

LEITCHS HUT

Topo50 Map: BF31Marokop & BF32 Piopio

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START:

Exit Taupo on SH1 North and left to Poihipi Rd

At end of Poihipi road turn right on SH32 northwards

At Whakamaru turn left (NW) on SH30

In 3km bear left still on SH30 Mitchell Road

Two km on turn left (SW) on Scott Road (SH30)

Pass through Benneydale (toilet stop)

Left off SH30 signed-posted to Mokau

Right to Pukurimu Road

Right onto SH4 signed Te Kuiti

Left to SH3 signed New Plymouth and Piopio

Through town (Piopio) and off right to Waitanga Falls

Left at T-junction on to Mangotaki Road

Left at Y-fork to Leitchs Road

Right at T-junction still on Leitchs Road

Left at Y-fork uphill into car park for track start

Total driving time about 2:20min to reach the start and the route from Taupo is indicated on the map below as the heavy red line.

Rough Description:

A moderately hard 2 day tramp in the Te Kuiti area over-nighting at Leitch's Hut (11). Not much in the way of views but good birdlife in parts, wood pigeon and paradise duck, and a "Frog Protection" area.

Day 1 from the end of Leitch's Road, accessed from Piopio on SH3, comprises 3 hours to cover 10km with 235m ascent and descent on relatively well marked but poorly maintained trail made more difficult by the many saplings brought down across the muddy trail by browsing cattle. Leitch's Hut is well worth the visit being clean, well-appointed and nicely situated. There is another route into the hut via Gribbons Road but access is restricted during the lambing season.

Day 2 covers 16.5 taxing kilometres with an ascent of 140m in the first hour or so then a descent of 340m over a trail that is not well marked but relatively easy to follow and can take about 8 hours. The poorest marking is right at the start of Day 2 after the river crossing. The southern end of the trail is again badly pugged by browsing cattle and some muddy sections are knee deep! Windfalls are a constant trial on the trail so there are many up-and-overs, down-and-unders or work-arounds.



The route followed is the red line with the northerly spur from Piopio being to the start point at the end of Leitchs Road – the gap between the two spurs in the top NW corner of the map is where the tramp was done.

Detail: Day 1 Close to one hour is needed to drive in from Piopio, where there are cafes and a toilet for weary travellers, with the various turns being detailed above in steps 11 – 15. The road is asphalt then gravel and is an easy drive – on the way in look for the house named "Heaven's Above" – it is well named. From the car park (01286masl) pass by and read the notices then head off on to a wide track that soon starts to prove a bit trying with mud (cattle pugging), saplings across the track (cattle browsing) plus there are several small streams to cross but they present no problem. About 20 minutes out the path is a bit stony / cobbly and slippery but there is a bit of a view (02361masl) of the sheep-grazing farmland to the right. Twenty minutes or so more fighting the saplings and mud brings you back to the edge of the woodlands and a better view (03395masl) before turning back into the woodlands. Progress seems to have been made when you reach a high point where there is a distance notice board and directly behind the board there is an area "closure" board with some information about the "Frog Protection Area".

