

## Introduction

The scenic route through Waitomo's landscape takes you from the SH3/Waitomo turn-off across to the historic west coast fishing settlement of Marokopa. From there it is a further five kilometres south down the coast to Kiritehere.

Along the way you can explore caves, waterfalls, gorges and natural bridges. You will see native bush at its most beautiful and take in panoramic views of the King Country. And if you look carefully, you will find marine fossils millions of years old.

## Limestone

The process that made the Waitomo landscape began 35 million years ago. The land was invaded by water and became a shallow sea. Shell fragments and the skeletons of other sea creatures built up on the sea floor and over time were buried, compacted and cemented together to form limestone.

Eventually, some 12 million years ago, movement in the Earth's crust pushed the

seabed up from beneath the sea. When the limestone became exposed to the corrosive power of rain, the Waitomo landscape, as we know it today, began to form.

Limestone landscapes, called *karst*, are famous for their unusual features. Rivers disappear into the earth and spring out of nowhere. Stone arches span deep gorges, and characteristically, there are caves - many caves.

## Fossils

Marine fossils from when dead creatures on the sea floor are covered by layers of sediment. Most animal and plant remains disappear quickly after death as they are eaten or decompose. The fossils we find today are of animals that had hard skeletons or shells and were buried quickly. They are exposed at the surface by gradual erosion of the rock, often perfectly preserved.

## Plants and wildlife

The forests of the Waitomo area are dominated by tawa but also feature a large number of small plants adapted to living in the damp, shaded conditions around caves and in gorges. Parataniwha is particularly noticeable, its large red-green leaves form a thick ground cover and make the most of the scarce sunlight.

The area is also home to some of our endangered animals such as long and short-tailed bats (New Zealand's only native land mammals) and two species of tiny native frog. However, you're much more likely to see birds like kereru, tui and perhaps a falcon. Falcons, which look a little like the more common Australasian harrier, can be distinguished by their faster wing beat, shorter, rounded wings and distinctive "kek-kek-kek" call.

## Opapaka Pa Bushwalk

You should make your first stop on this scenic journey here, seven kilometres from the Waitomo turn-off. This walk (35 minutes return) takes you through native forest and up a steep farm track to a pa site. This pa was occupied by Ngati Hia in the 1700s and was the site of a notable battle between Ngati Hia and a war party led by Tanetinarau. Take time to read the information panels which tell you about traditional uses for many of the plants seen along the way.

## Museum of Caves

The Waitomo Museum of Caves, in Waitomo Village just beyond Opapaka, is well worth a visit. The museum contains interesting displays and information about limestone and caves, and includes an excellent film describing the life of Waitomo's most famous resident the glowworm. Bookings are taken at the museum.



Australasian harrier



New Zealand falcon

Parataniwha



Limestone bluffs on the road to Marokopa



## Kiritehere Beach

Kiritehere, over the hill south of Marokopa, typifies the rugged character and isolation of New Zealand's west coast. Despite its remoteness and difficult access, surfers from as far away as New Plymouth consider the beach their best kept secret. At low tide you can see fossilised clams, mussels and scallop-like *Monotis* in the rocks at the end of the beach.

From Kiritehere you can travel on down the coast to Awakino or backtrack towards Te Kuiti. If you continue south have a look at the Waikawau Tunnel, cut through the cliffs to give access to the coast. Whichever way you go, we hope you enjoy your scenic journey through the limestone landscape.

Uplifted landform at Kiritehere Beach



## Safety Watch 0800 999 005

Report any safety hazards



- Protect plants and animals
- Remove rubbish
- Bury toilet waste
- Keep streams and lakes clean
- Take care with fires
- Camp carefully
- Keep to the track
- Consider others
- Enjoy your visit
- Toitu te whenua  
(Leave the land undisturbed)

## Information

For further information contact:

Department of Conservation  
Maniapoto Area Office  
48 Taupiri Street  
PO Box 38  
Te Kuiti  
Tel. (07) 878 1050  
Fax (07) 878 1051  
Hrs: 8.00am - 4.30pm  
www.doc.govt.nz

Waitomo Museum of Caves  
PO Box 12  
Waitomo  
Tel. (07) 878 7640

## West to Marokopa

A scenic journey in a limestone landscape



### Waitomo Bushwalk

Waiting for your guided tour of the cave to start? The Waitomo Bushwalk starts right opposite the Museum. It takes you along an excellent bush track, under a dense canopy of native bush as far as the Waitomo bridge.

