

URCHIN and WAIPAKIHI RIVER

Topo50 Map: BH35 Turangi

GPS: NZTM on WGS84

How to get to START:

- Exit Taupo southwards on **SH1** to Turangi (45 min)
- From Turangi stay on SH1 passing the turn off to SH46
- Turn left into **Kaimanawa Road** at 63.5km (**WP00**)
- Cross single lane bridge at 66.5km (1 hour) – still on tar seal
- At 67km (just over 1 hour) turn right on to Urchin signed gravel road
- At 68.5 km tight turn to left on to steep hill, slippery when wet
- At 69.8 km stay left again still on gravel
- At 71 km turn into car park on your right (**WP01**) with track signs etc.

Kaimanawa Road is sealed and normal width but about 3km down it there is a single lane bridge so be prepared to give way. Almost immediately after this there is a signed track on the right for Urchin and other locations – this is a gravel track with several tight turns and steep slopes.

Rough description: A moderate to moderate plus walk of around 14km taking about 4–6 hours depending on whether the Trig Point of Urchin is the target, or if the walk is extended along the ridge to then descend into the Waipakihi Valley (**WP11**^{969masl}) or go to the end of the Urchin ridge to the new link track to Umukarikari. The first and last options entail 13–14km distance with over 1000m ascent on the Waipakihi option. On a windy day this is a very exposed tramp and care must be taken but, if clear, the views are worth it.

The track is good all the way with no “tricky” or “technical” bits and suitable for all trampers apart from the descent / re-ascent to the Waipakihi River. The start is slightly user-unfriendly as it is straight uphill on leaving the car park (**WP01**^{859masl}). However moderate effort is needed only for a short time and then the track is more undulating than hilly. The bush line should be reached in well under two hours then it is again a slight effort to push up the gravelly track to the trig point on the summit of Urchin (**WP07**^{1394masl}) in about 2 hours. It is then possible to continue for another hour or so on the eroded ridge path. A decision is then made as to a descent into the Waipakihi Valley or go look at the route to Umukarikari or then again to turn round and go back. On wet days be ready to get out and push on the gravel road if the vehicle does not have all-terrain tyres and / or 4-wheel drive but, normally, all vehicles can pass without much of a problem. The car park for the start of the Urchin track is on the right near a crest and is easily spotted – on gaining this crest there is a construction with a mast on the left of the road just past the car park. There are no facilities in this car park.

Detail: Leave the rear of the car park on the well signed track and immediately start ascending, this is a bit steep but the track is in good condition with very few steps indeed. The first hour or so is in good forest with some huge trees and remnants of huge trees. Also noted early on was a tree with anti-possum bands plus a wire cage (**WP02**^{917masl}) – protection for some mistletoe. There are a few switchback turns with the first one being reached in just over 15 minutes where a low branch offers a perfect seat. Reference to the map will explain why the going is a bit hard since the track is making its way up a ridge but the slope soon levels off, a minor crest (**WP03**^{1135masl}) is reached, there are suitable places for a rest stop and since the forest is much more open some views can be seen.

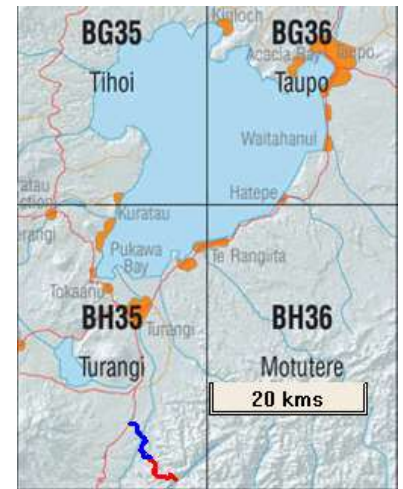
Happy trampers at the trig



Ruapehu to Taupo panorama



The sign at the track junction states that it can take an hour to 1:30min to the river but in fact the descent can be made in about 40minutes, though this is not advised to the faint-hearted or wobbly knee brigade, and the re-ascent takes under an hour.



