

PUKEKAIKIORE to WAIHOHONU and the DESERT ROAD

Topo50 Map: BH34 Raurimu & BH35 Turangi

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START: Exit Taupo on SH1 down the lake for 47km in 45 minutes to Turangi then:

- Follow the Desert Highway (**SH1**), turn off right to SH46 for Rangipo
- Continue on **SH46** to the T-junction with **SH47** and turn left
- At 90km (1:15 min) turn left on to gravel road for Mangatepopo & Tongariro Alpine Crossing – speed limit 40kph
- Park and off-load at car park with toilets at 96km and about 1 hour 30 minutes driving from Taupo.

Rough Description: A fairly strenuous walk of about 7 hours covering about 20km, with easily another 3km added for altitude gain and loss, in some of the wildest terrain in the Tongariro National Park. Starts on the tourist track from Mangatepopo car park towards the Tongariro Alpine Crossing and branches off clockwise before reaching the Mangatepopo Hut passing between Ngauruhoe and Pukekaikioire (1692metres) on a rough, back-country track which is basically unmarked whilst it clambers over scoria mounds filling river valleys. At the high point there is then some serious cross-country tramping to get up past the Tama Lakes before heading towards Waihothonu on or below the Tama Ridge to meet the Northern Circuit track coming from Whakapapa going to Waihothonu.

Rough, steep and misty



Careful planning and attention to the weather must be applied. The tramp starts at 1100 masl at the Mangatepopo car park and rises to 1600m just below Ngauruhoe before climbing another 30 metres about halfway through the tramp having crossed some of the wildest, roughest terrain to be found in this area. At any time of the year be prepared for some serious weather changes as temperature will drop as the ascent is made and there is some serious exposure to any winds that blow. If high winds or other inclement weather is forecast think twice before starting since there are some very serious bluffs on the route and they really should be visible at all times. On the day in question cloud was down giving about 50 metres visibility and all navigation was done via pre-plotted GPS route and waypoints – proving that with planning it can be done. Full wet and cold-weather gear must be carried plus, especially in warm weather, in excess of a couple of litres of water – there is none available once the ascent starts.

The track is first rate as far as the turn-off (**02**_{1183masl}) then it is back-country grade with no pole markers and basically off-track walking till you rejoin the tourist Northern Circuit track coming from Whakapapa just before Waihothonu.

Detail: Make an early start from Taupo (7:30 am) as it takes 90 minutes to drive the 96km to Mangatepopo car park (**01**_{1115masl}) where there is now ample space with the newly revamped car park. Hundreds of people could be about to do the Alpine Crossing and most of these people want to use the toilets so there will be a queue. The path starts on a section of boardwalk near the toilets and heads off up-valley basically in an easterly direction.

Within 20 minutes the sign indicating the path to Whakapapa is reached then immediately there is a branch off right (**02**_{1183masl}) basically into a stream line heading SE passing in and out of the river bed several times on a very basic track heading towards bluffs. Below the bluffs enter a narrow valley heading ENE (**03**_{1184masl}); the track is clearer now and there are a few broken or degraded marker poles.

Within the hour a minor crest (**04**_{1284masl}) is reached after a small grunt then the track continues upwards parallel to a very deep gully on the right. Ten minutes later the track vanishes and the first of the scoria mounds or flows has to be crossed (**05**_{1362masl}) as the route continues upwards on the true left bank.

There is a stream confluence (**06**_{1381masl}) within 90 minutes at a group of boulders just past a minor Y-fork where a very steep path goes off up the stream joining from the right. The track requires full concentration as it is quite tricky in places.

For the next 30 minutes the going is very rough passing (**07** & **08**) in and out of the stream line, over mounds of scoria and working along the junction between the scoria flows and the older country rock; there are several occurrences of basin like features between the mounds of scoria. Around 2 hours walking the high point (**09**_{1601masl}) is reached when the route ahead should be studied and compared with the map whilst the Chateau can be seen in the distance. At this point the rudimentary track is abandoned and some hard, off-track walking to scrambling starts as several gullies in the scoria are crossed whilst heading SE/SSE. Looking westwards a flat area known as the Cricket Pitch can be seen on a clear day – there is a route passing through this but it is no longer maintained. Basically the off-track section follows the contour heading SE but does pass through several steep sided, scoria gullies which are not obvious on the map. On a clear day and by looking straight ahead (**10**_{1610masl}) a marker pole can be seen on the ridge on the horizon – this is where GPS navigation really helps when visibility is poor. This pole is reached in about 3 hours (**11**_{1630masl}) and is the highest point of the tramp.