The Waitomo Walkway (1 hour one-way) continues on to the Ruakuri Scenic Reserve and highlights some of the area's unique geological features (see the Waitomo Walkway factsheet for additional information).

### Ruakuri Scenic Reserve

For both historical significance and sheer beauty, this stop is a must. Four kilometres from Waitomo village, on Tumutumu Road, Ruakuri Scenic Reserve contains classic limestone outcrops, caves, tunnels and beautiful native forest. It is also a place of strong cultural and spiritual significance to Maori.

A popular loop track (30 minutes return) takes you to the Ruakuri Natural Tunnel. The track descends into the tunnel giving you an unusual 'inside' view of the stream and tunnel entrance.

Guided tours for Aranui Cave are available. Ruakuri Cave itself is closed - the cave entrance, the burial caves above and the surrounding karaka trees are all *waahi tapu* (sacred) to Maori. The track has been re-aligned to leave the cave entrance undisturbed.

### Tawarau Forest

Tawarau Forest is one of the best examples of a virgin forest growing in a karst landscape. Dense forest, huge limestone bluffs and secluded waterfalls lie in wait for the serious tramp. Access to tramping tracks through Tawarau Forest can be gained from Appletree and Speedies Roads. For up to date information on these tracks contact the Maniapoto Area Office in Te Kuiti (or see the *Whareorino and Tawarau Forests* brochure).

### Mangapohue Natural Bridge

Situated five kilometres past the Appletree Road turn-off (25 kilometres from Waitomo village), Mangapohue Natural Bridge is one of the most spectacular sights on the scenic journey. The 17 metre-high limestone arch, which spans Mangapohue Stream, is all that remains of an ancient cave system.

The loop track (25 minutes return) passes under the bridge giving a superb view of the ceiling studded with stalactite-like formations and an excellent view back down the gorge. It then continues on over a farm trail where you can see 30 million-year-old fossilised oysters exposed in the limestone outcrops. At night, look out for glow-worms and the elusive long-tailed bat!

### Marokopa Falls

Marokopa Falls are another two kilometres down the road from Piripiri Cave. The 30 metre-high falls are often described as the most beautiful in the country! Take the short track (30 minutes return) to a platformed area, and obtain a spectacular view of the falls. Don't forget your camera!

Ruakuri Scenic Reserve



### Waitomo Valley Lookout

Six kilometres past the Tumutumu Road junction, this lookout provides magnificent views south. On a clear day, the volcanic mountains Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu can be seen to the south-east.

### Piripiri Cave

Four kilometres further on stop and visit Piripiri Cave. This cave is not operated commercially so you're on your own. You'll need a torch as there is no natural lighting in the cave, and boots, as the cave floor is slippery. The walk to the cave takes about 5 minutes but the amount of time you spend in the cave is up to you. Look at the layers of giant oyster fossils towards the back of the cave.



Marokopa - famous for its fishing

### Marokopa

Fifteen kilometres after leaving Marokopa Falls you reach the coast and Marokopa Village. Marokopa is famous for its fishing, particularly when the kahawai swarm into the mouth of the river between January and May.

Marokopa has a quiet, timeless feel to it, but its history is far from tame. In the 1820's, the great chief Te Rauparaha, realising his Ngati Toa people had to leave Te Arawa to avoid defeat at the hands of rival tribes, headed south to Kapiti. Fifteen hundred people followed their leader. On the journey Te Rauparaha stayed briefly at Marokopa with his pregnant wife Te Akau, and some say it is here that their son Katu was born.

In later years Marokopa developed into a thriving township where bushmen and road workers converged to pick up supplies. At this time, and for many years after the King Country was, in law at least, a 'dry' area. But Marokopa's harbour access encouraged a profitable bootlegging business and the town's two whisky shops did a roaring trade.



Marokopa Falls