

GULL COLONY LOOP

Topo50 Maps: BH34-Ruarimu & BJ34-Mnt Ruapehu

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START: Exit Taupo on SH1 down the lake to Turangi then you have the choice:

- Follow the Desert Highway (SH1) and turn off right on to SH46 for Rangipo. Left to SH47 at the one and only T-junction
- Turn off SH47 on to SH48 signposted for Whakapapa, or
- In Turangi turn off SH1 right to SH41 then left to SH47 and proceed as above. This route is shown opposite
- Pass the Chateau on the left and park in the car park on the right which has toilets and is quite safe for vehicles compared to some.

Rough description: A fairly long (16km), circular walk in the moderate category lasting five to six hours including breaks which starts and ends at the Chateau in Whakapapa, uses the track to Tama Lakes and returns via the Wairere Stream. There is an overall altitude gain and loss of about 350 metres. If a detour is made to the Tama Lakes more altitude and distance is involved. The first part of this is very easy but once past the Wairere Stream bridge on the way out the track is less good due to erosion and there is a little bit of uphill getting to the Tama Lakes turn-off (**WP07**^{1306masl}).

From this turn-off some very easy bush-bashing is involved heading south to get above the Gull Colony (**WP11**^{1481masl}). The return also involves off-track walking in a westerly direction then steeply downhill into the Wairere Stream (**WP13**^{1397masl}) then NW down valley back out to the Tama Lakes track.

Detail: Turn left out of the car park (**WP01**) opposite the Chateau and turn immediately right to go along the road up the side of the Chateau heading NE. Near the end of this access road ignore the track on your left (you might come back this way) and head for the track that goes straight ahead at the end of the surfaced road and is signed Taranaki Falls (**WP02**^{1145masl}). Proceed on the very good track crossing an open wooden bridge (**WP03**^{1187masl}) in about 25 minutes then upwards parallel to the gully which you then cross and go up on to an open, flattish area with a view of Ngauruhoe straight ahead after 30 minutes.

After 40 minutes descend to the Wairere Stream, over the bridge, straight ahead and uphill again reaching a signpost [**WP04**^{1220masl}] indicating the route for the lower path to Whakapapa and Taranaki Falls, a possible diversion on the return. Go straight ahead for Tama Lakes.

The track continues to gain altitude but the grade is easy as it wanders around through quite badly eroded areas and the track is rather in need of upgrading especially when it turns from SSE to ENE (**WP05**^{1320masl}). After about 1:45 minutes there is a wet area with board-walk in places and 10 minutes further on enter and go up a narrow valley heading E (**WP06**^{1289masl}) to cross the stream at the top – at this point the path is quite rough. A signpost (**WP07**^{1306masl}) is met at a Y-fork in 2 hours or so with the path to Tama going left whilst the right fork goes to Waihohonu Hut.. This is where the off-track starts as the route heads S then SSW and the guide is a rough, jagged rocky ridge running parallel on the left (E).

Ten minutes gets one up on to the first crest (**WP08**^{1335masl}) after fairly easy walking through minor tussock or other “lumpy” vegetation. From here on the surface is easy walking with little vegetation and small soft gravel underfoot. At about 2:40 minutes cross a small stream coming from the SW to get on to a clearer, slightly steeper (**WP09**^{1383masl}) ridge – still with the guiding, jagged, rough ridge on your left over the river with steep side slopes. About 20 minutes are need to crest this ridge, passing a largish boulder (**WP10**^{1427masl}) on the way. Stay on the top or slightly to the left of the top of the ridge as this enhances views into the valley and crater ahead.

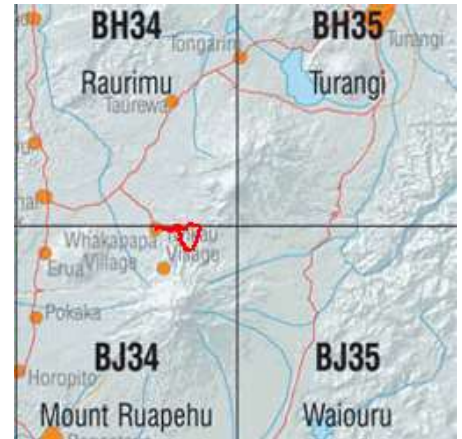
Guiding rocky ridge on left



View over crater and gull colony



Once at the top of the ridge (**WP11**^{1481masl}) there are good views of the crater lying to the E and also of the Gull Colony. There are gulls to be seen floating about but careful looking can be required as they might be a long way off. From the high-point crest, head off SW and soon a stream line is met; stay on the right hand side descending carefully as it is a bit steep and loose with rocks and boulders waiting to stop a rapid descent. There is a super small pool below a mini-waterfall (**WP12**^{1422masl}) as a lunch spot before the final descent to meet the path at the edge of the Wairere Stream (**WP13**^{1397masl}) within about 4 hours total time.

