

WHAKAPAPA RIDGE and SILICA RAPIDS

Top050 Map: BJ34 Mnt 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, or
- In Turangi turn off SH1 right to SH41 then left to SH47 and proceed as above. This route is shown opposite
- 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 circular walk in the moderate category lasting four to five hours including breaks. It starts and ends at the Chateau (**WP01**1135masl) in Whakapapa and can be lengthened or shortened at will. There are three routes that can be followed but at present only two of these are logged and described. Starting in Whakapapa the route goes up the Whakapapa ridge which lies to the NE of the Whakapapanui Stream. The stream is crossed then, with various options, the Bruce Road is reached after crossing the Waipuna Stream. From here it is possible to walk down the road but the better option is to slip off on to the track (**WP21** 1258masl) for Silica Rapids and get back to Whakapapa via the Silica and Golden Rapids. Much of the first half of this tramp is off-track whilst the track via the rapids takes a bit over an hour.

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 (touristic) and just within the bush line but within 10 minutes there are open views (**WP02**1210masl). Further up the track degrades a bit with some large, anti-hobbit sized steps just before a semi-round table. At this point there would appear to be two options so take the vague track that goes to the right and soon the tussock area is entered. Within 45 minutes the edge of the gentle crest is reached (**WP04**1317 masl) just before a small cairn from where there are good views up and down the valley. After this there is a gently descending wet eroded area where moisture can be seen seeping out from under the vegetated area uphill on the left hand side.

Continue walking more or less parallel to this eroded edge till about 55 minutes have elapsed when it is necessary to veer to the right towards the Whakapapanui Stream – a small cairn has been constructed at this point. After 15 minutes of sidling more or less to the SE there is a largish rock (**WP05** 1276masl) just at the start of the final descent to the stream, the last part of this descent is on loose material so watch the footing. The stream is now crossed (**WP06** 1261masl) but this is quite easy though damp, if not wet, feet will ensue. Once over the main stream cross a tributary which comes in on the left and go downstream for about 10 minutes. The first real fun of the day now happens with a bit of a struggle up a steep slope through very dense, rather unfriendly bush. A small, three stone cairn can be located marking the start of this ascent (**WP07** 1256masl) which does roughly follow a stream line which is a bit eroded and gullied at times – a good grunt upwards anyway to reach a crest (**WP10** 1271masl) in high bush.

Just past this crest enter the gully proper and continue upwards for the next 20 minutes or so keeping a lookout for a split (**WP10** 1369masl) where the preferred route is the right branch since the left branch is inclined to be slippery. The top of the gully (**WP11** i) is reached in about 2:10minutes when the vegetated area is left behind and the surface is rocky. This is basically the point where a decision has to be made as to which route to follow.

Narrow bridge



The northern route: Bearing to the right once getting above the bush line soon gives a view of the Chateau and in minutes the ridge is crested (**WP12** 1407masl) and continuing downhill eventually leads to Bruce Road. Fifteen minutes or so down the ridge there is a huge boulder (**WP13** 1327) from where a wooden bridge can be seen to the SW – this is the next target and is reached by getting down left off the ridge before the actual snout is reached, the route skirts the higher bush in the valley on the left.

Just under 3 hours should have the feet firmly on a small track (**WP15** 1258) and by going left, slightly uphill, one of the narrowest bridges in captivity is seen and has to be crossed – this carries the water pipeline leading to the Chateau from an off-take (**WP14** 1258masl) just off the track. The track is very vague here but by heading for the eroded slope leading up to the Bruce Road another small bridge (**WP19**1251) is located which leads to and crosses the Waipuna Stream and up the steep slope to the road. Half way up this quite dangerous slope – boulders and loose material fed from the road edge plus a bit of land-slipping – there is a good spot for lunch which gives a view of the latter parts of the “high” route and if the party has split the walkers can be seen coming quite easily.



