

## Kaweka Extravaganza

Topo50 Map: BH37 Rangitaiki & BJ37 Kuripapango

### How to get to START:

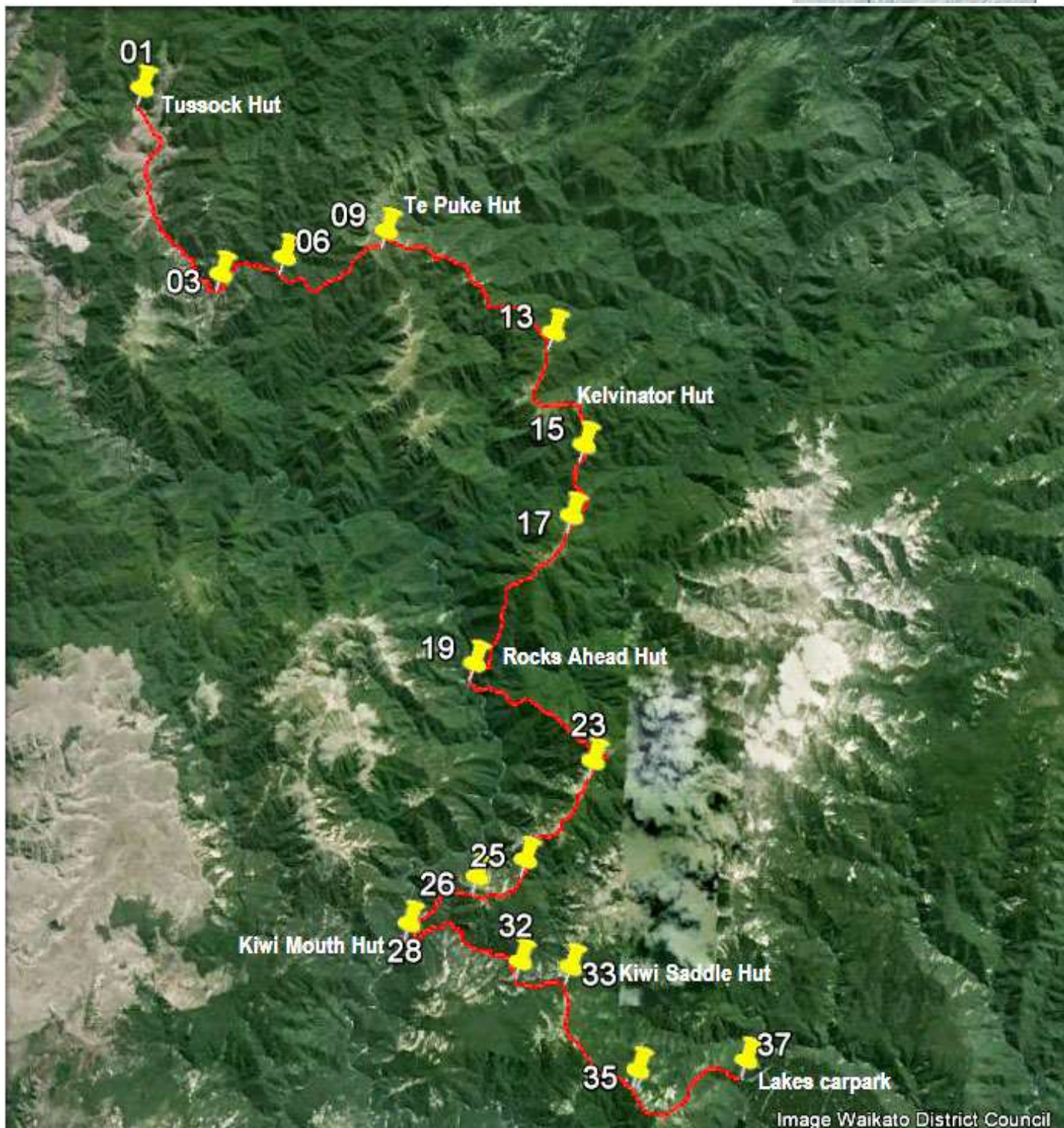
- Exit Taupo on **SH5** for Napier.
- In about 25 minutes turn right into **Taharua Road** at 27.5km
- At 37km pass turn off for Clements Mill Road, still on asphalt
- Road soon becomes gravel
- At 43km meet Poronui Station gate and follow track to airstrip by turning to the right

**Rough description:** A very hard 5 day tramp due to distance (almost 60km), endless ascents (close to 4,000metres) on very steep slopes with some of the descents as bad as the ascents. Starts with a night at Tussock Hut via a helicopter ride from Poronui Station which takes all of 8 minutes. There are then five days walking involved staying at Te Puke Hut, Tira Lodge (Kelvinator), Back Ridge Bivouac (camping), Kiwi Saddle Hut then out to the Lakes carpark in the Kaweka Forest Park. From there Gentle Annie was followed into Taihape for an all-day breakfast before returning via the Desert Road to Taupo.

