

IRON BARK and COLENSO HUTS

260 Series Map: 1:50,000 260-U21

Topo50 Map: BK36 Taoroa Junction

How to get to START: Exit Taupo on SH1 down the lake to Turangi (45min), Desert Road to Waiouru (1:35min) then 30km on to Taihape (2 hours).

- Six minutes south of Taihape go left sign-posted road to Mokai Gravity Canyon and immediately left again to Torere Road crossing a canyon on small bridge in about 2:15 minutes.
- At a T-junction 2 minutes later go right on Taoroa Road then pass bungy and flying fox on Gravity Canyon Bridge 2:25 min follow Mokai Road at Y-fork by going left
- 2:30 min pass sign for Makino Scenic Reserve and 3 minutes later the Colenso Monument on the left
- 2:35 minutes enter Mokai Station, follow car park sign to the right
- 2:40 min through closed gate for Ruahine Forest Park
- 2:50min park at end of grass road

Rough description: A hard 4 days 3 nights tramp in very steeply sloping terrain of the Ruahine Ranges some 2:30 minutes south of Taupo. Access to the start from Taihape via Mokai passes what might be the world's largest Flying Fox, with attendant bungy jump, in the Mokai Gravity Canyon. A shortcut over the hill avoids hours on the poled track. Day one comprises a 3 hour plus slog up very steep grazing land as a shortcut followed by a 2+ hour grind on poor path over steep slopes in thick forest to Iron Bark Hut – a mere total of 7+ km, 600m ascent in 5 hours 15 minutes. Day 2 is just as much fun taking about 5 hours for the 6+ km, ascending about 400m with some knee trembling slopes to the Colenso Hut from where a river-walk exploring the route to Ruahine Corner can be undertaken. There is superb forest and very active birdlife throughout. with fantastic views of Ruapehu to the north and the local tops and farmland of the area. Exit route more or less the same as entry.

Detail: Day 1: Uphill starts straight out of the car park (R01 508masl) on a grass road / track leading to a fence (R02 538masl) with an information board in 20 minutes. The stile over the fence leads on to a very steep grassy slope which is a poled track and takes one hour to ascend passing a couple of water tanks enroute. From the top tank (R04 752masl) the poled route going down then turning south can be seen as can the "short-cut" heading straight up the slope opposite you in a SE direction.

Leave the poled track more or less on the level section as it starts to bear to the south by climbing over an electric fence with a stile (R05 749masl) and go steeply up-slope till the top of the bush line on the right is reached (R07 796masl) where a sidle to the NE is started aiming at a cabbage tree and passing above quite a large bushy tree on the slope. On the map, the sidle starts where the red and blue tracks diverge and, if strength and youth is on your side, ignore the sidle and head straight up the slope to the easier walking near the crest. The sidle is hard work as the cross slope is very steep and hard on the ankles. A small bracken filled valley head is crossed in about 1:40 min (R08 894masl) then a rocky exposure (R09 932masl) is reached in 1:55 min from where a slight change in direction is advised going straight up the ridge to the SSE. A small animal track (R10 1024masl) is met at 2:15min whilst again tracking SE and walking is easier for a spell. However, several valley heads or stream lines then have to be crossed and since these carry dry shrub vegetation they are hard work and quite frustrating. A high point on the ridge is attained in 3 hours (R11 1082masl) when there are trees in the valley on the right and the route ahead down-slope can be seen with grassy areas leading through the shrubs to the NE. At the bottom of this pleasant descent the shortcut ends when the track sign-posted Puketaramea and Iron Bark is met (R12 904masl) – the track to the right is the extension of the poled track and the route to Iron Bark is the left fork.

