arrowtown (21 km east on the Cardrona road) is smaller, quieter but no less lovely and has a pleasant characteristic gold town feel about it. It's a good alternative to the more vibrant Queenstown, but has no less attraction particularly for the cyclist.

Try cycling the old gold road out to Macetown; a derelict ghost town remnant of the old gold mining days. This is approximately fifteen kilometres out of Arrowtown and includes 22 fords across the Arrow River. A great trip but check locally for the state of the river before setting out. Macetown itself is a lovely, sad place, very much full of atmosphere.

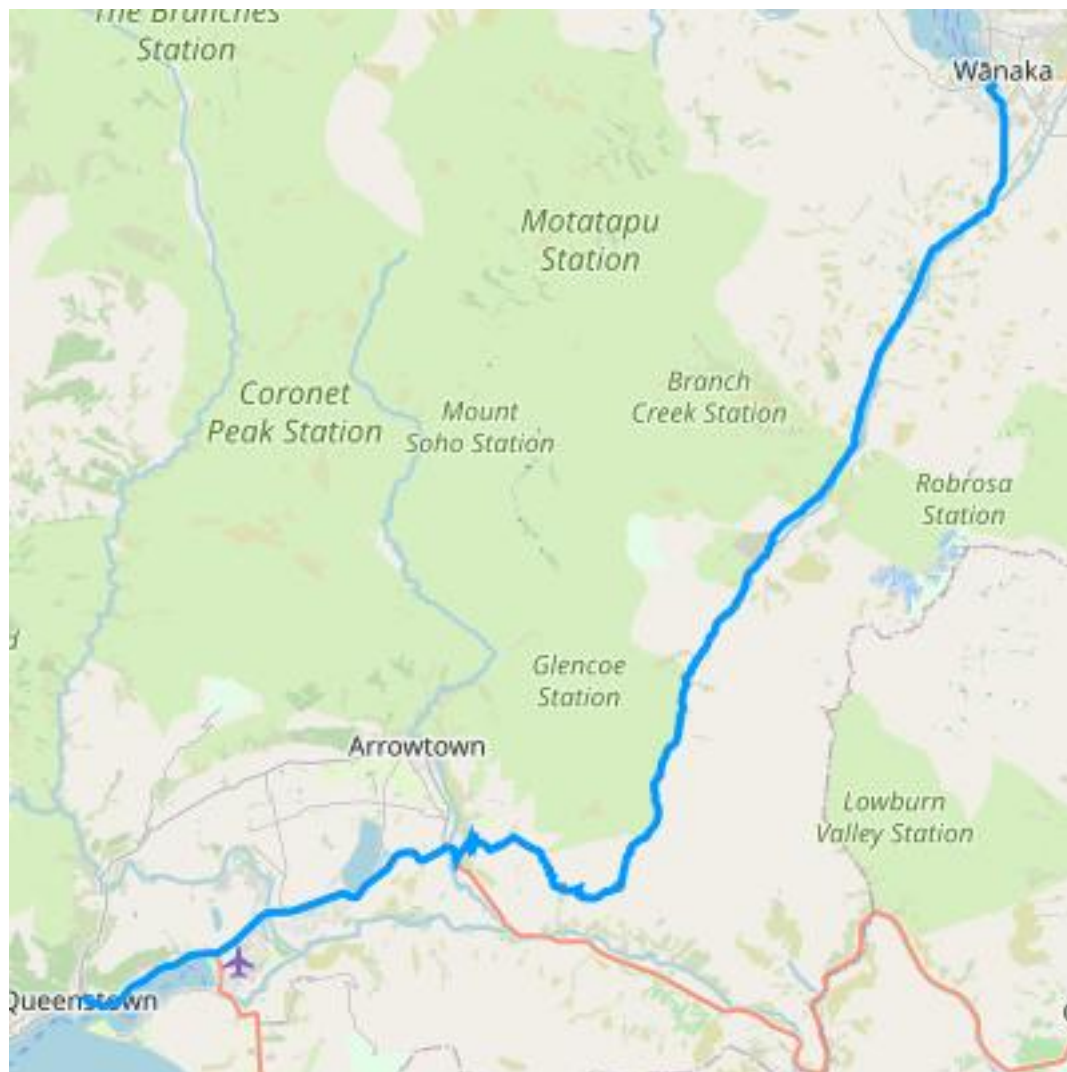


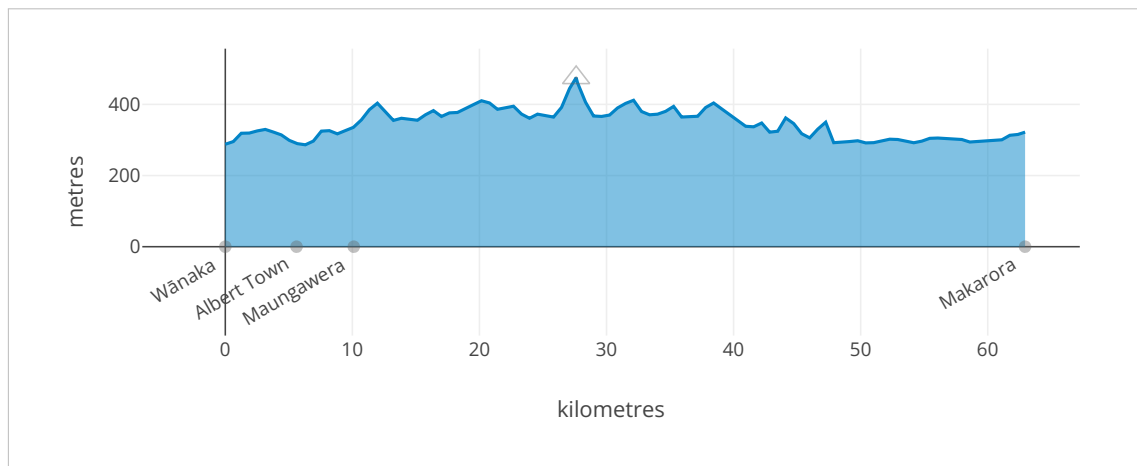
Figure 56.2: Wānaka to Queenstown via the Crown Range



# Wānaka to Fox Glacier

## 57.1 Wānaka to Makarora

Distance: 63 km   Ascent: 728 m   Descent: 694 m



If you travel up the West Coast of the South Island (arguably an easier gradient than travelling down it), it pays to check prevailing winds. With a good southerly behind you and a few fine days, this trip can be idyllic. Given headwinds and foul weather it turns into a gruelling trial of grimly endured kilometres between misty, isolated townships.

It pays to sit out a day or two in Wānaka and wait for perfect conditions. Then you will experience one of the finest cycle trips anywhere in the world. There is no doubt this is a hilly ride. Yet it rolls along beside lakes and many snow fed rivers that widen and spread as you approach the sea.

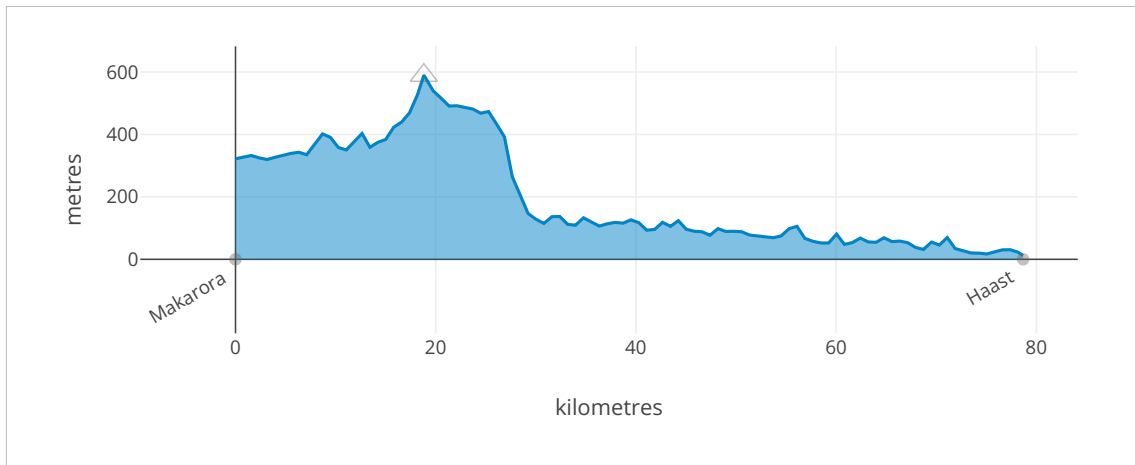
Take the first day easy and head for Makarora. There is a good camping ground here, a well equipped store and information centre. The day takes in a long lake front road alongside Lake Hawea before skirting the eastern shore of Lake Wānaka. Gorgeous country.



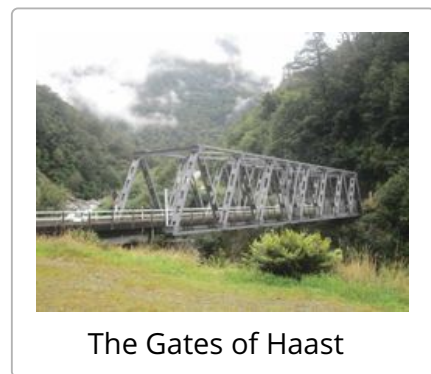
Figure 57.1: Wānaka to Makarora

## 57.2 Makarora to Haast

Distance: 79 km   Ascent: 868 m   Descent: 1178 m



Day two begins with a steepish climb to the ominously named 'Gates of Haast', this is a narrow pass on a winding road through bush clad hills and over box girder bridges that cross fast running rocky streams and rivers. After the 'Gates of Haast', the road is a glorious downhill stage that will roll you eighty one kilometres of easy cycling into Haast township. Again this is wonderful country with the Haast River on your right broadening into the white sands of the West Coast.



The Gates of Haast

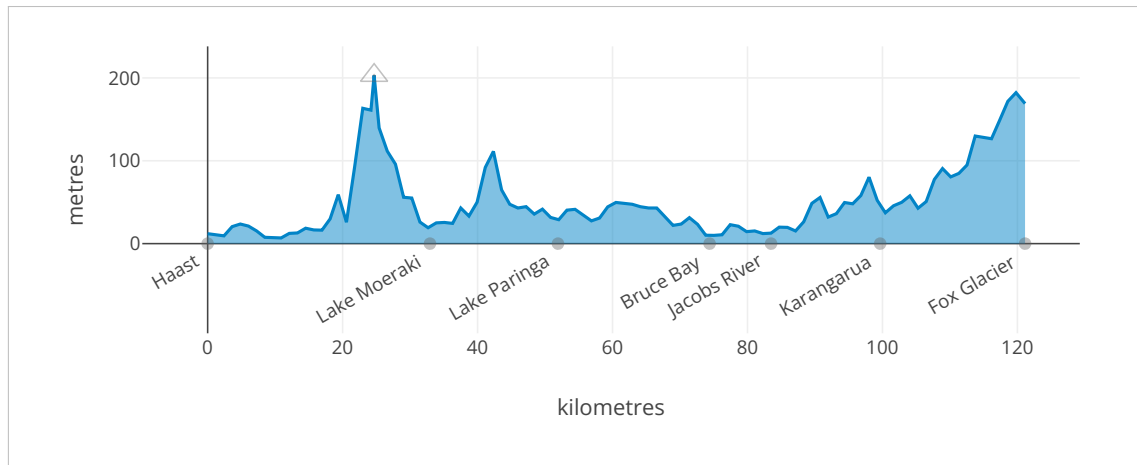
Haast township has backpackers and a decent sized store/supermarket and pub. The campground proper is a few kilometres further on, near the information centre.



Figure 57.2: Makarora to Haast

## 57.3 Haast to Fox Glacier

Distance: 121 km Ascent: 667 m Descent: 510 m



This is a long day's cycle but there are several places you can camp along the way. Lake Paringa (basic [DOC camp](#)<sup>1</sup>) is fifty odd kilometres from Haast. You will also pass Jacobs River, Bruce Bay (great takeaways on the beach, including whitebait fritters in season), and Karangarua.

The contours are hilly as you pass through Knight's point, and there are three distinct and quite steep saddles. But generally the road is even from there to Fox Glacier. The road skirts both lakes and the sea and the backdrop is always mountain and distant snow. Beautiful cycling.



Bruce Bay

Fox Glacier is a well established township with camping grounds and restaurants and backpackers. This, like Haast, is a tourist town and a good base to spend a day exploring local scenic spots. Most notable is the Fox Glacier itself, a frozen river of ice a few kilometres up a side road outside the southern end of the township.

Take your camera in the evening and head down the lane from the campground to Lake Matheson, also known as 'the mirror lake' for its clear reflections of mountains and bush.