**NB** The tramp route can be seen in red starting on BH37 then passing into map BJ37.

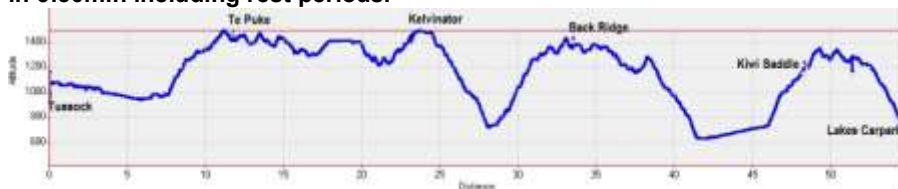
NZTM GPS: NZTM on WGS84

### Tramp location



**Day 1 Tussock Hut to Te Puke Hut via Harkness Hut: 12.3km, 869m of ascent in 6:30min including rest periods.**

**Narrow Harkness Valley**



From the hut (WP011075masl) it is a few metres due south on an ill-defined track to cross a minor stream then work slowly uphill to the SE through tussock where native falcon was spotted. The track then heads SW with the odd fairly easy stream crossing before continuing to the SSE and eventually enter the narrow confines of the Harkness Valley. The first possibility of wet feet soon arrives with a crossing (WP02988masl). There are then innumerable chances to wash the boots and feet, some parts of the track being quite tricky. Just short of 3 hours the narrow valley ends (WP03942masl) and a turn is made from SE to the NE in a wider tussock valley towards Harkness Hut (WP04980masl) which offers a good morning tea location. The neat hut is bright orange, has 6 bunks, a wood burner and river water supply.

The effort of the day, if not the whole tramp, starts soon after the hut with an anti-possum cage noted (WP51066masl) then a slight respite on a minor crest walking after 5 hours (WP061173masl) and more respite 30min later with some level walking (WP071256masl).



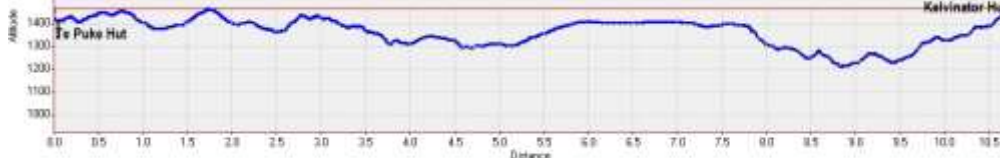
However the steep slopes do come back again until the bushline (WP081437masl) is reached in a bit over 6 hours then it is easier walking to the Te Puke Hut (WP091424masl). The helipad is crossed just before descending on a rather degraded section of track with anti-hobbit sized steps to the orange painted hut which has a great wood-burner though the water supply is again down-hill on steps to a small stream on the inward track.

**Te Puke Hut**

**More Uphill**



**Day 2 Te Puke Hut to Tira (Kelvinator) Hut: 12km, 876m of ascent in 7 hours including stops**



The day starts by heading back up towards the helipad then swinging to the east, down through quite a deep valley and up on to the SE trending ridge giving fairly good walking in nice beech forest to a clearing (WP101397masl) before a big uphill then over an eroding, gravelly scree slope. The terrain is now a narrow ridge and the marker poles must be watched as there is a U-turn at one point, if missed you are on a deer track. Soon after the U-turn it is steeply down on a scree slope to the tree line (WP111439masl) then over several small rocky tops on a mossy track on the tree covered ridge. The next feature is a marker pole (WP121434masl) on top of a steep scree slope which again leads into tree cover – bellbird heard in this area. Just over an hour after this there is a hill-slope bog (WP131341masl) to contend with then from the level top there are views of Ruapehu in the distance.

