

## ZEKE'S HUT and HIHITAKI FOREST SANCTUARY

Topo50 Map: BK35 Taihape

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

**How to get to START:** Exit Taupo on SH1 down the lake to Turangi (45min), Desert Road to Waiouru (1:30min) then 10km on towards Taihape. Look for sign to Hihitaki Forest Sanctuary on the left when the railway line is very close to the road and the Hihitahi Bridge is crossed.

- There is just enough space to park at the edge of the highway
- There is a locked gate across the start of the track and though previously the farmer would give access for parking he now declines to do this
- Just before the Hihitaki bridge there is a gravel road (rail service access) going off and there is a place a few hundred metres down here where it is possible to park off-road

**Rough description:** A moderate out-and-back tramp of about 6 hours covering 6.5km each way with about 750metres ascent and descent each way – a lot of hard work is required. The Hihitaki Forest Sanctuary really works and the birdlife is amazing with endless birdsong and many species seen or heard including: Wood pigeon, Blackbird, Thrush, Chaffinch, Tui, Paradise Goose, Bell Bird, Waxeye and Robin. Much of the walk is in good forest with many Cedars being seen along with the usual native species such as Totara. The target – Zeke's Hut – is a very modern 4 bunk hut with roof water supply and wood-burner but, for some reason, no proper verandah.

**Detail:** From the road (WP699masl) follow the red-topped marker poles which can be seen on crossing the stile at the top of the first paddock, the first few hundred metres heads ENE parallel to the fence and tree line then swings slightly to the left (NE) following the stream line. Within 10 minutes cross the Hautapu River on a very "bouncy" swing bridge (WP701masl) – if you dislike swing bridges then this is a beauty! On crossing the bridge turn sharp left and look for the new track notices (orange triangles) on the fence a hundred metres away – cross the small stream and follow this fence line remaining just upslope of the bog.

The old route, straight ahead on crossing the bridge, will give wet feet as it is very boggy with tussock – it is possible to tussock-hop through when things are frozen but be careful and watch out for the point where the stream line actually vanishes underground for a few metres. The ascent starts after 20 minutes (WP3720masl). From the edge of the bog the red-top posts lead up through the paddock then over a fence (WP4753masl) into low bush on a steep, muddy track with points where falling off the track is possible. Beech then mixed native forest is entered and birds make themselves noticeable by endless, variable calls and bird-song. A descent leads down to cross a small, deeply incised stream line on an earth bridge (WP5765masl) at around 35 minutes then there is a real upwards grunt.

The top part of this ascent is a bit tricky as it is slippery and rocky with not-quite perfect handholds and at the top bear off to the right on the track which is now well marked with orange DoC markers. There is a slight respite on a minor crest (WP6919masl) then a high point is reached (WP7957masl) followed by easy walking on good track along the ridge heading NE until, in 2:15mins, the Hihitaki Trig (WP91107masl) is reached – note that the tower has collapsed or been demolished but there are plenty artefacts to help identify the place.