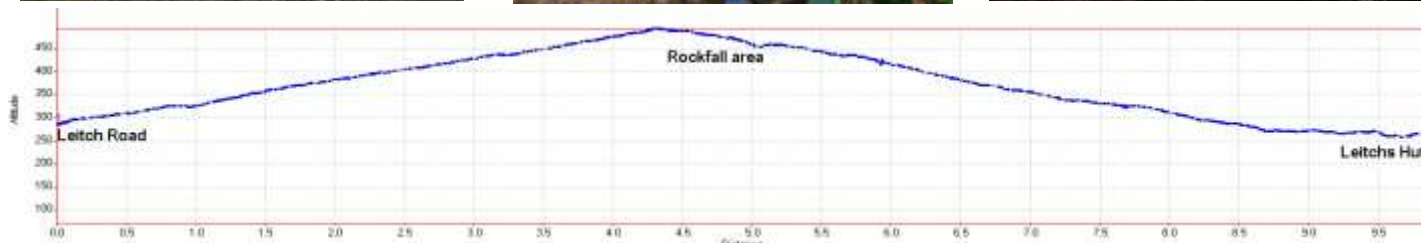
Start Leitch Road carpark



Distance Board



Frog Protection



The next feature is a small rock-fall area where the path is dodgy (06459masl) after which is a short uphill grunt and at 2 hours there is a pretty, dark valley head to cross (07436masl). From the high point progress seems better with fewer hazards to negotiate and a huge windfall with an arch (08356masl) cut into it is reached in 2:30 minutes and this was named "Hobbiton Arch" by the taller members of the TTC. An open area (09273masl) with a sign indicating 1km to the hut is reached in 3 hours but this kilometre takes close to 30 minutes since there is a tricky, poorly marked section of the route more or less on the rocks (LH10 259masl) at the edge of the river. Leitchs Hut (11262masl) is reached in 3:30 minutes which is 30 minutes longer than the sign-boards claim due to all the minor hazards that have to be negotiated on the walk.

Hobbiton Arch



The hut is a very pleasant surprise as it is clean and very well equipped having 16 sleeping bunk spaces in two dormitories, polished floor throughout, a wood/coal burner, internal water supply and sink plus hot water system supplied via the solid fuel stove. There are ample drying racks / lines on the verandah and inside the hut - plus the toilet is not too far away. During Day one ample bird life was seen and heard with sightings of wood pigeon and Paradise Ducks.

Day 2 After an overly warm night due to the solid fuel stove (this stove can boil water and be used for cooking) it is worth considering not donning the boots immediately as there is a river crossing (12287masl) within minutes of starting. However, the river bed is rocky and a bit slippery so be careful. Thirty minutes of organised chaos can now begin as the track signs are just not visible, do they exist? The answer is that on crossing the river do not follow the arrow indicated on the sign board but head more to the right and get a view across the river you have just crossed – some short distance on this line will give a view back over the river and "orange" markers will be seen in a tussock area, so cross back over the river again (13260masl). At about 35 minutes, or less if you pick up the signs quickly, cross the river yet again (14264masl) and make your way through the swampy valley bottom and slowly start to gain height and dry feet.

First Crossing



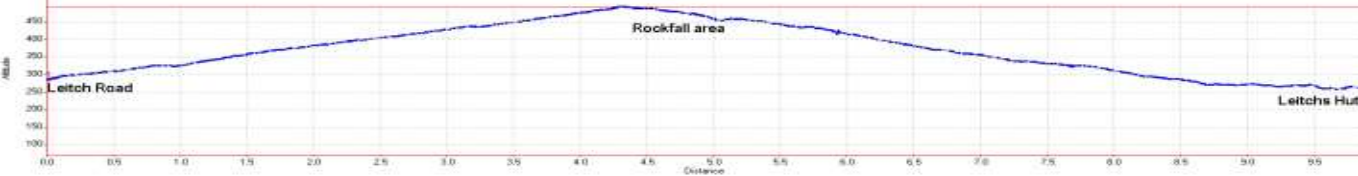
Flying Crossing



Fellow Trampler on Dry Land



From here the route slowly ascends for the next hour and the walking is not easy or too pleasant as the path is on the side of a steep cross slope, there are many windfalls plus a few stream crossings but, as they say, "this is all character building". Features include a sign board (15283masl), a wicked ascent at around 1:13 minutes (16322masl) then a track junction (17399masl) at a high point at just on 2 hours where you go left downhill. This is the start of a very long, almost never-ending, descent through good forest on cross sloping path with many windfalls which have to be got round, over or under.

