

PUKEKAIKIORE CIRCUIT

Topo50 Map: BH34 Raurimu & BH35 Turangi

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START: Exit Taupo on SH1 down the lake for 47km in 45 minutes to Turangi then:

- Follow the Desert Highway (**SH1**), turn off right to SH46 for Rangipo
- Continue on **SH46** to the T-junction with **SH47** and turn left
- At 90km (1:15 min) turn left on to gravel road for Mangatepopo & Tongariro Alpine Crossing – speed limit 40kph
- Park and off-load at car park with toilets at 96km, about 1 hour 30 minutes driving.

Rough Description: A fairly strenuous walk of 5-6 hours which can be stretched to 7 hours if alternative routing is followed. The preferred route covers about 12km, whilst the alternative is close to 15km, in some of the wildest terrain in the Tongariro National Park. Starts at Mangatepopo car park heading towards the Tongariro Alpine Crossing and branches off before reaching the Mangatepopo Hut on a clockwise loop around Pukekaikioire (1692metres) on a rough, back-country track which is basically unmarked whilst it clammers over scoria mounds filling river valleys. The return means bush bashing to join the Round the Mountain Track (RMT) from the Chateau to Mangatepopo. The longer route is not recommended for the faint-hearted.

RMT junction



Careful planning and attention to the weather must be applied. The tramp starts at 1000 masl at Mangatepopo and rises to 1600m just below Ngauruhoe halfway through the tramp having crossed some of the wildest, roughest terrain to be found in this area. At any time of the year be prepared for some serious weather changes as temperature will drop as the ascent is made and there is some serious exposure to any winds that blow. If high winds or other inclement weather is forecast think twice before starting since there are some very serious bluffs on the route and they must be visible at all times and ensure full wet-weather and cold gear is carried plus, especially in warm weather, in excess of a couple of litres of water – there is none available once you start ascending. The path is first rate as far as the turn-off (**02 1145masl**) then it is back-country grade with very few pole markers and basically off-track walking till you re-join the badly degraded RMT (**16 1174masl**)

Detail: Make an early start from Taupo (7:30 am) as it takes 90 minutes to drive the 96km to Mangatepopo car park (**01 1019masl**) where there are always several coaches, vans and cars off-loading some hundreds of people about to do the Alpine Crossing – most of these people want to use the toilets so there will be a queue. The path starts on a section of boardwalk near the toilets and heads off up-valley basically in an easterly direction.

Within 20-30 minutes the sign indicating the path to Whakapapa is reached (**18 1185masl**) then minutes later there is a branch off right (**02 1145masl**) basically into a stream line heading SE passing in and out of the river bed several times on a very basic track heading towards bluffs. Below the bluffs enter a narrow valley heading ENE (**03 1184masl**); the track is clearer now and there are a few marker poles.

Within the hour a minor crest (**04 1284masl**) is reached after a small grunt then the track continues upwards parallel to a very deep gully on the right. Ten minutes later the track vanishes and the first of the scoria mounds has to be crossed (**05 1353masl**) as the route continues upwards on the true left bank. A good morning smoko point is arrived at (**06 1381masl**) within 90 minutes at a group of boulders at a small confluence and just past a minor Y-fork where a very steep path goes off up the stream joining from the right. The track requires full concentration from now on as it is quite tricky in places.

For the next 30 minutes the going is very rough going in and out of the stream line, over mounds of scoria and working along the junction between the scoria flows and the older country rock; there are several occurrences of basin like features between the mounds of scoria. Around 2:15 min walking the high point (**09 1600masl**) is reached when the route ahead should be studied and compared with the map whilst the Chateau can be seen in the distance. The descent now starts and this is tricky whichever choice is made, on the rough track at the side of the scoria or over the top of the scoria. Much of this section is in a long, steep, narrow V-shaped valley which discharges on to a plain or fan area facing a small bluff with columnar rock formation (**10 1432masl**). At about 3 hours the route bears right (**11 1425masl**) round past this columnar formation at the foot of the ridge heading for an upstanding rock on the next ridge.

Start of the descent



This large rock (**12 1431masl**) makes a good spot for lunch after traversing a very pleasant slope that is covered in soft mosses and lichens with the odd wet area from water seepage and there is a good view of the Chateau. It is then necessary to loop round the top a valley head to avoid losing too much height as the route continues to the NW. Just short of 4 hours the descent starts (**13 1437masl**) when a gully can be seen ahead.

