

PILLARS of HERCULES and TREE TRUNK GORGE

260 Series Maps: T19 Tongariro

Topo50 Map: BH35 Turangi

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

- Exit Taupo southwards on **SH1** to Turangi (45 min)
- From Turangi stay on SH1 passing the turn off to SH46
- At 55 min (63km) a passing lane starts, get into left lane
- Turn left into **Kaimanawa Road** at 63.5km
- Cross single lane bridge at 66.5km (1 hour) – still on tar seal
- At 67km (just over 1 hour) turn right on to gravel road with signs for Umukarikari, Urchin and Pillars of Hercules and follow sign to car park for Pillars.

Rough description: A very pleasant little stroll on first rate track through mature broadleaf forest from the bridge over the gorge at Pillars of Hercules to the road bridge on Tree Trunk Road over the gorge. There are a couple of stream crossings so wet feet are possible and during wet weather the second crossing is not advisable as the stream is quite deep and can be swift flowing. This can be an out and back or a one way trip if a driver is used to move the transport.

Detail: As noted on the map, park in the Pillars car park (**WP1** 674masl) and before setting off on the designated tramp cross the bridge following the signs for the bike track – this track goes out to the Desert Road and can be walked if transport is arranged to pick up at the other end since one does not want to be walking on the Desert Road.

From the bridge have a look downwards in to the deep gorge below and also in an easterly direction where, on a good day, Urchin and Umukarikari can both be seen.

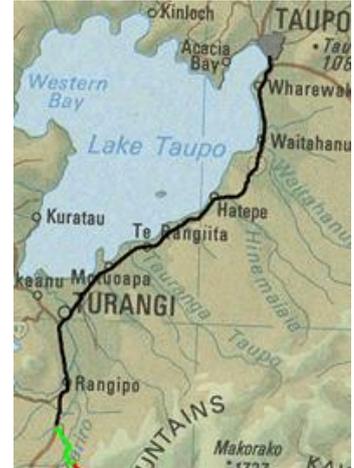
Go back to the car park and follow the well-marked track heading towards the Urchin camp site, the sign says 30 minutes but only a very slow walker takes that long. The track starts off zig-zagging upwards, is a delight in being well formed, passes through very attractive forest and is, in places, cut as a shelf on the side of the steep side slope. On bad weather days it is quite well protected but the wind can channel through here.

After about 20 minutes, pass through a barrier (**WP2** 761masl), turn right on a gravel road then have a look at the Urchin camp-site (**WP3** 759masl) on the right – grassy area with picnic table, place for a fire and with a DoC toilet. Re-cross the gravel road and slip off left on to the track for Tree Trunk Gorge – this track in fact is an old wide road and very easy walking.

NZ Grid GPS: Geodetic Datum 1949

NZTM GPS: NZTM on WGS84

Access



Pillars of Hercules Bridge

Superb track

Urchin Camp Site



Tree Trunk Gorge Track



After about 10 minutes on this track there is a barrier (**WP4** 700masl) where bikes have to go left but trampers can go straight ahead and cross the very degraded earth bridge, after this the track heads south following the stream line for a bit. A few hundred metres after this there is a small bridge then a section of undulating track which heads down to cross the next stream – at this point follow the orange track markers as the old track is badly degraded and crossing the stream can be tricky.

From here there is then a steady, gentle ascent to a high point at about 4km total distance. The track heads down towards the target and it does get steeper, narrower and the surface rougher. After a sharp turn on the track there is a bluff on the right and soon a small stream line (**WP5** 689masl) with huge logs as stepping stones has to be crossed. Almost immediately after this a decision has to be made to cross the next stream or not (**WP6** 688masl). After periods of extended rain this stream line can be tricky so a decision is required – cross or head back.

The end point of the track on Tree Trunk Gorge Road (**WP7** 744masl) can be seen on the map – obviously there is a section of uphill after crossing the stream.

