



# NAAAG



## Northern Adventure Aviation Group

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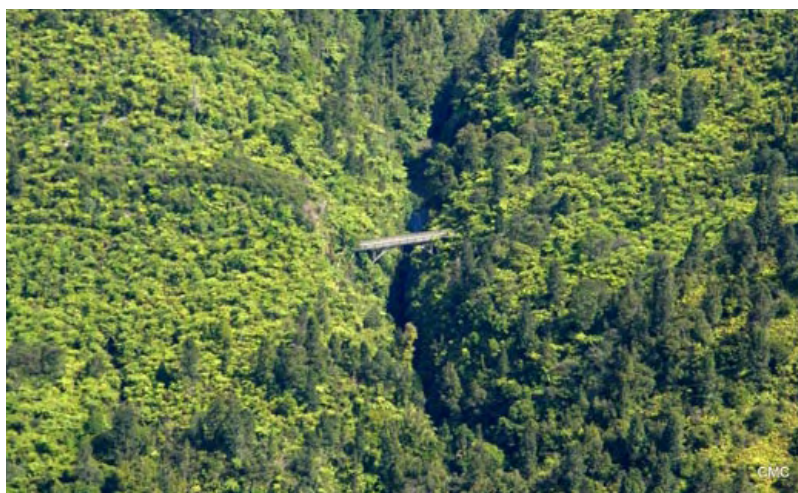
# Wanganui NAAAG Trip December 2011

On the 21<sup>st</sup> December we cobbled together just 5 aircraft for a trip to Wanganui. The days plan was to cruise the Whanganui River on the paddle steamer, Waimarie. I had contemplated the jet boat ride further up river but the logistics of getting everyone up there in the time available was really not practical. In the air from Thames at 9.30 we had a prearranged arrival time in

*'Bridge to Nowhere.' It sure is in a remote location.*

*Pipiriki Settlement along the Whanganui River.*

Wanganui of 11 am. Nooky and I had discussed earlier that we would go down the centre of the island and return home via New Plymouth and the West Coast. Weather predictions for the day were sunny with light winds. Well the wind part was right, but as the rest of the group were to find out, sunny was far from what they encountered on the way home! I modified my usual route over Raetihi further west to find the 'Bridge to Nowhere.' From Taumarunui, my new track had me following the Whanganui River downstream. There is some rugged terrain in this part of New Zealand and I can see why there was no one keen to stay on the land the government had set aside for the returned servicemen. The Bridge to Nowhere (formally called Morgan's Bridge) was constructed with the view that this area would become well populated and the roads leading to the bridge would be constructed at a later date. This was not to be and no roads ever eventuated. The area along the river could best be




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described as Tiger Country and I can sympathise with those that walked away from the land.

Following the river downstream at a lower altitude I was surprised at the number of kayaks we encountered with small groups of 3 - 5 every kilometre or so. We also spotted the Spirit of the River Jet boat making its way up the river. After winding our way down river for several miles we finally set heading directly for Wanganui as we were running a few

*Waimarie tied to the pier at Taupo Quay.*

*Peter Karl and Brian Sharp await departure on forward deck.*

minutes late. I had been in radio contact with each of the other planes on our journey south and I knew that Nooky and I would be the last to arrive. At ten miles out I could hear Murray and Laurel Smith arriving from the North West in their Cessna 172. We arrived overhead just as they slipped in beneath us. Nooky arrived 15 minutes later after needing to complete a spreading job back at Thames before his departure. We started the day off with payment of our landing fees and morning tea in the airport cafe. With a taxi van organised we were soon on Taupo Quay just a few meters from the paddle steamer, 'Waimarie'.

During lunch we were able to watch the crew getting the boiler up to pressure as bags of coal were brought aboard. Consuming quarter of a ton an hour it is quite a laborious task of moving the coal from the storage shed to stashing it below. Six crew are required to operate the vessel at any time.

*Murray Smith looks into the engine room that turns coal into smoke (and some power).*





The Waimarie was built in 1899 by the Yarrow & Co Shipbuilders at Poplar, London and transported in kitset form to Wanganui. Originally named Aotea, she was operated by the Wanganui Settlers River Steamship Co until 1902, when she was sold to Alexander Hatrick and renamed Waimarie meaning, 'good fortune / peaceful waters'.

