

RING ROUTE NO. 2

Summary

This route is divided into three stages. An easy 1 hour drive from Waitomo Lodge to Mokau. Lunch and then a 1½ hour drive to Marakopa. Finally a 1 hour drive back to Waitomo Lodge stopping at Marakopa Falls and Hanging Bridge on the way.

There's plenty to see at Mokau and before you start check out the Mokau River Cruise on the MV Glenroyal. The road to Marakopa is real back country New Zealand even down to the 17km's of gravel road and not a telephone line or power pole in sight.

Seems like a lot of driving but you'll appreciate the remoteness and enjoy your dinner at the HUUH Café in Waitomo before driving the short distance to Waitomo Lodge.

Brief Logistics	
Total Distance	214 km's including 17kilometres of gravel road
Driving Time	Around 3½ hours
Food Outlets	Ample
Petrol Stations	Waikawau only
Mobile Phone Coverage	Mokau only

Itinerary

Before leaving Te Kuiti fill your tank with petrol or diesel. There is a service station about 45 minutes south of Te Kuiti but that's the only one.

Leave the Waitomo Lodge and drive on State Highway 3 to Awakino. About 3km's out of Te Kuiti you'll pass All Black Pinetree Mead's former home and up in the hills to your left is where he and brother Stan trained for their rugby.



About 11km's out of Te Kuiti the Mokau River appears on your left. This river started back up behind Te Kuiti on the slopes of Mt Pureora. To early Maori the Mokau was an important waterway although it was more frequently used for warlike pursuits than peaceful ones. A bit further on watch out for Troopers Road and to your half right you will see the hill that was the old fighting pa of Arapae. This was a huge pa and using the Mokau River, Maori from here could be in Taranaki in two days.



Travelling on through some of our best sheep and beef farms with a few dairy farms here and there, you come to PioPio, a small service town. You leave the Mokau here as it veers south as you start to drop down into Mangaotaki Gorge with some magnificent limestone cliffs waiting to be photographed. Then it's up out of the gorge and over the top into the Awakino River catchment.

Famous for its trout fishing, this swift flowing river soon joins the road as you go through the tunnel into the Awakino Gorge.



Within 15 minutes you are out of the gorge and have left the trout behind and entered whitebait territory. In the season the lower reaches of both the Awakino and the Mokau will be lined with whitebaiters. First you reach Awakino and about 6km's further south along the coast you come to the seaside resort of Mokau, where the Mokau River meets the sea. On a good day and away to the south, Mount Taranaki will be visible.

The Museum at Mokau is a must see and well worth the hour or so it takes to view the exhibits. Then take the road up the river by turning off before the Mokau Bridge. Go right to the end and you will pass over a hundred whitebaiting stands. Have a look at one or two to see what they are like.



The Mokau has a unique history. It is the only river in New Zealand designated as a road. Up river the school teacher at Mackford was paid an allowance to pick his pupils up for school – no not in a bus but in a dingy! Cream, wool and livestock came down river along with coal from several coalmines upstream.

Today only three or four farms are left up river. The bush has reclaimed most of it and the coal seams are exhausted. The river still trundles on by and if you want an exceptional experience book the MV Glenroyal for a 2 or 3 hour river voyage.

The timetable is based around the tides but the voyage takes you well up river with very good commentary from the Skipper Ian.



Prices \$30 to \$45 and \$10 for children. Whitebait lunch on board is \$10 to \$15 extra. Ask the Waitomo Lodge Manager for details. Lunch is also available at two good cafes in the town.

Now it's time to head back to Awakino and on to the service station where you take the sign-posted road to Marokopa. It's all tarseal to the small Waikawau School (about 40–45 minutes from Awakino). Take the 5km trip on gravel road to the Stock Tunnel. This was carved out by 3 men with pick and shovel and finished in 1911. Designed to be high enough for a man to ride a horse through and wide enough for the biggest spread of horns on a cattle beast, it was to make it possible to drive stock down the beach to market. Also used to load wool onto surf boats out to sailing ships anchored off shore.

Then it's back out to the tarseal and north to Marokopa. About half an hours drive takes you to Kiritehere Beach where you can wander down the beach for about 10 minutes and you are in fossil heaven. A nice break from driving.

Over the hill now to the seaside resort of Marokopa. Baches here sell for \$350,000 to \$450,000. There is a little shop at the camping ground and the nice lady will make you up a toastie or chips along with tea and coffee. A good place to fuel up because we've got the Marokopa Falls to visit next.



Leaving Marokopa it's a 16.5km drive to the falls. These magnificent falls are 36 metres high and very, very photogenic. Access is an easy 20 minute return walk through native bush.

After the falls it's on up the road about 3 kilometres to the next hidden gem, the Natural Bridge (Mangapohue). This is really a spectacular "must see". An easy 10-minute walk off the road via an excellent wooden walkway takes you to the foot of a staircase where you get an excellent and stunning view of this 17-metre high natural limestone bridge. You can either return the way you came or walk the full circuit as described at the site. A good toilet is available here.



From the Bridge it's off through the Tawarau Gorge with the dense untouched indigenous forest on one side and Pinus Radiata forest on the other. After 10 minutes or so you are out of the gorge into sheep farms and suddenly you are at the top of the hill looking out over the King Country.



On a good day you will see the mountains of Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngaurohoe away to the South. A few minutes past the top of the hill is the Haggas Lookout which has a good descriptive sign of where and what to look for.

Finally time to head for Waitomo Lodge. We suggest an early meal at the HUUH Café, an award winning licensed restaurant serving small or big plate meals. There is a superb souvenir and gift shop attached and its located at the far end of Waitomo Village. From here it's a simple 16 minute drive back to Te Kuiti and Waitomo Lodge and those big comfortable beds.



Before you go to sleep check out our Route Book to see where you fancy for tomorrow.

Happy Days