Starting Sidle Shortcut



Downhill to end Shortcut



Into the forest

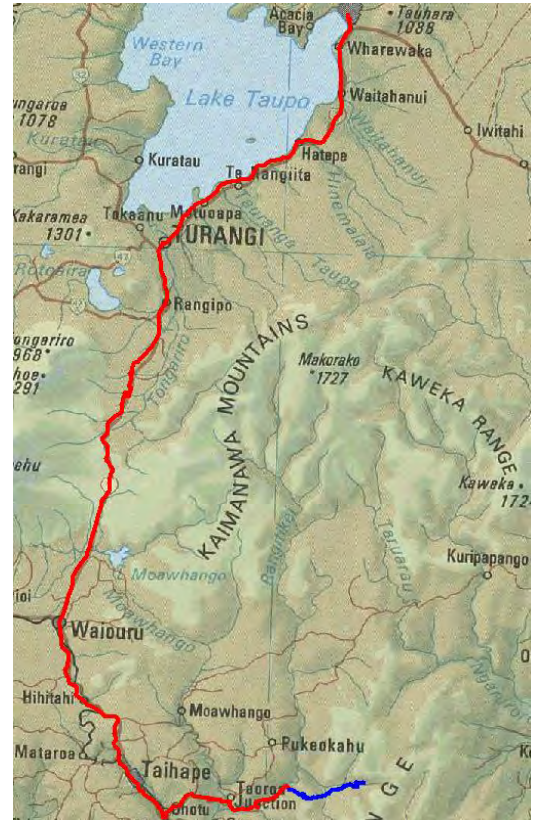


A stile leads into the forest and an hour and a half of wicked walking now starts on a totally unmaintained, tricky track which is, however, in great forest with ample birdlife – but do not get distracted as full concentration is required to avoid coming a cropper and falling off the track. The first sign of the end is a "No Hunting No Fishing" notice (R14 546masl) just above the DOC toilet at Iron Bark Hut and the hut (R15 537masl) itself is reached in just on 5:15min. The hut is good with 6 bunks, wood burner and river water a mere 10 metres away.