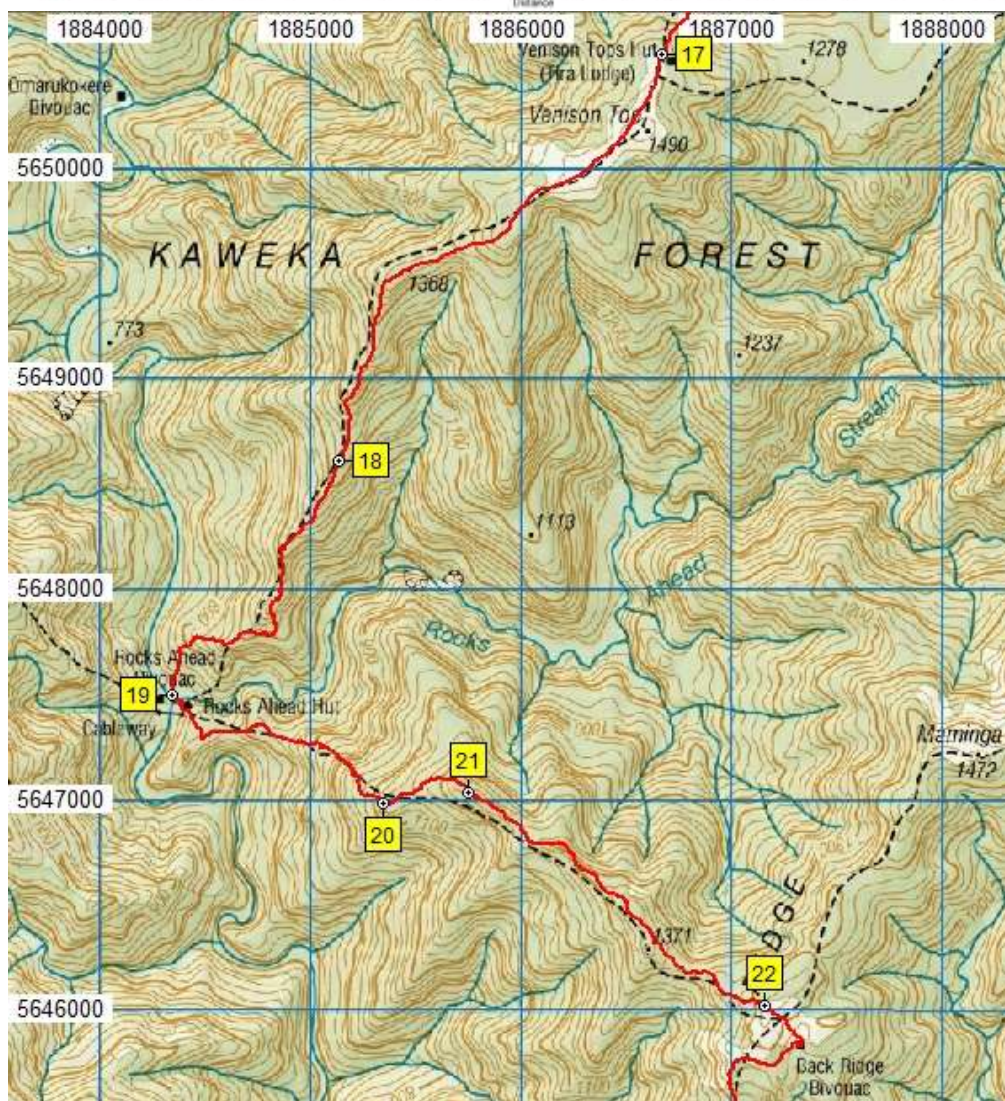
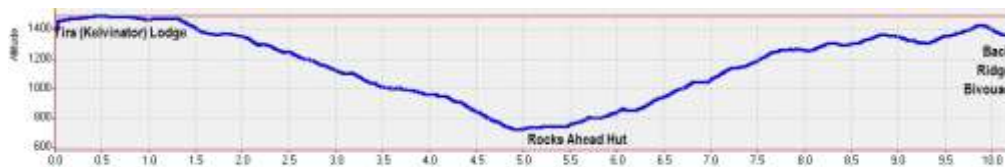
There are about 2km of relaxed walking on the more or less level top as the track swings round from SSW to due east to arrive at a track junction (**WP14**1402masl) with left for Mangaturutu Hut and right for the destination Tira Lodge. From here it is hard work with firstly a huge descent (**WP15**1212masl) then from a small coll (**WP16**1227masl) a steep ascent to eventually arrive at Tira Lodge/Kelvinator (**WP17**1450masl) – on the way track marking improves with new orange track markers being used and there is an old sign pointing off-track indicating water – this sign is someone's idea of humour.

