

SADDLE CONE via WHAKAPAPA RIDGE

Top50 Map: BJ34 Mt 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
- 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 other car parks.

Rough description: A fairly strenuous walk in the moderate to fit category lasting four to six hours including breaks. It starts at the Chateau (**WP01**^{1140masl}) in Whakapapa, goes up the Whakapapa Ridge to the SE onto the Pinnacles Ridge then descends to the NE to cross the Wairere Stream and re-ascends on to the next ridge. From this ridge Saddle Cone (**WP06**^{1524masl}) can be seen off to the SE below Ruapehu and starts with a steep descent – which has to be re-ascended on the return. The route home is then via the Wairere Stream and the Tama Lakes track.

Detail: Turn right out of the car park opposite the Chateau then cross the road and turn up behind the public toilets a few metres uphill from the Information Centre. The start is on a neat gravel track (marked Ridge Track) and just within the bush line but within 10 minutes the track degrades a bit with some large, anti-hobbit sized steps just before a semi-round table from where there are open views. At this point the track goes slightly to the right and soon enters a tussock area. Then it is essential to remain to the right (SW) side of an eroded edge where the silt-like vegetated cap towers above – do not enter this area as progress is very slow – just meander along the edge.

Soon there is a break and the cap vanishes but there is a small isolated remnant ahead, head for this and continue ascending the ridge heading in a SE direction. Another 20 minutes of steady ascent reaches the upper part of the Whakapapa Ridge (**WP02**^{1435masl}) with an obvious stream line lying to your left (E) below. Continue walking more or less parallel to this stream line heading (SE) then slowly, as the slope increases, head more or less due south to get on to the lower reaches of Pinnacle Ridge. Once on the Pinnacles Ridge head NE for a relatively easy descent to cross (**WP03**^{1358masl}) the Wairere Stream. Once over the stream Saddle Cone lies to the SE but stay on a NE heading as this gives a quick, easy ascent on to the next ridge. Now head SE and in after just over a kilometre (**WP05**^{1583masl}) a good view of Saddle Cone can be seen further to the SE and below the slopes of Ruapehu.

There is a steep descent off the ridge into the relatively flat looking area which lies to the N of Saddle Cone, in winter this descent takes very little time if the right equipment is carried and the skill level allows glissading. However, remember that this slope has to be ascended on the return. Once down it is possible to cut through the rocky area ahead or this area can just be skirted keeping the rocks on the left. Saddle Cone is then approached and ascended with the top being reached in something around 4 hours.

The return route can be done around two hours but there is that wicked ascent to get back on to the first ridge – in winter steps had to be cut in the hard packed snow / ice. Once on the ridge head N then slowly swing to the NW till the point where the ridge was ascended is found (**WP07**^{1419masl}) and descend down the relatively steep slope to the edge of the Wairere Stream in the region of where it was crossed earlier..

From here follow the rudimentary track which parallels the true right bank of the stream until the bridge (**WP08**^{1204masl}) carrying the Tama Lakes track is reached. Cross the bridge heading W and within the hour small car park (**WP09**^{1135masl}) behind Tongariro Chateau is reached.