Stepping logs

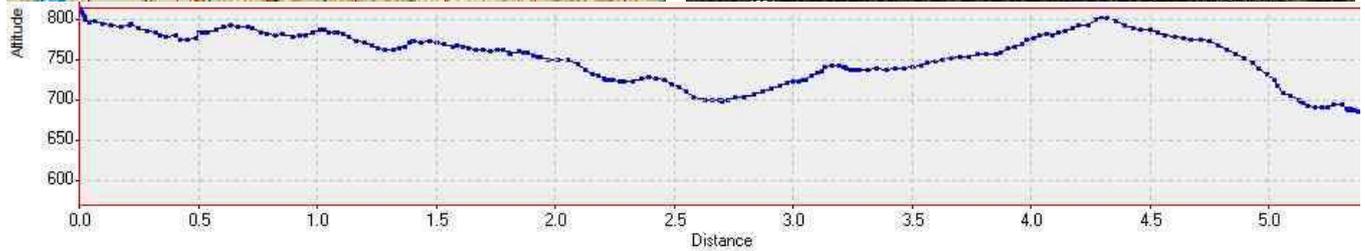
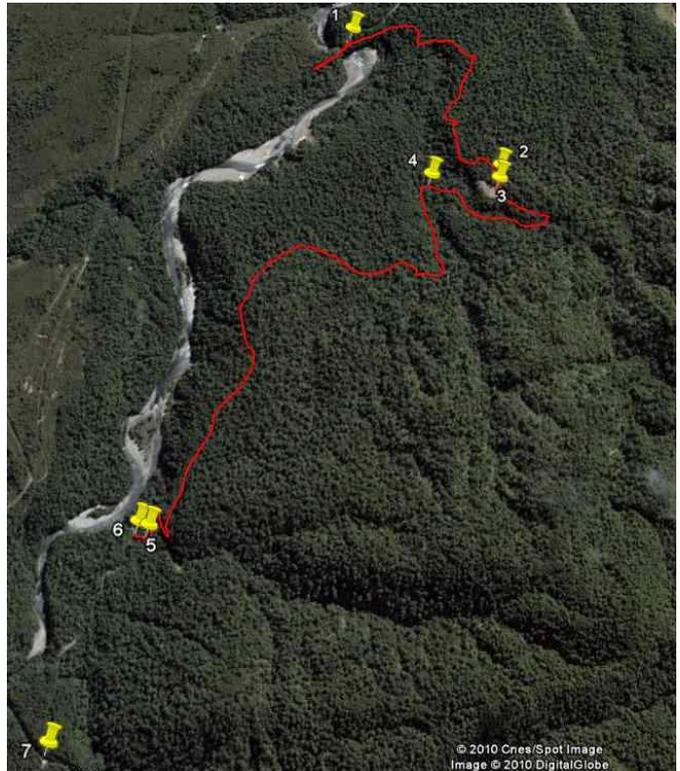
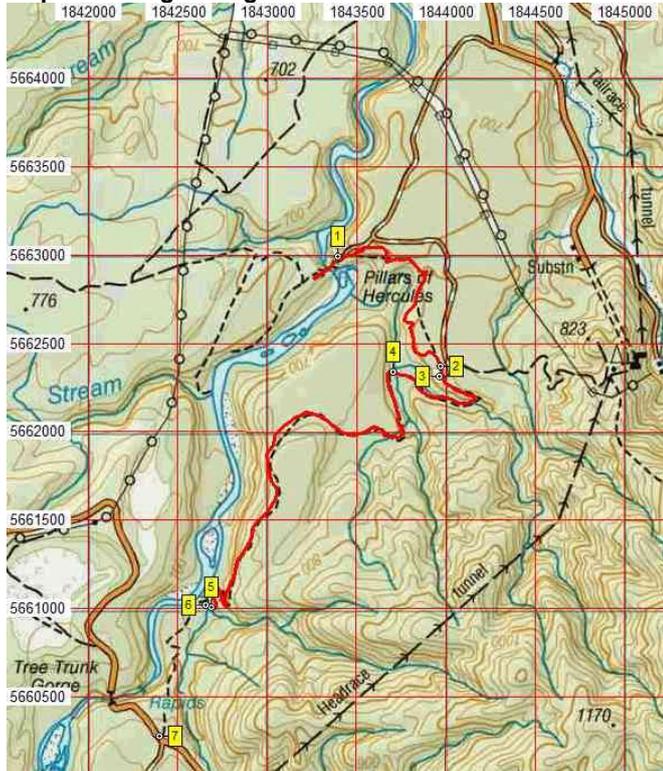


Deep and swift



The target can be the road bridge on Tree Trunk Gorge Road where pick-up is possible or lunch taken then walk all the way back again.

Map and Google Image with GPS data



Waypoints – NZTM

Name	Easting	Northing	Alt(m)	Description
1	1843392	5662990	674	Car park for Pillars of Hercules
2	1843969	5662369	761	20 minutes: End of link track from car-park to Urchin Road
3	1843963	5662317	759	Urchin camp ground
4	1843702	5662340	700	Barriers on track with left for bikes and straight for old bridge
5	1842691	5661008	689	Small stream crossing with huge log stepping "stones"
6	1842654	5661022	688	1:45min Deep swift flowing stream on wet days
7	1842396	5660281	744	Track end on Tree Trunk Gorge Road

NZ Grid

Easting	Northing
2753472	6224827
2754048	6224205
2754042	6224153
2753781	6224177
2752769	6222847
2752732	6222860
2752474	6222120

Tree Trunk Gorge



Tree Trunk Gorge



Lunch on the Tree Trunk Gorge Bridge



It should be noted that there was a dreadful accident in this gorge in 1985 when four rafters failed to exit the stream line in time and were drowned in the raging torrent of the gorge.

Notes: **GPS:** Garmin GPSMap 60CSx on WGS84
Wpt: Waypoints as taken by GPS unit
Masl: metres above sea level

Total Distance : 5.405 Km
 Minimum Altitude : 686 Meters
 Maximum Altitude : 814 Meters