

WHAKAPAPA RIDGE, SADDLE CONE & WAIRERE STREAM

Top050 Map: BJ34 Mt Ruapehu

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

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

- 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, **or**
- In Turangi turn off SH1 right to SH41 then left to SH47 and proceed as above.
- 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 strenuous walk, mainly off-track in the moderate to fit category lasting five to six hours, covering about 16km and ascending almost 700 metres with some slightly "hairy" descents. It starts and ends at the Chateau (**WP01**_{1134masl}) in Whakapapa. The route goes up the Whakapapa Ridge, crosses the Pinnacles Ridge, descends to cross the Wairere Stream then crosses another ridge to get to Saddle Cone – which is incorrectly marked on the current NZTM map. The return walk gets back in to the Wairere Stream, out to meet the Tama Lakes track and back to the Chateau

Detail: Turn right out of the car park opposite the Chateau to 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 (touristic) 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 (**WR02**_{1240masl}) of the Chateau. At this point there are several mini-tracks all basically going SE to enter a tussock area – all tracks do merge near the crest. 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 the continuous cap vanishes but there is a small isolated remnant ahead, (**WP03**_{1398masl}) 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 (**WP04**_{1440masl}) – a good morning tea stop - with an obvious stream line lying to your left (E) below and the uphill of where the Whakapapa Ridge merges to the Pinnacles Ridge is seen.

Continue walking more or less parallel to this stream line heading SE to SSE aiming just below a reddish area on the ridge ahead, do not go too high to the right as doing so – SSE to S – the higher reaches of Pinnacles Ridge can be accessed but good visibility is essential and there are bluffs everywhere. Try to follow the contour and slowly swing round until progressing almost eastwards to arrive at the crest edge overlooking the Wairere Stream (**WP05**_{1500masl}). There is a bluff "snout" just to the right and the descent look rather steep but is manageable: the Wairere Stream is reached in minutes and there are several obvious crossing points. The next target is to get on to the ridge ahead and the easiest route is up through a rocky cutting (**WP06**_{1483masl}) still heading SE. The ridge crest should be reached in about 2:30min (**WP07**_{1515masl}) from where it is possible to see the Gull Colony to the east. A short descent and re-ascent follows to cross a stream line and get on the next ridge crest (**WP08**_{1497masl}) which offers a good view of Saddle Cone. Almost immediately it is necessary to turn hard left (**WP09**_{1477masl}) to get round the snout of the next bluffed area and down into the valley.

Morning tea and route ahead



The rocky sentinel



The view ahead once down off the ridge is rocky to the left and open sandy fans to the right towards the bluffs and mountain with the preferred walking line aiming just to miss an upstanding rocky sentinel (**WP10**_{1453masl}) on the extreme SW edge of the rocky area. It is soft walking through this area – a bit like walking in soft snow – with just over 500m to the base of the cone (**WP11**_{1477masl}).