<sup>1</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/haast-paringa-and-moeraki-rivers-area/things-to-do/campsites/lake-paringa-campsite>



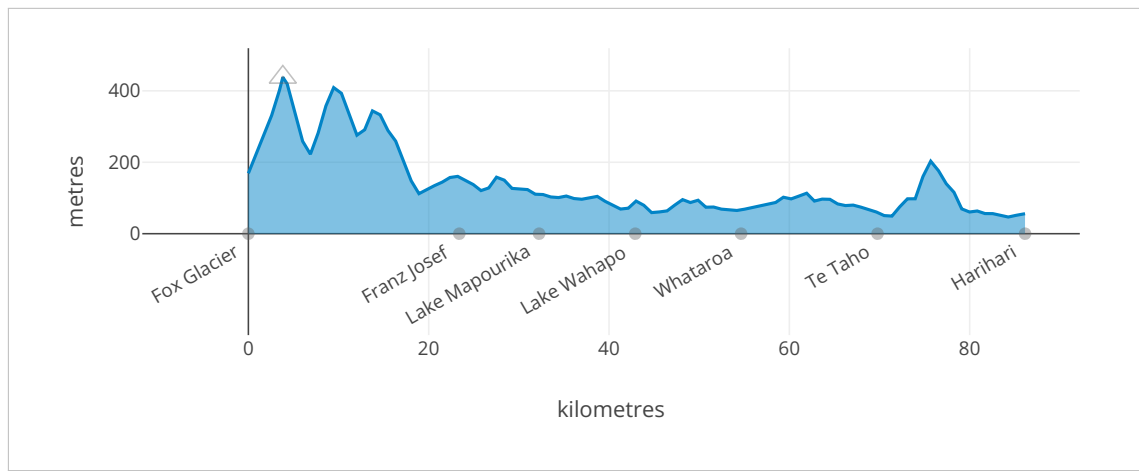
Figure 57.3: Haast to Fox Glacier



# Fox Glacier to Greymouth

## 58.1 Fox Glacier to Harihari

Distance: 86 km   Ascent: 992 m   Descent: 1105 m



There are several places you can stop on the way to Harihari. The emptiness of the bush clad road and glimpses of sea gives way to thirty kilometre stretches between established townships and old settlements. If you want a brief day's cycle, stop at Franz Josef, another established tourist town with all facilities (23 kilometres out from Fox Glacier) or Whataroa (55 kilometres out with backpackers, store and camping behind the pub).

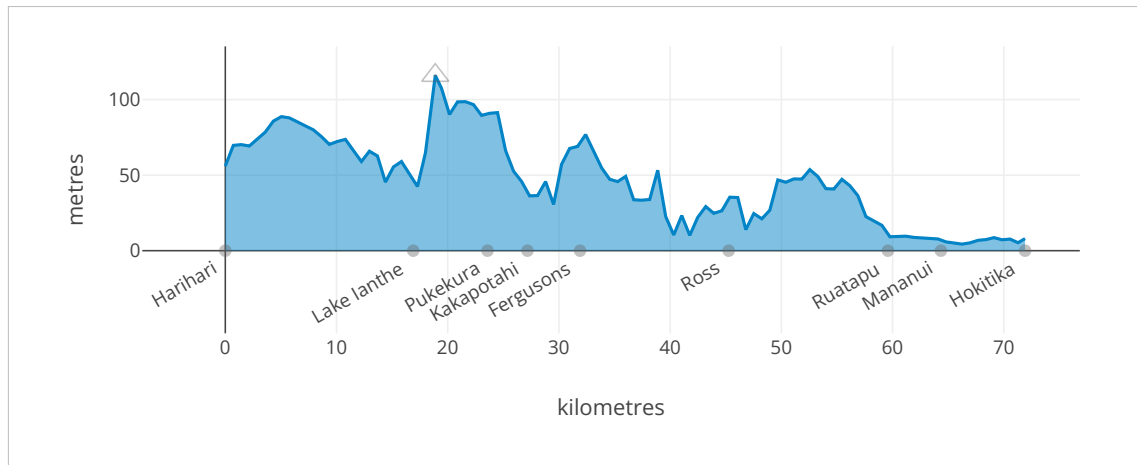
The road is generally rolling downhill but interrupted by Mt. Hercules (200 metres), not an onerous climb. Many people stop at Okarito, a sleepy, picturesque settlement around 46 kilometres from Fox Glacier. This is a few kilometres down a side road just before Whataroa. It is a lovely spot and offers basic facilities including backpackers and a DOC campground. Harihari has pub, store, camping and backpackers.



Figure 58.1: Fox Glacier to Harihari

## 58.2 Harihari to Hokitika

Distance: 72 km Ascent: 254 m Descent: 302 m



This is a relatively easy day's ride passing through bush and sea scapes and the towns of Pukekura (24 kilometres from Harihari) and Ross (22 kilometres). Both have camping/backpackers facilities and a store. The road winds and rolls easily enough until just past Ross where it flattens out for the last twenty kilometres to Hokitika. Ross is also the starting point of the [West Coast Wilderness Trail](#)<sup>1</sup>, a wonderful trail which stitches together old tram lines with bush trails on its progress through to Hokitika.

Hokitika sits on the coast and is a well established town with all the facilities you could want. Cafés, internet, camping, supermarket etc. You might be tempted to cycle on to Greymouth, a further 40 kilometres but Hokitika has a charm all of its own and is not to be overlooked. The sandy beachfront is covered with driftwood and, being on the West Coast, makes it ideal for sunset walks.

<sup>1</sup><https://nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/22-great-rides/west-coast-wilderness-trail>

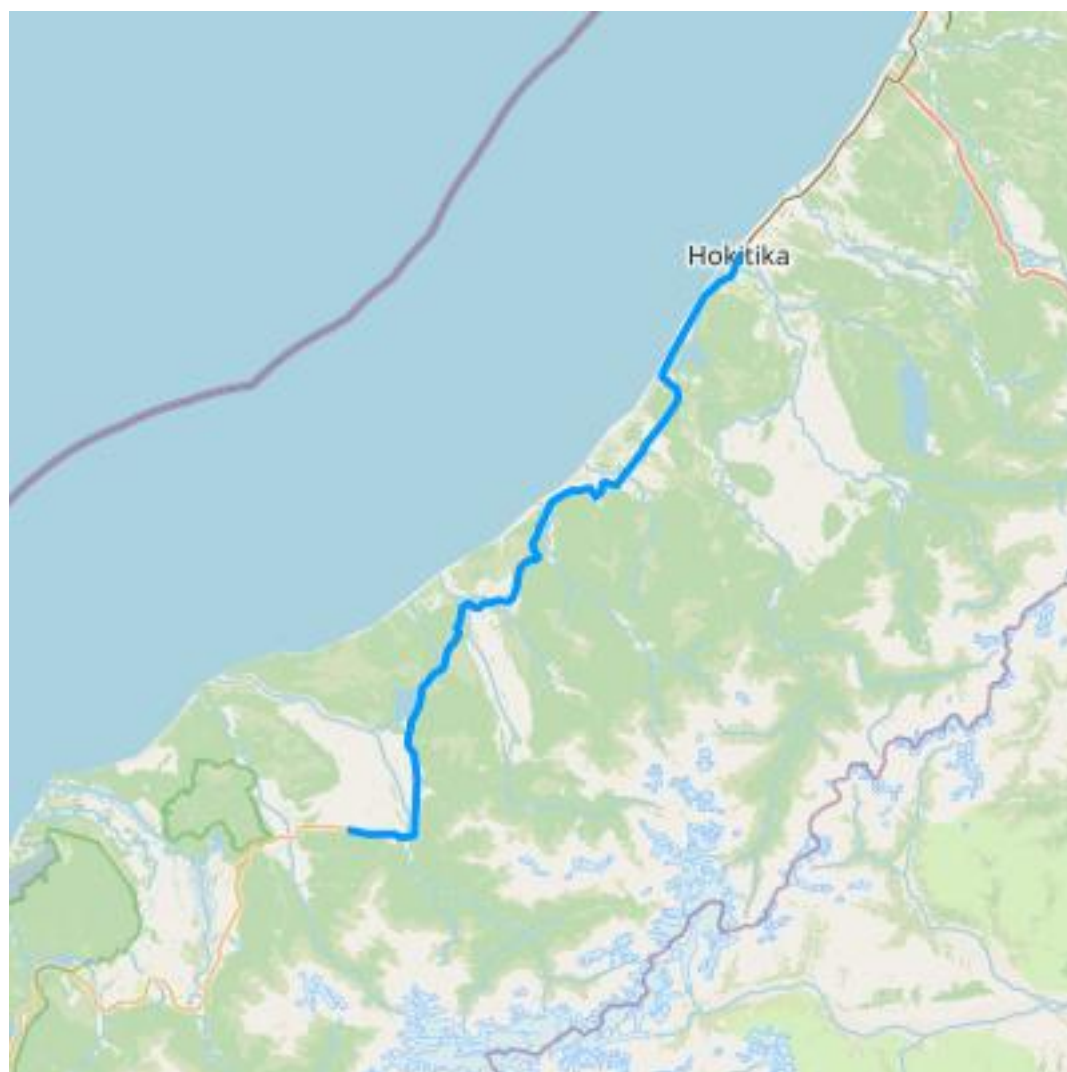
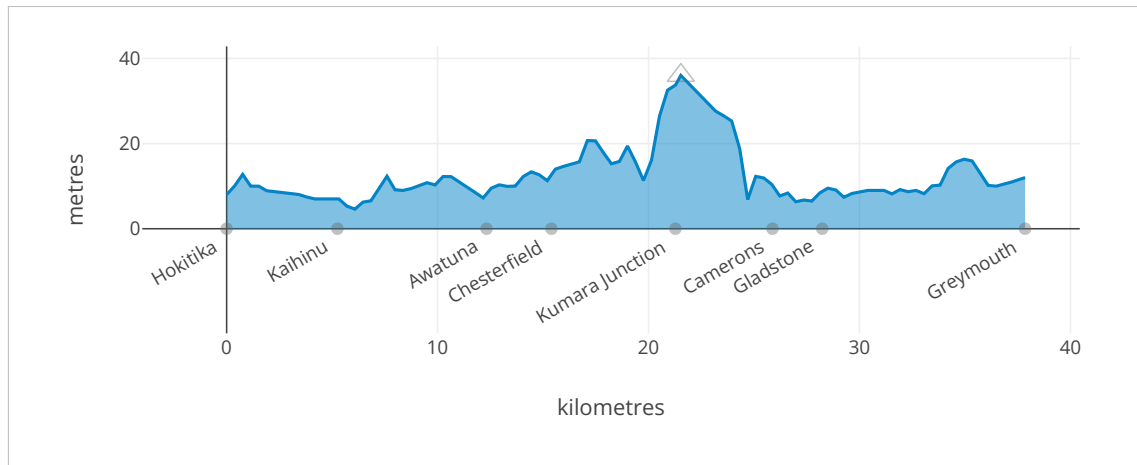


Figure 58.2: Harihari to Hokitika

## 58.3 Hokitika to Greymouth

Distance: 38 km    Ascent: a few m    Descent: a few m



From Hokitika the Wilderness Trail heads inland up and through Kawhaka Pass before returning to the coast, just after Kumara Junction, and continuing through to Greymouth. The more direct route along the highway is relatively flat and borders the sea for much of the way, with the option to pick up the trail again at Kumara Junction. This completes the greater part of your West Coast trip. Greymouth is the largest of the West Coast towns and has most of what you will need including bike shops, camping grounds, backpackers, internet and supermarkets.

Once you arrive in Greymouth, you have three choices of where to go next:

- Head over to Christchurch through the alpine route of [Arthur's Pass](#).
- Head [inland through Reefton](#) (or Westport), to Murchison through the Buller Gorge.
- Head [up to Karamea](#) at the top of the coast through Westport, bearing in mind you have to turn round and come back as there is no through road.

