

WAIRERE STREAM and WHAKAPAPA RIDGE

260 Series Maps: Ohakune T20 and Ruapehu T20

Topo50 Maps: BH34 Raurimu & BJ34 Mnt Ruapehu

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

- Turn off SH1 on to SH41 on the right and then turn left off SH41 to SH47
- Turn off SH47 on to SH48 signposted for Whakapapa and the Chateau
- Pass the Chateau on the left and turn right almost immediately into the car park with toilets. Park here (**WP01**) or
- Leave car park, turn left and immediately right up side of the Chateau – park at the end of this road (**WP02**).

The drive from Taupo takes 1 hour 15 minutes, route as the red line opposite

Rough description: A moderate to fit loop tramp of 5 to 9 hours depending on how far you go or the weather or conditions allow. This is a high altitude tramp and adverse conditions can exist in any season. There are many bluffs after about 2 hours and good visibility is essential. The tramp starts on the tourist track towards Tama Lakes from the Chateau then heads SSE following the Wairere Stream on a rough track which is unclear at times. About an hour or so out there is a series of waterfalls and impressive whaleback ridges and pinnacles. There is a “grunty” ascent up through bluffs at about 2 hours on to a gently to moderately sloping area – this ascent can be impossible in snow and ice. From here a side due south is done heading straight at Te Heuheu peak. At some point the Wairere Stream line is crossed and the route then loops back towards Whakapapa on the Whakapapa Ridge. This walk can be attempted in wintertime but is better as a summer outing.

Detail: Leave the car park (**WP01** 1137 masl) and head up the road at the side of the Chateau to get on to the very good track heading in an easterly direction which goes to Taranaki Falls and the Tama Lakes. In minutes the trees are left behind for more open terrain and to cross a newish wooden bridge within 20 minutes (**WP03** 1190masl). Five minutes later cross to the other side of the stream on another bridge (**WP04** 1204masl), walking parallel to a largish gully before the path winds round and crosses this gullied stream line.

Progress continues to be fast with an easy ascent and there is the odd bit of boardwalk before descending to the larger bridge over the Wairere Stream (**WP05** 1202masl). Cross the bridge and immediately turn right on to quite a small, sometimes indistinct, rough path heading SE parallel to the stream. In just over one hour total walk time (**WP06** 1256masl) the first in a series of waterfalls on the Wairere Stream will be seen.

Cold stop – steep slopes



For the next hour or so the mountain scenery is superb with several waterfalls plus impressive rocky ridges – some of which look like giant lizards’ or dinosaurs’ tails in misty weather. There is a very clear whaleback rocky ridge (**WP07** 1321masl) and then a flattish area (**WP08** 1350masl) is reached suitable for a refreshment stop and from where one can:

- Branch right for a relatively easy stream crossing to get up on to Whakapapa Ridge and a relatively short tramp – this is the blue line on the map and Google Image
- Branch left up the ridge slope as a short-cut to get to the Gull Colony

Continuing up the Wairere Stream there is soon a small landslip area (**WP09** 1386masl) on the edge of the stream-line to negotiate so some care is needed.

Minutes past this slight hazard there is a small stream (**WP10** 1399masl) to cross and this is the point where, by going left (eastwards) uphill, the Gull Colony is reached – this point can be reached in 1:50 – 2 hours. From this point on there is more ascending to do but none of it is really serious, just a minor grunt in places. At just on 2 hours walking the valley is much narrower (**WS11** 1421masl), a bit steeper and there are bluffs above on the left hand side.

There is then one of the best “dinosaur tail” ridges to walk alongside, before the steepest part of the tramp - getting up and round the top of the next rocky ridge and behind a bit of a pinnacle (**WP12** 1512masl) – steep but with fair footing; In winter time this is a serious ascent as it can be very icy. From some of these points it is possible to look down into the gorge of the Wairere Stream. From now on good weather and visibility are both essential as there are bluffs virtually all around and the stream itself is in a gorge. If it is not possible to see clearly do not attempt to continue but go away and come back another day. See in the photos on the right.

From the ridge behind the pinnacle head due south aiming at the peak of Te Heuheu; there are some rudimentary cairns (**WP13** 1560masl) to follow as the route aims at a largish round boulder on the cross slope. As the boulder is approached slowly move down-slope, left of it and work down to cross the stream at a confluence (**WP14** 1665masl). Once over the stream there is a choice:

- Bear right to the NNW to commence the ascent of Whakapapa Ridge and Whakapapa aiming for **WP22** then **WP23** as shown on the map
- Keep aiming at Te Heuheu (SSE) heading upslope towards a jagged rocky outcrop on the crest.