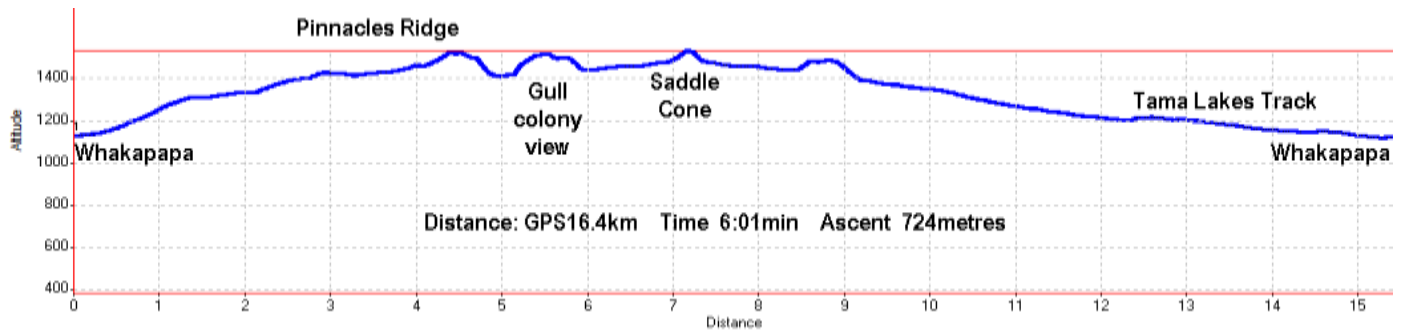
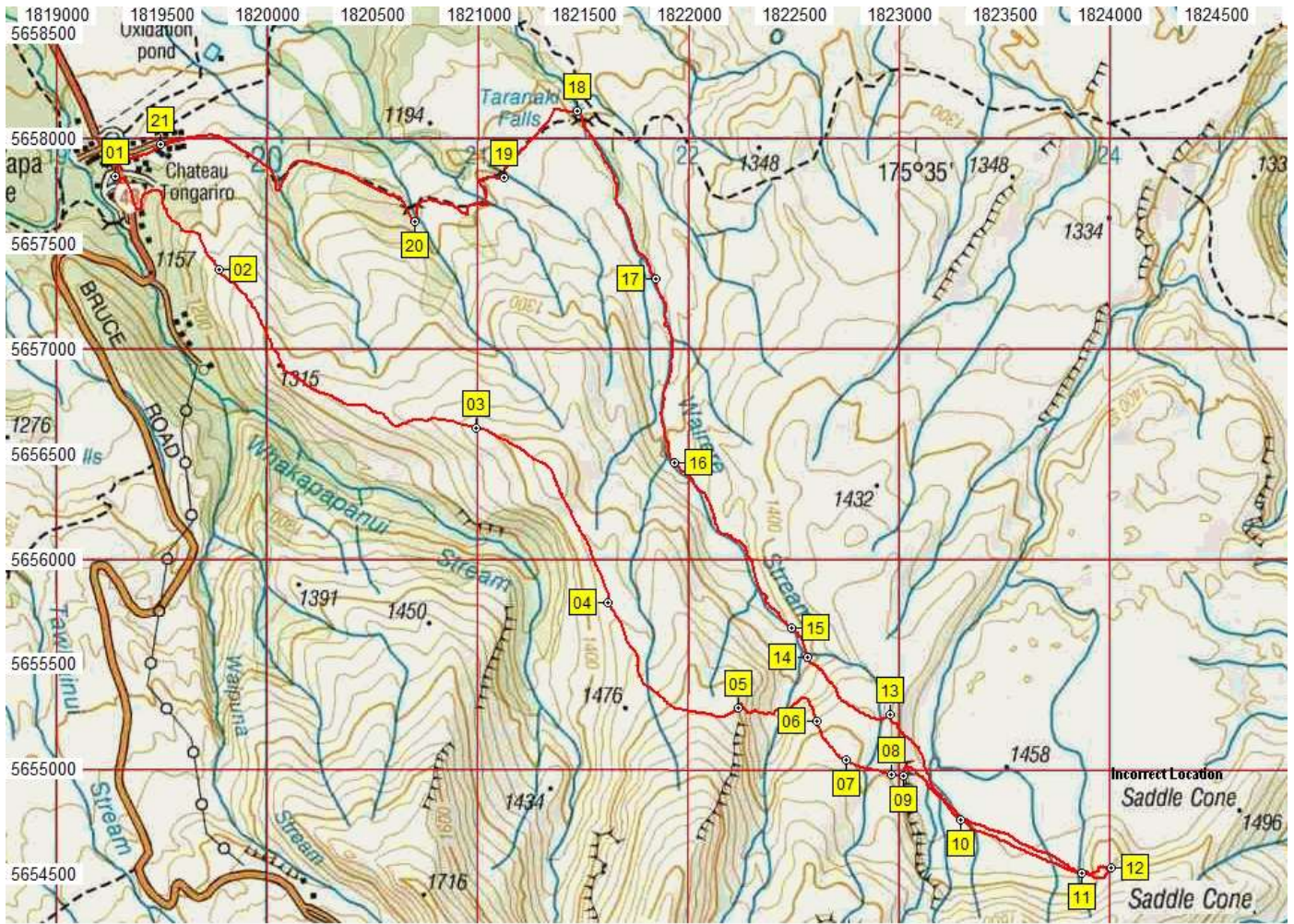


