



KAWHIA HARBOUR VIA THE CAVES

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All the elements of a classic road ride are brought together in this grand loop from Otorohanga out to Kawhia Harbour and back via Waitomo Caves. The roads are so quiet – less than 10 cars in the middle 100 km – that it is a wonder they are even sealed. But they are. The scenery is iconic to New Zealand: a constantly changing mixture of farmland, native bush, narrow valleys and expansive coastal views. There are several solid hills to hook your chain rings into, but none of them are murderous, and the long lazy downhills amply reward with stunning views.

Kawhia Harbour via the caves

Start/Finish: Otorohanga, 50 km south of Hamilton

5–9 hour hilly ride; 131 km

Climbs: 1200 m in total, including two category 3s and one category 4

Route description

From Otorohanga, head northwest on Kawhia Road (Highway 39) for 14 km before turning left at the large Kawhia sign. This is the only busy section, but the shoulder is generally ok. After turning off the busy highway, Kawhia Road passes through farmland and then Te Kauri Scenic Reserve as you tackle the toughest climb of this ride, an 8 km category 3, with a testing 2 km section averaging 7%.

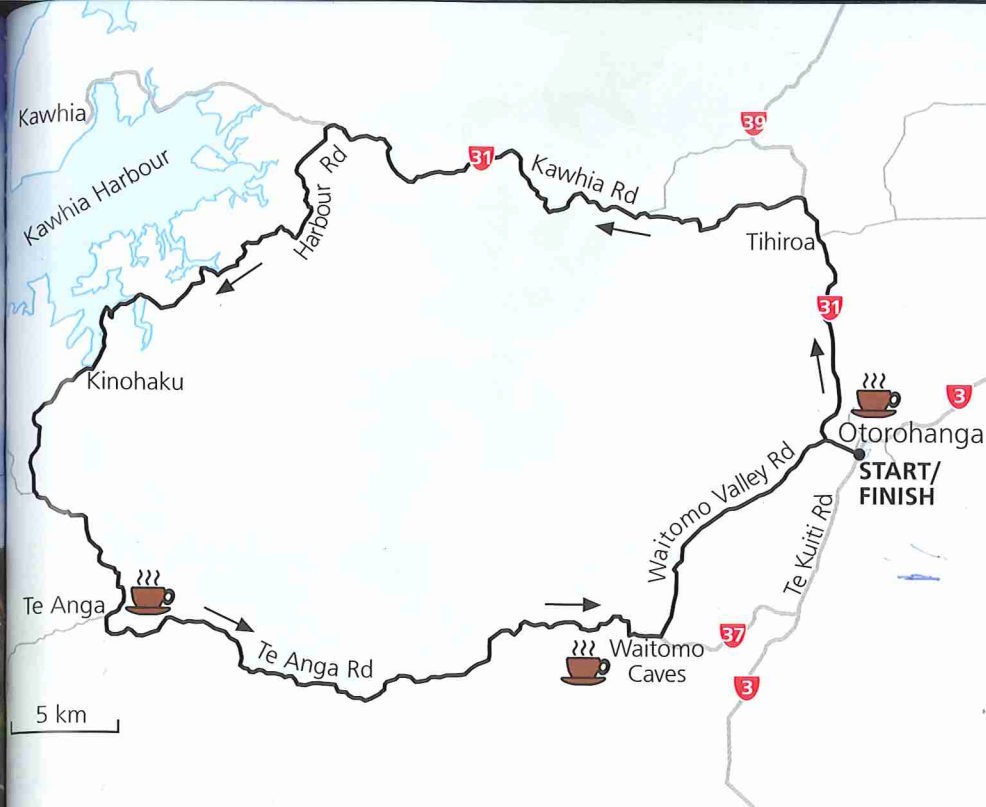
From the top, the westward views are endless, and so is the downhill as you drop into another world – Kawhia land.

At the 43 km mark, you'll reach a 'major' signposted intersection. Swing hard left to follow Harbour Road to the back of Kawhia Harbour, via a few small hills, some massive rock cliffs and, at a prominent viewing point

beside the road at 60.5 km, a stone slab like the Narnian-sacrificial table. Hopefully, that won't be necessary; hang in there for another few minutes and you'll reach some conventional picnic tables beside the harbour. There are several scenic reserves on this ride, including the jewel in the crown; Kawhia Harbour Scenic Reserve. During high tide the water laps right up to the edge of the road in places.