NZ Grid GPS: Geodetic Datum 1949

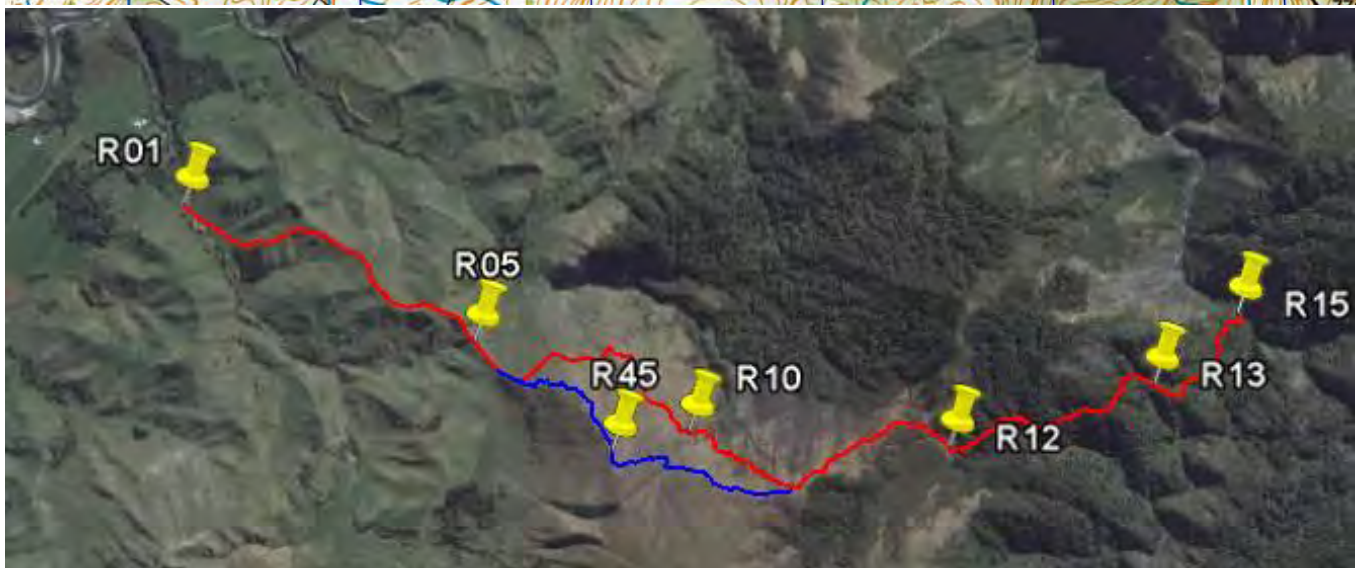
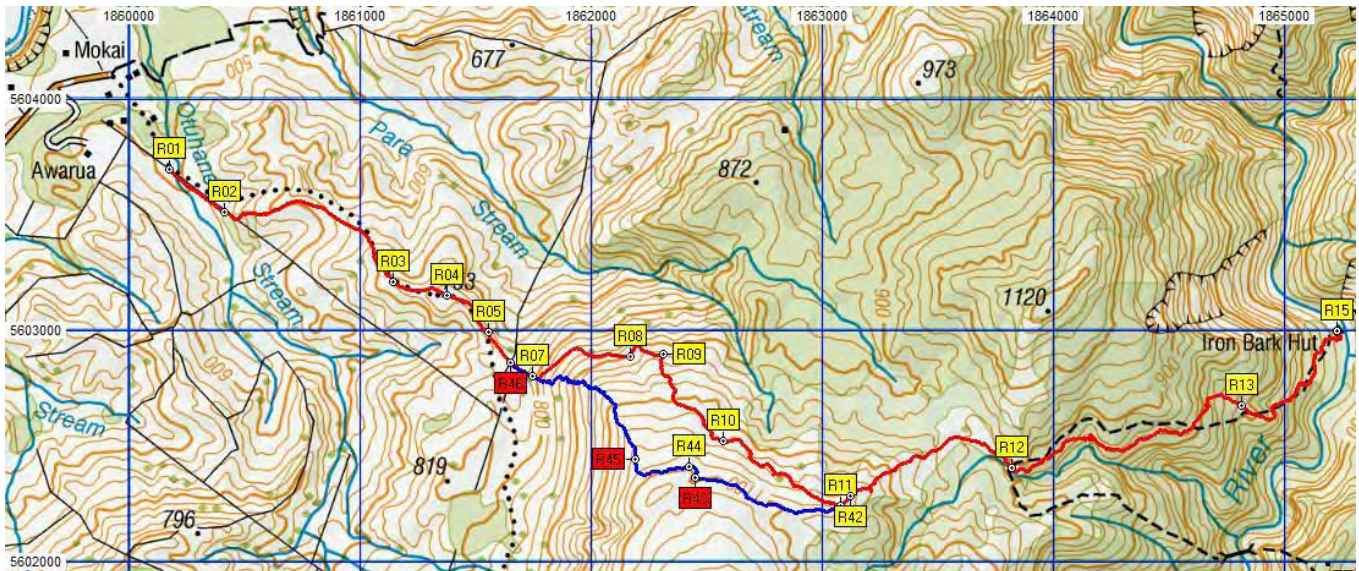
NZTM GPS: NZTM on WGS84

Access Route



The route can be seen as the red line above whilst the tramp location is the blue line.

Map and Google Image with GPS data for days 1 & 4



Waypoints – NZ Grid

Name	Easting	Northing	Alt(m)	Description
R01	2770114	6165805	508	23 NOV 2007 Day 1; Car park end of road on Mokai Station edge of Ruahine Forest Park
R02	2770356	6165620	538	20min; fence with info board at entrance Ruahine Forest park. Very steep uphill, white poled route
R03	2771082	6165319	730	50min; high point above watertank then track veers left
R04	2771313	6165257	752	1 hour; second watertank on crest, steeply down and see line of short cut leave poled track
R05	2771490	6165099	749	1:05min; leave poled track going off left over electric fence and steeply uphill
R07	2771684	6164909	796	1:12min; start side left aligned with bush line on the right aiming at "cabbage" trees
R08	2772106	6164997	894	1:40min; in bracken filled valley head with wicked cross slopes
R09	2772248	6165002	932	1:55min; map position check at rocky outcrop - go straight up the ridge
R10	2772508	6164631	1024	2:15min; side off left on minor animal track, easier walking but then several valley heads
R11	2773017	6164347	1082	3 hours; on downsloping ridge above trees in valley on RHS, go down leftish (+/-N)
R12	2773755	6164513	904	3:40min; post lunch meet poled track with sign for Iron Bark Hut and Puketaramea
R13	2774751	6164781	726	4:40min; wicked, tricky path on very steep slopes in good forest with ample bird life
R14	2775179	6165067	546	5:10min; "No Hunting No Fishing" notice on very steep descent just above DOC toilet
R15	2775164	6165104	537	5:15min; Iron Bark Hut on edge of river