For almost 50 years PS Waimarie, Queen of the River, plied the river between Whanganui and Pipiriki, navigating the rapids, carrying cargo,

*Plenty of seats available with only 36 aboard.*

*My passenger, Brian Sharp, had a turn at the helm.*

mail, river dwellers and tourists along this major inland highway. After the Whanganui River Road opened in 1935, the river traffic dwindled and finally, Waimarie, in need of a new boiler, was taken out of service in 1949. In 1952 she sank at her berth in Wanganui.

She remained buried in the silt and mud of the river until 1993, when she was salvaged by some enthusiastic volunteers and moved into the Whanganui Riverboat Centre for restoration. Some work was begun but it was not until grants from several trusts and lottery money came in that intensive work began in 1997. Completed in 1999 a major aspect of the restoration was that of the Yarrow Boiler. The replica boiler was lifted into Waimarie on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1999 and on her first firing was raised from cold to 160 psi in just 55 minutes. After 41 years buried in the mud of the Whanganui River, Waimarie was back in service.

With a cruising speed of 7 knots and a top speed of 11 knots this graceful lady is quite a site on the river as she makes her way under several river



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bridges leaving a trail of smoke in her wake.

For most of us, Wanganui is a bit off the beaten track. If you do happen to find yourself there for whatever reason, do make a point of taking a couple of hours out of your day to transport yourself back in time to that of the life of a river dweller.

With a little spare time, we crossed the City Bridge to the Durie Hill Elevator. Built in 1919 it is the only earthbound elevator in New Zealand and one of only two in the world.

*While there was a lot of smoke during the stoking of the boiler, it didn't last long.*

*Two hours on the river and 10 minutes trying to berth her!*

Reaching the top of the elevator we then gained access to the Memorial Tower. This 33.5 meter tower is built from fossilised shell rock and offers commanding views of the city, Mount Egmont, Ruapehu and the Tasman Sea.

Taking the elevator down again we then boarded a taxi back to the airport. Here we were met by local aviator, Daryl McIntyre who showed us several of the local aircraft including a couple under construction. Conscious of the time we readied our aircraft for departure with Nooky Robinson and me deciding to take the more scenic route up the west coast via Stratford and New Plymouth. The late afternoon lighting was perfect to highlight the eroded cliff faces between White Cliffs and Awakino.

We were in communication with the other three aircraft that had gone home via the more central route. We could hear them talking between themselves and becoming a little concerned about the weather ahead.



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For us, we were in sunshine and making the most of a 7 knot tailwind. Murray Smith called us saying we might have trouble getting through to Thames further north as Hamilton Tower was advising of widespread thunderstorms. Approaching Raglan we could see the sky becoming very black toward the east but we remained in calm clear air. I spotted a path between Huntly and Ngaruawahia where we were able to slip through toward Thames. We could see that the storm front was a

*Brian Sharp inspects the large chrome ball bearing with the river path depicted on it in relief.*



*Brian, Murray and Laurel enter the 213 metre long tunnel to the Durie Hill elevator.*



band of less than 10 miles in width but it stretched from Taumarunui to the bottom of the Bombay Hills. Unfortunately for Murray and his wife Laurel, they were not able to make their home strip at Ohaupo and had to land at Bill Izard's Foxhill Strip at Kihikihi. Bill and wife Lynda kindly fed them and lent them a car to complete the last few miles of their journey. While there was little rain at Kihikihi, Murray tells me they had 28mm just a few miles up the road at home.

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Again we had enjoyed a most memorable day out coupled with a bit of weather related drama.

*Interesting light patterns cast in the tunnel.*

*Eroded sea caves to the north of White Cliffs.*

*Huntly about to be enveloped by the approaching thunderstorm.*

To all the readers, I trust you have had a wonderful Christmas and I look forward to catching up with you in the New Year.

Happy holidays and safe flying,

*Cliff McChesney*

And if you feel sad this Christmas, just remember...




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**DURIE HILL  
ELEVATOR**

*The elevator, which was built to develop the Durie Hill suburb, was opened on 2 August 1919. The tunnel leading to the elevator is 213 metres long and the elevator shaft measures 65.8 metres.*

*The elevator is administered by the Wanganui District Council.*

CMC

*Left: Durie Hill Elevator. 'Built in 1919, it is the only earthbound elevator in New Zealand and one of only two in the world!'*

*Below: The Wanganui Memorial Tower. Built from fossilised shell rock dated at more than two million years old. The 33.5 metre Memorial Tower has 176 steps leading to the viewpoint.*



*Bill Izard has produced and directed a video of the NAAG Day out to Wanganui. Click on the image to proceed to the video.*



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