This is a fairly big hut with two bunk rooms with 6 bunks each, one being linked to the kitchen area whilst the other is not and is a very cold room. There is tank water and a superb wood-burner – which is required even in summer!

### Tira Lodge - Kelvinator



### Day 3 Tira (Kelvinator) Hut to Back Ridge Bivouac: 11.5km, 898m of ascent in 6:40min



The day comprises mainly a huge descent, almost 800m from Venison Top down to the river crossing at Rocks Ahead with some very tricky sections, then a bit of a climb of 700m up to Back Ridge. From Tira Lodge (**WP17**) the first kilometre or so is quite easy walking with nothing too steep – up or down and the real descent commences about 3km out (**WP18**1151masl) when the contours are so closely spaced on the map no other detail can be seen. About 75% of the way down some serious sidling has to be done off the east edge of the ridge – the faint hearted do need some assistance in places with foot and handholds. The lower parts are in good forest on good track and very pleasant to then suddenly be faced with a three-wire bridge (**WP19**726masl) or wet feet from wading the river then up a steep slope to Rocks Ahead Hut.

### Three Wire Bridge



The river views from Rocks Ahead Hut are stunning and very relaxing after a hard morning.

### Rocks Ahead Hut

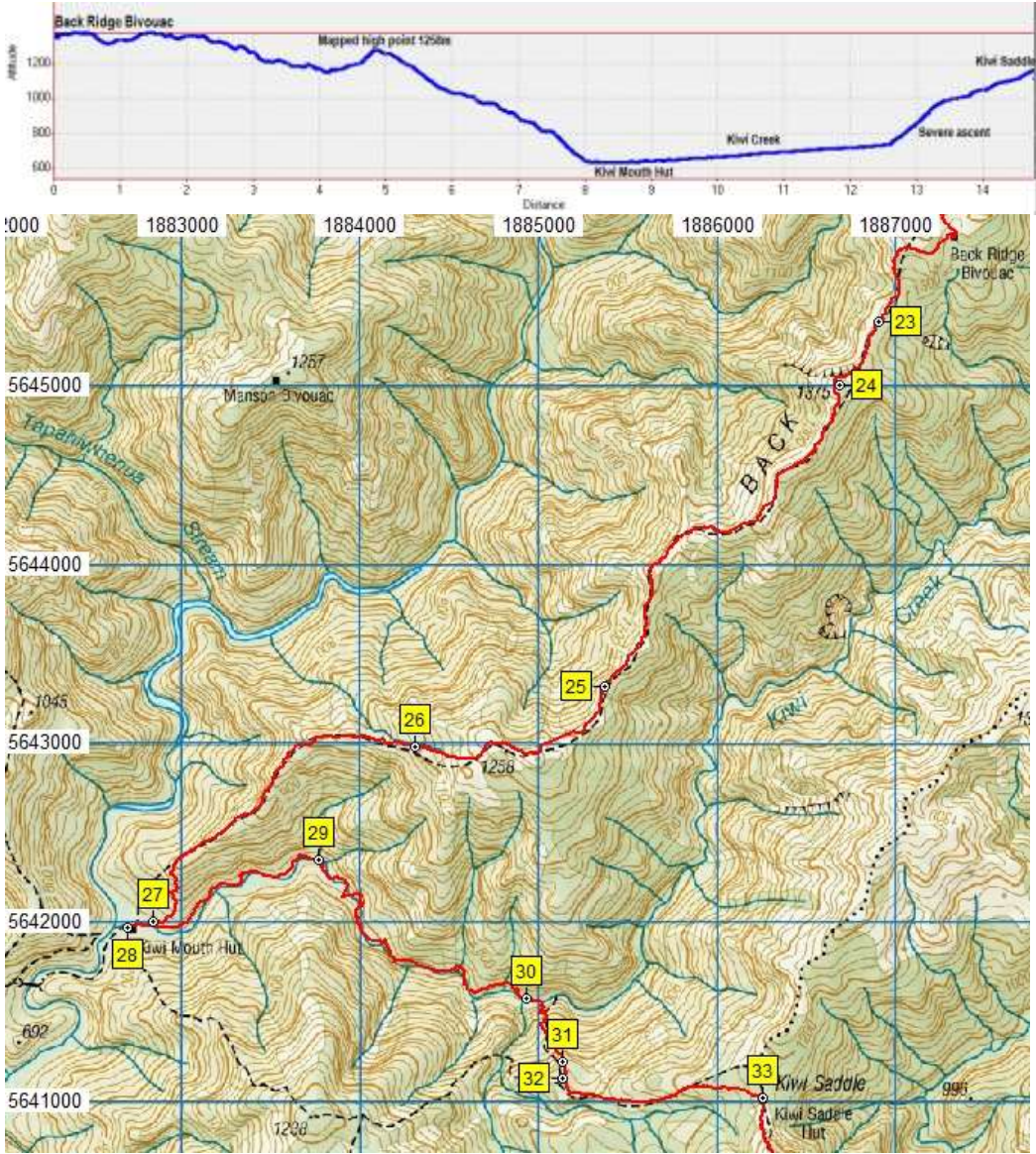


The ascent of the day starts from the hut and soon becomes pretty steep then an almost level respite (**WP20**1141masl) before an even steeper ascent to more or less be on top (**WP21**1264masl). The walking here is great on a narrow forested ridge track but ascending does soon kick in again with a severe grunt to reach the tree line (**WP22**1423masl) from where there are massive views. From here it is then gently downhill in a grassy valley to reach the tiny 2 bunk Back Ridge Bivouac with great camping spots all round it – there is firewood available and a well-built outdoor fireplace for cooking and the stream water supply in not very far away.

