



THE EKETAHUNA CHUCKLE



Why is it that when people talk about the small North Island town of Eketahuna laughter is never far away? It became a bit of a game to see what kind of noises people would make when I mentioned the town and an astonishing range of snorts, guffaws and even a 'bwahaha' erupted from various belly regions. Intrigued, I set about finding the joke.

This was more difficult than I imagined. When quizzed about their reaction most people looked puzzled and just said, "I dunno why it's funny. It just is." Others said it was because of the "funny name" but unless you speak Afrikaans (where Eketahuna sounds amusingly similar to the sentence "I have a chicken"), Eketahuna means to 'run aground on a sandbank', which isn't outrageously funny. After more investigation the best explanation I found was from Wikipedia. According to this oh-so learned resource,

much to offer the energetic visitor. The excellent community-run information centre should be your first point of call as it has many brochures as well as interesting historical and environmental displays. Local walks include a heritage trail around the town's museums and historical buildings; and the historic Cliff Walk (50min) which curves through scenic bush and along a cliff above the Makakahi River to a peaceful picnic, swimming and camping area.

About 8km south of Eketahuna on SH2 is the Anzac Bridge monument and a short walk (20min) through the WA Miller Scenic Reserve. This reserve is just 2km from the Pukaha Mt Bruce Wildlife Centre which is also definitely worth a visit. Huge efforts are being undertaken here to restore kiwi, kokako, kaka and other important species to the forest.

Eketahuna is also one of the gateways to the Tararua Forest Park which has many tramping,

Mountain biking is permitted on a number of routes in the Tararua Ranges and the closest track to Eketahuna is the Mikimiki to Kiriwhakapapa Tramline Track. It follows an old timber mill tramway through native bush to a short loop track at the Kiriwhakapapa end. If the biking hasn't worn you out, from the Kiriwhakapapa Road there is also a steep climb to the Blue Range Hut (900m) which has spectacular views of the Ruamahunga catchment area.

Trout fishing is also popular in the area and Eketahuna is a launching pad to numerous easy-access fishing spots. The upper reaches of the Mangatainoka River near Putara (10km from Eketahuna) make for especially good fishing early in the season with clear water, boulder runs and deep pools. Another option is the Makakahi River which parallels SH2 and has 30km of good access between Eketahuna and its confluence with the Mangatainoka River. Most rivers and streams in the Tararua Ranges are also home to trout.

There are many places to stay in the region and the whole area is perfect for the camping enthusiast. Camp grounds vary widely depending on your taste and range from the basic DoC grounds at Kiriwhakapapa to the pretty Eketahuna Camping Group with cabins and motor home sites.

A couple of weeks after I visited Eketahuna, I happened to be listening to Kathryn Ryan's Nine till Noon show on National Radio and what do you think happened? In the middle of a serious topical discussion someone mentioned Eketahuna and the studio burped with laughter. It seems that no one, not even the intelligentia at National Radio, can resist the Eketahuna chuckle. 🤪



The Anzac Bridge was built by local Alfred Falkner in 1922 in memorial of the local people who served in WWI

Eketahuna is mocked because it's known as the Kiwi equivalent to Timbaktu; in other words the middle of nowhere and lost in the sticks. Ah-ha! I thought. If that's the case, it's the perfect town for me.

As you'd expect from the epitome of Kiwiana, Eketahuna has chosen a giant kiwi as its symbol and 'the biggest kiwi in the world' waits patiently on SH2 ever ready to welcome the weary traveller to town. The giant kiwi is so up with the times that after having your photo taken with it, you can become friends with it on Facebook.

As well as a guaranteed laugh, Eketahuna has

fishing, mountain biking, camping, picnicking, rafting, kayaking, and swimming opportunities. The forest park is 20km from the township and the network of tracks and huts opens up the whole of the Tararua Ranges. Access from Eketahuna is via the Putara Road where a track (10min) leads to a swing bridge. If you follow the track to the left of the bridge for 30 minutes you'll come across a second and larger swing bridge. Beyond this is a steep climb (2hr) up to the Herepai Hut. Other nearby access points to the forest park include Mt Bruce and Mikimiki, both south of Eketahuna.

WILD FILE

- Eketahuna Information Centre
ph: (06) 375 8545
- Pukaha Mt Bruce Wildlife Centre
ph: (06) 375 8004 email: info@mtbruce.org.nz
- You must have a licence to fish for trout. These can be obtained from the Eketahuna Kiwi Country Information Centre.