### Fence on tree line



### Ruapehu through cloud



### Zeke's Hut



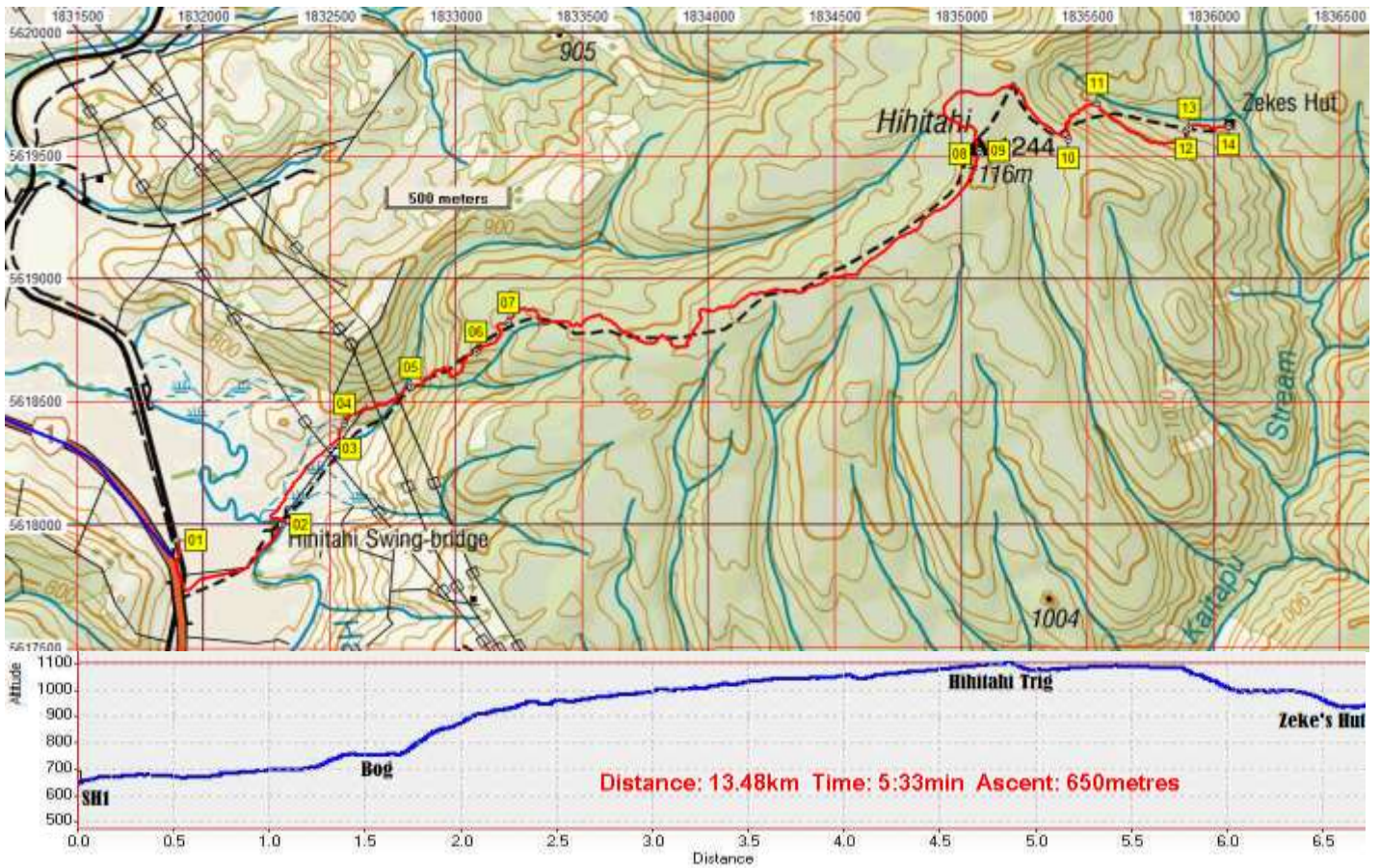
The descent starts soon after the trig and some bits are steep though there are plenty of level sections as well. One particularly steep part (WP101081masl) leads into an open area with views – the open grassy area might well be old landslip area – and there are many dead and dying trees to be seen. Many of these trees are cedar and theories abound as to why so many are dead. Study of the slopes visible across the valley to the north show several tree free grassy slopes and suggest there may well have been several landslips in the area stripping out the trees – these are not fire-breaks and no evidence of bush fires could be seen.

At the lower part of the grassy descent there is an indistinct T-junction (WP11990masl) where the marked track heads SE more or less on the contour. There are a few more steep parts to descend and a sharp lookout will spot a meat-safe hanging in the trees off to the right (WP12950masl) at just short of three hours walking.

