

OKATAINA RATA

260 Series Map: Tarawera, V16

Topo50 Map: BE37 Rotorua & BE38 Lake Rotoma

How to get to START: Leave Taupo on SH 1 North

- At Wairakei follow SH 5 to Rotorua
- Enter Rotorua and at roundabout follow SH30 to Whakatane
- At traffic lights go right on SH30 to Whakatane
- Next roundabout go straight on
- Traffic lights go straight on SH 30
- Over mini-roundabout, pass Rotorua Airport
- At Te Ngae go right on SH 30 to Whakatane, Pass "Hell's Gate"
- Hapaurau Bay then pass Western Walkway
- At Ruato turn right into Okataina Road (7km)
- Car park (**OR01**) on left at end of the road; there are toilets.

Rough description: Total driving time is 1:30 min to reach the start. This is a moderate tramp with a lot of off-track ascending and descending through steeply sloping native forest on the east side of Lake Okataina. Overall altitude gain is 430 odd metres whilst the total ascent is nearer 530 metres. As can be seen in the profile the descent is even steeper than the ascent. The target of the tramp is visiting several giant Rata Trees (These are considered trees due to size with the largest seen having a circumference of over 45 feet – that is almost 14 metres). Overall time required is 6- 7 hours as a long time can be spent at each of the giants.

Detail: As in the directions above leave Taupo heading north on SH 1 then go to Rotorua where, soon after entering the city limits, a right turn is made at a round-about for Whakatane on to SH 30. Pass the airport, Hell's Gate then on the edge of the lake at Ruato follow the road off right to Lake Okataina. On reaching the end of this road (7km) enter the car park (**OR01**_{318masl}) on the left overlooking the lake where toilets and the start of the Eastern Walkway path will be found along with many informative notices.

A T-junction (**OR02**_{327masl}) to Te Koutu Pa is arrived at in approximately 15 minutes walking from the car park, going straight arrives on the shoreline in a matter of minutes whilst the route to be followed is off left. Immediately after this there is a very gloomy section of forest to pass through with low light conditions; this is due to being below quite high bluffs. The path is good and undulating to rolling in nature.

Good views over Lake Okataina can be had from Kaiwaka Bay (**OR03**_{316masl}) which is reached in about 40min from the car park. South of Kaiwaka Bay the track follows the shoreline then works inland to round a stream line and through a valley head at the top of a relatively long climb. This point, about 3km out, is reached in less than one hour and then the route heads off steeply uphill in this valley line (**OR04**_{384masl}). This is a real grunt and basic tramping skills are required to get up as it is rather steep, loose underfoot and inclined to be slippery but the vestiges of a track are there to follow and odd bits of reflective fragments of venetian blind material to be spotted as well as the odd pink ribbon. There is a slight respite when the slope eases (**OR05**_{461masl}) then it is up again cresting this section in about 1:40 minutes (**OR06**_{516masl}).

At this point reflective markers can be hard to see on the trees and some of the pink ribbons seem to have been removed – there is not really much of a track. This section then crosses a small dip, passes through rolling terrain and has the odd grunt as it continues to climb. The first Rata (**OR08**_{561masl}) is reached after about 2 hours and five minutes later there is a big Rata (**OR09**_{565masl}) with a "tunnel" through the roots and then there is more ascent.

Real grunt upwards



The "Phantom" (**OR10**_{627masl}) is reached in about 2:15min and this is in a beautiful grove where the walking is really easy. The "Phantom" may well be the largest Rata in the country in that the measured girth or "dbh" (diameter at breast height) is a staggering 45 feet 6 inches (about 14 metres) circumference. There is no official (as yet) estimate of the age but the botanist in the party stated that it could be anything from 500 to 1,000 years old.

Vegetable caterpillar



Whilst in the soil caterpillars of various moths get invaded by fungus which takes over, the caterpillar becomes woody, grows and sends up shoots.