Pole on the ridge



From here the descent to the SSE commences aiming for a sandy stream bed (**12**_{1541masl}). Once walking in the stream bed head slightly to the right aiming at the bluffs ahead and hold closely in to the base – soon after this a “cube” shaped rock is passed to arrive at the entrance (**13**_{1390masl}) to a valley which heads SW and goes to the Tama Lakes. The route continues to the SE with Mt Tama showing as a beacon on clear days. Eventually a stream line (**14**_{1420masl}) develops on the left and by following the true right bank till slopes get a bit rough and steep there is then an ascent on to the slopes of Mt Tama.

Descent to WP13



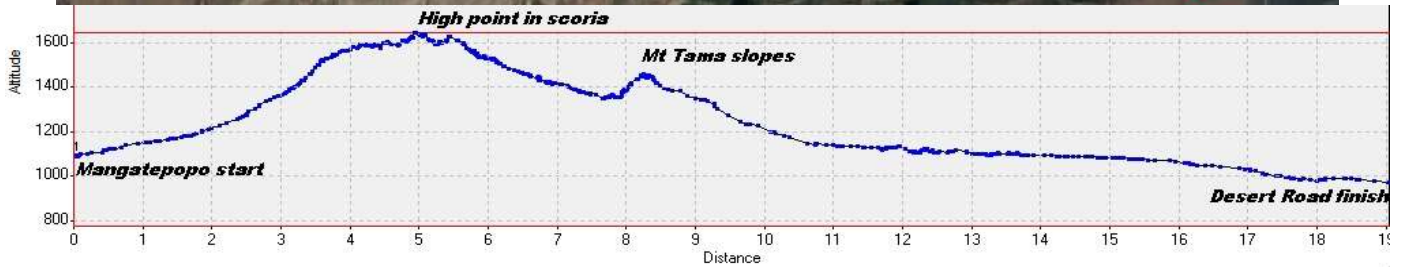
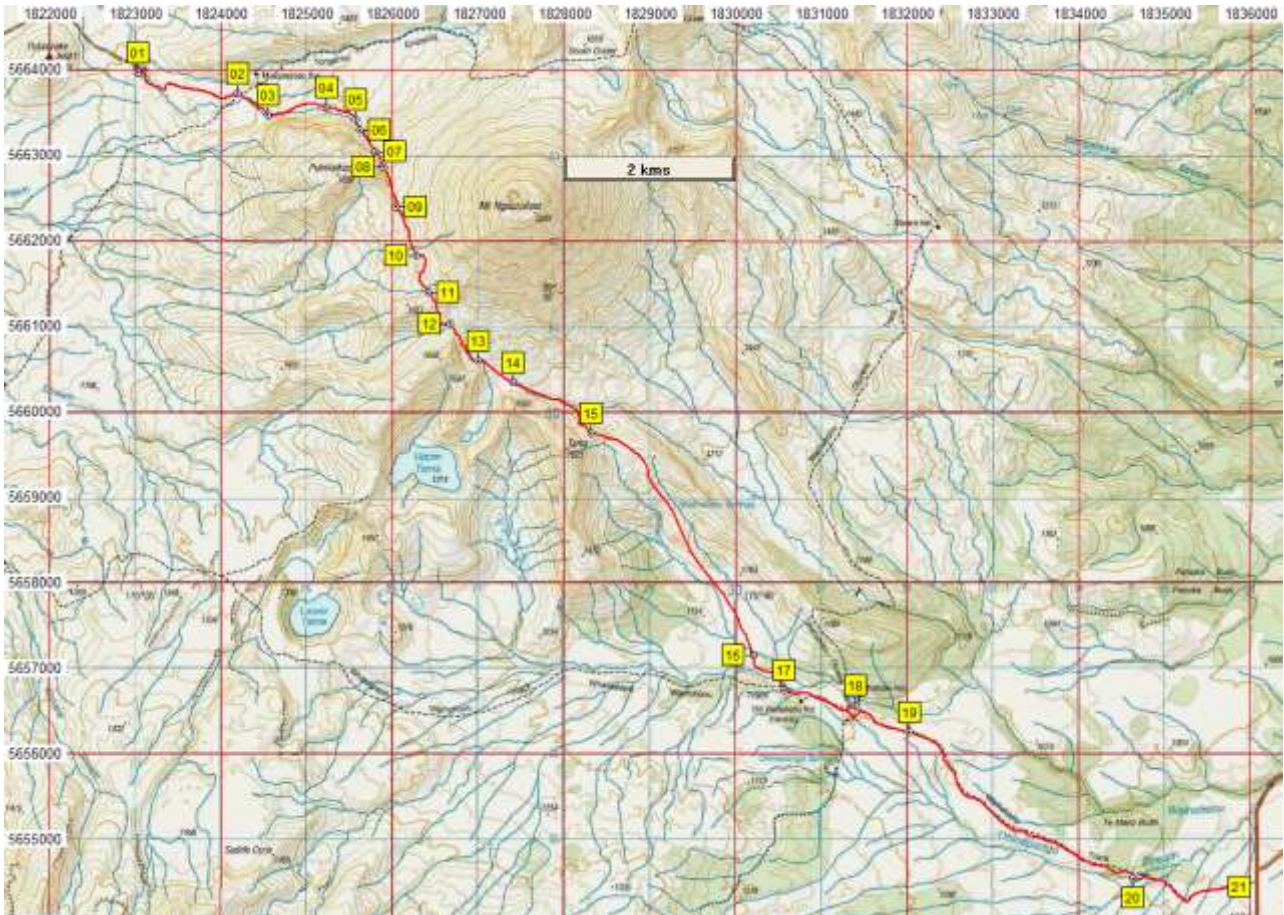
Access and maps