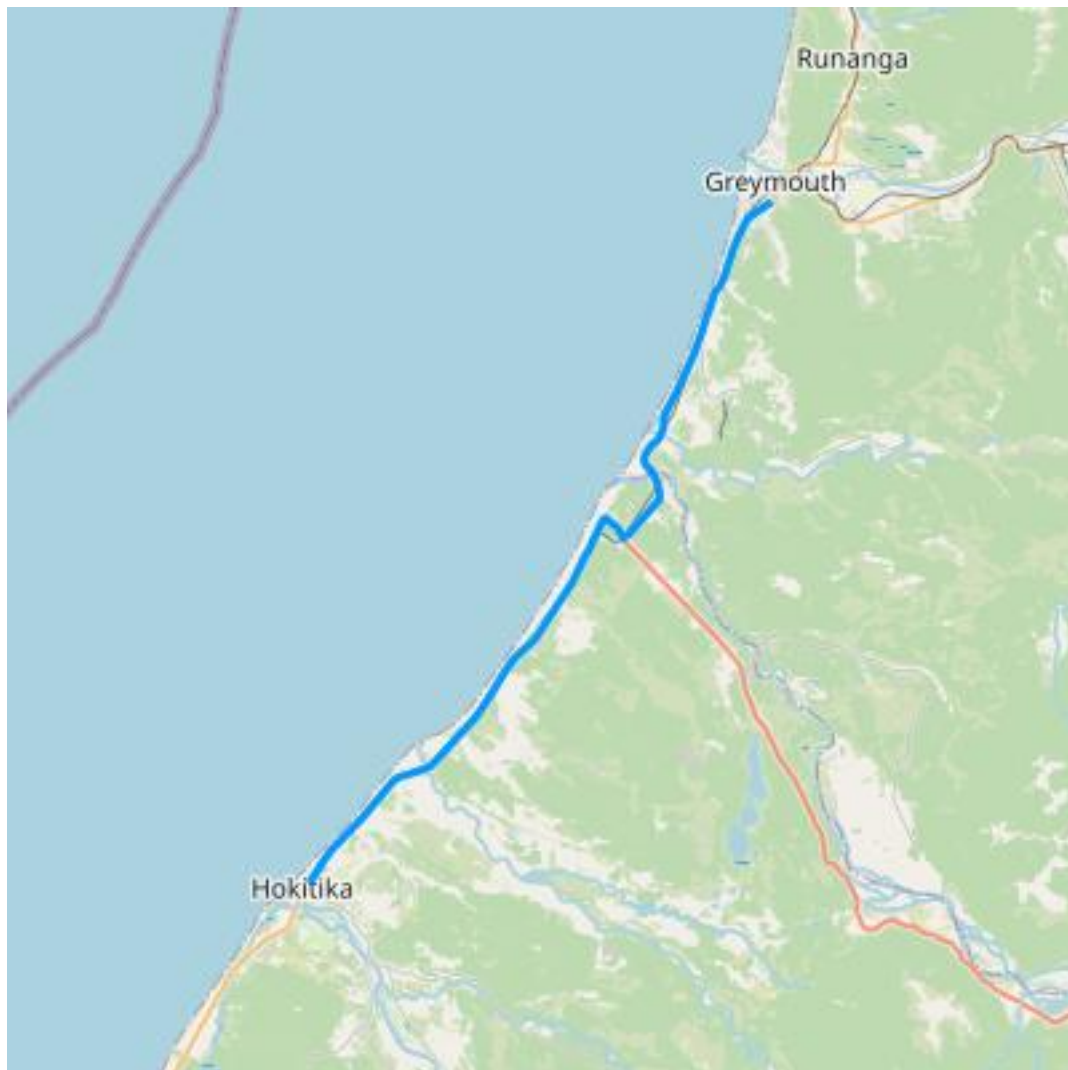


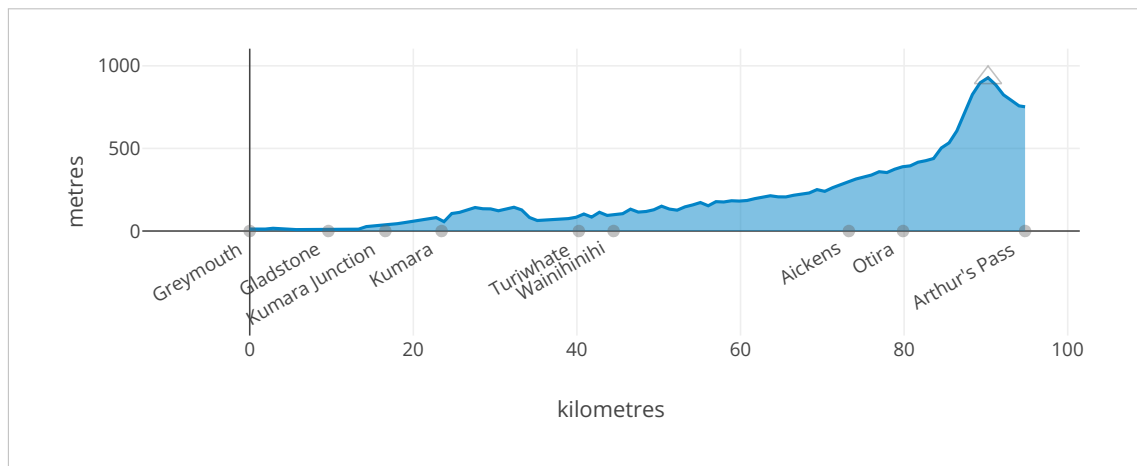
Figure 58.3: Hokitika to Greymouth



# Arthur's Pass

## 59.1 Greymouth to Arthur's Pass

Distance: 95 km   Ascent: 1239 m   Descent: 499 m



This route is alpine country and climbs to 900 metres before dropping down to the long, flat plains toward Christchurch. It is dazzlingly beautiful and covers a diverse terrain of mountains, valleys and lakes. Those of you familiar with the alpine passes from Switzerland to Italy might note similarities. The turnoff is at Kumara Junction almost mid-way between Greymouth (18 km) and Hokitika (22 km).



Rock Protection Shelter,  
Otira Gorge

The day starts easily enough through Kumara (10 km from turnoff) and then climbs steadily, but not too steeply through to Jacksons (46 km from turnoff, cabins, pub and great campground). From Otira (65 km from turnoff, backpackers, pub, DOC campground at Kelly's Creek) the road rises steeply as you hit the pass proper. Arthur's Pass (80 km from turnoff) is only a further 15 kilometres, but you will climb around 600 metres in that distance.

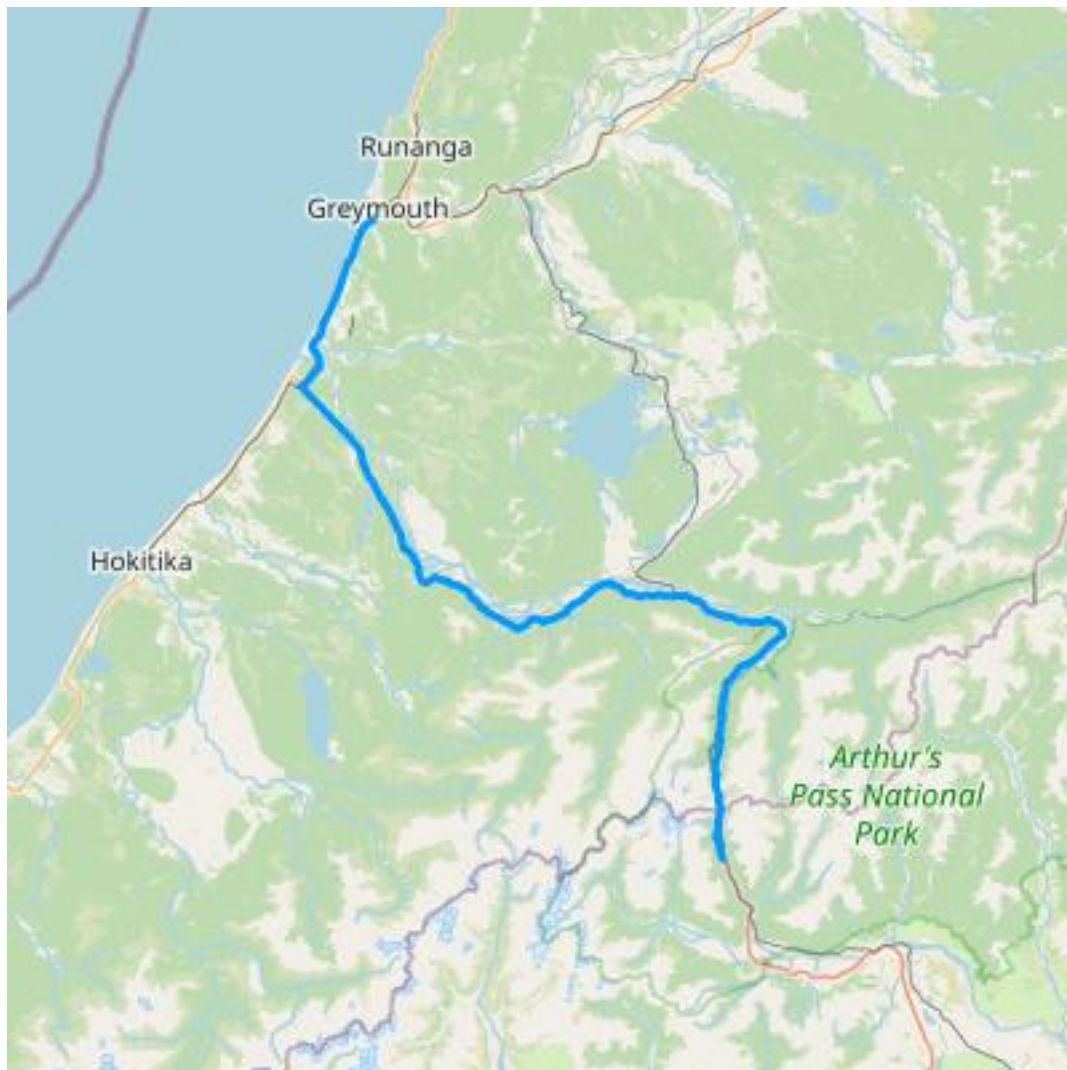
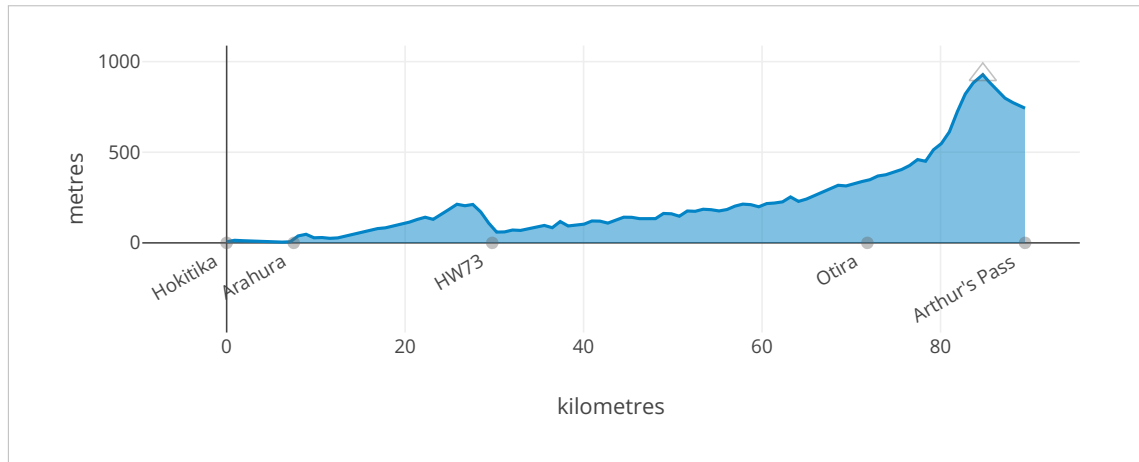


Figure 59.1: Greymouth to Arthur's Pass

## 59.2 Hokitika to Arthur's Pass via the Old Christchurch Road

Distance: 89 km   Ascent: 1235 m   Descent: 498 m



Head north out of Hokitika for about 9 km to Arahura. Once across the river take an immediate right into Old Christchurch Road. This quiet, country road follows the Arahura River gently up, mainly through rolling farm land with views up to the alps. Sealed for the first 10 km, it continues along well graded gravel through the Okuku Scenic Reserve before descending to join SH73 at about 30 km from Hokitika. For an easyish day stop over at Jacksons (pub, campground) a further 27 km along HW73 (just before the Lake Brunner turnoff).