NZ Grid GPS: Geodetic Datum 1949

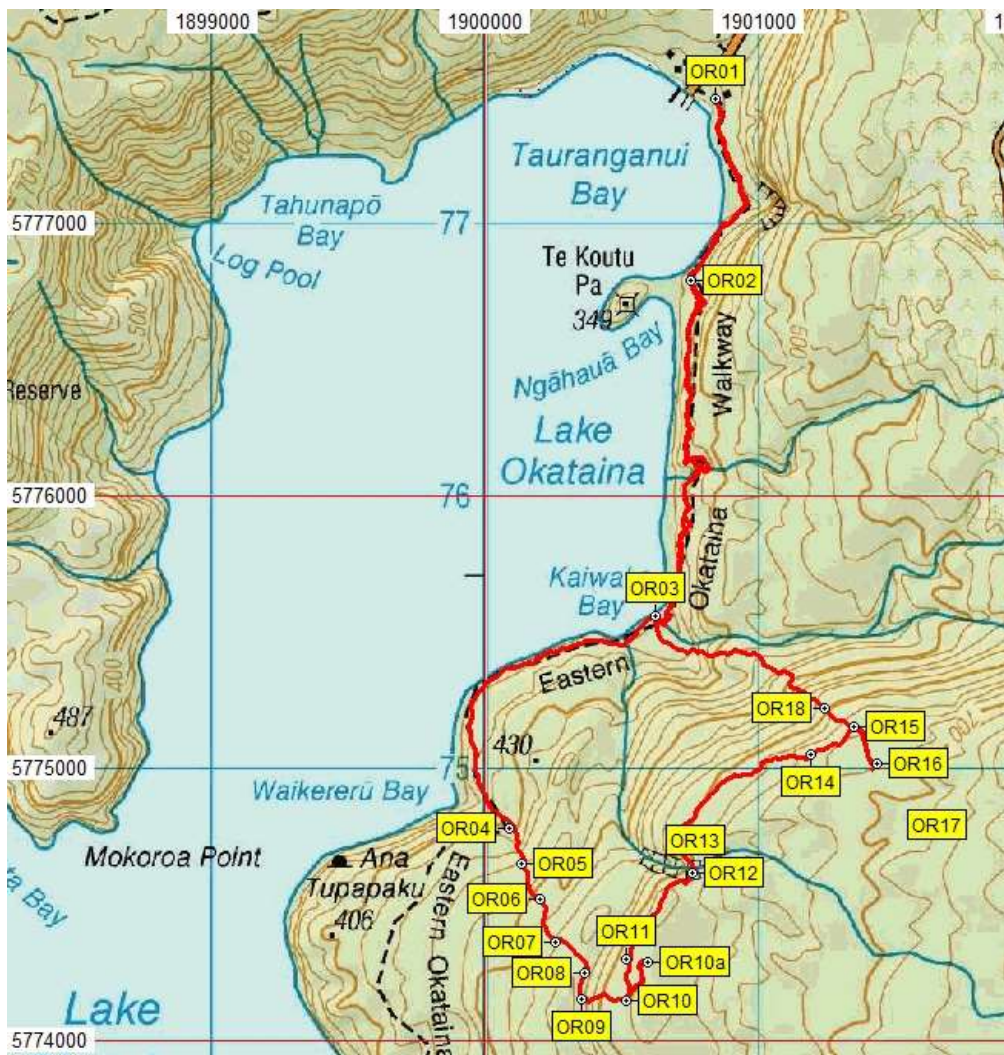
NZTM GPS: NZTM on WGS84

Access



The route can be seen as the red line on the map above whilst the tramp location is the blue line below the yellow car park waypoint.