This bit of the tramp is quite hard work and qualifies as a serious grunt but the views of the rugged terrain and bluffs to the south from the crest (**WP15** 1736masl) makes the effort well worthwhile. Near here is a possible old survey point (**WP16** 1785masl) as there is a piece of water pipe sticking up out of the ground and there are a few old pegs lying about. There is now another long drag upslope to the SE aiming at a pyramid shaped rock (**WP17** 1911masl).

NZ Grid GPS: Geodetic Datum 1949

NZTM GPS: NZTM on WGS84

Access



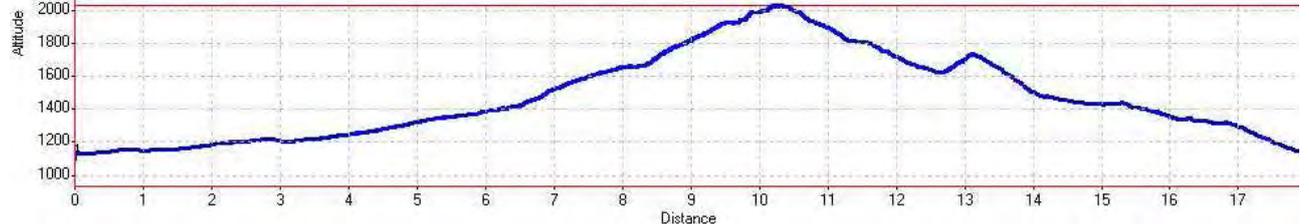
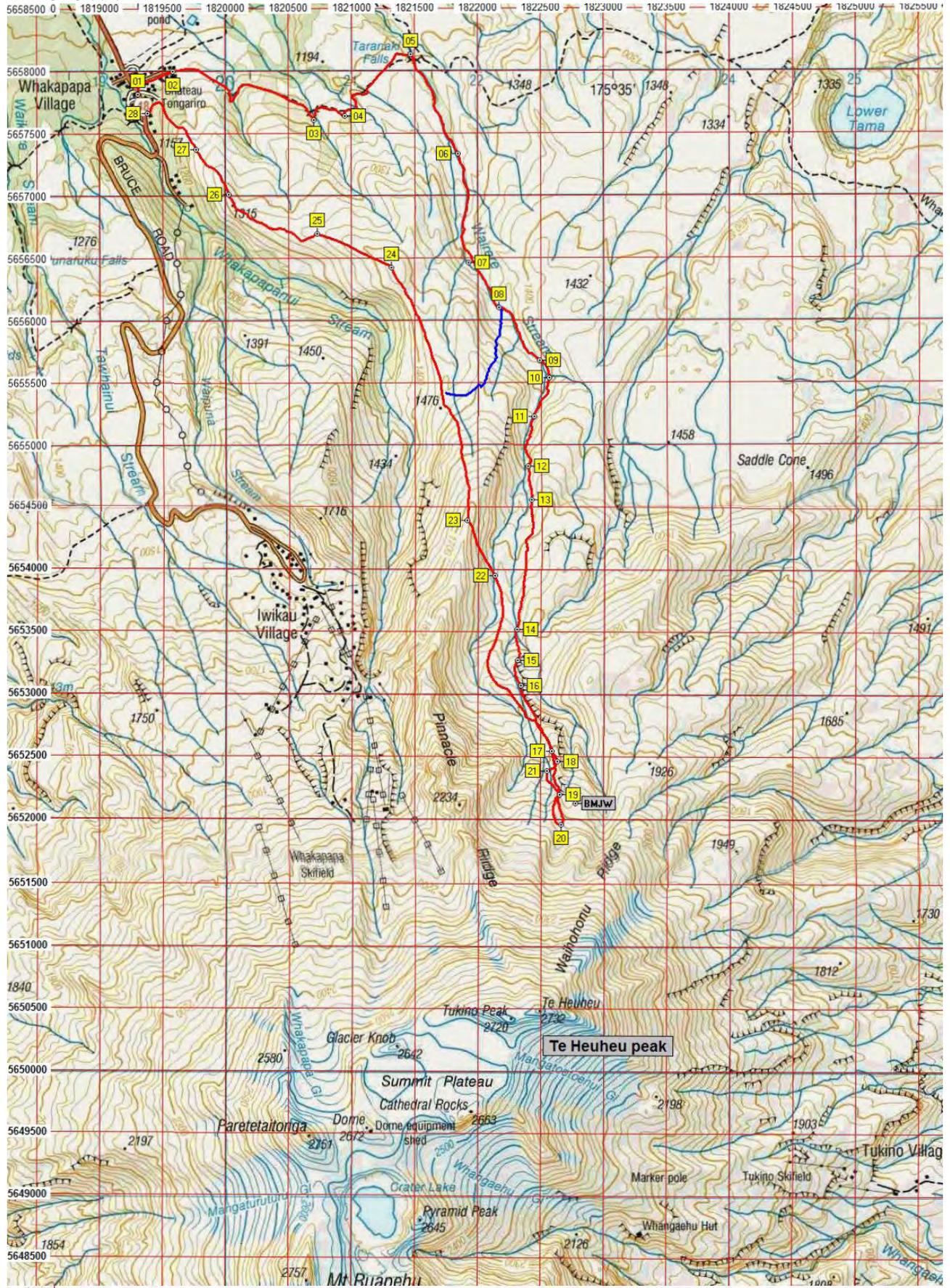
Winter ascent up dinosaur tail