Start of the Old Christchurch Road

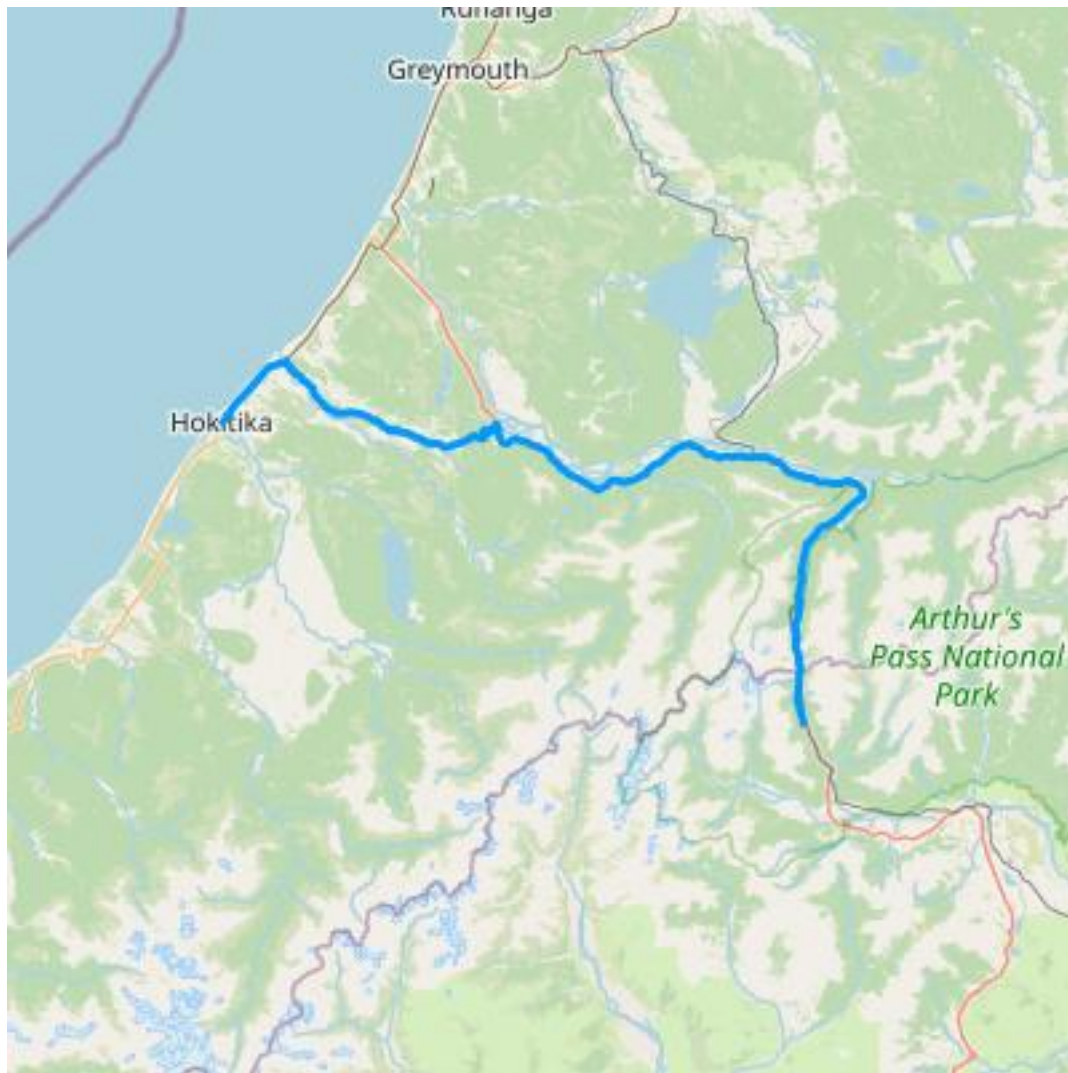
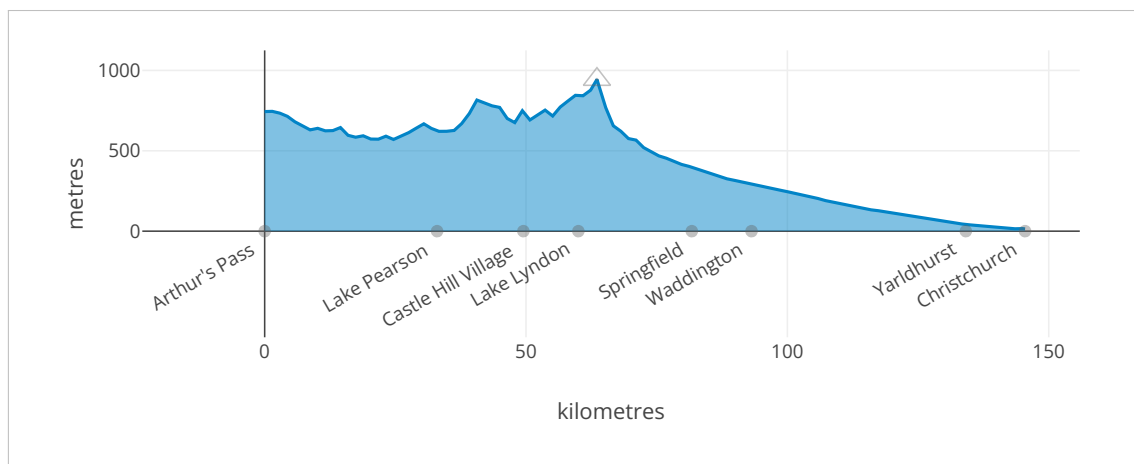


Figure 59.2: Hokitika to Arthur's Pass via the Old Christchurch Road

## 59.3 Arthur's Pass to Christchurch

Distance: 145 km    Ascent: 1029 m    Descent: 1759 m



Arthur's Pass is a township in the middle of a national park. If you are camping you can use the DOC camp or try the local YHA which has a limited number of sites. It is a pretty spot and sports a number of short walks, day hikes and longer tramps. Arthur's Pass is one of the great tramping areas of New Zealand.

When you decide to leave, you might like to think it is all downhill to Christchurch. Alas no, the road dips beautifully for nearly 300 metres and nearly 40 kilometres and then rises steadily for 24 kilometres to Porter's Pass.



Approaching Porters Pass

The four or five kilometres before the last pass are particularly steep and the road rises a further 400 metres. From here (after you have taken in the magnificent view of the Canterbury Plains and the distant Pacific), it is all downhill or flat for the next ninety odd kilometres to Christchurch.

Most cyclists use either Springfield, (83 km from Arthur's Pass, backpackers, camping in the Domain, store, pub) or Darfield (106 km from Arthur's Pass, backpackers, store, pub) as a base before the last stretch to Christchurch. Or you can skip Christchurch altogether and head north at Sheffield along the inland [Route 72](#).



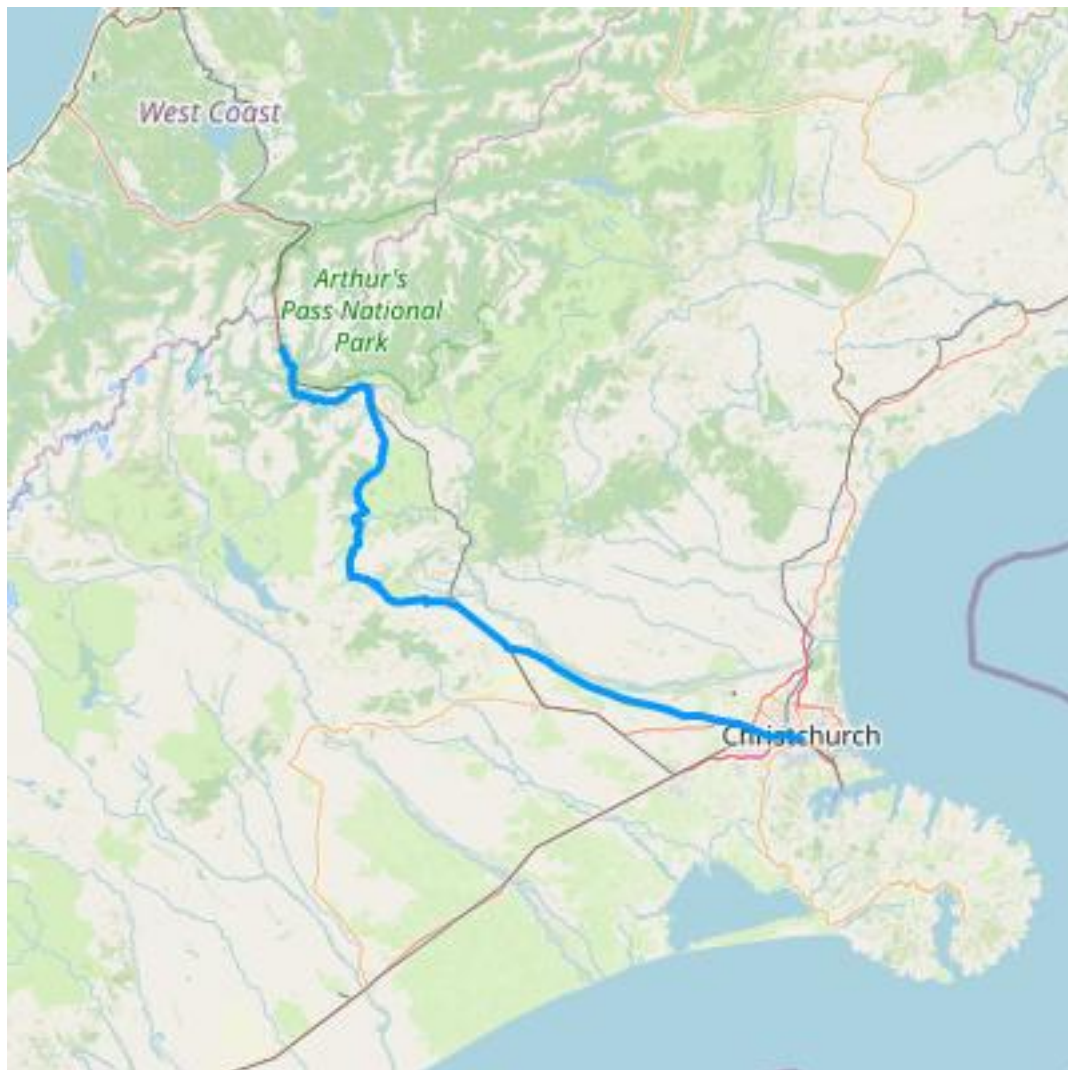


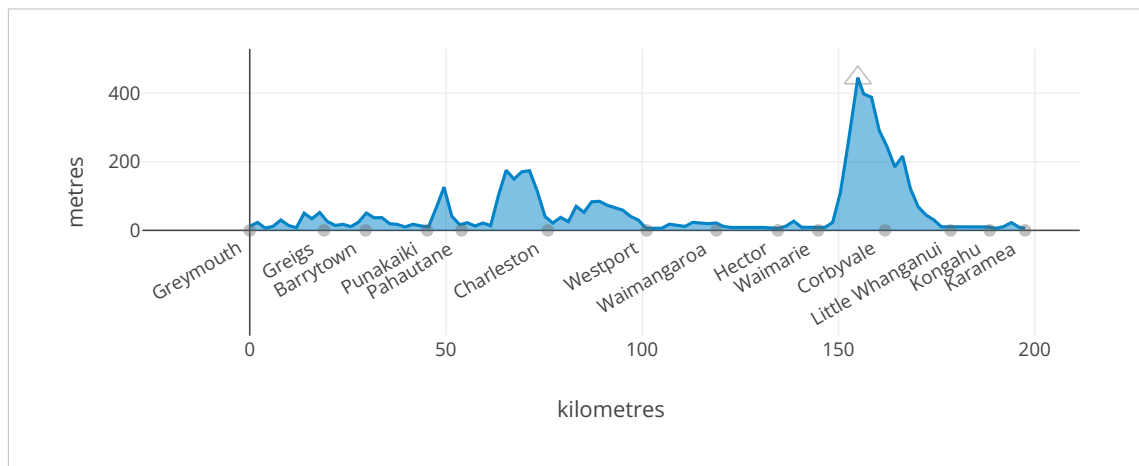
Figure 59.3: Arthur's Pass to Christchurch



# Heading North from Greymouth

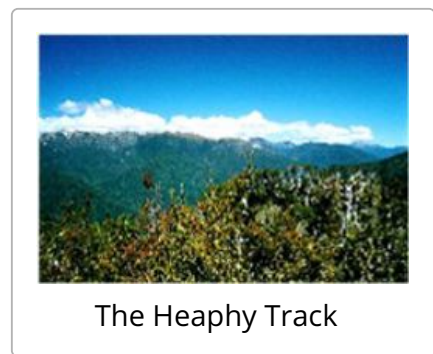
## 60.1 Greymouth to Karamea

Distance: 198 km   Ascent: 1528 m   Descent: 1534 m



First leg of this trip is to Westport (101 km).

This is a lovely day of winding, generally coastal road that rises and falls in a series of short, low hills. Be sure to take in the Punakaiki Rocks, a spectacular series of coastal rock formations where the rough sea surges and ebbs in a series of cauldrons and blowholes. There are a small number of sharp hills rising to 200 metres at Pakihi Hill, but you can take a break at Charleston (75 km, backpacker, store, camping), or head over the last hump of highway and cycle downhill the last ten kilometres into Westport.



