

PIRONGIA

Topo50 Map: BE33 Pirongia

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START: Head north on SH1 all the way to Putaruru and there turn left heading west for Te Awamutu passing through Arapuni having a look northwards to Maungatautari on the way. In Te Awamutu pick up Pirongia Road obviously all the way to Pirongia. The route then heads north on Karamea Road turning off left (west) on to Pahu Road then Hodgson Road and finally to Grey Road heading SW. There are signs for the Pirongia Forest Park from Pirongia onwards. Park in either the upper or lower (**WP1** 223masl) car-parks which appear to be quite safe as there is a house very close to it. There is a shelter with information boards and a DoC toilet.

Rough description: A very tough tramp that covers next to no distance at all but requires a high level of fitness, a lot of tramping skill and nerves of steel at times. Comment of the day on the way in was "Pirongia defends herself well" – endless, steep rough ascents and re-ascents whilst on the way out it was "She does not let her visitors go easily" (vicious descents and re-ascents). However the feelings of satisfaction are high, the views – when they come – are worth it and it is a tramp that can be undertaken in pretty wild weather though if it was overly wet the mud sections would be a bit trying. At a rough estimate some 1,600 metres were ascended over the entire tramp with an overall gain in reaching the summit of 800 metres.

Detail: Pass through the upper car park to have a look at the information boards then pick up the clearly marked track heading for the Nature Walk (**WP2** 224masl).



The tramp line can be seen in red in the top left hand corner of Sheet BE33



Panorama visible on the way in – each one of the tops on the horizon is passed over

Make the most of this super-duper track with boardwalk, steps and platforms for studying the Rimu. After about 15 minutes or so pass over the bridge on the Mangakara Stream then immediately turn left (**WP3** 181masl) on to a rooty, rough steep back-country track where a few flights of steps will be encountered. Ten minutes up here the gradient eases, there are several well marked (pink triangles) pest control tracks and the bird life increases when Grey Warbler and Kaka were heard.



Steps galore

Within the hour the junction with the Waites Road track entering from the right is reached (**WP4** 356masl) then 15 minutes later a huge, fluted rock (**WP5** 444masl) gives a reason for a breather on the endless uphill. The upwards continues unabated till the junction with the Tirohanga Trail (**WP6** 621masl) is reached and direction remains SW but the track becomes rougher – more of a route. Ruapane Trig (**WP7** 733masl) is reached in about 2:15 minutes after a steep, rocky, chain-assisted ascent and makes a good viewpoint plus place for morning tea. So far so good! Soon after this things start to get tricky and there is a bit of a testing descent of a bluff on chains – various gods were appealed to at this point.



Fluted rock

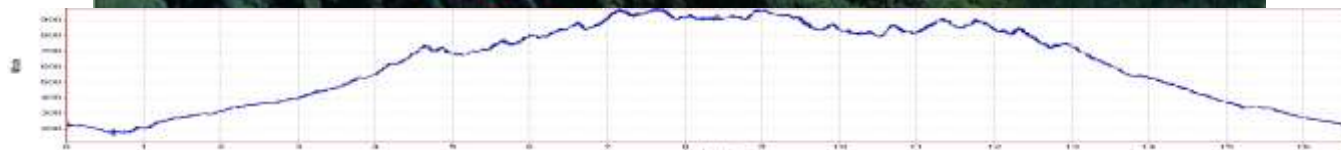


Praying to various gods!

Slow progress continued all the way to a minor crest below (**WP9** 771masl) Tirohanga Bluff. All the hard won altitude was then given up passing down below and round the bluff to ascend all over again – this was very slow and rough going. The ascend-descend pattern continued till after 4:45 mins views were again obtained from a minor crest (**WP10** 884masl) from where the Pirongia Platform could be seen in the distance. Fifty minutes later the next crest with the junction to the Tahanui Track was attained (**WP11** 963masl).



