

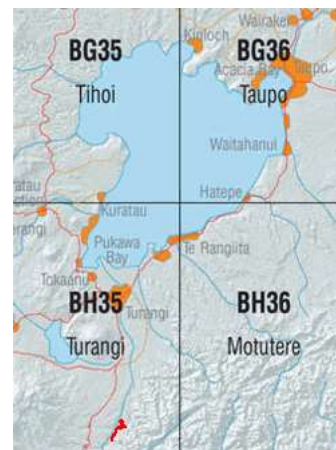
# PILLARS of HERCULES and TREE TRUNK GORGE

Topo50 Map: BH35 Turangi

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

**How to get to START:** Exit Taupo down the lake on SH1 to Turangi then:

- Exit Taupo southwards on SH1 to Turangi (45 min)
- From Turangi stay on SH1
- Turn left into **Kaimanawa Road** at 63.5km
- Cross single lane bridge at 66.5km (1 hour) – still on tar seal
- At 67km (just over 1 hour) turn right on to Urchin signed gravel road
- At next bend go straight on sign for Pillars of Hercules



**Rough description:** A very pleasant A to B, or out-and-back, walk on good track through native bush and broadleaf forest. Starts from the carpark for the Pillars, goes onto the bridge to overlook the Pillars of Hercules gorge then on to the road bridge over the gorge on Tree Trunk Gorge Road. There are two or three stream crossings so wet feet are possible and during wet weather the last crossing is not advisable as the stream is quite deep and can be swift flowing. If the final stream is crossed there are then two other worthwhile views – Tree Trunk Gorge itself and also the headrace tunnel for the local hydro scheme. Depending on the walk a driver can be required to move the transport.

**Detail:** From the carpark firstly go and have a look at the gorge from the swing-bridge.

From the bridge (WP01673masl) have a look downwards in to the deep gorge below and also in an easterly direction where, on a good day, Urchin and Umukarikari can both be seen. Head back up into the car park and follow the well-marked track on the right (WP02674masl) heading towards the Urchin camp site, the sign says 30 minutes but usually takes less. The track starts off zig-zagging upwards, is a delight in being well formed, passes through very attractive forest and is, in places, cut as a shelf on the side of the steep side slope. On bad weather days it is quite well protected but the wind can channel through here.

After about 20 minutes bear right (WP03714masl) to pass through the Urchin Campsite, grassy area with picnic table, place for a fire and with a DoC toilet. If the grass is wet stay on the road and soon there is a choice to do a one km loop walk which is well sign-posted (WP04715masl). On exiting the Loop Walk turn left and slip off to the left on to the track for Tree Trunk Gorge – this track in fact is an old wide road, now a well-used MTB trail, and very easy walking.

**Pillars of Hercules Bridge**



**Superb track**



**All you need is wet-weather gear**



The track heads south (WP05700masl) following the stream line for a bit before swinging westwards then resumes its SSW direction paralleling the river, there are a few slopes to wander up and down but nothing too taxing though the downslope (WP06700masl) is tricky due to an incipient gully forming in the middle – not deep but narrow and gravelly in parts, in fact it is easier and quicker to walk up this slope than down. Slope now increases and the track makes a sharp bend to the right to get under quite a high bluff. A small stream line is then crossed a bit before wet feet can be earned on crossing the main stream-line (WP07688masl) – this point can be a good lunch spot. If the stream cannot be crossed then it is back the way you came.

If the stream can be crossed it is then a bit of a climb for 15–20 minutes before reaching the DoC notice board at the end of the track on Tree Trunk Gorge Road (WP08744masl).

If the road is reached then before turning right to go home it is worthwhile heading SE on the road, which soon becomes gravel, to view the massive pipeline (WP10741masl) which is part of the headrace tunnel for the local hydro scheme.

**Headrace pipeline**



The hydro installation lies a few km to the NE of the track end and is shown on the map.