The Heaphy Track

Be careful on this road. It winds and is narrow in parts and bus drivers in particular are often impatient. Westport is a fair sized town with all the facilities you generally require, camping grounds, supermarket, backpackers, bike shop, pubs and cafés. Westport to Karamea (97 km) is flat apart from a steepish 400 metre climb over the Karamea Bluff and a short climb over the Happy Valley Saddle. This is a quite beautiful ride and there are a number of small towns en route where you can take a break. Granity (30 km, pub and

store), or Little Wanganui (78 km, pub, backpackers).

Karamea is a small township with pub, backpackers, store and camping. It is most notable for being at the end of the famous Heaphy Track, one of New Zealand's best known walking tracks. Karamea is, of course a dead end and you will have to turn round and head back to Westport, or catch a shuttle bus. You cannot cross the Heaphy Track unfortunately.

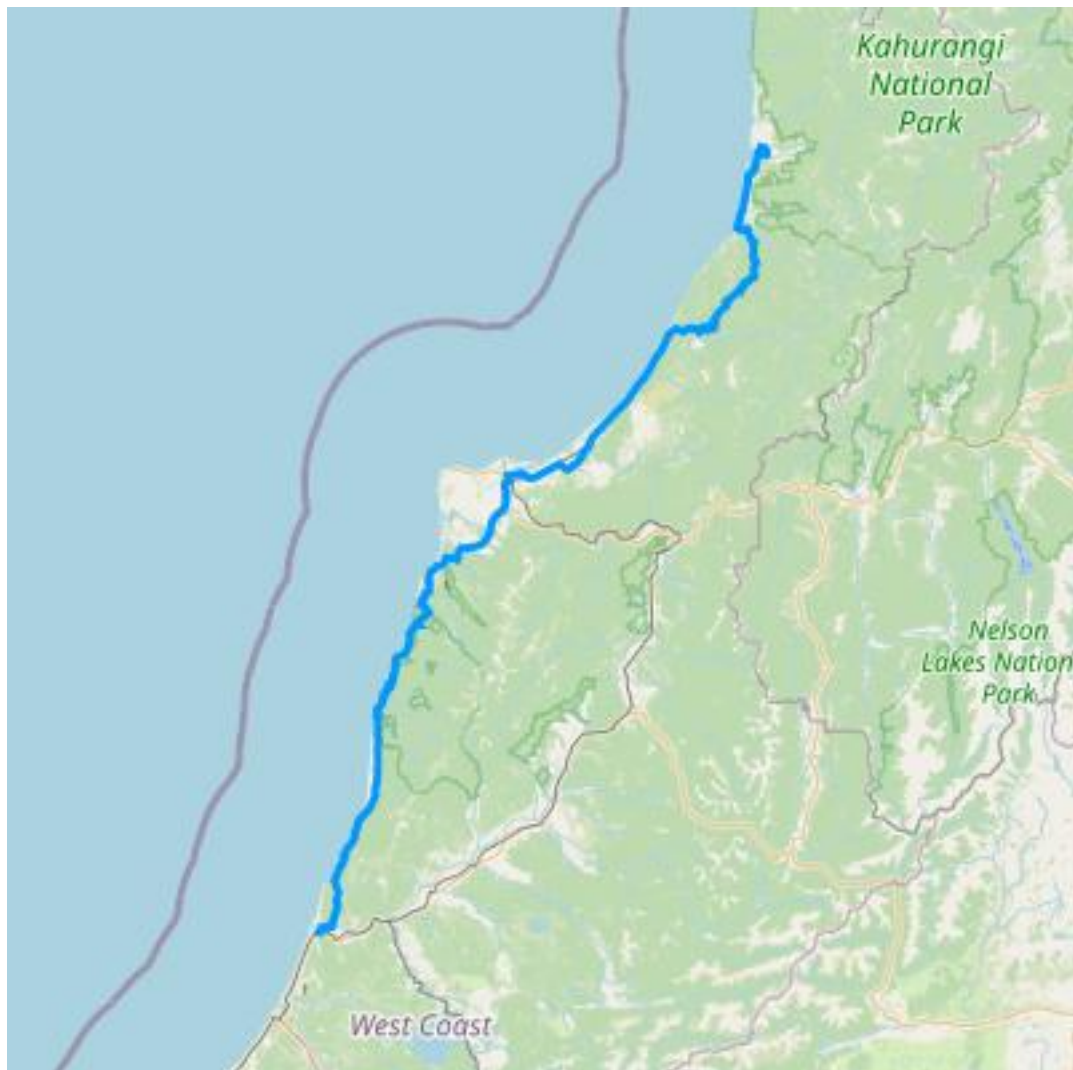
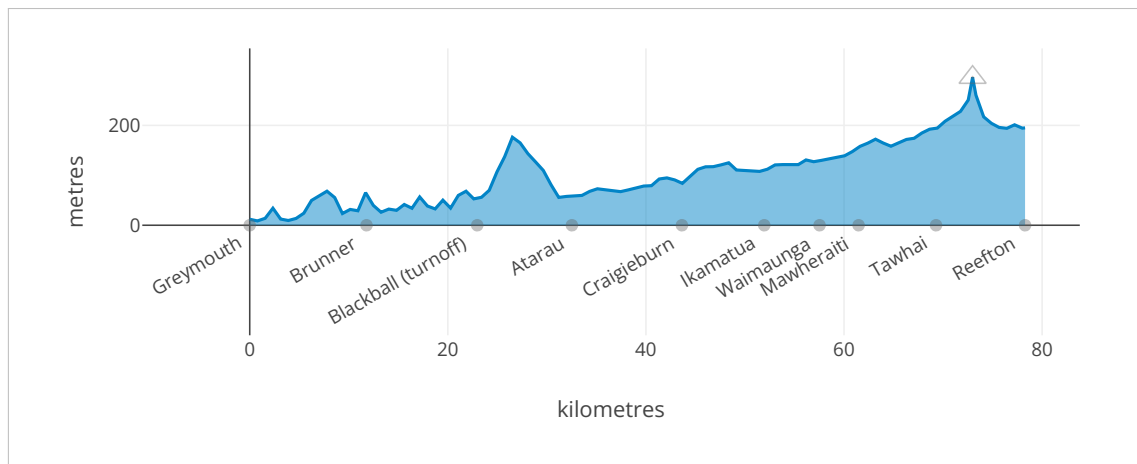


Figure 60.1: Greymouth to Karamea

## 60.2 Greymouth to Reefton

Distance: 78 km    Ascent: 649 m    Descent: 466 m



This is a pleasant day's cycle where the road rises gradually, but not noticeably, to around 300 metres. To avoid traffic, take the lighter route on the northern side of the Grey River and visit the old coal mining towns in the district.

There is a lot of New Zealand pioneer history here from mining disasters at Brunner to attractively sleepy and slowly declining coal towns. Take a side trip to Blackball (store, backpackers) in the foothills of the Paparoa Ranges and perhaps carry on a few kilometres to Roa, an even smaller, sleepier remnant of communities that once built their livelihoods around coal.

These are settlements set in beautiful surroundings and are redolent with an atmosphere of a slower, arguably gentler time. Out of Blackball, the road winds emptily through picturesque landscapes of fields and over bridges crossing shingle rivers before eventually joining the main highway again at Ikamatua. Approximately 20 - 25 kilometres further on you reach Reefton, a good sized town with most of the facilities you might require; campground, small supermarket, pubs, backpackers. Reefton is another old coal town, but it has survived more prosperously than most.

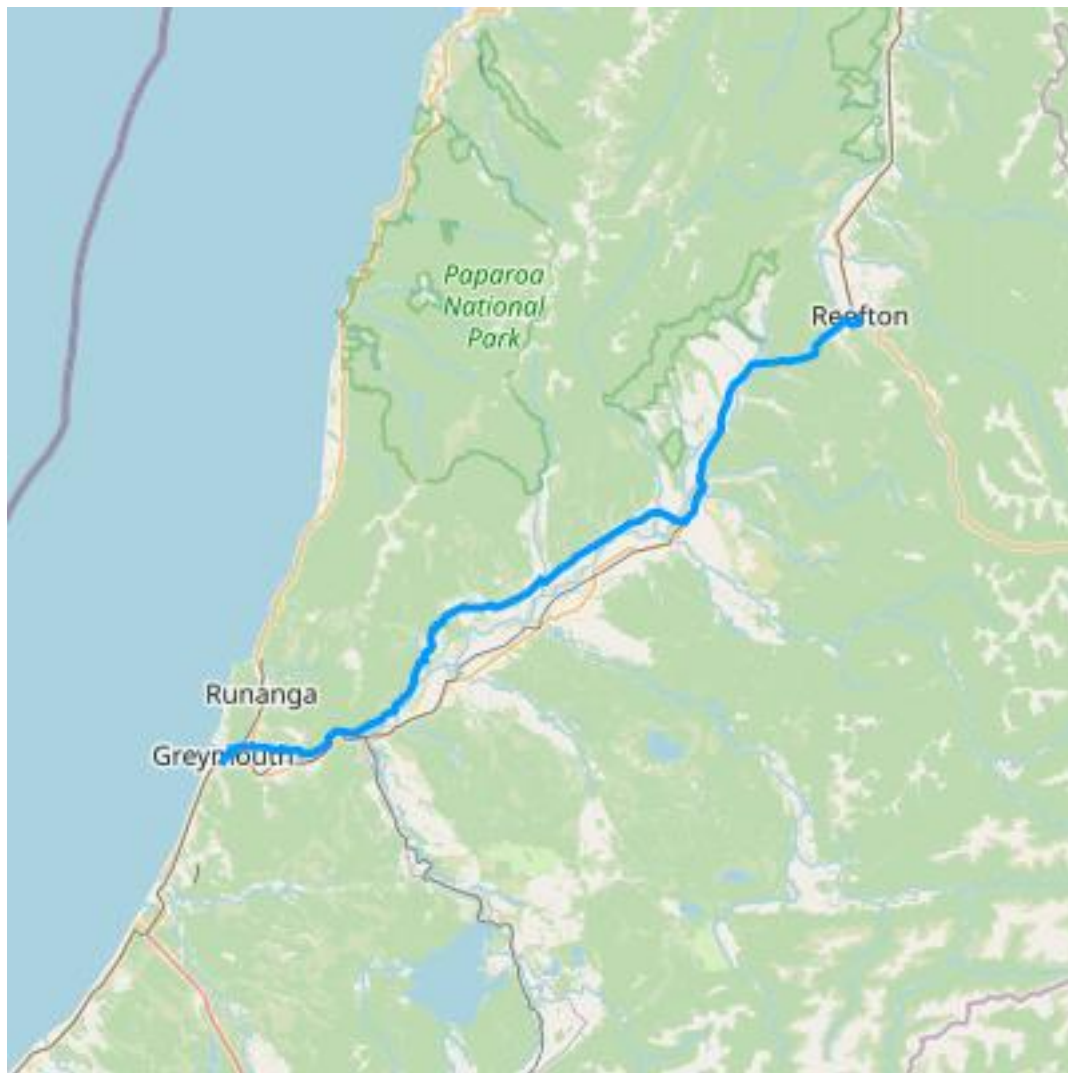
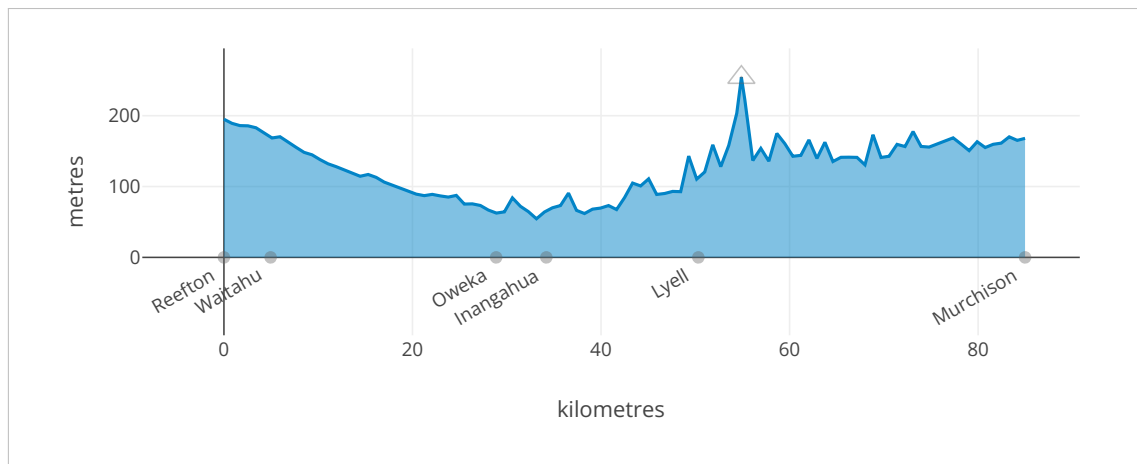


Figure 60.2: Greymouth to Reefton

## 60.3 Reefton to Murchison

Distance: 85 km   Ascent: 742 m   Descent: 769 m



From Reefton to Murchison the road rises around 100 metres, not so steep that you would notice it and the countryside to the junction at Inangahua is grand and open and generally light in traffic. From here the route is taken up travelling through the Buller Gorge alongside a wild river running through a deep ravine of green and blue pools and shingle basins. There is a [DOC camp](#)<sup>1</sup> at Lyell, a grassed reserve dedicated to the scant remains of an old township. A few graves remain in the bush, but little actually is left bar a few grey photographs in a display stand. While the setting is lovely there is unfortunately no store and only a bare block of stone marks where the pub once was. What's more, the sandflies here are ferocious!