Access



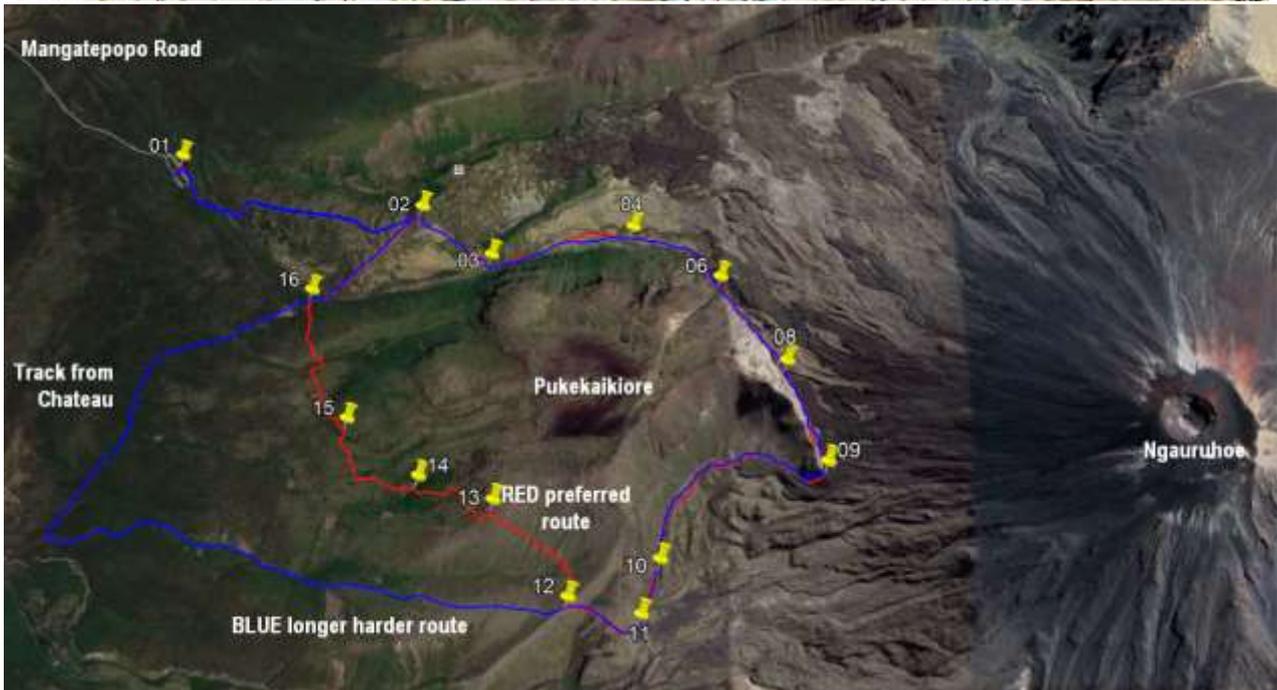
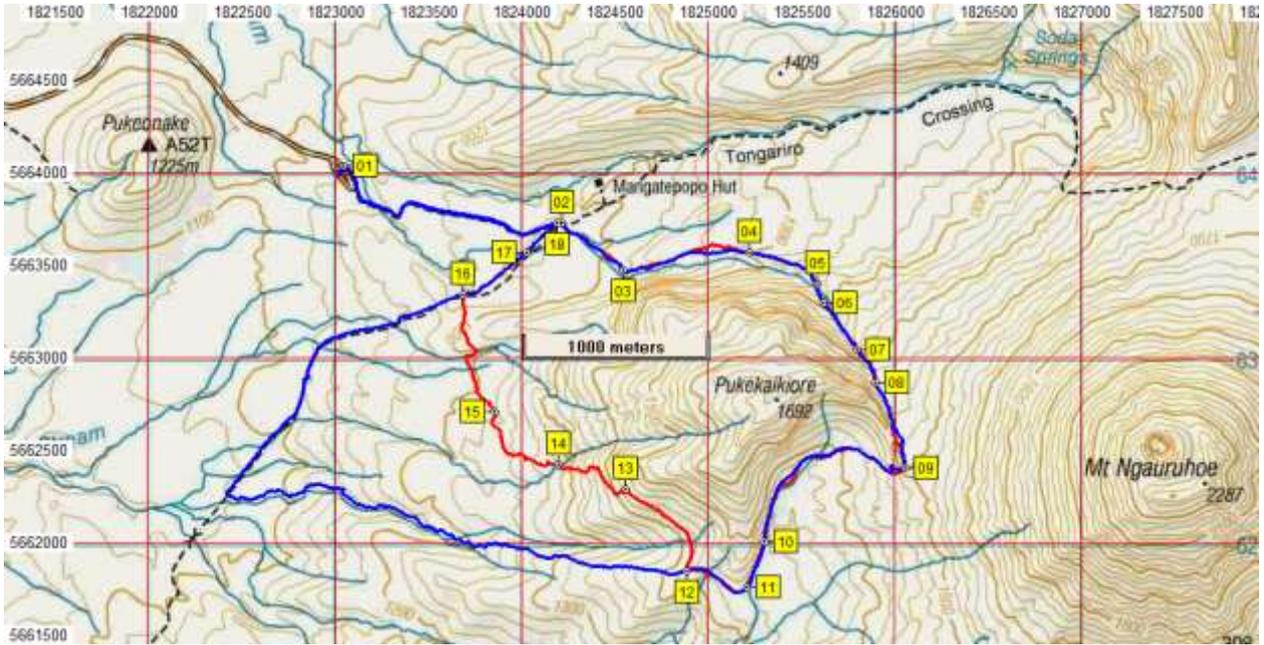
Into valley below bluffs