Heading off below Tirohanga Bluff



Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1788782	5795407	223	Car park at end of Grey Road with shelter and DoC toilet
02	1788760	5795477	224	4min (147m); multi junction on to Mangakara Nature Walk with steps, rails and Rimu
03	1788594	5795741	181	18min (752m); bridge over Mangakara Stream then left on to rooty, rough steep track with steps
04	1787416	5795721	356	1hour (2.38km); junction, right for Waites Road exit. High fire risk from forest debris, good track
05	1786816	5795261	444	1:15min (3.23km); huge fluted rock near crest in dense forest
06	1786119	5794858	621	1:50min (4.25km); junction with Tirohanga Trail - head SW on to steeper, rougher track
07	1785846	5794699	733	2:15min (4.63km); Ruapane trig after steep, rocky ascent. Good smoko point
08	1785850	5794559	709	2:45min (4.79km); top of chain assisted descent down very rough, tricky bluff
09	1785320	5794085	771	3:40min (5.64km); minor crest below big rocky outcrop of Tirohanga. Very rough, very slow going
10	1784855	5793391	884	4:45min (6.62km) ; minor top in series of steep, rough dragon's teeth. View Pirongia platform
11	1784466	5793227	963	5:25min (7.16km); grunt up to crest with straight (30min) for Pirongia & Tahuanui Track right
12	1784428	5793035	939	5:35min (7.38km); crest with junction. Right for Pirongia top and left for Mahaukura track exit
13	1784225	5792910	972	5:45min (8.62km); under platform on Pirongia summit
14	1783740	5792799	912	6:20min (8.24km); Pirongia helipad two minutes from hut
15	1783685	5792837	914	6:22min (8.33km); Pahautea Hut
16	1784675	5792730	873	1:26min (1.52km) from Hut; long steep tricky descent then up to boggy area but good view of Pirongia
17	1785621	5792541	828	3hours (2.65km); some good track then up rough, steep wet slope, many track signs. Big steps at top
18	1785784	5792569	909	3:10min (2.95km); back on ridge after diversion downslope with ridge blocked off with wood barriers
19	1786136	5792689	889	3:40min (3.42km); nasty ascent to open area on rock then very tricky chain assist descent
20	1786157	5792692	901	Minutes later on to Mahaukura Helipad after exposed, rocky ascent followed by a difficult descent
21	1786401	5793121	847	(3.95km); into open at junction with right to O'Shea Road exit and straight for Grey Road
22	1788734	5795472	231	7:20min (8.16km); gate after dragons teeth then very long more gentle descent through good forest



Tirohanga Bluff – the route is down the RHS

There are several constructed camping bays, all hedged in, an external sink and table under cover plus a very low set sink which seems ideally designed for boot washing – there is some mud on the track. The toilet is 20 metres from the hut and can be described as being very well ventilated and like the hut it has a bright red door.

Note that this junction as determined by GPS does not coincide with the mapped position, there is a difference of a few hundred metres. Ten minutes after this there is another crest with a junction (**WP12**^{930masl}); right for Pirongia and left for the Mahaukura Track exit to O'Shea Road. Rejoice for from here there is a lot of boardwalk and good steps to speed the way to Pirongia Summit and platform (**WP13**^{972masl}). From the platform there are expansive views with Ruapehu and Taranaki plus the coastal strip being visible on good weather days – but on windy days hold on tight as this is very exposed. The 30 minute walk on to the Pahautea Hut is quite good and it is almost like being a maze at times as the vegetation seems to have been trimmed like a hedge and it is a very good windbreak, a helipad (**WP14**^{912masl}) is passed about a minute before the hut. Pahautea Hut (**WP15**^{914masl}) is small but well constructed and not too cold despite not having any heating. The two platforms are designed to sleep 6 – 8 but could easily take a few more; there is a good work bench plus internal sink with water supply.



One of the easier chained sections

If there were any thoughts about a fast exit the next day then forget it, get to bed early and set off as early as is possible – the downhill route is probably even harder than the uphill route and there is considerably more mud in places.



A wee bit of bog – this is on a crest



Dense bush with steep descent – there is a track of sorts



The Pirongia platform – can be seen for miles on the way out

The views from the helipad in the morning are spectacular with both Ruapehu and Taranaki being visible though not easy to catch on camera. As is to be expected the route back to WP12 is easy and fast. Within 1:30 minutes there is the start of a long steep tricky descent then it is back up to rather boggy area (**WP16**^{873masl}) but there are good views of Pirongia and the platform. One and a half hours after this there is some good track but then it is off the ridge then back up a very steep, wet slope with many track markers and a few anti-hobbit sized steps near the top – this is quite an unstable slope (**WP17**^{826masl}). The ridge is soon regained and the wood barrier closing off the old track is soon seen (**WP18**^{909masl}). At around three and a half hours things get very tricky as there is a nasty ascent in an open, exposed area on rock then there is the descent of the day on rock but with chains (**WP19**^{889masl}). Minutes after this the Mahaukura helipad is reached and twenty minutes later the junction (**WP21**^{847masl}) with the track to O'Shea Road is passed. From here is an interminable ascend-descend routine for the next 2:30 to 3 hours to eventually get back down on the relatively level Tawa forest floor near where the tramp started – spirits start to rise when pink marker number 7 is seen – this is the anti-pest trap line 700 metres from the end of the walk! It is then uplifting to count off the markers all the way to the forest park gate (**WP22**^{231masl})

Notes:	GPS: Garmin GPSMap 60CSx on WGS84 Wpt: Waypoints as taken by GPS unit Masl: metres above sea level	Total Distance : 16.621 Km Minimum Altitude : 165 Meters Maximum Altitude : 973 Meters
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