Roughly 25 km further will bring you to Murchison, a small town with a bit of character with its old pubs and interesting museum. There is a good sized store here and two campgrounds, one of which affords easy access to river-side swimming. The pub also doubles as a backpackers. There is a laundrette (surprisingly) and cheap meals at the pub.

<sup>1</sup><https://doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/lyell-area/things-to-do/campsites/lyell-campsite/>

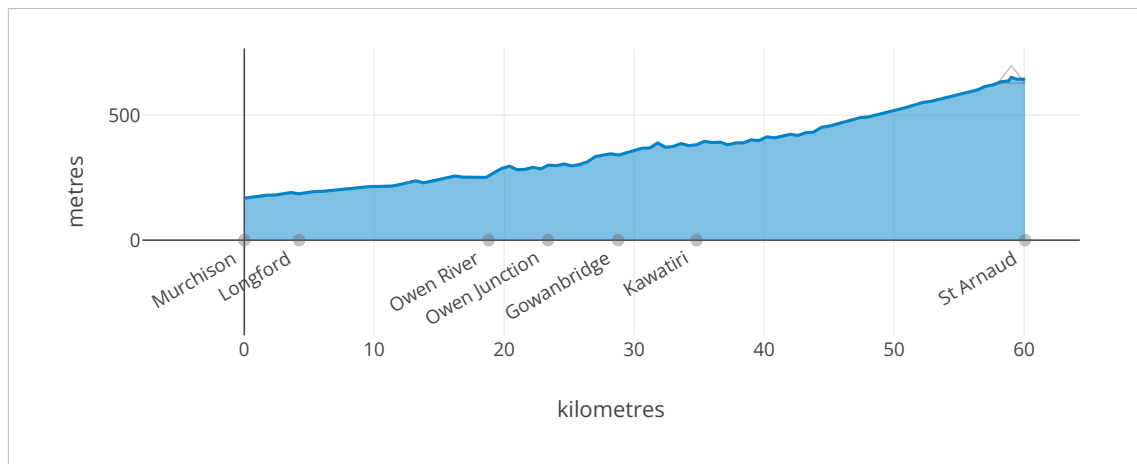


Figure 6o.3: Reefton to Murchison



## 6o.4 Murchison to St Arnaud

Distance: 60 km   Ascent: 657 m   Descent: 180 m



While 65 km does not sound too much for a day's cycle, the road from Murchison rises around 500 metres to St Arnaud. Still, it is a pleasant and not overly steep route and the scenery is bush clad hills and fast rivers in deep gorges. Around 35 km from Murchison you will need to turn right at Kawatiri Junction. Take plenty of water on this section as there are no shops or garages. St Arnaud has a good sized store and a good quality backpackers and Youth Hostel. There is a DOC camp just out of town.



Deep gorge, road to St Arnaud

St Arnaud is the principal departure point for those wishing to travel the [Rainbow Road](#) to Hanmer Springs. A wonderful isolated, gravel road that winds through valleys and alongside and through rivers and over bluffs. This is a one to two day trip and a guaranteed memorable experience. Again, take some insect repellent for midges.

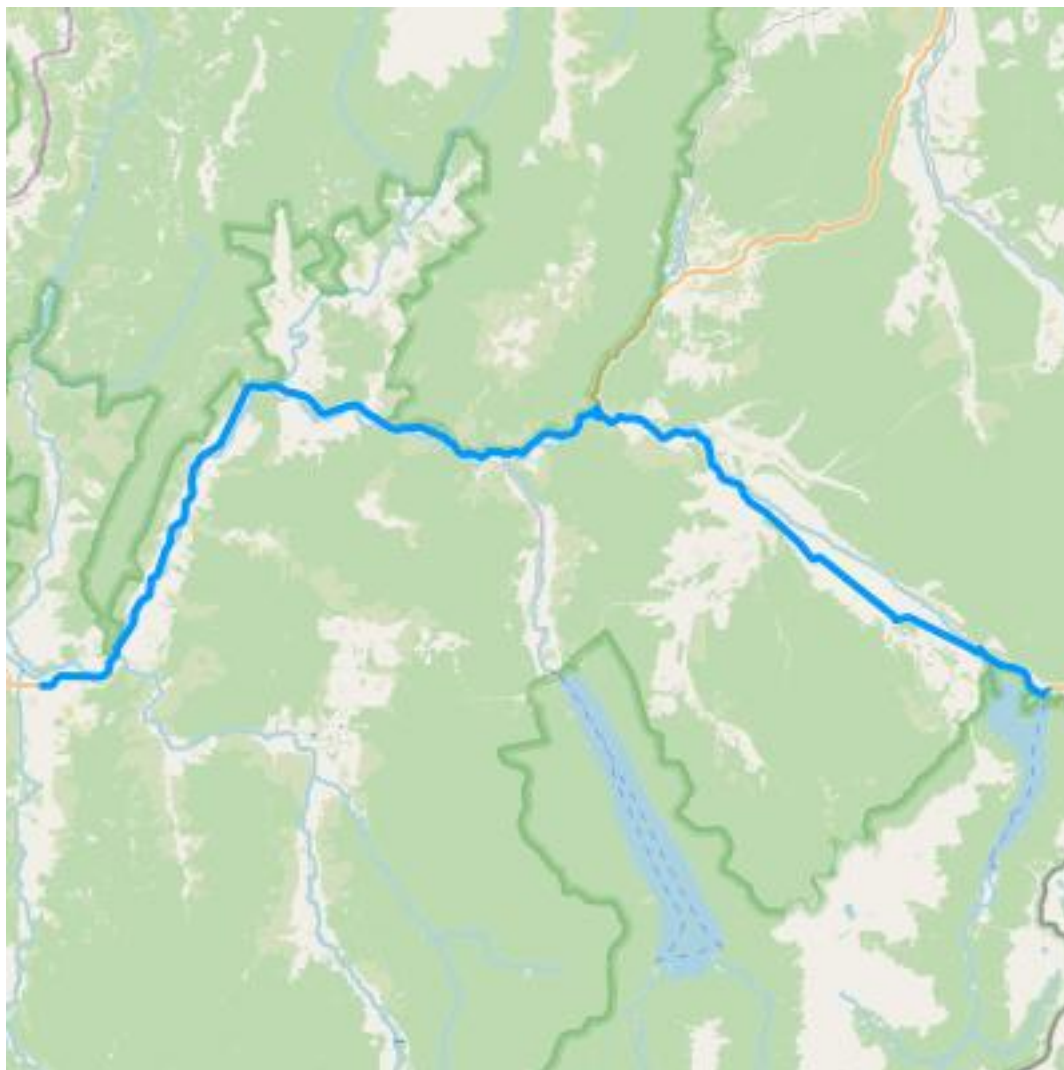


Figure 6o.4: Murchison to St Arnaud

# **Appendices**

# Getting Started

## The Bike

In New Zealand you can set yourself up on a bike with carriers and panniers for around NZD \$3000. Any reputable bike shop will sell you a good quality bike for about \$2000 (more or less, depending on your requirements). The remaining \$1000 will cover racks and panniers.

Another good option is to buy second hand. Good used touring bikes and kit sometimes come up on [TradeMe](https://trademe.co.nz)<sup>1</sup> at reasonable prices. [Natural High Rentals](https://naturalhigh.co.nz/)<sup>2</sup> in Christchurch also regularly sell off good quality second hand gear.

Don't let cost be a barrier. I once met a cyclist successfully touring with makeshift panniers on a bike he'd bought for \$20. He was having the time of his life.

## Hybrid, Mountain or Touring bike?

Dedicated [touring bikes](#)<sup>3</sup> are purpose built to be robust, low maintenance, and support long days in the saddle...but they are not cheap.

Unless you are planning an extended world tour a standard Mountain Bike or a Hybrid bike should be just fine. I have found hybrids suit New Zealand's wide variety of road surfaces and have travelled off-road and on sealed surfaces riding my old aluminium Giant Prodigy for many years. This has a straight handlebar with bull-bars attached and 700 mm wheels (aka, 29ers). But 'type of frame' is a hotly debated issue. Mountain bikes have fewer punctures because of their thicker tyres. They are rugged, with smaller frames and smaller wheels and are easier to put on buses and planes.

Tandems are fine but difficult to use with public transport. You really need to get on well with your partner to ride a tandem day after day.

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<sup>1</sup><https://trademe.co.nz>

<sup>2</sup><https://naturalhigh.co.nz/>

<sup>3</sup><https://tomsbiketrip.com/touring-bike-faq-1-what-makes-a-bicycle-suitable-for-touring/>

## The Frame

Select your basic frame from any well known make including Giant, Marin, KHS, Kona, Surly, etc. Almost all frames are made in China. Some serious cyclists like a steel frame which is heavier but easier to weld if it gets a crack and more flexible to cycle on. Others use a chro-moly. But most frames bought today in a shop are light-weight aluminium. Although strongly built, the problem here is, you cannot easily weld aluminium if it cracks. Arguably more important than the frame, is the componentry that goes with it.

## The Components

I suggest a good, basic starting place for your componentry (gears, brakes, bearings etc.) should be Shimano Deore. If you can afford it, Deore LX and Deore XT and XTR are better quality. Shimano Altus and Alivio are cheaper alternatives, but a bit lightweight in quality. You should get two good quality racks thrown in (Phillips are not bad for the price, Blackburn have a good name too) and Schwalbe Marathon tyres fitted. Try to get good quality rims with 32/36 holes/spokes.

Your bike will have around 24 - 30 gears. Ensure you have a good range of gears and a low, low ratio gear if you are a beginner. It makes the hills easier. In short, this means an extra-big cog on the rear cluster at the back. For the most part you will have to trust your dealer on this. Explain your requirements and be prepared to experiment before you get the bike set up correctly.

## The Saddle

A good saddle (seat) is essential. Not too hard and not too soft, with fabric that does not absorb water. A good saddle is anywhere between \$100 to \$400. At the higher end of the range are [Brookes](https://brooksengland.com)<sup>4</sup> leather saddles. In particular the B17 & its sprung equivalent the Flyer are favoured by cycle tourers the world over. Though expensive, once worn in a leather saddle moulds to your shape and can be ridden on for hours with minimal discomfort.

## The Handlebars

Handlebars are another important contact point with the bike. Long hours riding can put considerable strain on your hands. The key to avoiding discomfort is to have handlebars which allow you to [change hand positions](https://cyclingabout.com/all-about-bike-touring-handlebars/)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup><https://brooksengland.com>

<sup>5</sup><https://cyclingabout.com/all-about-bike-touring-handlebars/>

European touring frames with drop handlebars are OK, but often unsuited to the wider variety of terrains you encounter in New Zealand. Much depends on your own physical body shape and what feels comfortable to you.

If you have flat bars then one easy and inexpensive option is to add bar ends: small extensions that attach to the end of bar. I started with cheap bar ends, eventually trading up to the more expensive [Ergon grips](#)<sup>6</sup> which offer extra wrist support.

### The Mirror

Be safe and get yourself a mirror. New Zealand does not have a cycling culture or cycle tracks as sophisticated as parts of Europe and the States. Sometimes you have little choice but to use a main road, and New Zealand drivers are not always careful when dealing with cyclists.

Some cyclists swear by the mirrors that attach to either your helmet or sunglasses. I've tried both, though without much success. Invariably the mirror shakes around and viewport is too small. Currently I have a good, large mirror that attaches to the bar end. Remember that, as we drive on the left, the mirror will be on the right-hand side.

