

The Bridge to Somewhere



By Phil Barron

In the early eighties, I caught a jetboat from Pipiriki and went up the Whanganui River to Mangapurua Landing, and walked onto the **Bridge to Nowhere** from there. The bridge was built to access the land that early settlers and First World War Returned Soldiers settled on.

The land was covered in bush, and the access in those days was shocking. The bridge was built in 1935, but by that time many of the Settlers had left, finding the country and life too hard. In the following few years all the rest had gone, and the land reverted back to its natural state. I did hear that only one car ever crossed the Bridge.

A few years later I heard about a similar bridge, built for the same purpose around 1936, and now called the **Bridge to Somewhere** in the Aotuhia Valley.

For the last two years, I was intending to visit the bridge, but did not get there. Both bridges are situated in pretty remote areas of the King Country and Taranaki boundaries. I also wanted to travel the roads from Ohura to Kotare, and then on to Whangamomona. These roads are all metal, until you reach Highway 34 to Whangamomona. The plan: I am now 80. Time to do it.

Monday 5th February: Leaving on Trip. Accommodation? My Toyota Hiace work van. Bed in the back. Bash up a base. Shoot down to Maleme Street, grab some pallets, slap my apron on. Whoops. Belt has shrunk. Ok, base completed, and a unit with a couple of drawers secured in Van. Cut up some large drapes for curtains. Job completed. Van loaded with basic supplies, (and I mean basic) and ready to leave on Monday for Taumarunui.

Ngiare's thoughts. "What do you want to go away the hell down there, on all those rough, dusty roads, to see a Bridge. Go somewhere nice, stay in a good hotel, enjoy yourself".

They do not get it.

Tuesday 6th Feb. 7am. I am on my way from Taumarunui to Ohura, and will be going via the Okahukura Saddle. A road I used to travel when I was an apprentice, as we were working in the Ohura area.



I started off in fog but came out in the sun half way up the saddle, and the bush looked lovely. Lovely windy road with hardly any traffic. Stopped at Ohura for a coffee, and map consultation. Leaving Ohura, I took the Waitaanga Road to Kotare and was not too far into the journey when the metal roads started.

Waitaanga Road, if you travel its full distance, connects with Highway 3 to New Plymouth at Ahititi.

The road is windy and takes you over a few saddles and through lovely native bush. The farms that you do see are all on pretty hard looking land. Very little traffic on these roads, so would not want to break down. Phone reception not the best. I finally arrived at the tarseal and Kotare, where I turned on to Okau Road, which would take me to Mt Dampier and then meet up with Highway 43 to Whangamomona.

The tar seal did not last long, and was back on metal again, and a narrow rough road. I finally arrive at the walkway into the falls at Mt Dampier.

Had a boil up and then walked into the falls. A nice easy walk across farm land, and then into the bush, following the walkway to the falls viewing area.

Lovely peaceful area, looking out over the native bush and hills in the distance, thinking to myself, how it would be great if I could fly.

I landed and slowly made my way back to the carpark, where I had a sandwich and a beer, cold of course.

This is the life.

The metal road finished at Mt Dampier and I was on the seal all the way to Whangamomona, stopping at spots of interest on the way. Camped at the old school grounds in Whangamomona, which is now the over-night spot for tourists. I am glad I did these roads today, and yes, they were rough and dusty, but good scenery.

Would I do it again? No, but I don't have to.

Wednesday morning, after a good nights sleep, and I am ready to finally make my way to the **Bridge to Somewhere**. Heading towards Stratford on Highway 34, over the Whangamomona Saddle and Pohokura Saddle, until I reached Brewer Road at Strathmore.



Leaving Highway 34, headed towards Mangaehu Road passing through the Makahu Road Tunnel, still on seal, but on reaching Mangaehu Road, the metal started. A rough narrow dusty road with logging trucks thrown in as a bonus. Not many homes on this road. After about 5 kms, the loggers headed into the bush, and I saw nobody on the road after that. The road followed the river for most of the way, and finally, after about 20 kms I arrived at a gate with "Aotuhia Station" Private Property. What now? Open the gate and drive

through, stopped, and went to shut the gate, and around the corner came a farm vehicle and drove through the gate and stopped. I spoke first and they assured me I was very close to my destination. "Follow us" and they were gone. I still had to shut the gate. The old rule, you open the gate, you shut it. I followed the dust, and after a couple of kms I had arrived. There was the Bridge. Drove across it, turned around, and stopped in the middle. Then parked up and had a boil up and sandwich. I finally got to walk across the **Bridge to Somewhere**.



I still think to myself, after seeing both these areas, it was not a great reward for the Returned Servicemen, who served their country, to be balloted such terrible land. Mainly because of access and location.

I took a roundabout way of getting to the bridge, taking two other roads I had always

wanted to travel on, consisting of close to 100 kms of rough dusty roads. I am glad I did this in the summer, as these roads, when wet, would be terrible.



I did get a puncture from a sharp stone as a bonus. I am now ready to continue the rest of my time away on tar seal and more familiar territory. I am happy I have done this. These roads I have travelled are not for our Jaguars, apart from Highway 34 which as a club we have travelled on.

Phil