NZTM

Easting	Northing
1860175	5603698
1860417	5603513
1861144	5603211
1861375	5603149
1861552	5602992
1861746	5602802
1862168	5602890
1862311	5602895
1862570	5602524
1863080	5602239
1863818	5602406
1864815	5602675
1865243	5602961
1865228	5602998

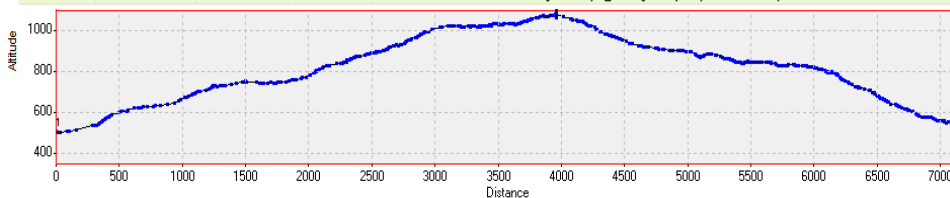
Waypoints for Exit Route Variation on Day 4

Waypoints NZ Grid

Name	Easting	Northing	Alt(m)	Description
R40	2773747	6164520	899	Day 4 Exit Variation: At bushline and start of shortcut and signs for poled track
R41	2773640	6164625	910	5min; cross stream line and up grass slope on left but not in stream line
R42	2773058	6164390	1069	32min; rocky knoll well up grassy ridge with trees in valley on left. Skirt tussock and view Ruapehu
R43	2772389	6164469	1098	1:05min; minor valley / valley head post minor stretch in tussock
R44	2772361	6164519	1107	1:12 min; small level area on upper ridge with fantastic views all round
R45	2772131	6164550	1077	1:25min; on ridge top overlooking Mokhai Station and see poled track and start point etc
R46	2771591	6164968	766	2 hours; down extremely steep grassy slope (with sidles) at corner of electric fence

NZTM

Easting	Northing
1863810	5602413
1863704	5602518
1863121	5602283
1862452	5602361
1862424	5602412
1862194	5602442
1861653	5602861



Distance and Altitude Data

Altitude gain	594 m
Overall descent	560m
Distance walked	7.2km
Total time	5 hr 15 min
Walking time	4 hr 30 min

Iron Bark Hut



Iron Bark Hut Interior



Ablutions Area



Day 2: Out of the hut, straight into and over the river (R16 533masl) then into scrub and very steeply uphill for a 55 minute grunt on quite a dangerous track due to gravel surface and extreme slopes in places. Although extremely steep there are a few step like respites with a good one after 20mins (R17 602masl) and 40 min (R18 706masl) with a possible bivouac site at the latter. The top of an ultra grunt comes in just over one hour (R19 831masl) then terrain becomes undulating and offers views of Ruapehu through the trees behind you and the slopes get easier. A definite high point is reached 20 minutes later (R20 917masl) then the walking becomes a delight in the rolling to undulating forest along the upper ridge. Altitude is gained and there is a small bluff with an overhang, suitable for a bivouac (R22 957masl), after about 2:30 minutes before there is a very steep down hill as the track goes to your left (due N). The descent has now started and there a few quite steeply incised streams to cross and a valley head (R25 684masl) to work round before going more gently down parallel to the stream line.