The tramp route is the red line and the route from Taupo to the start is described opposite.

Snow filled gully





Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1823020	5663977	1115	9:00am; car park at Mangatepopo
02	1824186	5663728	1183	17min (1.3km); right off track just past junction with Whakapapa track heading SE on small track
03	1824544	5663476	1184	28min (1.78km); enter narrow valley to ENE below bluffs on RHS
04	1825221	5663570	1284	44min (2.44km); minor crest after minor grunt, go upwards ESE parallel to deep valley on the right
05	1825564	5663422	1362	55min (2.89km); off vague track over scoria valley fill to continue upwards on true left bank
06	1825617	5663295	1381	1:01min (3km); confluence of stream from the right 50m SE of minor Y-junction
07	1825796	5663047	1465	1:17min (3.36km); in stream line on rough rock plus scoria with steep ascent to SE
08	1825894	5662869	1528	1:44min (3.61km); nose of scoria flow then up RHS on junction of scoria and rock
09	1826044	5662405	1601	2:01min (4.1km); views S & SW plus Chateau. Leave minor track and go cross country to SSE
10	1826274	5661826	1610	2:34min (4.82km); big boulders above Cricket Pitch in gullied scoria area with pole on ridge ahead
11	1826422	5661395	1630	3hours (5.43km); at white wooden marker pole on ridge crest. Start descent to SSE
12	1826665	5661025	1541	3:15min (5.98km); off slope to stream line going right to hold close below bluffs. Cube shaped rock
13	1827003	5660599	1460	3:30min (6.59km); passing entry to valley for Tama Lakes - heading SE
14	1827401	5660352	1420	4hours (7.06km); headwaters / valley head on true right bank below steep slopes to the South
15	1828305	5659748	1457	4:45min (8.26km); high point on shoulder of Mt Tama after steep ascent
16	1830205	5657161	1122	5:45min (11.72km); stream crossing several hundred metres due North of Northern Circuit track
17	1830571	5656754	1120	6 hours (12.31km); meet Northern Circuit Track just short of junction to Historic Waihohonu Hut
18	1831393	5656564	1095	6:10min (13.25km); Waihohonu Hut
19	1832027	5656255	1090	15min from Hut (14.28km); tree line
20	1834639	5654540	983	1hour from hut (17.65km); bridge with 20min to go
21	1835880	5654436	959	7:40min (19.07km); Waihohonu Track car park 1:20min from Hut

Descent to PK14 with slopes of Mt Tama to right



Ngauruhoe from upper slopes of Tama Ridge



On the day the party actually went slightly higher than is really required up the very steep, often loose slope but with the increased altitude (**151457masl**) the full length of the Tama Ridge can be seen stretching off to the SE. There is now a choice to be made; stay on the Tama Ridge until it meets the Waihohonu to Oturere track or bear more to the right (SSE) and follow the wide, gently sloping sandy fan directly towards the new Waihohonu Hut. If the valley route is followed then there is a minor stream crossing (**161122masl**) to contend with before ascending slightly more to the south to meet (**171120masl**) the Northern Circuit track from Whakapapa, then follow this for 10 minutes to arrive at Waihohonu Hut (**181095masl**) in roughly 6 hours' total time. This is a good spot for a break before tackling the final hour or so out to the Desert Road.

Detail is not given for the walk out from the Waihohonu Hut (1095 metres) to the car park (959 metres) near the Desert Road since much of the route is fully described more fully elsewhere in the various Taupo Tramping Club publications though one or two waypoints are presented for reference purposes.

Middle of the sandy fan descent



Stream crossing



Notes:

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

Total Time: 7 hours 40 minutes
Total Walk Time: 7 hours
Total walk length: 19.7km (GPS records)
Overall ascent: 1010 metres
Overall descent: 1126 metres