### Back Ridge Biv Campsite



**Day 4 Back Ridge Bivouac to Kiwi Saddle: 15.5km, 920m of ascent in 9:30min**



This is the longest, hardest day. After coming SW down Back Ridge to Kiwi Mouth Hut there is a choice of following Kiwi Creek for 3.6km then ascending to the Saddle or, during wet weather, face much more ascending by using the “storm” route keeping the feet dry but the agony of even more ascending. The day starts with a short climb back on top of Back Ridge to then head SW when 20min leads to the edge of the ridge with forest on the left and steep, eroded fall-off slopes on the right (WP231326masl). Fifteen to twenty minutes after this a secluded camping area known as “God’s Little Park” (WP241376masl) can be found just a few metres off the left or E side of the track. The walking is fairly easy as altitude falls but there are a few little knobbly tops to work over such as at (WP251168masl). The track then swings to the west and a huge, very exposed gullied edge on the left (S) side is passed (WP261098masl). After this the descent is slightly steeper but being on good track there are no problems and within 4 hours or so a track sign at Kiwi Creek (WP27634masl) is met – cross the stream to get to the large grass clearing with Kiwi Mouth Hut (WP28632masl) – a good lunch spot with informative notices as to which route to now follow for Kiwi Saddle Hut 2:30 – 3:00 away.

**A dry challenge in the creek**



The dry weather route is to the NE up Kiwi Creek and some of this is on wide easy track whilst a lot of time is spent in or crossing the stream. A very noticeable bend (WP29662masl) with impressive scenery is passed when the stream swings round to the SE but there are very few obvious confluences. After seven hours or so there is another obvious bend and a track marker (WP30727masl) can be spotted on the steep lower slopes to the right (true left bank) – this is where the scary stuff starts. There is now a massive ascent of 258m over 650m distance on very steep slopes.

