

SOUTHERN CROSSING

Topo50 Map: BP33 Featherstone

GPS: NZTM on WGS 84

How to get to START: The motor camp in Levin (**WP0035masl** at 1793799E 5499676N) makes a good overnight stop before starting this tramp. The starting point at Otaki Forks is reached by heading south from Levin to Otaki, crossing the river then head SE on Otaki Gorge Road. If you have time a drive round the extensive camping areas at Otaki Forks is worthwhile but the start of the Southern Crossing is not actually signposted. The easiest way is to navigate to **WP0187masl** via GPS – otherwise turn left downhill to the first camping ground that is reached and signposted. There is a shelter with information boards there with the very obvious bridge to walk over to start the tramp.

ROUGH description: This is a monster and falls in the “Fit” category of tramp with three pretty long days and a 1,500m ascent the first day up to Kime Hut. Day 2 is all high level walking reaching over 1,500m at Mt Hector then traversing many very narrow ridges descending to Alpha Hut. The exit route was not via the normal track down Marchant Ridge but the shorter, but possibly harder, Bull Mound Track via Cone Hut to the car park at the northern end of Waiohine Gorge Road **WP39176masl**. In total some 31km were walked, ascending over 2,500m in just on twenty one and a half hours. The scary thing is that the mountain runners do the whole thing, via Marchant Ridge, in less than 5 hours!

Detail Day 1: Once the start point (**WP0187masl**) is located it is over the large wide bridge then steeply upwards to stroll through a level grassy area to reach a small junction (**WP02148masl**) within 25 minutes or so. From here it is right to soon enter the forest going uphill on good track through a few zigzags to another junction (**WP03178masl**) where the left branch is taken. Within 50min 300m are ascended.

Start of the track shelter



Second seat



The track remains almost tourist grade for about 3km (**WP04473masl**) but it does remain good allowing fairly fast progress as altitude is slowly gained. After 2hrs or so there are a couple of convenient seats made from trimmed windfalls (**WP05682masl**) before more of a climb is tackled which is a bit of a slog on the rooty, rocky track – but this levels off at a bit of a crest (**WP06838masl**). Fields Hut (**WP07848masl**) is reached after a gnarly ascent up through some “magic or goblin” forest. This very old hut very popular and it is worth 15min or so to wander round to look at the old pictures and read the notices.

Local trampers appear to use Fields as a stopover whilst on day walks and to rest up after going up to Table Top. Gaining altitude now seems the name of the game and within half an hour from Fields the bush (**WP08922masl**) changes from trees to high-shrubs and soon it is out to tussock as Table Top (**WP091014masl**) is surmounted.

The going now involves more and more relatively steep sided ridge walking but there is a bit of a drop to pass through a boggy area which has been board-walked – the boardwalk makes a great seat for a lunch break (**WP10998masl**).

Minutes later there is a track junction with Penn Creek Hut sign-posted off to the left (**WP1110444masl**) and the ascending continues till a small narrow coll or dip in the ridge (**WP121173masl**) is passed then it is upwards for views of Wellington and the coastline. Some serious altitude is now gained and less than an hour later a track marker pole exists (**WP131394masl**) with an obvious junction just beyond it. This junction (**WP141394masl**) indicates Mangahua Hut off to the left. The next feature is the high point of the day at 1432m – Hut Mound (**WP151432masl**) which has a sign-post indicating that Kime Hut (**WP161390masl**) is only 15minutes away to the right and downwards.