Dinosaur tail up to pinnacle



Map with GPS data



Google Image with GPS data



NB The blue trace on the map and the Google image above is the link from WP08 to follow the shortest route for this tramp giving a walk of 3 – 4 hours but it is still a serious outing, especially in winter. It takes less than 30 minutes from WP08 to the crest of the ridge where great views are obtained and an excellent spot for lunch.

After and above the pyramid-shaped rock the views are again spectacular from the crest of the ridge (**WP18** 1927masl); just past this point there is a gentle fan with small stream-lines on either side covered in smaller boulders and stones with a loose sandy surface.

Continuing in the same direction for another 30 minutes reaches yet another ridge crest (**WP19** 1992masl) with very steep slopes / bluffs on the NE side and views over the Waihohonu Ridge - this is an excellent lunch spot. To get on to the Waihohonu Ridge there is a bit of a dip to go down through unless one holds altitude and tries to stay on the contour; it takes only 5 or 10 minutes anyway. This ridge (**WP20** 2028masl) is also covered in soft sandy material and artifacts can be located from an aircraft which crashed in 1961 when the plane collided with the Pinnacles on Ruapehu and crashed on the Waihohonu Ridge killing 6 people on board.

Down-slope Waihohonu Ridge



Upslope on Waihohonu Ridge



Waypoints NZ Grid

Waypoints NZ Grid				NZTM		
Na...	Easting	Northing	Alt(m)	Description	Easting	Northing
01	2729392	6219670	1137	Car park with toilets opposite the Chateau in Whakapapa	1819306	5657814
02	2729669	6219856	1141	Car park at head of Tama Lakes track up behind the Chateau	1819583	5658000
03	2730783	6219464	1190	20min; bridge in open on very good path	1820697	5657609
04	2731031	6219494	1204	25min; wooden bridge over valley, parallel to large gully then work round gully top	1820946	5657639
05	2731558	6219990	1202	38min; Turn right and head SSE at fifth bridge walking parallel to Wairere Stream on basic track	1821473	5658136
06	2731931	6219187	1256	Superb waterfall on RHS, first in a series of falls	1821846	5657332
07	2732011	6218313	1321	Whale back rock outcrops plus series of waterfalls	1821927	5656458
08	2732251	6217956	1350	1:18min; smoko point with cut-offs. Left up ridge for Gull colony or right over stream for Whakapapa	1822167	5656101
09	2732575	6217532	1386	Land slip area on edge of stream line	1822492	5655677
10	2732651	6217388	1394	1:53min; Stream line and normal turn left for Gull Colony	1822567	5655533
11	2732531	6217077	1421	1:55min; valley steeper and narrow below bluffs on LHS	1822448	5655222
12	2732480	6216679	1512	2:15min; Behind pinnacle after fair grunt up slope. Head due south aiming for Te Heuheu	1822398	5654824
13	2732505	6216414	1560	2:25min; Small cairn on cross slope still aiming at Te Heuheu and right of large round boulder	1822422	5654559
14	2732391	6215377	1665	2:58min; Cross Wairere Stream at confluence then upslope aiming at jagged outcrop on crest	1822309	5653521
15	2732398	6215129	1736	3:11min; Minor ridge above rocky peak with views of pinnacle and bluffs to the south	1822316	5653273
16	2732419	6214926	1785	3:21min; Possible old survey site with pipe embedded in ground + pegs. Sidle right off ridge crest	1822337	5653070
17	2732664	6214398	1911	3:49min; Pyramid shaped rock near ridge crest after long drag upwards to SE	1822583	5652542
18	2732711	6214316	1927	3:53min; Crest of ridge with fantastic views of very rough terrain	1822630	5652460
19	2732729	6214053	1992	4:28min; Crest of next ridge with very steep slope / bluffs on NE side and view over Waihohonu Ridge	1822649	5652197