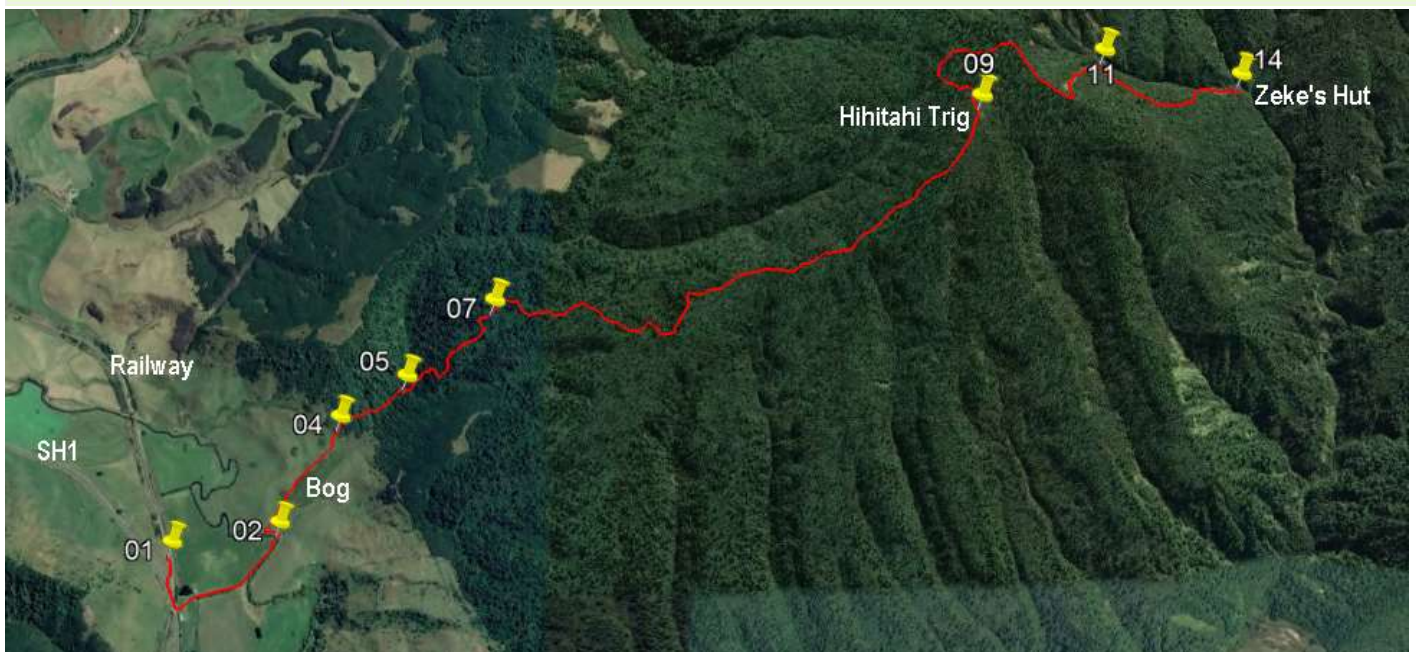
Minutes after this there is a flat platform which must have been the site (WP13942masl) of the old Zeke's Hut – but where the water supply would have been was not obvious. A few hundred metres further on the new Zeke's Hut is found and, as stated earlier, this is a very new hut but it is mystifying as to why there is no proper covered deck (verandah) where wet trampers could dump wet gear then hang it up to dry.



The road route can be seen as the BLUE line whilst the tramp route is the RED line.



Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1831896	5617939	690	Park on side of railway service road on east side of SH1 10km S of Waiouru
02	1832309	5618004	701	14min (725m); Middle of "bouncy" swing bridge then avoid bog walking parallel to fence line
03	1832506	5618312	720	27min (1.20km); End of the bog and start uphill section
04	1832558	5618412	753	30min (1.31km); Cross fence from paddock into bush after fair grunt uphill
05	1832824	5618562	765	44min (1.68km); Earth bridge over stream after steep descent then big grunt upwards
06	1833081	5618706	919	1:06min (2.10km); Gently sloping crest section after steep ascent then up again
07	1833206	5618825	957	1:26min (2.39km); High point in area with many birds and bird-song
08	1835077	5619510	1107	2:16min (4.85km); Easy walking on emerging from forest to bush then open grassy area with views
09	1835071	5619524	1107	2:17min (4.87km); Hihitahi Trig - no tower left standing
10	1835423	5619566	1081	2:34min (5.77km); Steeply downwards to NE after level ridge walking
11	1835538	5619717	990	2:45min (6.06km); Minor T-junction, go right on contour heading SE
12	1835887	5619606	950	2:54min (6.51); Meat safe in trees off right and above old hut site on the steep path downwards
13	1835900	5619616	942	2:55min (6.55km); Shelf on steep downwards section and site of previous (old) hut
14	1836060	5619625	937	3:00min (6.74km); Zeke's Hut



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