### Panniers

Good quality panniers can set you back around \$400 per pair. The best in my opinion is [Ortlieb](#)<sup>7</sup>, a German company, but they are also the most expensive. Phillips make a good, cheaper waterproof alternative. Waterproof is the operative word, and I have had some disasters with cheaper canvas-type panniers. You can get away with just two rear panniers, but any serious cycle tourist will have two smaller, additional panniers on the front AND a handlebar bag. Be prepared to haggle and get 10 - 15% off if you are buying new. Most New Zealand cycle shops are reputable. It is a good idea to talk to a cycle mechanic rather than a salesman to start with.

If you know what you are doing, buy second-hand, and you may get some excellent deals. If you don't, keep asking around. Inform yourself on bikes and bike culture. If you can, take a short course in bike maintenance.

Bob-trailers (or similar) are also very popular, but a little trickier with public transport. Some cyclists swear by Bob-trailers, others by panniers. This is another hotly debated cycle issue.

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<sup>6</sup><https://ergonbike.com/en/fe-ergonomics.html>

<sup>7</sup><https://ortlieb.com>



## The Tent

Keep it lightweight and functional (about 3.5 kg or less generally if you are solo). Again, good quality fabric (rip-stop) will save any mishaps in isolated places. Look for properly sealed seams and a good [hydrostatic head](#)<sup>8</sup> (AKA water-column) rating to prevent leakage when that torrential downpour comes. The best tents are arguably by Swedish company [Hilleberg](#)<sup>9</sup>. Others are [Macpac](#)<sup>10</sup>, [Vaude](#)<sup>11</sup> and a host of reputable American and European companies. Make sure you can set up and pack down your tent in rain (it happens). Some makers prefer a tent style in which the tent inner clips onto the poles first and then the fly goes over top - difficult to set up in rain without the inner getting soaked.

Choose between a single lightweight if it is just for yourself or a Tunnel or a Dome tent if there are two of you. The tent should have adequate storage in the fly for your gear. I began with a cheaper tunnel tent which began to leak after two seasons. I went on to a Mac Micro-light which was wonderfully rugged, simple and light but a bit small. I now have a heavier Dome Fairydown. I prefer Dome tents to Tunnel tents because they are often free-standing plus you can exit either side, rather than through the front, which is less hassle in the middle of the night.

Tents are usually designated by seasons. Thus, a four-season tent would be more rugged, usually better quality, designed for alpine use and more expensive than a two or three season tent. But if you are a summer camper, you might find a four-season tent too hot (i.e. lacking inner mesh to minimize heat loss). Alas, there is no such thing as the perfect tent and you must strike the right balance between weight, size, performance and price. A good quality two to three-season is generally enough for touring.

## Groundsheet

I always carry a small plastic groundsheet with brass eyelets around the sides. The groundsheet stops small holes or punctures forming in the base of your tent if you pitch on stones or twigs. The groundsheet can also be used to wrap around your bike for travelling, even by plane. Just tie it round your bike using the eyelets and any bits of loose string.

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<sup>8</sup><https://theexpertcamper.co.uk/blog/camping/what-is-the-best-hydrostatic-head-for-a-tent>

<sup>9</sup><https://hilleberg.com>

<sup>10</sup><https://macpac.co.nz/>

<sup>11</sup><https://vaude.com/>

### **The Sleeping Bag**

I have a single sided Macpac lightweight down sleeping bag because I usually tour in summer. If it gets cold I put more clothes on. I can slip a Three Quarter Thermarest mattress into a sleeve underneath the bag. Down is the best material for wadding although there are excellent and cheaper man-made fibres (like Dacron) that can be used as alternatives. However, down packs down tighter and uses less space. The Mac model I have is sadly no longer made but the trick is to get something small and lightweight that you feel comfortable with. Much depends on whether you are a warm or a cool sleeper. It helps if the sleeping bag zips open into a duvet for those really warm nights.

### **Stove**

Use a cheap, lightweight gas cartridge stove to start with. Carry a spare gas cartridge. Later you can go for more expensive liquid fuel stoves if you wish. MSR make a range of high-quality liquid fuel stoves. Most campgrounds in New Zealand have access to stoves, but you may need cooking gear. Buy quality Seagull stainless steel pot and fry-pan or equivalent with thick bases (thin bases buckle with intense heat) and include at least a sharp knife, cutlery and a tin opener. You can carry these in a plastic toothbrush container. Some cyclists like lighter weight anodyne or aluminium pots and pans. I do not. A tea towel and small abrasive pad is good. Ask around. Every cycle tourist has their own method and favourite style stove. It is illegal to take gas cartridges or fuel bottles on a plane. The former because of pressurisation issues, the latter because of the possibility of fumes and fire. Some travelling cyclists just rinse out their fuel bottle thoroughly and take it on the plane anyway, although this appears a bit cavalier to me.

### **Other Tips**

I have a couple of rain covers for the rear panniers; not for waterproofing, but because they are brightly coloured and visible from a distance. It gives drivers more time to plan their approach and overtake safely.

Take a pillow slip and fill it with your jacket and clothes at night. It is never comfortable, but you get used to it. I have not had much success with micro-towels and prefer a medium weight regular towel. Take sunglasses, sun block and insect-repellent. For security, I prefer a D lock rather than a chain lock. The D Lock is heavier but harder to break. You can also use a D Lock as a hammer if the ground is too hard for tent pegs.

A toilet bag is always handy (available from Kathmandu stores), these are about \$20 on sale. They include hook and mirror and various pockets for soap and shampoo etc.

One important item is a torch. I really like my compact four bulb Petzl Zipka head-light which enables me to read and is bright enough to put up a tent in the dark etc. I have even used it as a headlight at night on the bike. Carry a rear red light of top quality that has a flashing mode and at least 5 L.E.D's. Bolt this to your frame to prevent theft and don't leave the batteries in it. You will inevitably at some point turn it on accidentally and then have no light when you need it because of flat batteries.

### **Tool Kit**

Take a basic tool kit and one or two spare tubes.

- A spanner or Allen key to take off your pedals if necessary. Remember ONE of your pedals has a left-hand thread and the other a right-hand thread... don't strip the thread accidentally. The end of the pedal will have an L or R to indicate which way you need to turn the spanner.
- Oil, of course, and a toothbrush for cleaning the derailleur
- A rag is useful to wipe your hands if you get a flat
- Small needle nosed pliers
- 100 mm adjustable/crescent spanner
- A range of Allen keys to suit your handlebars and other bits/racks etc
- A two-way Phillips/regular screwdriver
- A good quality, small action (lightweight) pump that takes both tube-valve types (schrader and presta). The pump fits on your bike. Make sure the pump can inflate up to the pressure recommended for your tyre.
- A tube repair kit and sleeve/pad for possible splits in a tyre
- A spoke wrench
- Chain links for quick, on-the-road repairs
- A small roll of cloth tape can be used to repair just about anything
- A range of nylon ties is useful

- Also in my toolkit is [the next best thing](#)<sup>12</sup>, a lightweight tool for removing the rear cassette in case of a broken spoke

This is my basic kit and it all fits in a large pouch (available from cycle shops) fitted underneath the rear of the seat.

Some cyclists carry spare spokes (in the tube below the seat post in the frame) and tools for chain adjustment and repair etc. Some also carry a spare tyre (sometimes wrapped around the front hub inside the spokes, sometimes folded up under the seat). It is all a matter of balancing light weight against the possibility of break-down in far-flung places.

### **Water and Water Bottles**

You might want to have your bike fitted with a set of extra lugs so you can carry three water bottles or, if you wish, you might want to carry your fuel bottle on your bike frame instead of in the pannier. Drink plenty of water and save your kidneys.

Water from streams and lakes? Generally no, but if it is fast-running and coming from high up, you might want to take a chance. Just remember, you don't know what has died and/or fallen into the water supply further upstream!

### **First Aid Kit**

First-aid kit should include some sort of painkillers (e.g., nurofen) and something to lessen fever, bandages for sprains, antiseptic cream, a good all round cream for anti-chaffing. Pads for severe cuts and a range of plasters for blisters and or light cuts. Scissors. Bring a high SPF suncream and use it liberally and often. In high summer the sunshine in New Zealand is very strong. You'll burn more easily here.

### **Clothes**

Two sets of cycle shorts, one long set of cycle longs for colder weather (it happens) and three cycle shirts. Start with (cheaper) cages on your pedals and wear regular sports shoes or similar until you feel more experienced and THEN switch to the more efficient clip-less shoes/pedals if you wish. I still use cages because I don't want to carry extra shoes with me. But this is a trade-off and another issue debated by cyclists. Some wear Tevas (sandals), but you can get fairly dry and cracked skin on your feet this way.

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<sup>12</sup><http://www.m-gineering.nl/nbtg.htm>

Buy a good, medium weight waterproof jacket, usually Goretex (up to 800 dollars) with gutter zips (armpit zips) and a hood. This will do to keep the rain off and also be able to be used when just walking around and sightseeing etc. Ensure it is long at the back to cover your backside when you are leaning forward on the bike. You will almost always sweat inside your jacket when cycling. Buy some sort of fleece, lightweight jacket. The rest of your wardrobe is up to you. Choose easy washable and quick dry fabrics. I am a fan of North Face zip off trousers (longs and shorts in one) and thin merino wool vests etc.

### **Your First Day**

Aim for about 25 km and be ready for a sore rear end and aching muscles as your body gets used to the bike, and you fine-tune the bike to your body. Adjust your seat and/or handlebars to compensate for any back aches. Between-the-shoulder-blades ache and lower end backache are the two most common. Once you get the adjustment right, you can cycle all day with a minimum of soreness.

Keep left and cycle defensively!

## Resources

### New Zealand Cycle Trails

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#### [The New Zealand Cycle Trail](#)

Official site for *Ngā Haerenga* (The New Zealand Cycle Trail)

#### [New Zealand Cycling Network](#)

A handy map of New Zealand Cycle Trails from *Waka Kotahi* (New Zealand Transport Agency)

#### [Tour Aotearoa](#)

The Kennett Brothers' bikepacking route stretching 3,000 km from Cape Reinga to Bluff

#### [Otago Central Rail Trail](#)

New Zealand's first Rail Trail, following the former Otago Central railway between Middlemarch and Clyde

#### [Queen Charlotte Track](#)

A 73.5 km walking & cycling track through the Marlborough Sounds

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## Other Touring Sites

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### [Travelling Two](#)

Andrew & Friedel Grant's excellent site

### [Crazy Guy on a Bike](#)

A place for bicycle tourists and their journals

### [Odyssey by Bike](#)

A blog by New Zealand cyclist Tony Simmons

### [Cycle Touring in New Zealand](#)

A New Zealand cycling blog with some nice route descriptions

### [Cycling Dutch Girl](#)

Intrepid cyclist Mirjam Wouters' 2013 NZ tour

### [Rennert Web](#)

Reinhold Rennert's 2013 tour

### [Wuthering Bikes](#)

Guy and Steve's 2011 NZ tour

### [Chasing the Long White Cloud](#)

Ron Kinang's 2010 tour

### [Hiking/Biking Adventures](#)

Anne and Mike Poe's 2010 tour

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## Accommodation

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### Warm Showers

A community of touring cyclists and those that support them

### Youth Hostels Association (YHA) New Zealand

A not-for-profit network of budget accommodation throughout New Zealand

### Department of Conservation (DOC) Campsites

A network of basic camp sites throughout New Zealand's conservation estate

### Rankers

A website and phone app for finding camping locations, backed by credible reviews

### Camper Mate

A website and phone app for finding camping locations, geared towards camper van users

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## Useful Stuff

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### [Visitor Information Centres New Zealand](#)

New Zealand's official visitor information network with over 60 i-SITEs nationwide