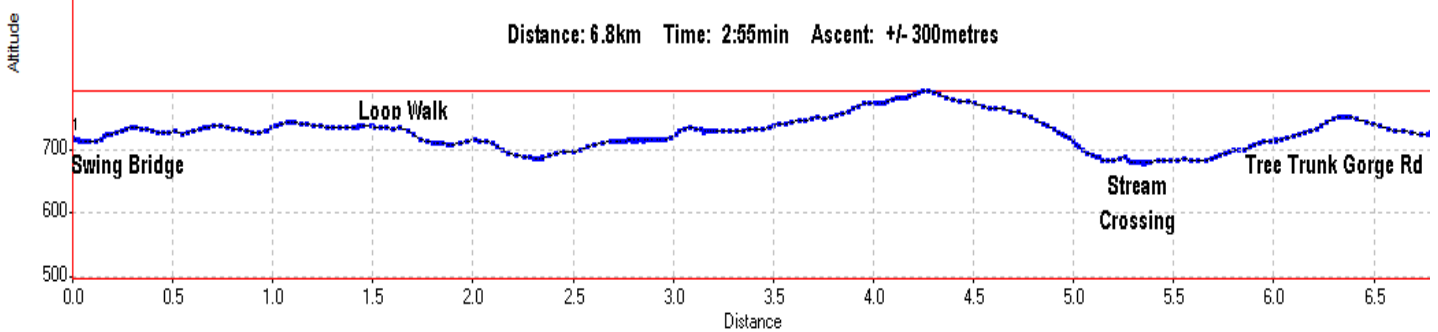
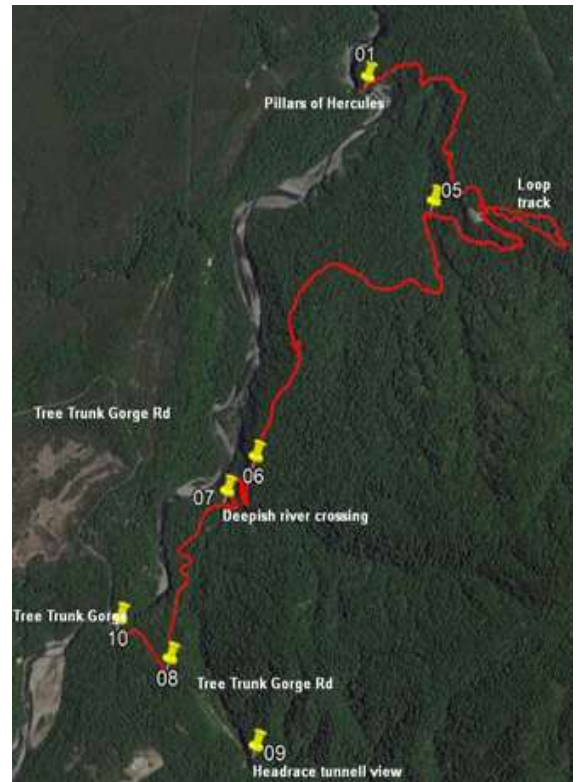
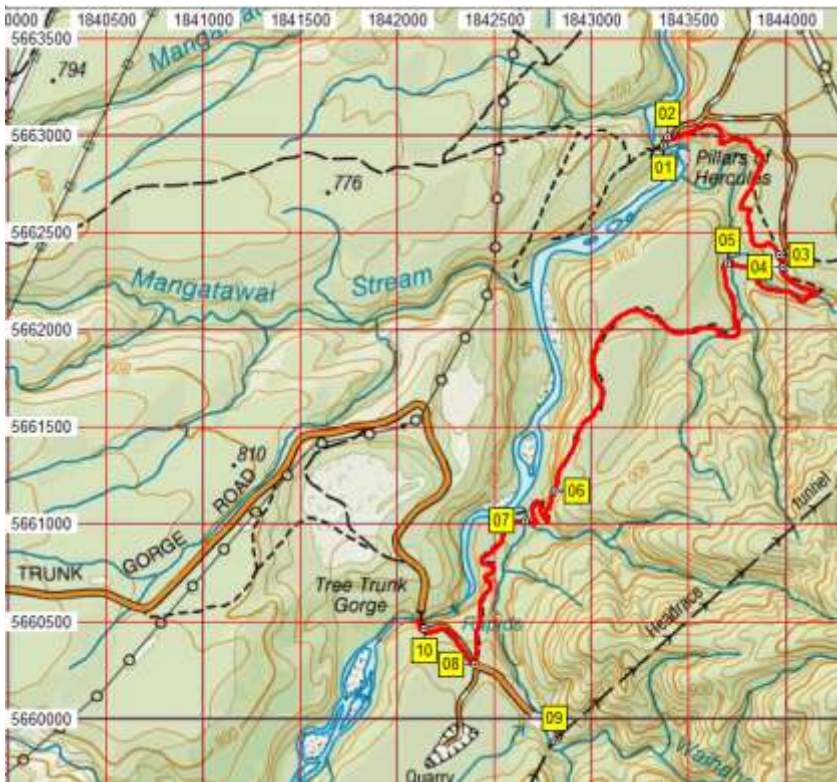
The final target should be to have a look over the edge of the road bridge into Tree Trunk Gorge. If one is brave and confident on steep slopes it is possible to descend from the left hand side of the road (WP10700masl) at the north end of the bridge.



With the vagaries of weather conditions trip leaders on this tramp must have a clear arrangement with their van mover to cover all options:

- 1 Van mover walks in to the stream (WP7) to assess the situation and talk to the party if timing is correct.
- 2 Relocate the van to Pillars carpark after discussion or after an hour over expected exit time.





N	Easting	Northing	Alt	Description
01	1843370	5662950	673	Mid point on swing bridge a minute or so from car park
02	1843392	5662990	674	2min (0.1km); Back to car park with DOC sign on the right to start Link Track Urchin campsite
03	1843965	5662389	714	34min (1.63km); End of Link Track, branch right on small track into Urchin camp ground or use road
04	1843985	5662324	715	39min (1.78km); Start of Loop Track which needs 21min for 1.12km
05	1843702	5662340	700	1:30min (3.97km); Directional change from WNW to SSE on good bike track / old forest road
06	1842808	5661173	700	2:12min (6.23km); Farly steep, incised gravelly slope where ascent is easier than descent
07	1842654	5661022	688	2:31min (6.86km); Swift flowing stream, deep on wet days, then moderate ascent of 1km to road
08	1842396	5660281	744	2:45min (7.85km); Track end on Tree Trunk Gorge Road
09	1842811	5659882	741	4:40min (11.5km); Headrace pipeline accessible by wandering SE on road
10	1842139	5660463	700	South end of bridge over Tree Trunk Gorge with very steep access to gorge on left at N end of bridge



*It should be noted that there was a dreadful accident in Tree Trunk Gorge in 1985 when four rafters failed to exit the stream line in time and were drowned in the raging torrent of the gorge.*