Convenient boardwalk seat



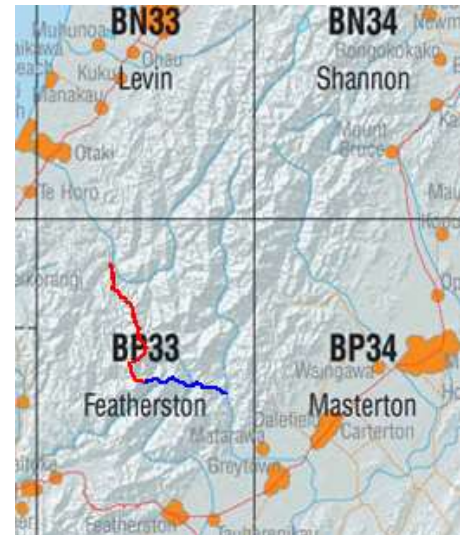
Ridge walking in search of altitude



Approaching Kime Hut



Kime Hut (**WP161390masl**) sits in a bit of a hollow and (February 2013) was in total chaos as the old hut is the builders’ base for the new hut under construction – the builders were very welcoming and proved good company for the night but one would not want them, their dog and tools as house guests. Distance for the day 11.2km in 7:10mins ascending 1498 metres.



The tramp is entirely within the Tararua Range

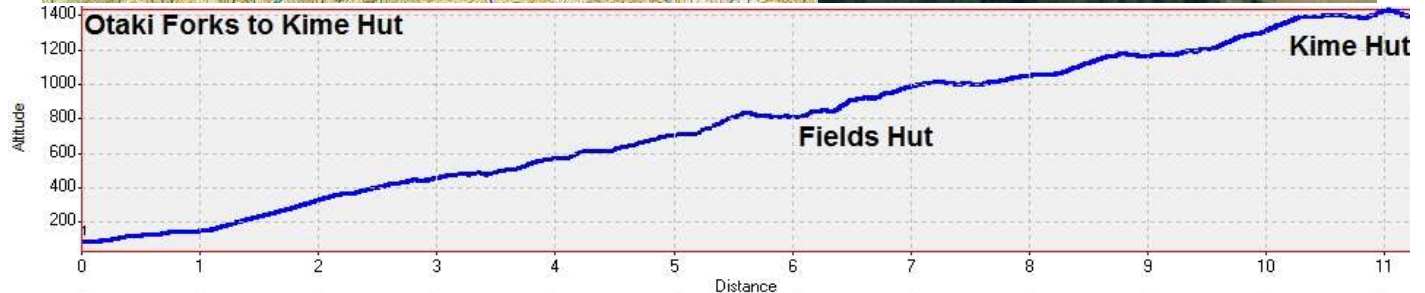
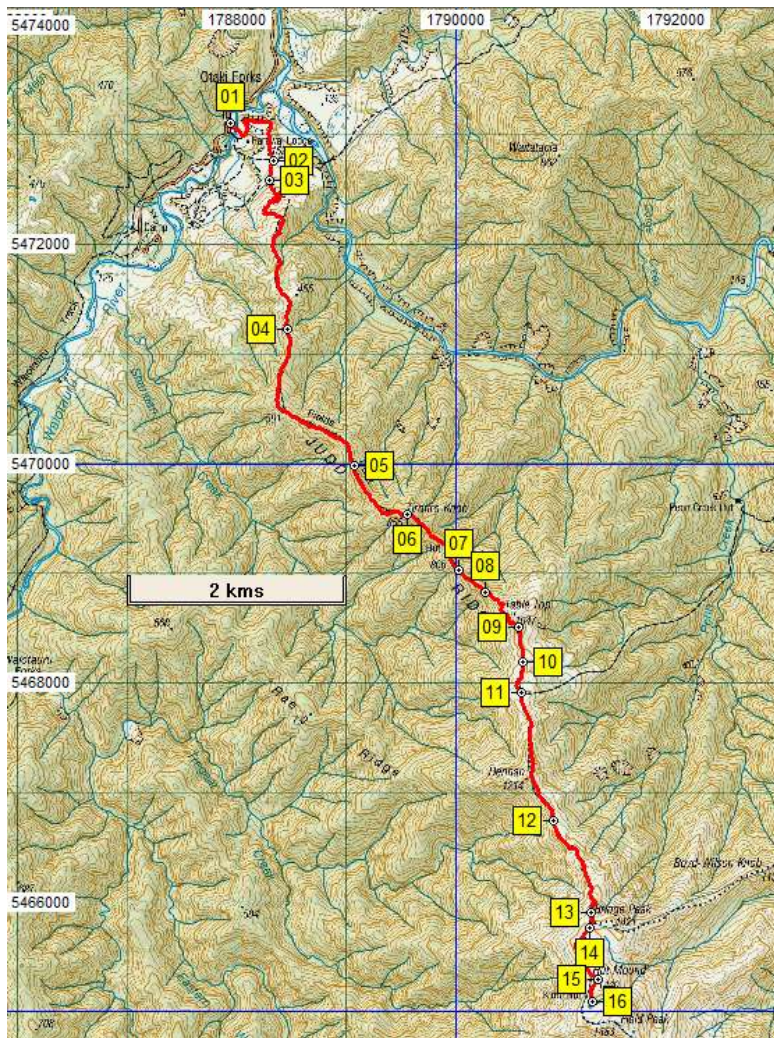
Level grassy area