20	2732745	6213812	2028	5hours; Midslope of sandy fan ridge below Te Heuheu (Artefacts)	1822664	5651955
21	2732631	6214241	1929	Small sandy fan / ridge between two small north flowing stream lines	1822550	5652385
22	2732210	6215808	1628	6:05min; Cross stream line then angle up fair slope heading NNW to get on to Whakapapa Ridge	1822128	5653953
23	2731992	6216251	1733	6:40min; Crest of Whakapapa Ridge below and north of The Pinnacles	1821909	5654395
24	2731400	6218276	1438	7:23min; High point on Whakapapa Ridge after long, fast, soft walking weaving through rocks N and NW	1821315	5656421
25	2730809	6218547	1362	7:42min; First of the vegetated bank on the right, stay left and do not enter the vegetated area yet	1820724	5656692
26	2730107	6218865	1318	7:57min; Clear view of the Chateau. Head downhill on degrading, poor track	1820022	5657009
27	2729853	6219230	1242	8:04min; Table in middle of the excuse of a track - the track soon improves ahead	1819768	5657374
28	2729467	6219520	1146	8:14min; Emerge on to the road at small car park at toilet block in Whakapapa	1819381	5657664
BMJW	2732856	6213983		Possible wreck site (Data supplied by Barbara Morris and John Wheeler, TTC)	1822775	5652127

Old photo of plane wreck site



Photograph supplied by Barbara Morris from previous visits to the site.

Twenty minutes after the high point the first of the vegetation (**WP25** 1362masl) is reached – this is a high eroded bank and is virtually impenetrable so ensure you walk to the left of it. Somewhere around 8 hours there is a clear view of Tongariro Chateau (**WP26** 1318masl) and from here it is down hill on a deteriorating track with the only other feature of note being a picnic table (**WP27** 1242masl) in the middle of the path. The track soon improves as it has been upgraded for tourists and the end is behind the shelter with toilets on the road in Whakapapa (**WP28** 1146masl).

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

The same route can be used for the return but it is much better to retrace the route back to between **WPs16** and **17** but do not cross the stream line towards the east and instead head NW to cross the tributary on the left after walking parallel to that stream for the best part of 2 kilometres (**WP22** 1628masl). On crossing the stream-line head upwards on the slope bearing NNW to get up on top of the Whakapapa Ridge, this is a steep grunt with some loose rocks but most of the slope is very manageable and is quite stable. The ridge is crested (**WP23** 1723masl) just below and north of the Pinnacles. If the whole tramp has been attempted this is a good spot for afternoon tea whilst admiring the scenery.

From here it is about 4km back along the ridge but this is done in about 90 minutes. The only point to watch out for is to ensure that after about 500m north of cresting the ridge the route does bear slightly left - otherwise, if the right branch of the ridge is followed one ends up back in the Wairere Stream valley.

The walking is fast on very soft ground with some weaving about through the rocks and boulders though there is one slightly uphill section to reach a high-point (**WP24** 1438masl).

Panorama back towards Ruapehu



As can be seen below the trip is about 20km when altitude is included

From : 05-Jan-10 07:07:03
To : 05-Jan-10 15:24:54

Time taken : 8:17:50
Total Distance : 17.933 Km

Minimum Speed : 0.000 KPH
Maximum Speed : 6.683 KPH
Average Speed : 2.161 KPH

Minimum Altitude : 1104 Meters
Maximum Altitude : 2029 Meters