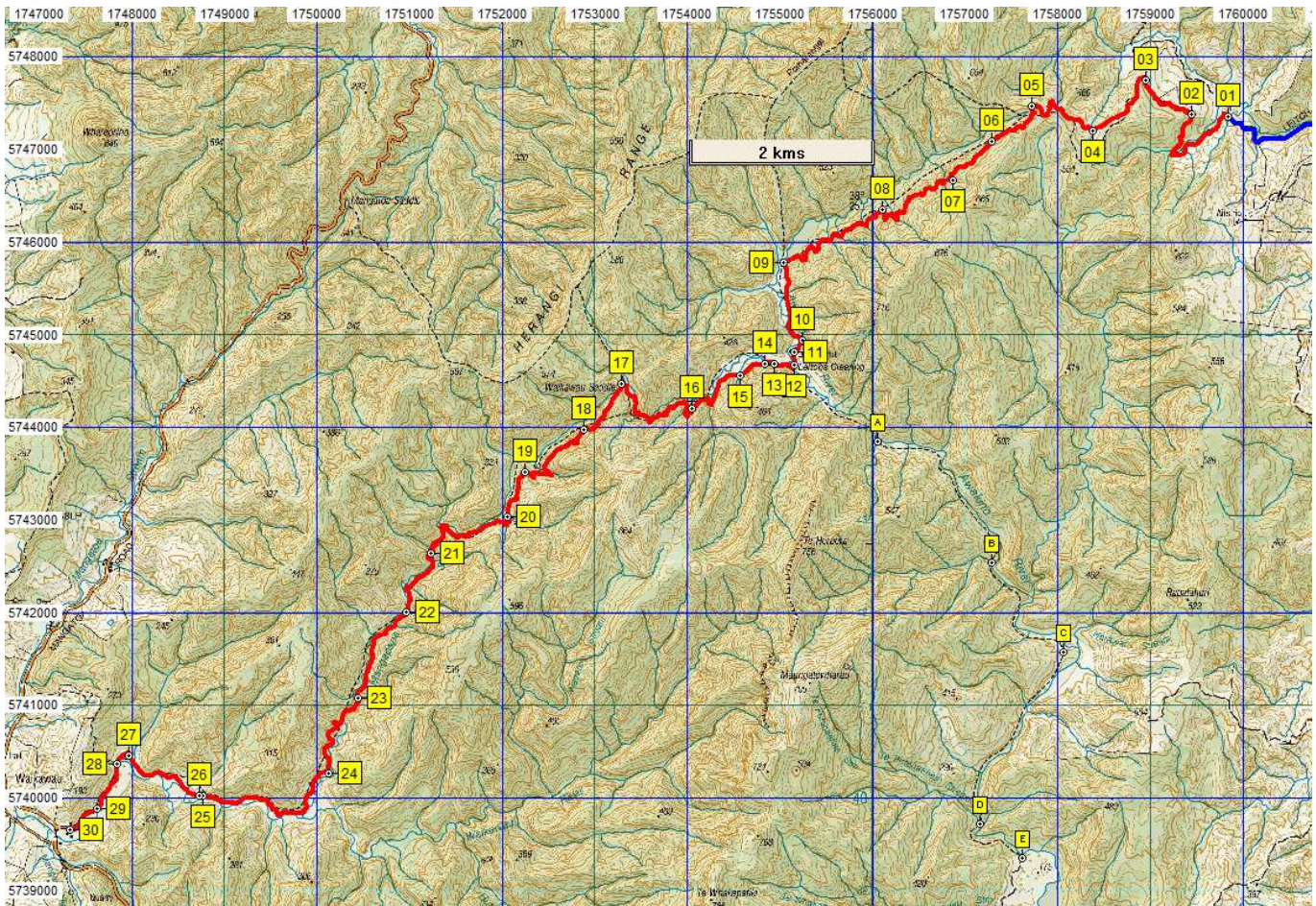


Top of the Hill 5 – 6 hours to go



Yet another Windfall to Bypass





NB Waypoints A – E added to the map as a possible escape route out to Gibbons Road and is part of the Leichts Hut day-walk

Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1759838	5747364	286	08-SEP-07 End Leichts Road car park for tramp start
02	1759440	5747387	361	20min (1.54km); cobbly, slippery, muddy then view on RHS
03	1758945	5747757	395	45min (2.29km); edge of fields then SW back into forest
04	1758374	5747205	438	1:10min (3.21km); small meadow area
05	1757713	5747473	490	1:30min (4.26km); Y-fork but right blocked off as frog Protection area
06	1757289	5747085	459	1:50min (5.02km); rock-fall area then short grunt uphill
07	1756866	5746673	436	2hrs (5.73km); small, dark, pretty upper valley / valley head stream crossing
08	1756100	5746348	356	2:30min (7.03km); Hobbiton Arch - huge tree archway
09	1755043	5745784	273	3hours (8.68km); open area with "1 km to hut sign"
10	1755240	5744943	259	3:20min (9.67km); tricky, poorly marked section more or less in river / rocky ledge
11	1755147	5744819	262	3:30min (9.86km); Leichts Hut
12	1755156	5744673	287	Day 2: 3 mins; calf deep 5m wide river crossing with mod flow
13	1754938	5744692	260	30min (550m); chaos as no track markers - second crossing to track markers on N side
14	1754832	5744692	264	35min (730m); third stream crossing
15	1754563	5744567	283	45min (1.06km); sign board then awkward walking as cross slope on path
16	1754053	5744213	322	1:13min (1.99km); bit of wicked ascent with wind-falls and stream line crossings
17	1753287	5744468	399	1:54min (4.03km); high point with track junction and notices
18	1752877	5743981	359	2:23min (4.89km); morning tea break on hard cross slope section with many windfalls
19	1752243	5743515	302	3:18min (6.25km); small section of good, level open footpath
20	1752056	5743035	262	3:40min (6.92km); steep descent / re-ascent through incised stream line
21	1751226	5742642	187	4:30min (8.51km); only 3 - 4 metres above stream line so descending a lot
22	1750966	5742013	160	5:15min (9.66km); lunch spot - still hard work as path not clear plus windfalls
23	1750441	5741085	103	6hours (11.07km); stream crossing
24	1750127	5740272	90.0	6:30min (12.32km); noticeable bend in track in open area / small meadow
25	1748766	5740022	63.0	7hours (14.22km); fence line with open section giving cows access
26	1748722	5740030	56.0	7:05min (14.32km); Conservation notice then into meadow / parkland with cows and conifers
27	1747968	5740454	42.0	7:25min (15.31km); pass through electric fence and see small, red hut/shed off right
28	1747837	5740373	39.0	7:30min (15.6km); pass through level paddock then gate to farm road
29	1747624	5739893	38.0	7:40min (16.12km); second gate on road, muddy due to cattle pugging
30	1747334	5739663	32.0	7:45min (16.5km); exit gate to gravel road with houses on left and asphalt road to the right

Memorable features are few and far between for the next 3 – 4 hours but there are all those windfalls to get past ensuring that there are some memories of the day. Hope starts to return after about 6 hours with a stream crossing (**23**^{103mas}) and soon you are into the open with a small meadow (**24**^{90mas}) and then at 7 hours a fence (**25**^{63mas}) – with a gap in it which has allowed the browsing cattle access to the nightmare of an excuse for a track you have just plodded down.

Minutes later there is a "Conservation" notice (**26**^{56mas}) then it is down-hill into a meadow – parkland indeed – with conifers and cows. Twenty minutes in here and you pass an electric fence (**27**^{42mas}) from where you see a small hut or shed off to the right indicating that civilisation is not far off. Another 20 minutes down the grass farm track takes you through 3 gates with the final one

(3032masl) giving access to a motorable track that leads directly to the asphalt road which is your escape or return route. This point was reached in 7:45 minutes after covering 16.5 kilometres meaning you have been walking at only 2 km per hour which reflects the awkwardness, not the difficulty, of this track. Faster, fitter trampers will require an hour or so less for this trip.

The drive back to Piopio takes just under an hour and presents no navigational challenges at all.