Panorama from Ngauruhoe to Ruapehu



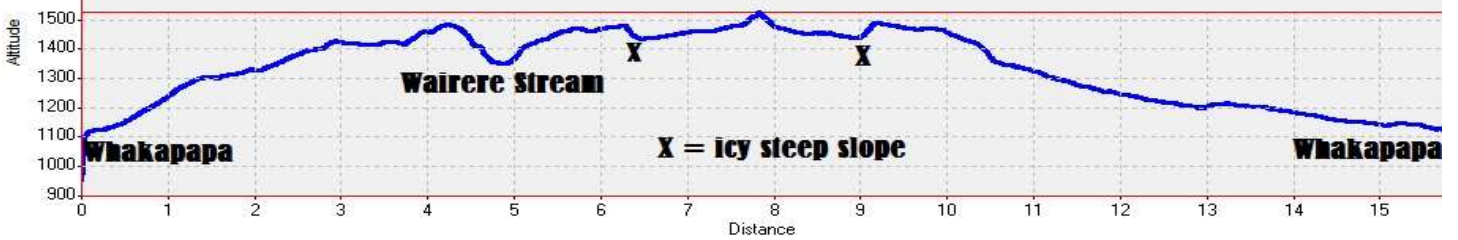
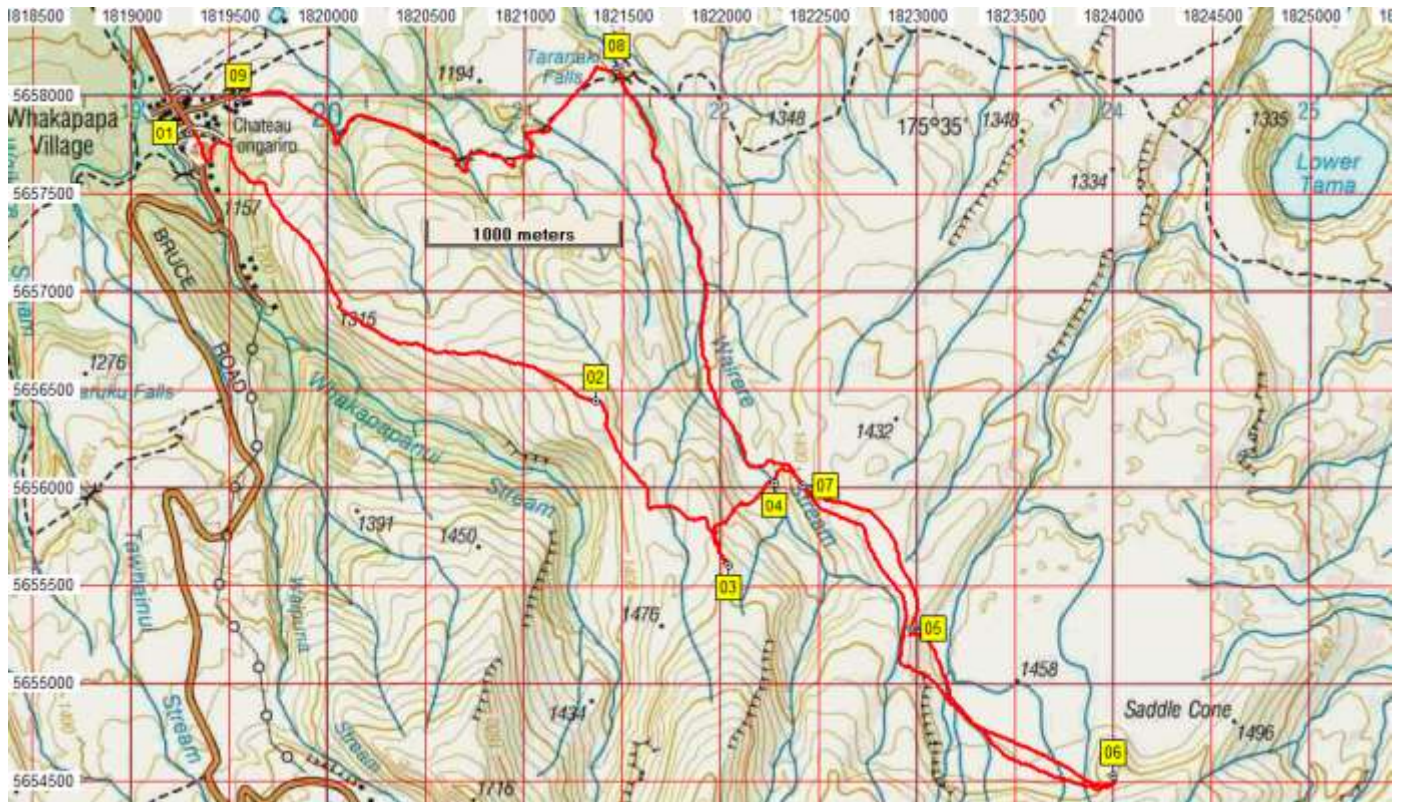
The map above shows the tramping route at the top part of sheet BJ34 whilst the access roads can be determined from the map

Picnic table above Chateau



Upper Whakapapa Ridge





Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1819288	5657812	1140	Whakapapa carpark opposite Chateau
02	1821364	5656442	1436	1:05min (2.96km); High point on Whakapapa Ridge for Smoko
03	1822042	5655604	1486	1:55min (4.25km): Cornice and too steep to descend to Wairere Stream, backtrack
04	1822272	5656020	1358	2:18min (4.91km); Cross Wairere Stream and head NE upslope to ridge
05	1822972	5655283	1483	2:55min (6.24km); Crest of ridge overlooking Saddle Cone to the SE
06	1823998	5654528	1524	4:02min (7.8km); On top of Saddle Cone
07	1822422	5656012	1419	5:01min (10.34Km); Start moderately steep descent to the Wairere Stream
08	1821468	5658131	1204	6:01min (12.93km); Bridge over Wairere Stream on Tama Lakes track
09	1819544	5657982	1135	6:52min (15.74km); Carpark behind Tongariro Chateau

Snow free Chateau



Icy cold and sparkling Ngauruhoe



Long icy descent slope



Chilly conditions



The slithery slope with rapid descent



Saddle Cone from WP05 on the ridge



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