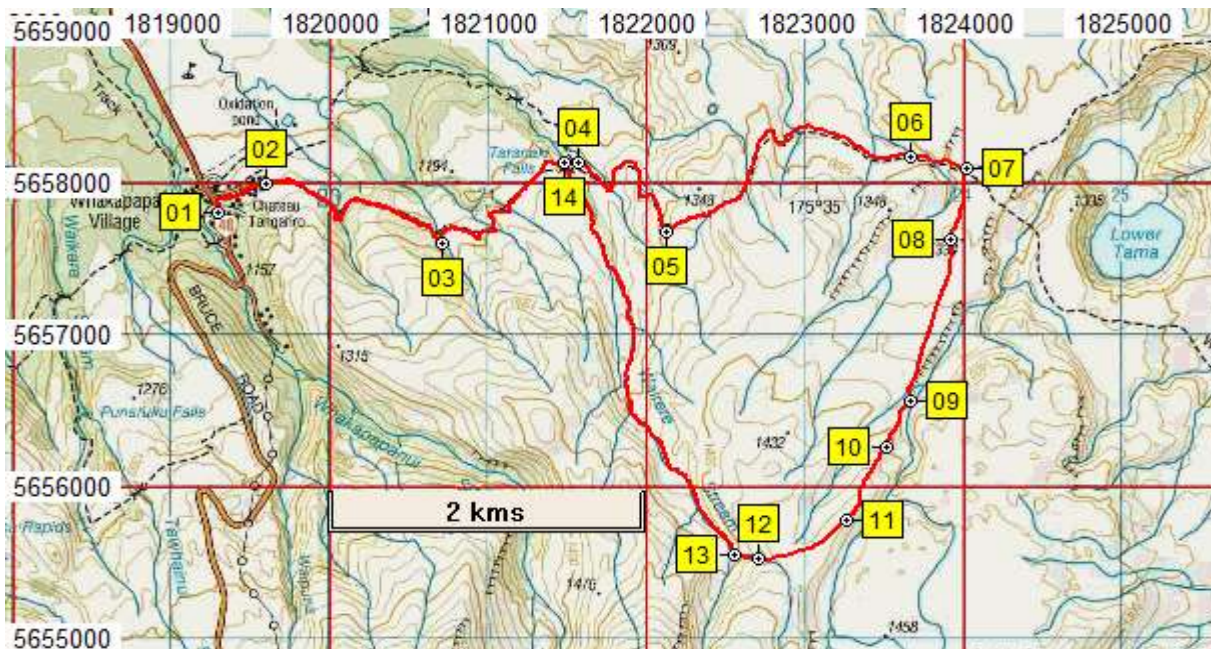


Smoko on degraded track



Bridge over Wairere





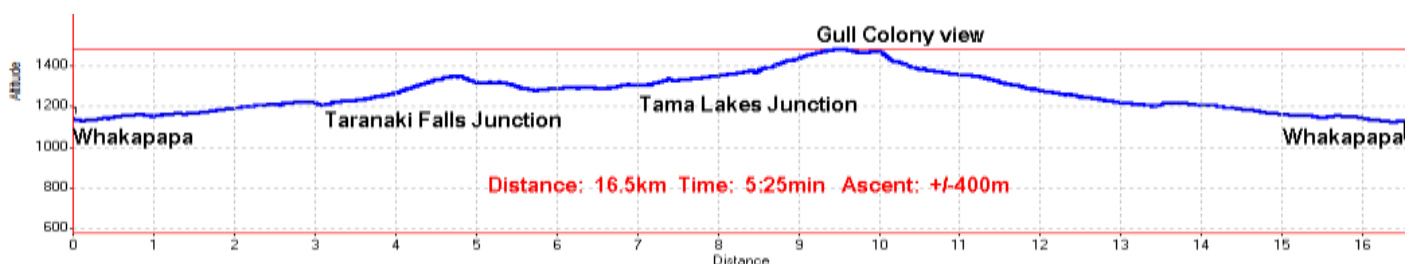
From here follow the badly eroded, ill-defined track on the true right bank – parts of this are more or less in the stream at times.

Go all the way to meet the bridge (WP141204masl) on the Tama Lakes track; this bridge was crossed on the way out.



From here it is 45 minutes for the 3km back to the car-park on the path used at the start of the walk or, if a diversion is taken to exit via the Taranaki Falls, possibly about one hour.

Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1819296	5657811	1139	Car park with toilets in Whakapapa Village
02	1819592	5657999	1145	7min (400m); Start of track at end of road up past back of Chateau
03	1820703	5657615	1187	28min (1.8km); First large wooden bridge
04	1821564	5658137	1220	50min (3.2km); Track junction with left to Taranaki Falls and Whakapapa
05	1822121	5657685	1320	1:10min (4.4km); Old rough, degraded path now replaced with super highway turns from SSE to ENE
06	1823660	5658177	1289	1:55min (6.6km); Small, V-shaped valley heading East
07	1824009	5658105	1306	2:05min (6.9km); A few metres before the junction for Tama Lakes leave the track to bush-bash due S
08	1823919	5657641	1335	2:15min (7.4km); On crest of first ridge after mod easy, lumpy off-track
09	1823658	5656571	1383	2:40min (8.5km); Off-track after crossing incised stream line and on lower part of gravelly ridge
10	1823506	5656263	1427	2:50min (8.9km); Large rock on upper parts of long, easy-ascend ridge. Stay on ridge edge for views
11	1823255	5655783	1481	3:05min (9.5km); Crest of ridge with good views of Gull Colony to E plus waterfall
12	1822698	5655520	1422	3:25min (10.2km); Lunch spot with pool below mini-waterfall overlooking Wairere Stream
13	1822554	5655563	1397	3:53min (10.4km); Post lunch, meet mini, ill-defined Wairere Stream track - head NW
14	1821475	5658136	1204	4:45min (13.5km); Rejoin Tama Lakes track at bridge. Go left with 45min 3km walk back to car park



Notes:

- GPS Garmin GPSmap 60CSx masl = metres above sea level