

Whangaehu Valley

Topo50 Maps: BJ34 Mt Ruapehu & BJ35 Waiouru

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START: The route to the start involves going south on SH1 from Taupo through Turangi and then down the Desert Highway (**SH1**).

Exit the Desert Highway as in the map opposite turning right on to the **Tukino Access Road** shown as the pink line in Figure 1 – taking note of the signs at the start about 2 wheel drive vehicles.

Follow the gravel road and at the obvious **Y-fork go right** as turning left is posted as Army territory. Variants of the road weave around a little bit but follow the poles and in wintertime watch out for some minor puddles to rather large stretches of wet flooded areas.

The **2 wheel-drive car park** is reached in 15 minutes and a further 20 minutes is required to reach the repeater station with twin masts. Park near the masts (**RH01** 1419masl) or even at the start of the Round-the-Mountain track (**RH02** 1425masl)

Rough description: A first attempt at the wrong time of year to get up into the Tukino Ski Village via the Whangaehu Valley. The first hour is spent walking on the Round the Mountain track towards the Rangipo Hut then the rest is off-track through very mixed terrain from soft, easy walking ridges to steep loose scree descents – then there is the Lahar gully! In winter time it is just not possible to proceed up the gullied sections of the Whangaehu streamline.

Detail: The Tukino Access Road leads to the Tukino Alpine Village which is a ski centre; some of the huts or lodges can be seen from the Round-the-Mountain track. Due to “not the best skiing conditions or access” the area has now been taken over for use for Outward Bound or outdoor skills and training for youngsters. From the radio masts (**01** 1419masl) walk along the road in a WSW direction for 5 minutes to where the “Round-the-Mountain” track crosses the road (**02** 1415masl) and turn left off the road on to the well sign-posted track heading off in a SE direction.

As can be seen the track, as presently mapped, is quite accurate but it does “wobble” about a little bit and basically heads SSW crossing a few minor stream lines on the way. Within 35 minutes the first of the larger stream (**03** 1400masl) lines is crossed and the track follows then runs parallel to a minor, sandy stream bed to climb up on to the next crest or ridge. The well poled track can be seen a fair distance ahead most of the time as it winds its way up and down through the various stream lines. After about 1 hour the footing gets a bit rougher and loose whilst the slope down into one of the tributaries of the Whangaehu is steeper than previously. Once cresting the far side of this valley the first of the “Lahar” warning signs (**04** 1464masl) is encountered – this sign may be considered by some to be out of date now but it is a good historical marker and if volcanic activity increases would still be valid.

A few minutes later there is a second sign with a good view of the Lahar gully (Whangaehu Valley) and the refurbished swing bridge which was badly damaged during the last Lahar outburst – the bridge (**05** 1451masl) being reached within about 1 hour 5 minutes of leaving the car park.

Once over the bridge turn hard right upstream in a narrow rocky channel which is steep in places. Then pass through the “rock wall” sitting on the minor rise and down through the next channel and up a sandy gravelly slope to pass the “hazard board” (**06** 1476masl) on the south side of the Whangaehu River. It should be noted that from here on there has been major re-alignment of the track as it continues of to the Rangipo Hut.

Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1828955	5650154	1419	Radio masts on Tukino Access Road just before Round-the-Mountain track
02	1828750	5650070	1416	RMT (Round-the-Mountain track) crossing the Tukino Access Road
03	1828378	5648663	1400	35min (1.69km); into first sizeable gully on the Round-the-Mountain track (RMT)
04	1827358	5647985	1464	1 hour (3.08km); first Lahar warning notice
05	1827167	5647915	1451	1:05min (3.26km); middle of swing bridge
06	1826896	5647875	1476	1:10min (3.60km); top of sandy, gravelly ascent and past “hazard” board
07	1826622	5647712	1503	1:30min (3.92km); branch off right to the NW from the Round the Mountain track
08	1825971	5648021	1552	3hrs (4.77km); on return leg, small terrace with rocky rim, lunch / fair campsite

At the point where the present track turns to the left (**07**1503masl) to parallel the next stream line the route being attempted goes off-track following the ridge that heads to the NW. Study of the map shows that on the return a more direct line parallel to the Whangaehu Stream can be taken. The ridge is covered in very small pebbles and volcanic sand and uphill can be tiring but downhill is very easy and rapid. Once on the upper sections of the ridge a sharp right turn was made and the soft sandy slope skated down to get into the valley below – fun going down but pretty hard work on the way back up later.