**Rest in Kiwi Creek before final upslope**

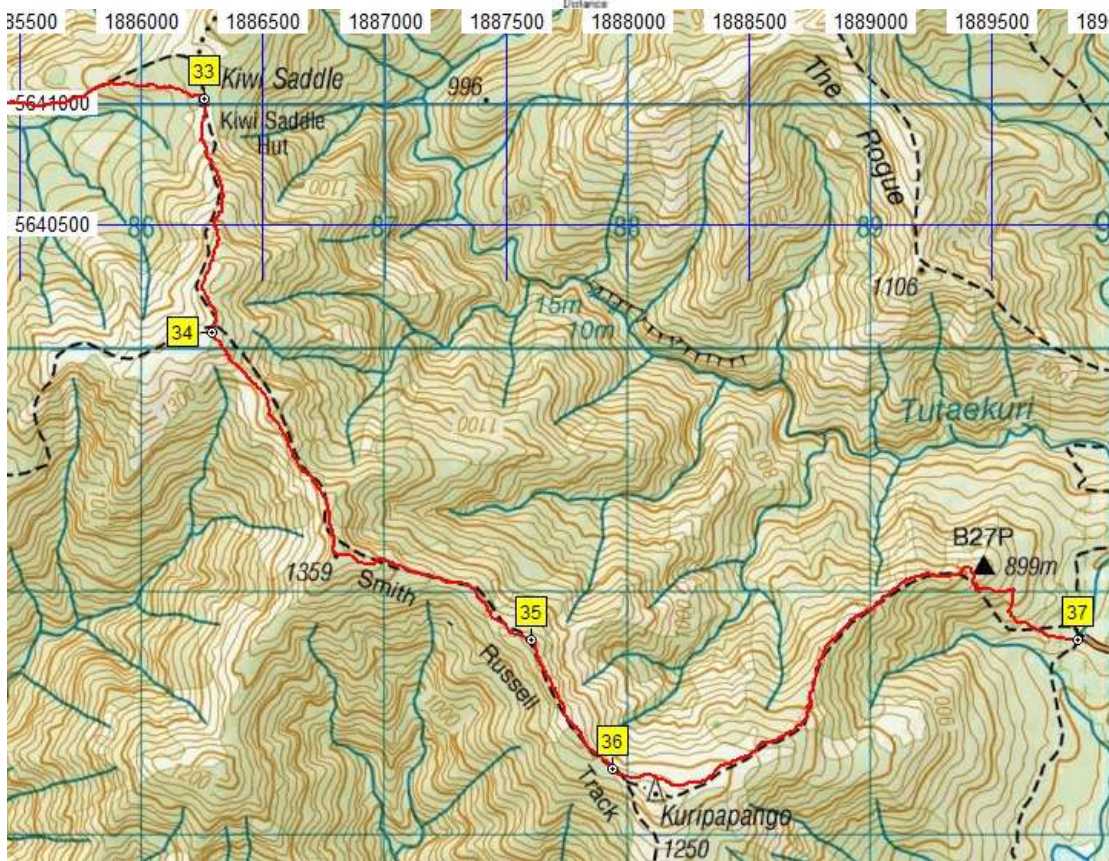


For weary legs the lower slopes can prove almost impossible due to steepness and poor grip – but upwards must be easier than descending! Many stops have to be made as the strain is pretty high but height is gained with the first of several small cairns being reached (WP31960masl) before the slopes start to ease and eventually the track junction with the flood route is met (WP32984masl) when by going left Kiwi Saddle Hut is only 1.5km or just over an hour away. This part of the track is upwards but easy going and in nice forest and the hut (WP331163masl) is very comfortable and quite spacious – NB this is NOT DoC hut so read the notices regarding payment – there are Kiwi to be heard overnight.

**Really steep gravelly slopes**



**Day 4 Kiwi Saddle to Lakes Road carpark: 6.85km, 394m of ascent in 2:41min**



This is the easiest and shortest day of the tramp which can be done pretty closely to the time stated on the track notices – 2:30min.

The walk starts with a little bit of a grunt for just over one kilometre (**WP34**1390masl) to meet a track junction where the route is downhill to the SE. The track – the Smith Russell - is first rate as it passes through beech forest with a few undulations and a good spot (**WP35**1290masl) for morning tea exists on a bit of level ground after about 90 minutes.

Another track junction (**WP36**1223masl) is met just before Kuripapango summit – this exit track which leads out to Taihape Road is rather steep with gravel and can be a trial for tired legs. By continuing straight through the junction (**WP36**) and over the Kuripapango summit the track is far better and makes for easier, less stressful walking if tired. These last two kilometres take about one hour.

Track junction at Kuripapango (WP36)

Good info board at track end (WP37)



There are good information notices in the Lakes carpark, a toilet and plenty of space to hang about, to relax and get the boots off.

**View over the Kawekas and Kaimanawas towards Ruapehu**



GPS: Garmin GPSMap 62sc

WP: Waypoint as taken by GPS  
masl: metres above sea level altitude taken by GPS

February 2015