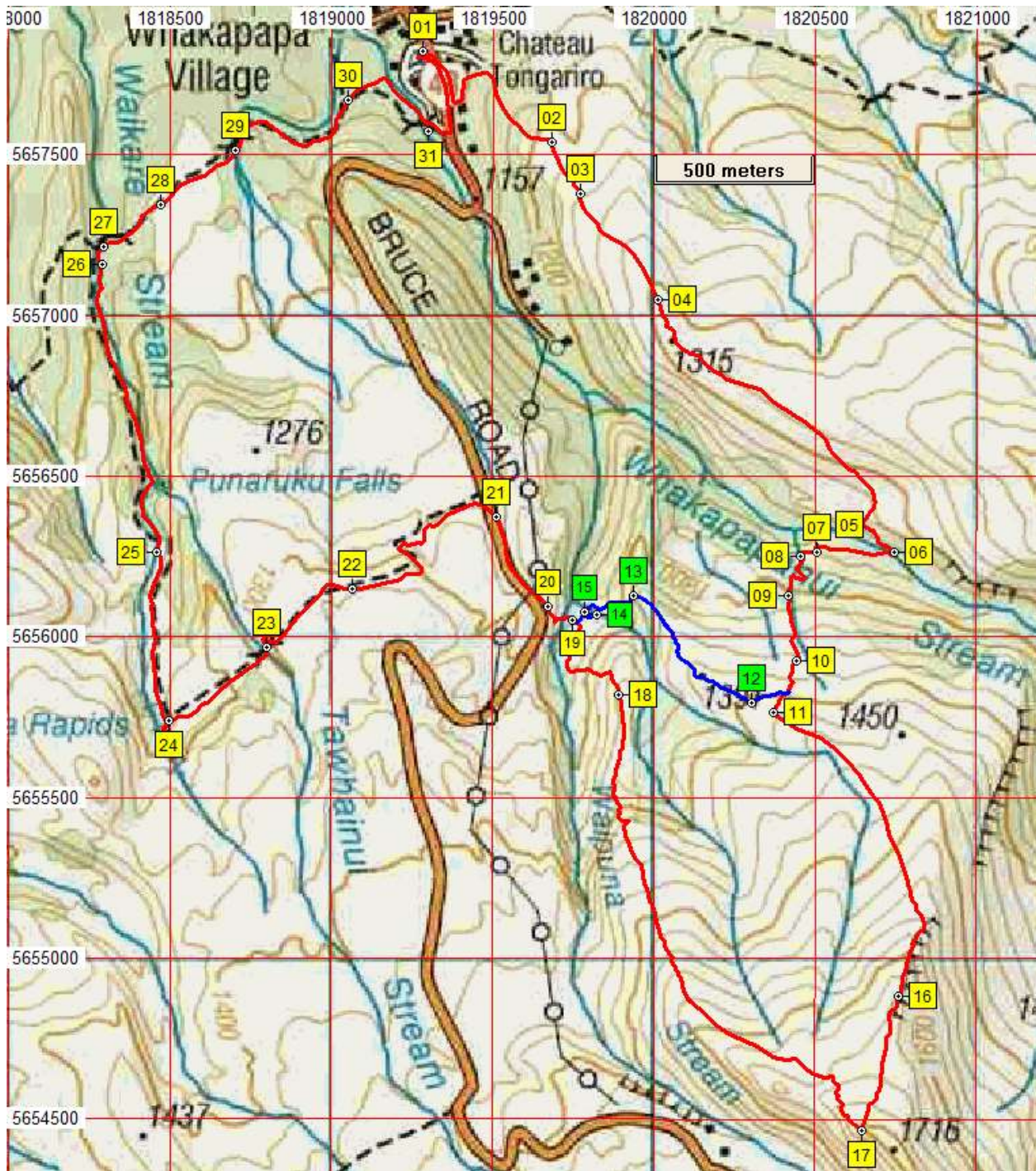
Route to start in **BLUE** and tramp route is **RED**