Ruapehu View



At about 3:50 min there is a junction (R26 687masl) with the notice for the "Unknown Campsite" and the Colenso Hut downhill to your left. At just over 4 hours (R27 704masl) it is more open with grassland, bog, boardwalk plus some tussock then there is a sting in the tail with yet another grunt to the SE passing Lake Colenso with this grunt being crested in about 20 min (R28 764masl).

Lake Colenso



Leave your pack and take a short diversion to the left at the T-junction (R30 730masl) and go to the lake which is a bit green and scummy looking. The Colenso Hut is then only a matter of minutes away being reached in a fraction under 5 hours. The hut (R32 725masl) is very good with 8 bunks, wood burner, external roof-water supply and overlooks the river with attendant bull-frogs in the ponds. There are a few tight spots for tents on the track just before the hut.

Colenso Hut



Colenso Interior



Tight Campsites



Plans to continue to the Ruahine Corner Hut were dropped but the first part of the route was investigated as instructions to hand were not too clear and the route does involve river walking. From the hut (R32 725masl) go downstream (North) in the river following track markers and pink ribbons when they are seen.

Keep your eyes open as there are several outcrops of fossil bearing rock in this area; the fossils are shells not unlike oysters. At the first confluence (R33 708masl), which has a small cairn marking it, go upstream in the tributary on the right eastwards and in about total time of 35 minutes there is a small waterfall on the left and a clear, large pink track marker on the right (R34 720masl).

Map and Google Image with GPS Data for Day 2

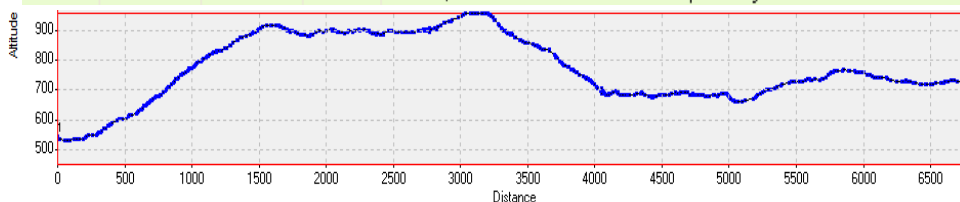


Waypoints – NZ Grid

R16	2775214	6165091	533	Day 2; 7:50 easy, shallow river crossing and into scrub then hit very steep slopes
R17	2775383	6165051	602	20 min; almost level respite after very nasty steep, gravelly ascent
R18	2775586	6165161	706	40min; possible bivouac site on one of a few minor steps on the otherwise very steep slope
R19	2775647	6165427	831	1:05min; top of ultra grunt then undulating ridge with Ruapehu views then easier slope
R20	2775921	6165579	917	1:25min; high point then undulating lovely forest walking
R21	2776862	6165693	902	2 hours; morning tea break in stunning forest
R22	2777194	6165799	957	2:30min; overhang on RHS with possible bivouac shelf then windfall and steep descent on left
R23	2777722	6166124	686	3:20min; steeply incised stream line on pretty poor path
R24	2777930	6166259	675	3:30min; second steeply incised stream line
R25	2778155	6166268	684	3:45min; third stream line plus valley head crossing then down parallel to stream line
R26	2778305	6166312	687	3:50min; T-junction with left for Colenso Hut and up right to "Unknown" campsite
R27	2778515	6166392	704	4:05min; open grassy, old boardwalk in bog then grunt upwards again to boggy tussock area
R28	2778805	6166086	764	4:20min; at top of "sting in the tail" grunt upwards
R29	2778973	6166084	758	4:30min; glimpse of Lake Colenso off left
R30	2779224	6166141	730	4:40min; T-junction with 5 minute diversion to Lake Colenso
R31	2779116	6166211	720	4:45min; edge of Lake Colenso - rather scummy and green!
R32	2779328	6166084	725	4:55min; Colenso Hut at end of hard tramp of tricky track