After 68 km, you'll reach a cluster of houses called Kinohaku and a T-intersection. Head left on Te Waitere Road towards Te Anga and left again on to Taharoa Road at the next signposted intersection. This takes you over another category 3 climb (5 km long), which is followed by a brilliantly long freewheeling descent. As you're gliding along, each turn of the road reveals a new scene – side valleys, old farm buildings, forests and creeks. This is cycling at its best!

At the 84 km mark, near the bottom of a broad valley, you'll reach a crossroads in the middle of nowhere – at least it would be the middle of nowhere but for the presence of the solitary, rustic Te Anga Tavern. You may feel like a lycra-clad alien walking into such an outback pub, but it's worth it; this is the first shop since Otorohanga.



The grand loop from Otorohanga to Kawhia Harbour contains all the elements of a classic ride.

Beyond Te Angra there are a few easier hills and lots of native forest, as well as short walks to a stunning waterfall and a cave, en route to Waitomo Caves. Everything is well signposted along the way, so you can't easily get lost as you head inland.

After the picnic tables at Haggas Lookout (category 4 climb), it's time to coast down to the next lot of shops at Waitomo Caves township at the 117 km mark. This bustling little town exists to satisfy people's speleological desires. Rather than heading underground, you can just find a good coffee and sit back to do a bit of tourist watching while your legs process some lactic acid.

From Waitomo, don't be tempted to take the main road back to Otorohanga. It's fast in a car, but there's a big hill in the way and it's often chokka full of traffic. The cyclists' gem is the winding Waitomo Valley Road. It's now all sealed and fairly flat. After 13 km, turn right at the main road, and ride just one last kilometre back to Otorohanga. What a fantastic ride!

Notes

Go well prepared. This is one of the most isolated rides in the North Island. It's amazing

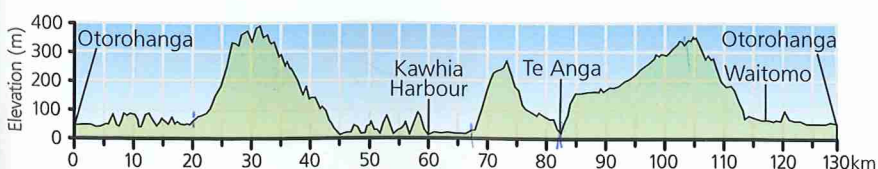
that it's all sealed. There are holiday homes at Kawhia Harbour, so traffic will be busier on public holidays; we only saw 10 cars in the middle 100-km section though.

Te Angra Tavern opening hours: 12 noon, Thursday–Sunday; closed Monday; opens 3 pm Tuesday and 1:30 pm Wednesday; closing time – last man standing.

Weekend holiday option

This ride can be turned into a great two-day holiday by riding 12 kilometres from Te Angra out to the tiny seaside village of Marakopa. Accommodation there is fairly basic, and there are no cafes or restaurants – just a motorcamp shop. But the scenery is fantastic. Day one from Otorohanga to Marakopa would be 96 km, and day two would be 60 km. For those over the age of 40, it will take you back to your childhood.

The train that runs between Auckland and Wellington is an easy way to get you and your bike to and from Otorohanga. It costs less than \$100 each way.



Introducing the Kennett brothers

The three Kennett brothers, Paul, Simon and Jonathan, began publishing cycling books in 1993. Their first book was *Classic New Zealand Mountain Bike Rides*, which has now sold over 50,000 copies.

Although best known as mountain biking pioneers, they have always been interested in road cycling, and in 1995 they won the 425-kilometre Nelson to Christchurch Classic, and a month later led the front peloton into Taupo on their triple bicycle. Since 2004 they have published one book a year on New Zealand cycling legends and this year they teamed up with BikeNZ's Kieran Turner to write and publish a long overdue guide to road cycling in New Zealand – *Classic New Zealand Road Rides*.