Wet area below eroded edge



River crossing





North Route is the **BLUE** line

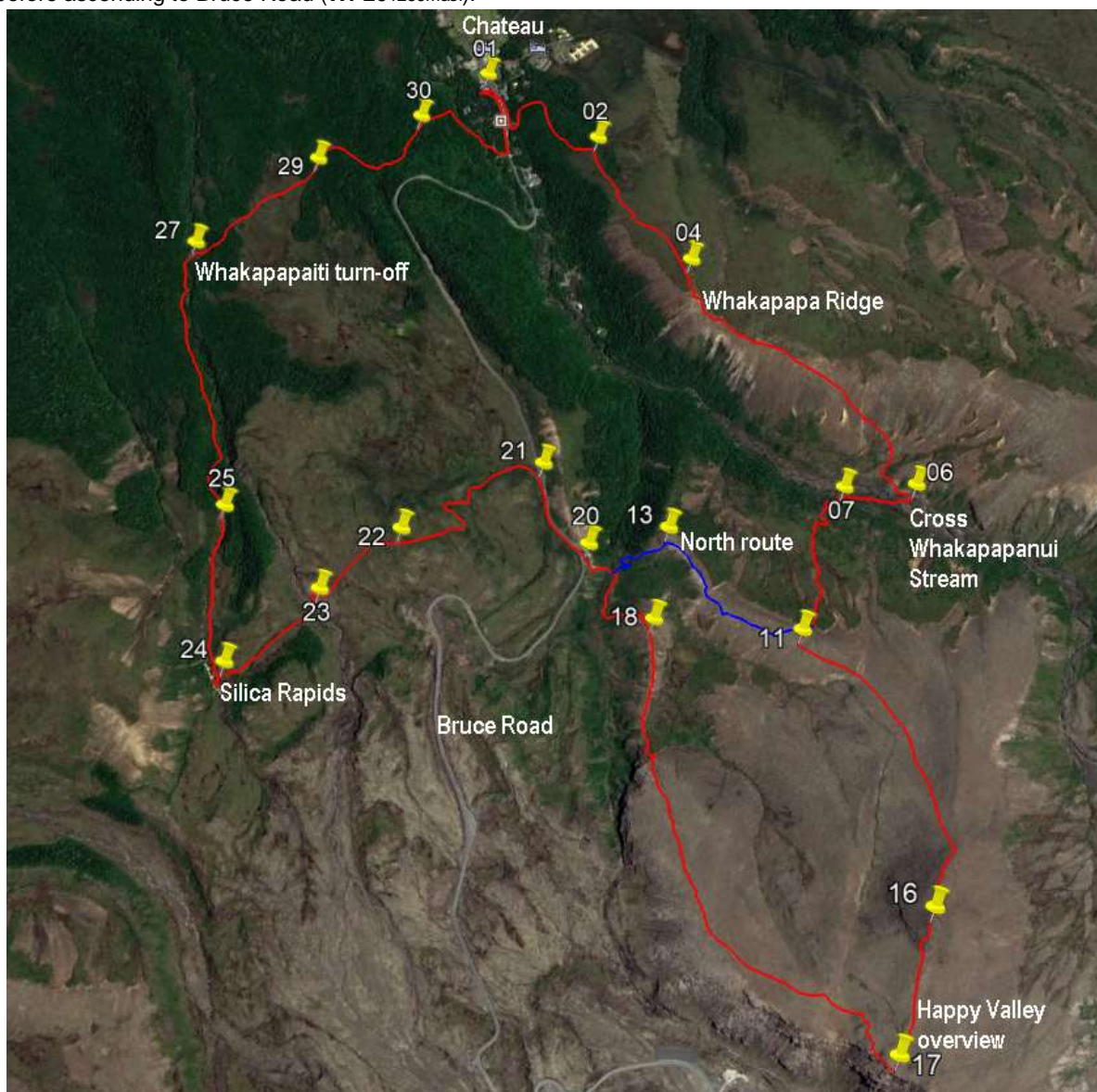
The middle route: This route has been walked but not logged so little can be said about it apart from the fact that the route comes off the ridge long before the northern one does and actually links up with the latter part of the high route near waypoint **WP18**^{1368masl}.

The high route: By going uphill to the SE on the ridge a good work-out plus a bit of scrambling can be had and Happy Valley can be seen if one goes high enough. There are very obvious castellated rocky outcrops on the crest line and it takes only twenty to thirty minutes to reach the first and most obvious of these outcrops (**WP16** 1647masl). Once on the higher parts of the ridge care has to be taken as there are very serious bluffs on the E to SE side above Happy Valley, but the views are stunning especially from the last outcrop (**WP17** 1706masl). On approaching this last outcrop it is possible to go around it on either the left or the right but a good sense of balance and no fear of heights is recommended. From here it is virtually all downhill as the ridge parallel to the Waipuna Stream is followed NW then NNW – the descent to the lower parts of the ridge takes about 45 minutes. Do not be tempted to head straight towards Bruce Road as this would involve some very large bluffs on the edge of the stream line on your left.

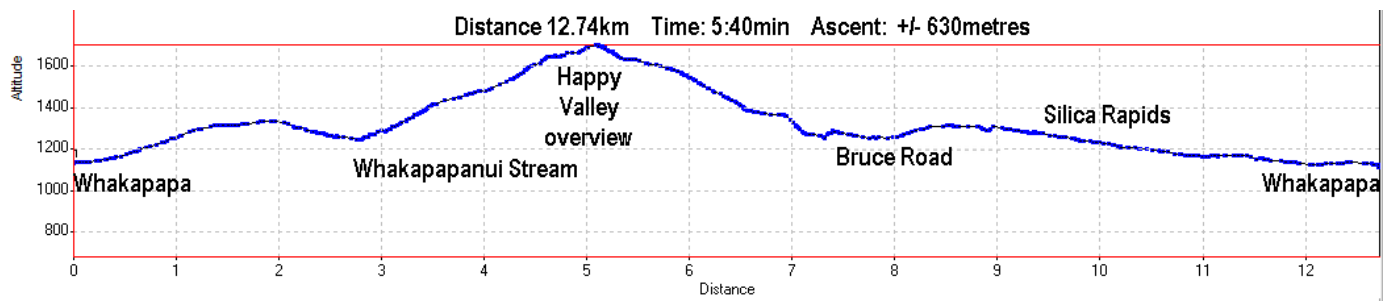


Above Happy Valley

Near the bottom of the ridge there is a gully across your route then a slight ascent back on to the ridge till a large raised area of vegetation is seen (**WP18**^{1368masl}) on the right hand side – at this point turn to the left (W) and select which gully you wish to descend – whatever you choose does end up in very dense, high vegetation before a small bridge (**WP19**^{1251masl}) is reached and crossed before ascending to Bruce Road (**WP20**^{1286masl}).