Vegetated cap edge



Above descent to Wairere Stream





Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1819281	5657823	1134	Car Park
02	1819771	5657376	1240	17min (0.9km); picnic Table with good Chateau views
03	1820990	5656627	1398	53mins (2.5km); highest remnant vegetation cap with eroding edge
04	1821616	5655793	1440	1:33min (3.7km); Whakapapa ridge merges to Pinnacles Ridge
05	1822237	5655295	1500	1:56min (4.6km); on edge of crest ready to descend to Wairere Stream with bluff edge on RHS
06	1822609	5655232	1483	2:26min (5.3km); steep ascent through rocky cutting to gain ridge crest to SE
07	1822751	5655046	1515	2:35min (5.5km); ridge crest with first view of Gull Colony area due East
08	1822964	5654978	1497	2:41min (5.8km); next ridge crest after minor stream crossing with full view of Saddle Cone
09	1823022	5654971	1477	2:44min (5.85km); sharp turn left to N to get round snout of bluffs, then head SE downslope
10	1823292	5654763	1453	2:54min (6.3km); passing rocky promontory sentinal then on to loose, soft sandy fans
11	1823869	5654509	1477	3:05min (6.9km); break of slope below Saddle Cone (lunch)
12	1824008	5654535	1530	3:30min (7.1km); on the rim of Saddle Cone
13	1822957	5655263	1480	4:09min (8.7km); on ridge after steep ascent, traverse NW to Wairere Stream (do not use stream line)
14	1822562	5655533	1399	4:21min (9.2km); meet basic track on edge of Wairere Stream and head NW on true R bank
15	1822492	5655677	1386	4:28min (9.4km); slightly tricky land slip area on edge of stream line
16	1821934	5656459	1321	4:45min (10.4km); whale-back rock outcrops plus series of waterfalls
17	1821846	5657332	1256	4:59min (11.4km); superb waterfall on true left bank in a series of falls
18	1821474	5658132	1214	5:13min (12.3km); bridge over Wairere Stream go left about 45min for the Chateau
19	1821122	5657818	1175	5:28min (12.8km); bridge about 30 minutes from the end
20	1820697	5657609	1190	5:37min (13.6km); bridge in open on very good path about 20mins from end
21	1819491	5657977	1128	5:56min (15.1km); junction with Taranaki Falls Track on the right & road to Chateau

The base (**WP111477masl**) of Saddle Cone makes a good lunch spot with the option to then get up on to the rim (**WP121530masl**) or down into the actual crater – rocky and slightly steep but a safe extension. The way back starts now by retracing steps to get back up on to the last ridge (**WP131480masl**) descended from but aim to get on to the ridge some 200-300m further north than on the inwards route. From this point head NW aiming to hit the Wairere Stream, do not be tempted to slip into and use the stream line on your right hand side as the lower reaches of this are bluffed down close to the Wairere. The Wairere should be reached in about ten minutes from the ridge crest close to a minor confluence (**WP141399masl**). Stay on the true right bank heading NW whilst trying to follow the very basic track that does exist.

Saddle Cone



Saddle Cone crater



Almost immediately there is a choice when a lower slope land-slip has to be crossed (**WP151386masl**) – either use fast-feet on the slip or drop down virtually into the stream bed. The next three kilometres to reach the Tama Lakes track can be a bit of a challenge as the basic track keeps vanishing and little progress seems to be achieved but this is one place where regular looking behind is well worth while. The views of the mountain, numerous interesting rock formations (dinosaurs' tails) (**WP161321masl**) and waterfalls (**WP171258masl**) are all pretty magic to look at.

If the Tama Lake track is busy the aimed for bridge can be seen some 5 – 10 minutes before it is reached as people cross it but the bridge (**WP181214masl**) should be reached in something over 5 hours after setting out. It is basically 45 minutes back to the Chateau from here and there are two routes:

- by going right there is a small marked junction sign-posted to Whakapapa passing the Taranaki Falls
- by crossing the bridge and following the track – which is a bit degraded in the first few hundred meters.

If a bit tired use the second option as the other has some steep steps near the end.

On the way back in using option two there are a couple of good time markers, both bridges with one (**WP191175masl**) 30 minutes from home and the other (**WP201190masl**) 20 minutes from the Chateau. The option one track re-joins just before the Chateau coming in from the right hand side (**WP211128masl**). From this junction it is only five minutes down the sealed road passing the back of the Chateau and coming into Whakapapa itself virtually opposite the starting carpark.



- **GPS** Garmin GPSMap 62sc **WP** Waypoint as taken by GPS above **masl** Metres above sea level