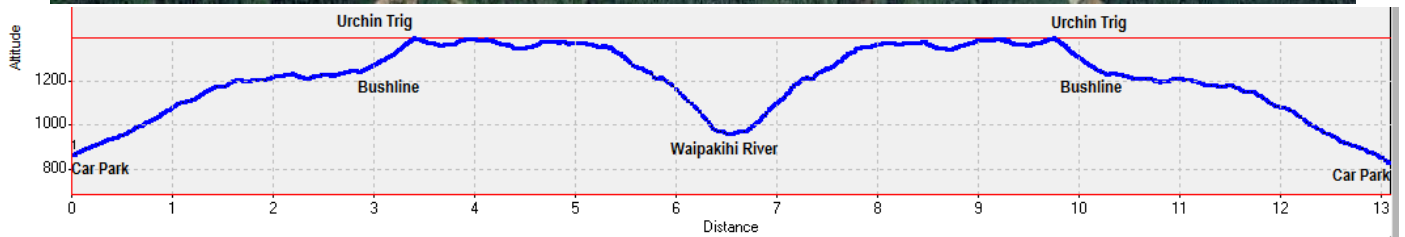
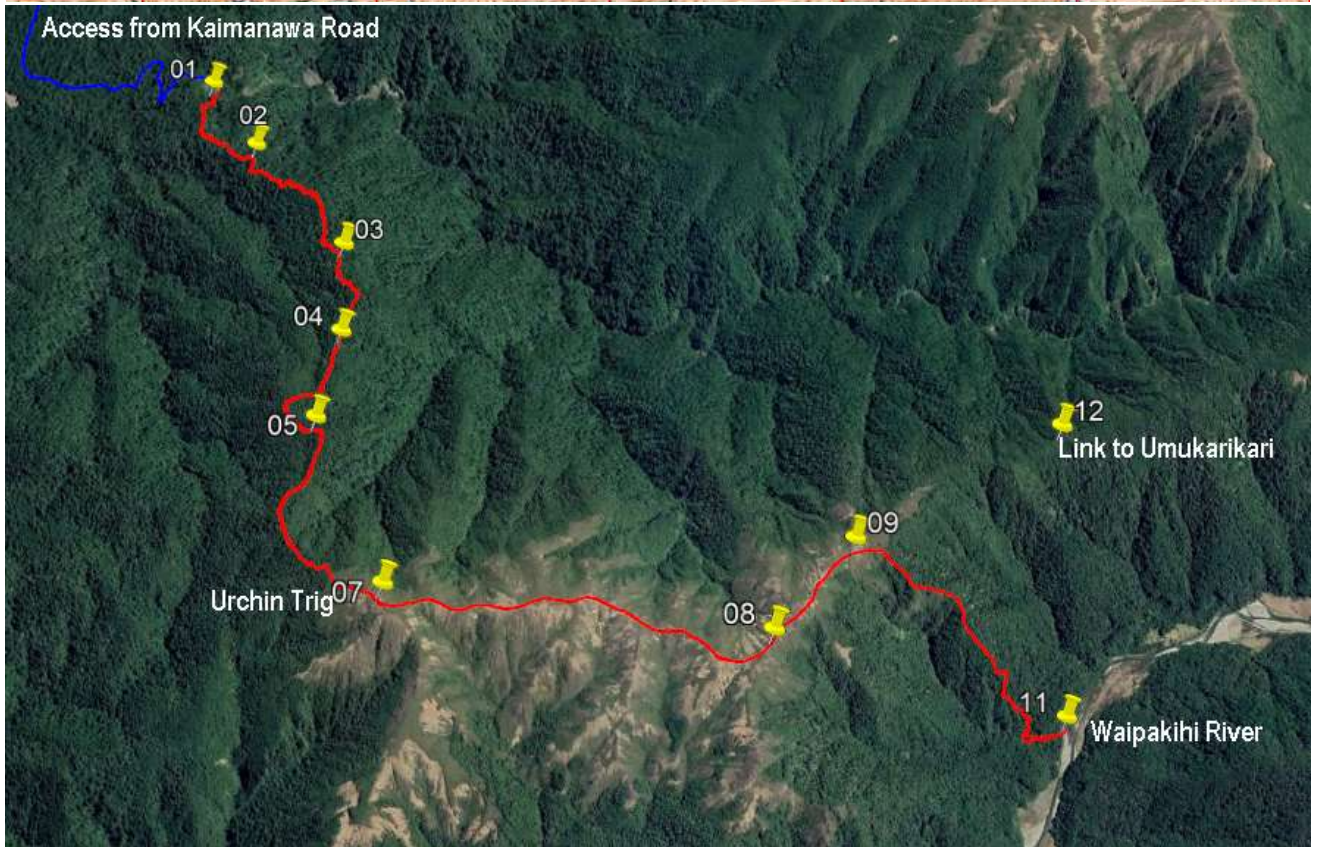