Name	Eastings	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1819283	5657823	1135	Car park opposite Chateau in Whakapapa
02	1819683	5657539	1210	10min (700m); Out of trees into open with views of Bruce Road and Chateau
03	1819769	5657377	1242	15min (905m); Table on poor track with anti-hobbitt steps. Branch to the right
04	1820014	5657047	1317	45min (1.33km) ; Crest edge, views up / down valley and just before small cairn then wet eroded zone
05	1820605	5656346	1276	1:10min (2.39km); Big rock, start of final descent to stream line - last bit on very loose surface
06	1820746	5656263	1261	1:15min (2.56km); Whakapapanui crossing then back downstream to cross tributary stream from the left
07	1820508	5656262	1256	1:30min (2.82km); Small gully from the stream with small stone pile on RHS as marker
08	1820458	5656250	1271	1:40min (2.89km); +/- crest in high bush then into gully and upwards
09	1820414	5656130	1314	1:50min (3.12km); Back in stream line after in and out a few times
10	1820443	5655929	1369	2:00min (3.32km); Y-fork in gully - go right as left option slippery
11	1820370	5655763	1420	2:10min (3.53km); Above veg line, just past party split point with high route off left uphill to SE
12	1820302	5655797	1407	2:20min; On the ridge. left and up for Happy Vally. Right and down for Bruce Road
13	1819937	5656129	1327	2:35min; Huge rock on lower ridge snout with views of target bridges below to SW
14	1819822	5656070	1258	2:55min; Off-take for Tongariro Chateau water supply
15	1819784	5656083	1256	2:50min; On small pipeline track. Go left to cross very narrow pipeline bridge
16	1820760	5654883	1647	2:30min (4.63km); High point on ridge then heading SSW to other high points
17	1820644	5654465	1706	2:45min (5.08km); Overlooking Happy Valley on rocky high point then NW to descend ridge
18	1819893	5655821	1368	3:30min (6.90km); Near end of ridge, flat topped vegetated mound on RHS - descend to left in gullies
19	1819748	5656057	1251	4 hours (7.31km); Small footbridge then steeply up for Bruce Road. Lunch on the slope.
20	1819670	5656090	1286	4:15min (7.44km); Edge of Bruce Road heading downhill to NW
21	1819516	5656371	1258	7.75km; Post lunch and 5 - 6 minutes down Bruce Road for Silica Rapids track on left
22	1819067	5656151	1316	4:25min (8.50km); Erosion info board near crest with "interesting" rock formations on left horizon
23	1818802	5655963	1295	4:30min (8.87km); Newish bridge in steep sided valley
24	1818495	5655735	1281	4:35min (9.41km); Info boards etc at Silica Rapids
25	1818460	5656263	1235	4:45min (9.96km); Boardwalk then bridge just before bush-line
26	1818285	5657155	1172	5 hours (10.90km); DoC track counter
27	1818296	5657213	1170	5:02min (11.0km); T-junction with track to Whakapapa Hut off left
28	1818471	5657347	1174	5:10min (11.21km); Seat before Alpine Bog with boardwalk and views of Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu
29	1818706	5657509	1159	5:20min (11.52km); Bridge at Golden Rapids
30	1819053	5657670	1132	5:25min (12.05km); T-junction with Whakapapanui Track
31	1819297	5657576	1137	5:30min (12.37km); Bridge on Whakapapanui Stream then uphill to car park and road at Fire Station



From here it is about 30 minutes back down the road to Whakapapa but a better alternative is to slip off left on to the Silica Rapids track (**WP21**^{1258masl}). Despite what the notice says it takes only 30 minutes to reach the rapids (**WP24**^{1281masl}), another 35 minutes to Golden Rapids (**WP29**^{1159masl}) and about 1:30 minutes total to get back to the car park in Whakapapa (**WP01**). This part of the walk is not described in detail, being presented in the Shorter Walks publication, but several points of interest are noted as waypoints and shown on the map. In all some 10km are walked with about 450metres of ascent and descent within an altitude variation of just under 300metres on the northern route within 5 hours including refreshment breaks. The high route covers almost 13km and the altitude ranges all the way up to over 1700 metres as seen in the profile below.

Heading down with Bruce Road below



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