Inside Fields Hut



Map with GPS data Day 1
Otaki Forks to Kime Hut



Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1787934	5473110	87.0	Car park at Otaki Forks - this point is NOT well sign-posted
02	1788327	5472763	148	25min (1 km); right at track junction and soon uphill in forest
03	1788291	5472591	176	30min (1.2 km); good track zig zagging to junction - go left with 300m ascended in 50 minutes
04	1788452	5471233	473	1:20min (3.1 km); end of tourist grade track but still good walking in forest
05	1789071	5469981	682	2:19min (4.8 km); second large seat from trimmed tree on track edge
06	1789550	5469535	838	2:50min (5.6 km); more or less level crest after long hard slog up on rooty, rocky track
07	1790015	5469027	846	3:14min (6.4 km); Fields Hut after gnarly ascent in "magic" forest
08	1790260	5468836	922	3:50min (6.7 km); out of tree cover to high bush
09	1790565	5468513	1014	4:11min (7.2 km); on Table Top in tussock
10	1790609	5468195	998	4:50min (7.6 km); section of boardwalk, good seat for lunch
11	1790587	5467909	1044	4:58min (7.9 km); track junction with Penn Creek hut off left
12	1790885	5466747	1173	5:50min (9.2 km); narrow col then up for views of Wellington coastline
13	1791232	5465903	1394	6:44min (10.3 km); pole on track with junction just ahead
14	1791217	5465769	1394	6:49min (10.4 km); junction with Maungahuka Hut off to the left
15	1791285	5465294	1432	7:03min (11 km); Hut Mound with sign-post and Kime Hut 15min to the right
16	1791233	5465101	1390	7:10min (11.2 km); Kime Hut - old in chaos and new under construction

Detail Day 2: A fairly heavy day with ascent of Mt Hector on a stony track, steep ascents and descents on narrow ridges over the Beehives and a long walk on the Dress Circle Track. Within minutes of leaving Kime Hut in tussock it is upwards on a stony rocky section of track to the crest of Field Peak (WP171473masl) then a slightly tricky descent to a small col before ascending the slopes to Mt Hector. It is a bit of a grunt to get to the massive wooden cross (WP181518masl) which can be seen from a long way off.

Memorial cross on Mt Hector



The views, of course, are spectacular though the route ahead does look slightly daunting as one overlooks the hilly section of the Beehives with their very narrow ridges. The Beehives (WP191470masl) are traversed within 1:45min of the start then it is past Atkinson and on to the Dress Circle on what is possibly the narrowest section of ridge (WP201448masl) to be used – slow and steady is the way to go here. One hour later the track ahead is a bit friendlier with much more gentle slopes (WP211363masl). Actual features are a bit sparse around here but the views of the coast and Kapiti Island keep interest high though there is one white notice at the side of the track where some wag has appended Spa Pool Entry \$5 – this is situated at a bend which is slightly boggy (WP221331masl).