NZTM

Easting	Northing
1865278	5602985
1865447	5602945
1865650	5603055
1865711	5603322
1865985	5603473
1866927	5603587
1867259	5603694
1867787	5604020
1867995	5604155
1868221	5604164
1868371	5604207
1868581	5604288
1868871	5603982
1869039	5603979
1869290	5604037
1869182	5604107
1869394	5603980



Distance and Altitude Data

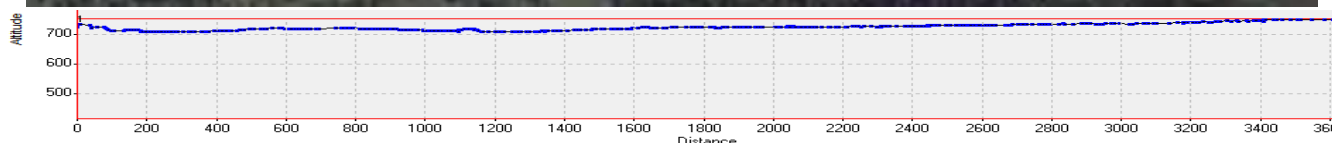
Altitude range	426 m
Overall ascent	550 m
Overall descent	400m
Distance walked	6.8km
Total time	4 hrs 50 min
Walking time	4 hrs 30 min

A short overland section occurs after 45 minutes or so (R35 725masl), a small low gravelly island is seen minutes later then in about one hour there is a series of flat, gravelly river terraces (R37 730masl) and from here on there appear to be no more route markers. Huge boulders (R38 738masl) enforce a bit of scrambling up around to your left ten minutes later and after a total time of 1:20 minutes at another confluence the DOC notice (R39 749masl) for the Ruahine Corner Hut can be seen on the bank on your left (true right bank). The track onwards from here was not investigated but the first 50 metres or so had been slashed and was very obvious. The river walk to here is not difficult and deep water was not encountered as there were several detours past tricky spots but it would be fairly taxing lugging a full pack. The walk back to Colenso Hut took about one hour.

It should be noted that the track notice from the Iron Bark to the Colenso Hut states a walk of 3 hours whilst the sign at the other end states it is a 5 hour walk – it really is 5 hours for all except high speed heroes. Similarly the time of 30 minutes seen on the sign is quite wrong and a full hour is needed by the mere mortal type trampler.

Day 3: Day three was the reverse of Day 2 with both the ascent from the Colenso Hut and the descent down to the river and the Iron Bark Hut being pretty strenuous and tricky; in fact two trampers made minor excursions into the bush from the track at different times but, in both cases, without any major injuries. The scratches and bruises suffered were a reminder that these are not easy tracks. The bluff (R22 957masl) makes a superb morning tea stop on the way out. The views of Ruapehu were more noticeable in this direction as they were in front and not behind. As stated earlier birds were very active on this tramp with what appeared to be a couple of falcons seen in the farmland, Grey Warblers and Morepork heard and a Tom Tit seen.

Map & Google Image with GPS Data of River Walk



Waypoints – NZ Grid

R32	2779328	6166084	725	4:55min; Colenso Hut at end of hard tramp of tricky track
R33	2779084	6166648	708	River Walk; 25 min downstream turning right into tributary with cairn at junction
R34	2779249	6166762	720	35min; small waterfall on left and pink triangular marker on right
R35	2779440	6166656	725	47min; off to left on dry land cutting out river bend
R36	2779526	6166590	727	50min; gravelly island on right but route stays on left bank (true right bank)
R37	2779719	6166629	730	1 hour; several flat, gravelly river terraces but few or no markers
R38	2780198	6166631	738	1:10min; huge rocks in river bend work around on the left, upslope
R39	2780271	6166645	749	1:20min; river confluence with DOC notice board for Ruahine Corner and obvious slashed track

NZTM

Easting	Northing
1869394	5603980
1869150	5604545
1869315	5604658
1869506	5604552
1869592	5604486
1869785	5604526
1870264	5604528
1870338	5604542

Shell Fossil



Flat River Terraces



Target Reached



Day 4: Day four is the reverse of Day 1 but a variation was made to try and avoid the valley heads and gullies encountered on the way in (Refer waypoint **R10 1024masl** on the map). The route through the forest on the “wicked” path was exactly the same but once out of the forest and into the open it can be seen in the map that instead of sidling round the ridge the route followed was virtually straight up and below the tussock.