### [Cycling Action Network of New Zealand](#)

New Zealand's national network of cycling advocates

### [Auckland Cycle Touring Association](#)

Check out their New Zealand tour reports

### [Cycling About](#)

Tech articles, reviews, tips, how-tos and more

### [New Zealand Code for Cyclists](#)

The New Zealand Transport Agency's official code for cyclists

### [Park Tools Online Repair Guides](#)

A comprehensive online bicycle repair guide

### [Mechanical Tempest](#)

Fix your bike at Wellington's community bike workshop

### [Natural High Bicycle Hire](#)

A bike hire company, offering a range of guided and self-guided tours

# Index

- Ahipara
  - Ahipara to Cape Reinga via 90 Mile Beach, 18
  - Rawene to Ahipara, 16
- Alexandra
  - Dunedin to Alexandra, 223
  - Ophir to Alexandra, 235
- Amberley
  - Amberley to Sheffield via Route 72, 167
- Anaura Bay
  - Tokomaru Bay to Anaura Bay, 101
- Arthur's Pass
  - Arthur's Pass to Christchurch, 268
  - Greymouth to Arthur's Pass, 264
  - Hokitika to Arthur's Pass via the Old Christchurch Road, 266
- Auckland
  - Auckland to Parakai, 4
- Balclutha
  - Balclutha to the Caitlins and Invercargill, 212
  - Dunedin to Balclutha via the Coast Road, 210
- Blackhead Beach
  - Blackhead Beach to Herbertville, 119
  - Napier to Blackhead Beach, 116
- Blenheim
  - Blenheim to Kaikōura, 178
  - Picton to Blenheim, 176
  - St Arnaud to Blenheim, 169
- Cape Palliser, 125
- Cape Reinga
  - Ahipara to Cape Reinga via 90 Mile Beach, 18
- Cheviot
  - Cheviot to Christchurch, 184
  - Kaikōura to Cheviot, 182
- Christchurch
  - Arthur's Pass to Christchurch, 268
  - Cheviot to Christchurch, 184
  - Christchurch Airport to the City Centre, 186
  - Christchurch to Geraldine, 188
  - Hanmer Springs to Christchurch, 165
- Clyde
  - Cromwell to Clyde, 240
  - The Otago Central Rail Trail, 230
- Coromandel
  - The Coromandel East Coast, 84
  - The Coromandel West Coast, 79
- Cromwell
  - Cromwell to Clyde, 240
  - Cromwell to Garston via the Nevis Road, 243
  - Cromwell to Wānaka, 248
  - Omarama to Cromwell via the Lindis Pass, 194
- Danseys Pass
  - Duntroon to Naseby via Danseys Pass, 198
- Dargaville
  - Dargaville to Waipoua Forest, 11
  - Parakai to Dargaville via Pouto

- Point, 9
- Dunedin
  - Dunedin to Alexandra, 223
  - Dunedin to Balclutha via the Coast Road, 210
  - Dunedin to Middlemarch by Bike, 226
  - Waikouaiti to Dunedin via Karitane, 206
- Duntroon
  - Duntroon to Naseby via Danseys Pass, 198
- Fairlie
  - Geraldine to Lake Tekapo via Fairlie, 190
- Featherston
  - Featherston to Wellington via the Remutaka Rail Trail, 132
  - Featherston to Wellington via Ōrongorongo Station, 129
  - Tiraumea to Featherston, 123
- Fox Glacier
  - Fox Glacier to Harihari, 258
  - Haast to Fox Glacier, 256
- Garston
  - Cromwell to Garston via the Nevis Road, 243
- Geraldine
  - Christchurch to Geraldine, 188
  - Geraldine to Lake Tekapo via Fairlie, 190
- Getting Started, 279
- Gisborne
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Mahia, 110
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Mōrere, 108
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Tiniroto, 105
- Tokomaru Bay to Gisborne, 103
- Greymouth
  - Greymouth to Arthur's Pass, 264
  - Greymouth to Karamea, 270
  - Greymouth to Reefton, 272
  - Hokitika to Greymouth, 262
- Haast
  - Haast to Fox Glacier, 256
  - Makarora to Haast, 254
- Hamilton
  - Hamilton to Te Kuiti, 42
- Hanmer Springs
  - Hanmer Springs to Christchurch, 165
  - Maruia Springs to Hanmer Springs, 163
  - Molesworth Road, 173
  - St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs, 171
- Harihari
  - Fox Glacier to Harihari, 258
  - Harihari to Hokitika, 260
- Helensville
  - Auckland to Helensville from Waitākere Station, 20
  - Helensville to Mangawhai, 23
- Herbertville
  - Blackhead Beach to Herbertville, 119
  - Herbertville to Tiraumea, 121
- Hokitika
  - Harihari to Hokitika, 260
  - Hokitika to Arthur's Pass via the Old Christchurch Road, 266
  - Hokitika to Greymouth, 262
- Invercargill

- Balclutha to the Caitlins and Invercargill, 212
- Invercargill to Tuatapere, 214
- Kaikōura
  - Blenheim to Kaikōura, 178
  - Kaikōura to Cheviot, 182
  - Kaikōura to Waipara via the Inland Road, 180
- Karamea
  - Greymouth to Karamea, 270
- Karitane
  - Waikouaiti to Dunedin via Karitane, 206
- Kawhia
  - Kawhia to Marokopa, 37
  - Raglan to Kawhia, 35
- Kingston
  - Kingston to Queenstown, 246
- Lake Tekapo
  - Geraldine to Lake Tekapo via Fairlie, 190
  - Lake Tekapo to Omarama, 192
- Lake Tutira
  - Lake Tutira to Napier, 114
  - Wairoa to Lake Tutira, 112
- Lindis Crossing
  - Omakau to Lindis Crossing, 237
- Lindis Pass
  - Omarama to Cromwell via the Lindis Pass, 194
- Makarora
  - Makarora to Haast, 254
  - Wānaka to Makarora, 252
- Mangarākau
  - Tākaka to Anatori, 153
- Mangawhai
  - Helensville to Mangawhai, 23
  - Mangawhai to Whangārei, 27
- Wellsford to Waipu via Mangawhai Road, 25
- Marokopa
  - Kawhia to Marokopa, 37
  - Marokopa to Mokau, 40
- Martinborough
  - Cape Palliser, 125
- Maruia
  - Murchison to Maruia Springs, 160
- Maruia Springs
  - Maruia Springs to Hanmer Springs, 163
  - Murchison to Maruia Springs, 160
- Masterton
  - Palmerston North to Masterton via Pahiatua, 75
- Mavora Lakes
  - Queenstown to Te Anau via the Mavora Lakes, 220
- Middlemarch
  - Dunedin to Middlemarch by Bike, 226
  - The Otago Central Rail Trail, 230
  - Waikouaiti to Middlemarch, 204
- Milford Sound
  - Te Anau to Milford Sound, 218
- Mokau
  - Marokopa to Mokau, 40
  - Mokau to Waitara, 47
  - Te Kuiti to Mokau, 45
- Molesworth
  - Molesworth Road, 173
- Mōrere
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Mōrere, 108
- Motueka



- Motueka to Tapawera, 156
- Motueka to Tākaka, 151
- Nelson to Motueka, 149
- Murchison
  - Murchison to Maruia Springs, 160
  - Murchison to St Arnaud, 276
  - Reefton to Murchison, 274
  - Tapawera to Murchison, 158
- Napier
  - Lake Tutira to Napier, 114
  - Napier to Blackhead Beach, 116
- Naseby
  - Duntroon to Naseby via Danseys Pass, 198
- Nelson
  - Nelson to Motueka, 149
  - Pelorus to Nelson via the Maungatapu Road, 146
  - Picton to Nelson, 143
- New Plymouth
  - New Plymouth to Whangamōmona, 49
  - Taumarunui to New Plymouth via Ōhura, 55
- Oakura
  - Whangārei to the Bay of Islands via Oakura, 29
- Oamaru
  - Oamaru to Waikouaiti, 202
  - Omarama to Oamaru and the East Coast, 196
- Ohakune
  - Ohakune to Taihape, 70
  - Whakahoro to Ohakune, 67
- Ōhura
  - Taumarunui to New Plymouth via Ōhura, 55
- Omakau
  - Omakau to Lindis Crossing, 237
- Omarama
  - Lake Tekapo to Omarama, 192
  - Omarama to Cromwell via the Lindis Pass, 194
  - Omarama to Oamaru and the East Coast, 196
  - Omarama to St Bathans, 200
- Ophir
  - Ophir to Alexandra, 235
- Ōpōtiki
  - Whakatāne to Ōpōtiki, 92
  - Ōpōtiki to Te Kaha, 95
- Pahiatua
  - Palmerston North to Masterton via Pahiatua, 75
- Palmerston North
  - Palmerston North to Masterton via Pahiatua, 75
  - Taihape to Palmerston North, 72
- Papakura
  - The Coromandel West Coast, 79
- Parakai
  - Auckland to Parakai, 4
  - Auckland to Parakai by Train, 7
- Pelorus Bridge
  - Pelorus to Nelson via the Maungatapu Road, 146
- Picton
  - Picton to Blenheim, 176
  - Picton to Nelson, 143
- Pipiriki
  - Pipiriki to Whanganui, 63
  - Taumarunui to Pipiriki by Canoe or Kayak, 60
- Pouto Point
  - Parakai to Dargaville via Pouto Point, 9

- Pukekohe  
Pukekohe to Waingaro, 31
- Queenstown  
Kingston to Queenstown, 246  
Wānaka to Queenstown via the Crown Range, 250
- Raglan  
Raglan to Kawhia, 35  
Waingaro to Raglan, 33
- Rawene  
Rawene to Ahipara, 16  
Waipoua Forest to Rawene, 14
- Reefton  
Greymouth to Reefton, 272  
Reefton to Murchison, 274
- Russel  
Whangārei to the Bay of Islands via Oakura, 29
- Seddon  
Molesworth Road, 173
- Sheffield  
Amberley to Sheffield via Route 72, 167
- St Arnaud  
Murchison to St Arnaud, 276  
St Arnaud to Blenheim, 169  
St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs, 171
- St Bathans  
Omarama to St Bathans, 200
- Taihape  
Ohakune to Taihape, 70  
Taihape to Palmerston North, 72
- Tākaka  
Motueka to Tākaka, 151  
Tākaka to Anatori, 153
- Tapawera  
Motueka to Tapawera, 156  
Tapawera to Murchison, 158
- Taumarunui  
Taumarunui to New Plymouth via Ōhura, 55  
Taumarunui to Pipiriki by Canoe or Kayak, 60  
Taumarunui to Whakahoro, 65  
Te Kuiti to Taumarunui, 58  
Whangamōmona to Taumarunui, 52
- Tauranga  
Tauranga to Whakatāne, 90
- Te Anau  
Queenstown to Te Anau via the Mavora Lakes, 220  
Te Anau to Milford Sound, 218  
Tuatapere to Te Anau, 216
- Te Araroa  
Te Araroa to Tokomaru Bay, 99  
Te Kaha to Te Araroa, 97
- Te Kaha  
Te Kaha to Te Araroa, 97  
Ōpōtiki to Te Kaha, 95
- Te Kuiti  
Hamilton to Te Kuiti, 42  
Te Kuiti to Mokau, 45  
Te Kuiti to Taumarunui, 58
- Tiniroto  
Gisborne to Wairoa via Tiniroto, 105
- Tiraumea  
Herbertville to Tiraumea, 121  
Tiraumea to Featherston, 123
- Tokomaru Bay  
Te Araroa to Tokomaru Bay, 99  
Tokomaru Bay to Anaura Bay, 101  
Tokomaru Bay to Gisborne, 103
- Tuatapere

- Invercargill to Tuatapere, 214
- Tuatapere to Te Anau, 216
- Tutira
  - Wairoa to Lake Tutira, 112
- Waihi
  - The Coromandel East Coast, 84
- Waikouaiti
  - Oamaru to Waikouaiti, 202
  - Waikouaiti to Dunedin via Karitane, 206
  - Waikouaiti to Middlemarch, 204
- Waingaro
  - Pukekohe to Waingaro, 31
  - Waingaro to Raglan, 33
- Waipara
  - Kaikōura to Waipara via the Inland Road, 180
- Waipoua Forest
  - Dargaville to Waipoua Forest, 11
  - Waipoua Forest to Rawene, 14
- Waipu
  - Wellsford to Waipu via Mangawhai Road, 25
- Wairoa
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Mahia, 110
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Mōrere, 108
  - Gisborne to Wairoa via Tiniroto, 105
  - Wairoa to Lake Tutira, 112
- Waitākere
  - Auckland to Helensville from Waitākere Station, 20
  - Auckland to Parakai by Train, 7
- Waitara
  - Mokau to Waitara, 47
- Walter Peak
  - Queenstown to Te Anau via the Mavora Lakes, 220
- Wānaka
  - Cromwell to Wānaka, 248
  - Wānaka to Makarora, 252
  - Wānaka to Queenstown via the Crown Range, 250
- Wellington
  - Featherston to Wellington via the Remutaka Rail Trail, 132
  - Featherston to Wellington via Ōrongorongo Station, 129
  - Wellington Airport to the City Centre, 135
  - Wellington Round the Bays Loop, 137
- Wellsford
  - Wellsford to Waipu via Mangawhai Road, 25
- Whakahoro
  - Taumarunui to Whakahoro, 65
  - Whakahoro to Ohakune, 67
- Whakatāne
  - Tauranga to Whakatāne, 90
  - Whakatāne to Ōpōtiki, 92
- Whangamōmona
  - New Plymouth to Whangamōmona, 49
  - Whangamōmona to Taumarunui, 52
- Whanganui
  - Pipiriki to Whanganui, 63
- Whangārei
  - Mangawhai to Whangārei, 27
  - Whangārei to the Bay of Islands via Oakura, 29