Memorial plaque



Narrow ridges



Steep eroded edges



The Beehives and Mt Hector



Minutes beyond the Spa Pool a track junction (WP231357masl) has Elder Hut off right whilst Alpha Hut track goes to the left. Wellington trampers do a loop walk in via Elder Hut, over Mt Hector and out to Otaki Flats. There is now a long traverse to the SE until finally the last high point of the day is ascended at about 5 hours total walking (WP241344masl) and half an hour past this the bush line (WP251162masl) is reached. Walking in the shade of the trees is a relief on warm sunny days but the descent down through the trees is on a very rough stony track to arrive at Alpha Hut (WP261109masl). Alpha is a big hut with 20 odd bunks, a large kitchen area but lacks an inside sink and water supply. There is a wood-burner and plenty of bench and table space but the toilet was a definite “no-go” area as it was damaged, totally fouled-up and heavily infested with blow-flies. The day encompassed 9.4km, 600 odd metres of ascent in 5 hours 40minutes.

Alpha Hut



Detail Day 3: For some quite a daunting day with stories of horrendously steep descents on slopes that offer little grip and distances that just would not reduce on real back-country track.

Backlit Goblin Forest



The exit from Alpha Hut was spectacular with the trees apparently being on fire due to the dawn sunshine filtering through what is known as “Goblin” forest. This is truly a magic area with grotesquely shaped trees and amazing moss coverings. To begin the day it is gently downhill then an easy ascent to the first crest of the day (WP271163masl) then down a tricky, steep slope with several “root ladders” to reach the pass known as Hells Gate (WP281001masl). Ten minutes upslope from here it was off the main route to head NE on the Bull Mound Track (WP291080masl) heading for Cone Hut.

Goblin sized track sign



During the next twenty minutes there is not much change in altitude but a small open rocky top (WP301101masl) is reached where there are very good views so one’s location can be confirmed as there are very few track markers in this area – not good news in inclement weather. Soon after this Bull Mound is passed, without noticing it, when direction changes from NE to SE. The relatively gentle descending continues and soon there are more moss laden trees in the Goblin Forest (WP31974masl).

There is a track somewhere



Around 5 hours out the knees start to notice that a lot of descent is happening as more and more forest is passed through and it took this long for the first birds of the day to be heard (WP32788masl). Eventually Kaka were identified along with Tom Tits. At just over 6km distance and 4 hours the long awaited river was eventually seen (WP33390masl) when dreams of a footbath might be realised. The river crossing (WP34327masl) was easy as this was in the middle of summer at the end of a prolonged dry spell and the water was only knee deep.