From the bush-line (**R40 899masl**) the path was followed back to below the “shortcut” ridge and then the stream was crossed after 5 minutes (**R41 910masl**) and the slope ascended on the grass through the shrubs virtually right up the ridge reaching a rocky knoll in 30 minutes (**R42 1069masl**) with trees in the valley to the left then continuing towards the skyline in a WNW direction. After passing through some tussock and a small valley head (**R43 1098masl**) in just over an hour stunning views of Ruapehu plus the local hills and farmland were obtained from a small flat area on the upper ridge (**R44 1107masl**). In less than 1:30 minutes the downhill starts (**R45 1077masl**) and Mokai Station and poled track can be seen. This descent takes a good thirty minutes as it is very steep and sidles are not too common to ease the strain but the fence line is reached (**R46 766masl**) within 2 hours on the shortcut. More or less level walking commences for a spell but, be warned, the very last descent down parallel to the fence to the notice board is very steep and taxing.

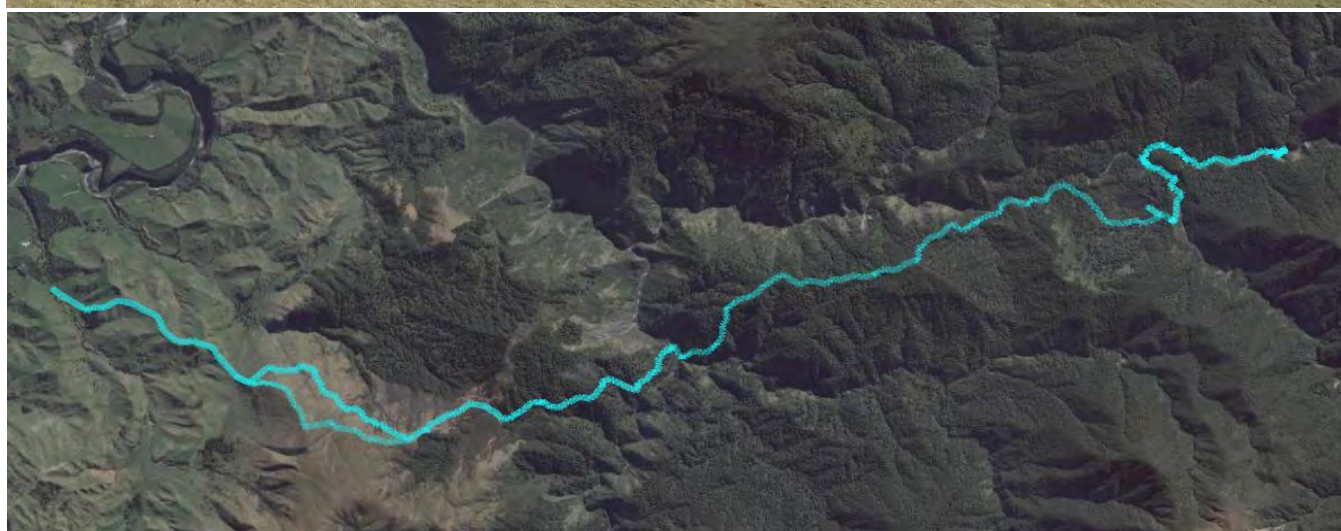
Below the Bluff



Steep Slope



Ruapehu Panorama from Ruahines and Google Image of Entire Tramp



The farm manager of Mokai Station was most helpful when contacted by the party leader before this tramp regarding using the shortcut rather than following the poled track all the way.

Notes: **GPS =** Garmin GPSmap 60CSx on **Geodetic datum 1949** / masl = metres above sea level altitude