Map with GPS data

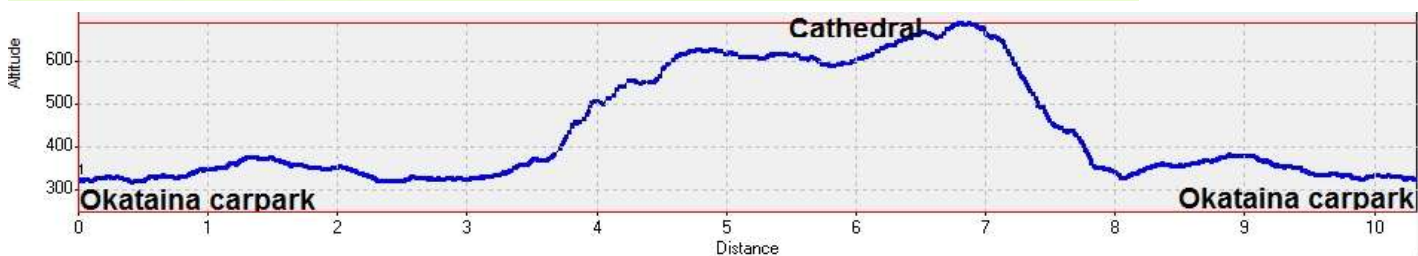


Waypoints – NZ Grid

| N... | Easting | Northing | Alt(m) | Description |
|-------|---------|----------|--------|--|
| OR01 | 2811008 | 6339156 | 318 | Car park at end of Lake Okataina Road |
| OR02 | 2810911 | 6338488 | 327 | 15min (0.8km); Y-fork with right for beach at Te Koutu Pa and left for Okataina Walkway |
| OR03 | 2810781 | 6337257 | 316 | 40min (2.4km); Kaiwaka Bay with good lake views |
| OR04 | 2810248 | 6336482 | 384 | 1:05min (3.6km); Top of long uphill slope turn off left steeply uphill in valley head |
| OR05 | 2810292 | 6336352 | 461 | 1:32min (3.8km); Slight respite after very steep, slippery, root infested grunt upwards |
| OR06 | 2810354 | 6336225 | 516 | 1:41min (4km); On crest at top of next grunt up with white reflectives/pink ribbons |
| OR07 | 2810416 | 6336065 | 549 | 1:51min (4.2km); Undulating area after mini grunt |
| OR08 | 2810521 | 6335949 | 561 | 1:58min (4.4km); First Rata |
| OR09 | 2810508 | 6335858 | 565 | 2:02min (4.5km); Big Rata with tunnel through the roots then uphill again |
| OR10 | 2810672 | 6335854 | 627 | 2:15min (4.7km); On crest area in grove and below the "Phantom" Rata |
| OR10a | 2810753 | 6335993 | | 2:38min (4.9km); "Bridge" Rata on small ribboned out & back track |
| OR11 | 2810675 | 6336002 | 623 | 2:58min (5.2km); Beautiful grove with deer wallow and "Vegetable Caterpillars" |
| OR12 | 2810915 | 6336320 | 616 | 3:38min (5.6km); Open area with gully to lake on LHS then gently down past 9.1m dbh Rata |
| OR13 | 2810927 | 6336436 | 621 | 3:42min (5.8km); Rata with side-stay and reportedly pumice in upper storeys |
| OR14 | 2811352 | 6336752 | 666 | 4:10min (6.4km); Uphill once more, quite steep and slippery |
| OR15 | 2811513 | 6336856 | 668 | 4:18min (6.6km); Small junction near 11.7m dbh Rata in gully, the uphill to SE for Cathedral Rata |
| OR16 | 2811592 | 6336719 | 696 | 4:31min (6.8km); Cathedral Rata then backtrack to junction OR15 |
| OR17 | 2811809 | 6336491 | 746 | 5 hours; 15 minute extension to lone tree (Putaputaweta) in clearing on old logging road |
| OR18 | 2811403 | 6336920 | 628 | 4 - 5 hours (7.2km); Commence very steep tricky descent with white "venetian" markers |
| OR19 | 2810728 | 6337231 | 329 | 5:57min (8.1km); Steep bank to rejoin Okataina Walkway with 30min to the right for car park (10.4km) |

NZTM

| Easting | Northing |
|---------|----------|
| 1900848 | 5777457 |
| 1900752 | 5776788 |
| 1900623 | 5775556 |
| 1900091 | 5774780 |
| 1900136 | 5774649 |
| 1900198 | 5774522 |
| 1900259 | 5774362 |
| 1900365 | 5774246 |
| 1900352 | 5774155 |
| 1900516 | 5774151 |
| 1900597 | 5774290 |
| 1900519 | 5774299 |
| 1900759 | 5774618 |
| 1900771 | 5774734 |
| 1901195 | 5775051 |
| 1901356 | 5775155 |
| 1901436 | 5775019 |
| 1901654 | 5774791 |
| 1901246 | 5775219 |
| 1900570 | 5775530 |



Phantom (45 feet 6 inches/14 metre girth)



From the “Phantom” there is a small ribbon marked trail that heads just E of N and it leads to yet another Rata – christened the “Bridge” by the group (OR10a). This short diversion takes about 25min for the 500m or so.

The way home from the Cathedral is, as they say, all downhill back to the edge of Lake Okataina. But – be warned – there are some very steep sections and care must be taken, plus the route marking is not too clear at times so hurrying is not advised. There is a particularly steep section about 30 minutes down from the top (OR18^{628masl}) and much use of the “bum-brake” may be required leading to dirty shorts .

The main Okataina Walkway path is re-joined (OR03^{316masl}) 2.5km out from the car park and this final stage of the return takes about 30 minutes. The whole outing can take about 7 hours but the time can be reduced by not doing the extension to the lone tree and by spending less time studying the purpose of the tramp – the Ratas.



The trail proper heads due north from the “Phantom” and enters a very pleasant grove (OR11^{623masl}) within which there is a deer wallow (small pond) and also “vegetable caterpillars”.

The walking remains very pleasant and easy as a gully on the left (OR12^{616masl}) offers a glimpse of where the lake is then there is a gentle downhill section passing yet another giant with a girth of over 9 metres. A climbable Rata is then to be found slightly off trail on the right (OR13^{621masl}) and this one has a side branch which looks like a support stay and in the past has given access to the upper storeys to adventurous trampers and, reportedly, some pumice was found at some height up the tree. More ascending on a steep slippery slope (OR14^{666masl}) leads to a small T-junction (OR15^{668masl}) with another giant Rata (circumference 11.7metres) in a small gully. From the junction heading uphill to the SE leads to the “Cathedral” Rata (OR16^{696masl}). This one is so photogenic the reason for the long day can be understood. Normally a day tramp would descend from here but there is an extension that can be undertaken – uphill of course.

By going SE from the “Cathedral” through some Punga, up a minor slope and ascending via a shallow gully a lone Putaputaweta tree in a clearing (OR17^{746masl}) is reached in about 15 minutes. This tree stands on an old forest logging road which would connect to a mapped road / track that can be located to the east on the map. A full 5 hours will have passed by the time this tree is reached but this time could be reduced by spending less time admiring the vegetation!

The Cathedral



Distance and Altitude Data

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Altitude gain | 436 metres |
| Overall ascent | 530 metres |
| Inwards | 436m ascent over 8.5km |
| Outwards | 436m descent over 1.5km |
| Distance walked | 10.3km |
| Total time | 6 - 7 hours |
| Walking time | 5 – 6 hours |

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