Twisted tree in Goblin Forest

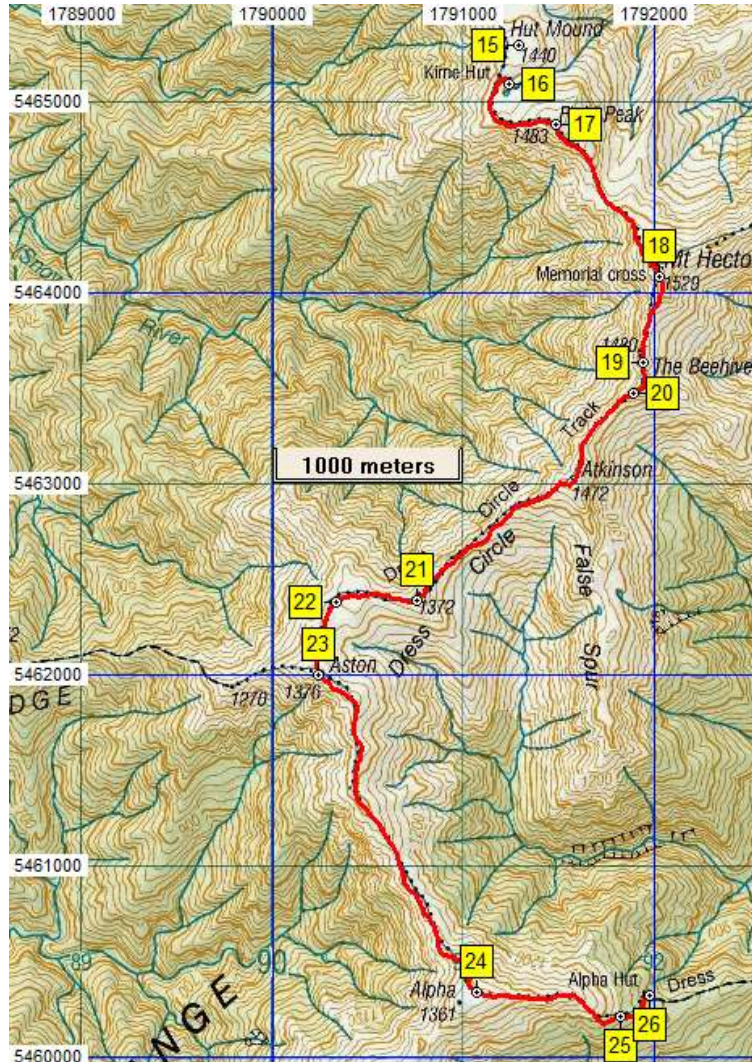


Once over the river it is only 5 minutes to reach the very old, romantic looking Cone Hut (WP35348masl). This is very basic accommodation but there is a large fireplace, a stream line exists not too far away as a water supply and rumours of 4 legged companions cannot be confirmed as an overnight stop was not made. This makes an excellent stopping place for lunch, or even a second lunch, as fuelling up before the next section is a good idea.

Warm clear water



Map with GPS data Day 2



Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
16	1791233	5465101	1390	7:10min (11.2 km); Kime Hut - old in chaos and new under construction
17	1791477	5464881	1473	[Day 2] 31min (0.7km); Tussock then rocky, rubby tricky track to Field Peak crest
18	1792019	5464088	1518	1:13min (1.7km); Summit of Mt Hector after fair grunt upwards
19	1791940	5463643	1470	1:42min (2.2km); Very narrow and steep traversing the Beehives
20	1791885	5463478	1448	2:01min (2.4km); possibly narrower and steeper leading on to Dress Circle track
21	1790757	5462394	1363	3:1min (4.1km); very gentle looking slopes ahead after undulating slopes below the Beehives
22	1790325	5462381	1331	3:25 (4.6km); Faded white notice for Spa Pool only \$5 entry! Boggy area
23	1790237	5462004	1357	3:33min (5 km); junction with Elder Hut to right and Alpha Hut to the left
24	1791066	5460344	1344	4:56min (7 km); last high crest for the day
25	1791823	5460212	1162	5:30min (7.9km); bush line just short of Alpha Hut on pretty rough track downhill
26	1791966	5460325	1109	5:41min (8.1km); Alpha Hut with the most disgusting toilet ever encountered - reported to DoC

Feeding time at Kime Hut



New Kime Hut construction



Cone Hut crew



From Cone Hut it is a bit of a grunty ascent but only 300m up the track there is the first of the track junctions (**WP36411masl**) to Cone Saddle going off left. Forty five minutes later after a bit of a brutal ascent (almost 250m) the second junction (**WP37657masl**) for Cone Saddle is reached.

For the weary there now seems to be an endless section of featureless forest to walk through covering about three kilometres continually thinking about the very steep, knee trembling descents that were mentioned previously. There are several false indicators as the ridge seems to narrow from both sides and steep slopes can be seen. Eventually the brakes had to be well applied as there is a bit of a steep descent to be made, but nothing that needs to be feared, to arrive at a track sign for Totara Flats (**WP38182masl**) which is still quite a long way above the river which can be seen below. However, a few strides to the right and a high level, huge swing bridge gives easy passage way high above the river without having to make that last awful descent. Once over the bridge it is only minutes uphill to reach the car park (**WP39176masl**) at the end of Waiohine Gorge Road.

Long way down to the river

Very high swing bridge



Relief – boots off!



The car park is large, with a shelter and toilets plus, for those that can walk a few metres more, it is possible to go have a dip in the river to freshen up after covering about 12km whilst ascending 600metres and descending considerably more in a mere eight and a half hours through pretty rugged terrain.

What was done:

Day	Time on feet	Metres ascended	Km covered
1	7:10 mins	1,498	11.2
2	5:41 min	456	8.1
3	8:36 min	601	11.7
Totals	21:27min	2,545	31.0

For those that do not want quite such long days there is the possibility of adding two days to this tramp by staying in Fields Hut then in Cone Hut – they both look delightful but do lack a few facilities – but a hut is a hut!