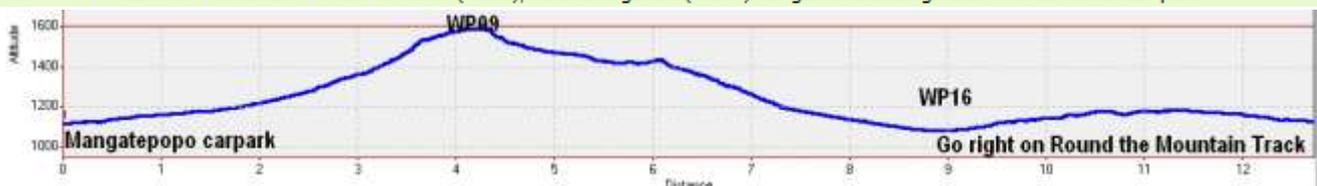
GPS check



Red = preferred route / blue = longer harder route



Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
01	1823045	5664035	1019	Car park at Mangatepopo Road end
02	1824214	5663730	1145	22min (1.5km); right off track just past junction with Round the Mountain Track (RMT) heading SE
03	1824544	5663476	1184	30min (1.9km); enter narrow valley to ENE below bluffs on RHS
04	1825221	5663570	1284	47min (2.6km); minor grunt, go up ESE parallel to deep valley on S (true right)
05	1825584	5663400	1353	57min (3km); off path over scoria valley fill and go up on true left bank of stream
06	1825617	5663295	1381	1hr (3.1km) confluence of stream from right 50m SE of minor Y-junction
07	1825796	5663047	1465	1:28min (3.5km); into stream line on rough rocky plus scoria steep ascent to SE
08	1825894	5662869	1528	1:43min (3.7km); nose of scoria flow then up RHS on junction of scoria and rock. Several flows.
09	1826051	5662403	1600	2:19min (4.3km); high point with view S and SW plus Chateau then start steep, rough descent to NW
10	1825301	5662002	1432	3:15min (5.4km); exit long, narrow V-shaped valley facing small columnar bluff at end of ridge
11	1825209	5661760	1425	3:20min (5.7km); snout of ridge end below columnar bluffs; go up towards rock on ridge
12	1824883	5661847	1431	3:28min (6.1km); large rock with Chateau view then go in a loop NW up through valley head
13	1824556	5662292	1437	3:53min (7.4km); cross slope with gully ahead, view of Mangatepopo car park. Head W downslope
14	1824197	5662425	1275	4:21min (7.9km); into stream line from thick scratchy bush on steep slope
15	1823857	5662710	1221	4:53min (8.6km); stream with old iron track marker after section through scratchy bush.
16	1823683	5663341	1174	5:25min (9.3km); meet and go right (E) on badly degraded RMT
17	1824028	5663570	1176	5:34min (9.8km); cross E-W flowing stream line on the RMT
18	1824191	5663725	1185	5:40min (10km); meet and go left (WSW) Tongariro Crossing track with 20 min to car park



Columnar bluff



The decision to start going down is sensible due to the gully ahead plus the fact that by staying high there would be bluffs to contend with. The Mangatepopo car park can be seen from this area but so can the waist high bush that has to be walked through. An open, eroded area is crossed at about 4:15min after crossing a small stream line (**14**^{1275masl}) on emerging from the thick bush on a steep slope. Then an old iron track marker pole (**15**^{1221masl}) is located with the slightest indication of an old unused track. Progress is slow and very frustrating though this bush area, especially as the RMT can be seen in the distance but never seems to get any closer. The badly eroded RMT is met at about 5 hours (**16**^{1174masl}) and, by going right (E then NE), the Tongariro Alpine Crossing track (**18**^{1185masl}) is arrived at some 30 minutes later where the information boards can be studied as an excuse for a rest before tackling the 20 minute walk back to Mangatepopo car park.

If a longer, harder outing is desired then follow the route shown in blue on the map and Google image. From point **12** head more or less west down the gently sloping ridge instead of to the NW and through the next stream line. But be warned the “scratchy” bush become less fun as it keeps making progress slow and fraught with tumbles as the ground just cannot be seen and foot placement is a lottery. Eventually the way out of this is much more fun but just as hard work – get into the stream line and follow it. However, the rocks are all very slippery, there is still a lot of bush bashing through the thick scratchy vegetation and trips and falls are still more than likely. The going is painfully slow but is good fun in a perverse sort of way. Eventually pick up the track from Whakapapa to Mangatepopo and head NE for 2km or so to arrive at waypoint **16** which is less than an hour from the end of the tramp at Mangatepopo carpark

Summer conditions



View of route ahead from the high point

Winter conditions



Cold Hobbit in winter conditions



Notes:

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

Total Time: 6 hours

Total Walk Time: 5 hours 15 minutes

Total walk length: 11.5 (10km from gps plus 1.5km return to car park)

Overall altitude gain: 600metres

Time taken : 5:38:11

Total Distance : 9.982 Km

Average Speed : 1.771 KPH

Minimum Altitude : 1011 Meters

Maximum Altitude : 1601 Meters