On crossing the rocky stream-line with remnant snow patches the sandy ridge parallel to the Whangaehu was followed upwards to the NW for almost a kilometre. Some wandering about ensued as the cloud came down and good views of the terrain sought. Once the cloud lifted it was possible to overlook the Whangaehu Valley and also see the huts up in the Tukino Ski Village – but there was absolutely no way the planned trip could continue

Slopes were very steep down to the stream line and often covered in snow plus the valley was impassible due to snow and ice shelves. Turning round and retreating was then the order of the day with ideas as to how and when the tramp could be completed.

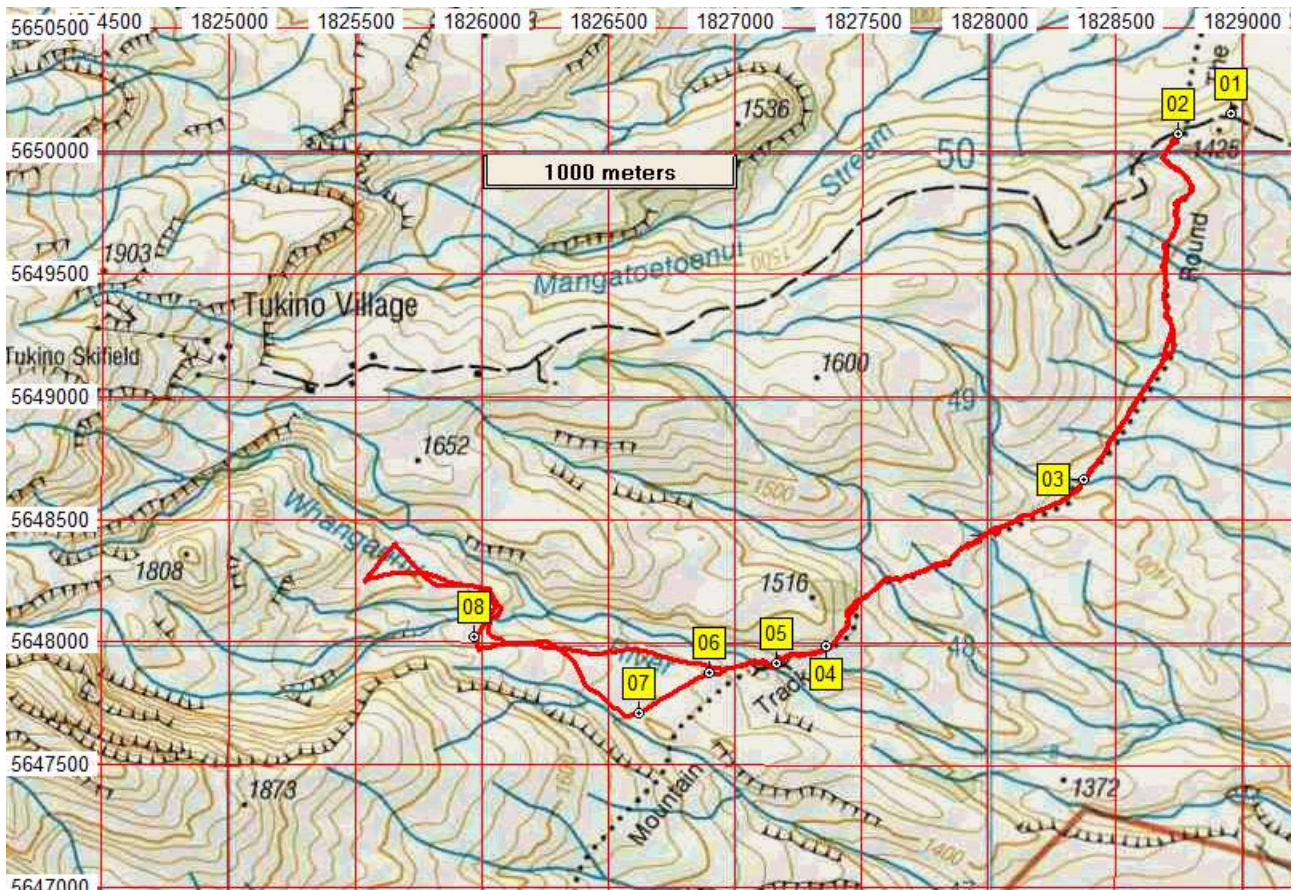


BLUE is Tukino Access Road
RED is tramp line

The 100km drive from Taupo takes about 1:30 minutes

Warning sign





Notes: • *GPS = Garmin GPSMap on NZTM WGS84* • *WP = Waypoint as taken by GPS unit* • *masl = metres above sea level*