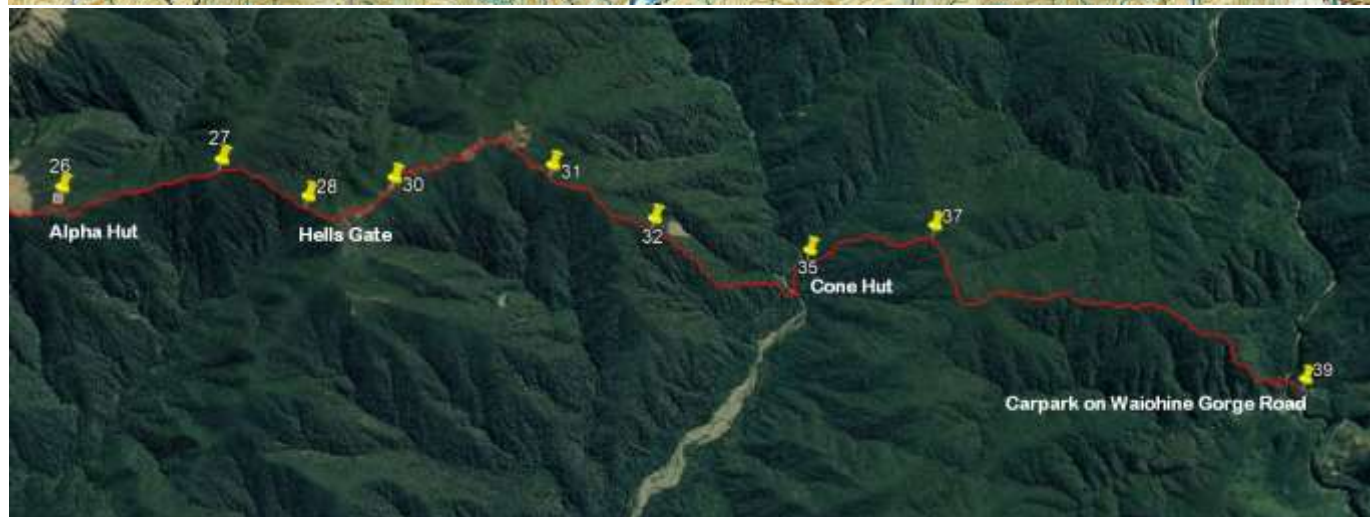
Second lunch at Cone Hut



Inside Cone Hut



Map with GPS data Day 3



Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
26	1791966	5460325	1109	5:41min (8.1km); Alpha Hut with the most disgusting toilet ever encountered - reported to DoC
27	1793113	5460469	1163	[Day 3] 43min (1.4km); crest after walk through (dawn) back-lit "Goblin" forest
28	1793667	5460253	1001	1:10min (2 km); Hells Gate pass but very steep slopes with some root ladders
29	1793878	5460134	1080	1:21min (2.3km); Kaitoke / Bull Mound junction, go left for Cone Hut track
30	1794304	5460334	1101	1:38min (2.8km); open rocky top with good views but few track indicators
31	1795402	5460449	974	2:31min (4.4km); heading downhill in more Goblin forest (heavily laden with mosses)
32	1796111	5460101	786	3:08min (5.2km); smoko & first birds of day in wonderful forest with a great deal of descending
33	1796997	5459796	390	4:18min (6.3km); on lower slopes with views of the river
34	1797180	5459722	327	4:33min (6.5km); knee deep river crossing, easy as in very dry spell
35	1797249	5459978	348	4:43min (6.9km); Cone Hut at 5mins from the river
36	1797467	5460082	411	5:47min (7.2km); track junction after steep ascent from Cone Hut, go right
37	1798161	5460035	657	6:34min (8km); second junction for Cone Saddle after hard ascent from first junction
38	1800825	5459036	182	8:28min (11.5km); junction after steep descent after long section of easy walking, right for bridge
39	1800976	5458926	176	8:36min (11.7km); car park at track end at Waiohine, shelter and toilets

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