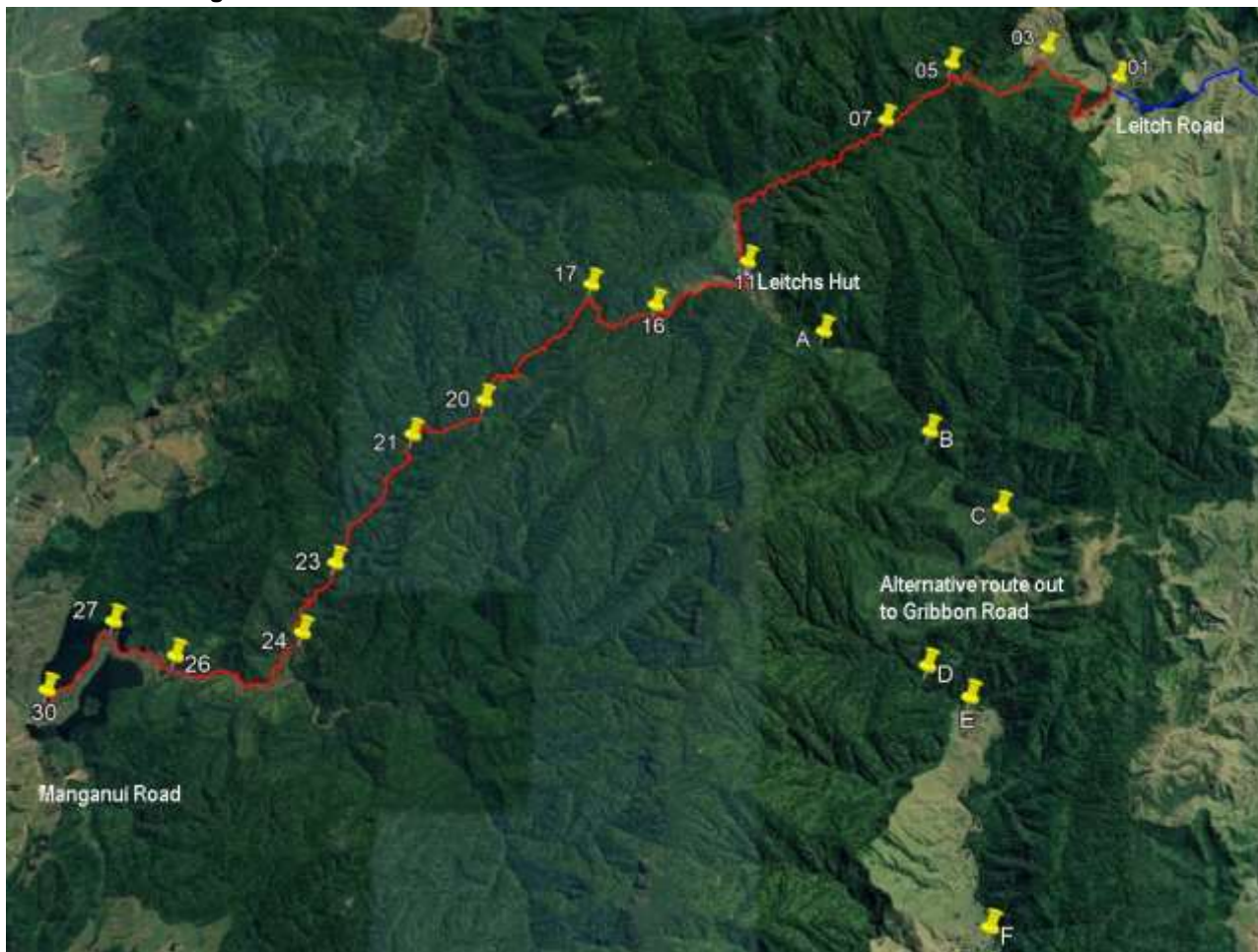
Organisationally this tramp needs either a car / van mover or split the party in two with some starting at either end hence one party drops and picks up the other. If you start at the end (WP30) you have a very long tramp uphill and there is every chance that you will need a tent as there is no way the Leitchs Hut can be reached the first night – unless you set off very early indeed.

Into the Parkland

Round the Corner to the End



Track and WPs on Google Earth



- Notes:**
- GPS Garmin GPSMap 60CSx
 - WP = Waypoint as taken by GPS unit
 - masl = metres above sea level