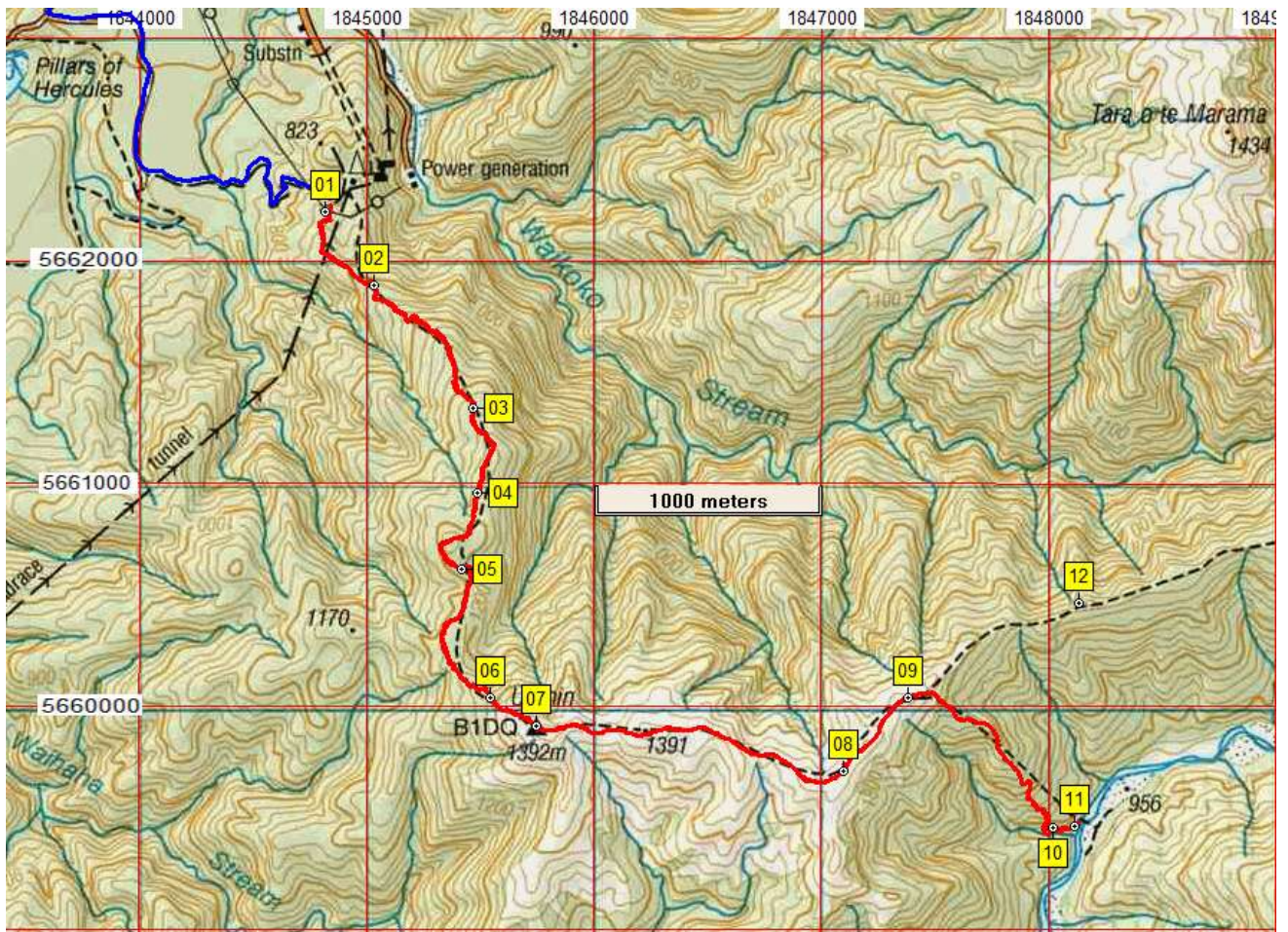
Time from Taupo 1:10 minutes

BLUE = Kaimanawa Road

RED = tramp route

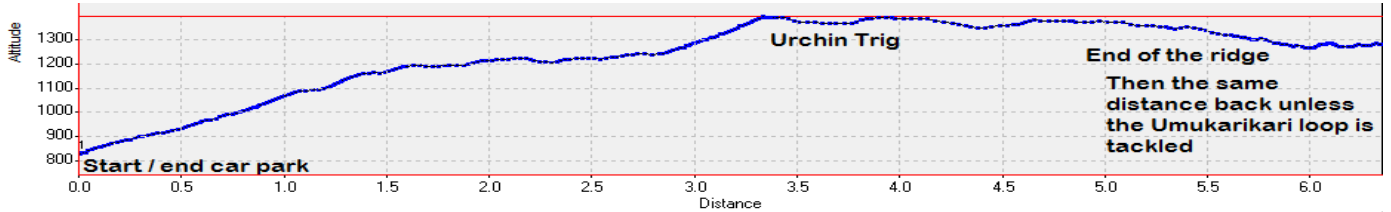
Good forest track





Name	Easting	Northing	Alt...	Description
00	1842287	5666577		Turn left off Desert Road SH1 to Kaimanawa Road
01	1844814	5662218	859	Urchin carpark, 71km and 1:10min from Taupo
02	1845030	5661892	917	13min (0.53km); steep ascent, huge trees + mistletoe cage
03	1845467	5661336	1135	43min (1.44km); minor crest, more or less even walking and open woodland
04	1845489	5660961	1178	54min (1.89km); end of level / undulating area with view of Urchin to the SE
05	1845420	5660615	1193	1:03min (2.37km); more ascending again plus rolling terrain
06	1845548	5660042	1312	1:27min (3.20km); bush line and on to steeper, stony poled track
07	1845744	5659914	1394	1:45min (3.45km); Urchin trig point and 5:00-5:15min on return
08	1847098	5659713	1368	2:16min (4.96km); rough eroded ridge track with view of Waipakihi River
09	1847384	5660041	1349	2:26min (5.44km); right to Waipakihi River straight for Umukarikari link (4:26min on return)
10	1848024	5659455	979	3:06min (6.61km); turn left (E) on meeting side stream
11	1848119	5659466	969	3:36min (6.76km); edge of the Waipakihi River with hunters' campsites
12	1848132	5660468	1279	Very narrow, undulating, gnarly, grunty ridge on Umukarikari link

Tramp profile – end of the ridge option



The Y-junction (**WP09**^{1349masl}) has one branch descending down right into the Waipakihi valley on a sometimes slightly tricky track that takes less than an hour to reach firstly a side stream (**WP109**^{79masl}) and minutes later the edge of the Waipakihi River (**WP11**^{969masl}). This is a good lunch spot at the site where hunters camp-out. There is an option to then head for the Waipakihi Hut by going upstream for a few hours. The re-ascent up the steep slope can be completed in about an hour back to the track junction (**WP09**) and hence back to the car park unless one explores the end of the ridge and the route to Umukarikari. The left or straight-ahead option from **WP09** towards **WP12** follows the route for the loop track to link to Umukarikari just past the end of the ridge. The track then descends a bit to go over a small watershed then heads up into the bush and scrubby trees.

The next part is very new, raw track and not easy to traverse as it heads down the ridge before starting a long ascent to the NE on Umukarikari. This final option via Umukarikari is gazetted by DoC as requiring around 10 hours for the complete trip and is quite a serious walk not to be undertaken without careful planning and consideration. Winds on much of this tramp from before the Urchin Trig to the end of the ridge can be very strong and, combined with the very low air temperature in winter time, the section between **WP06** and **09** can prove to be exhilarating but very hard work. Wind normally sweeps up the gullies and side valleys from the southern side of the ridge.

Iced track



Smoko at bush-line



Lunch at river edge



Cold trampers



Waipakihi or Umukarikari?



New track to Umukarikari



Wind blasted photographer



View into Waipakihi River



Waipakihi River



GPS Notes:

- **GPS** Garmin GPSmap 62sc **WP** = Waypoint as taken by GPS unit **masl** = metres above sea level