

Northern Ruahine Range tops loop, Ruahine Forest Park

This four-day backcountry tramp involves a 33km loop, taking in the Ruahine tops, with the chance to swim in tarns and traverse knife-edge ridges. The majority of the trek is above 1500m and involves camping though huts are also available.

Start at the Mangakukeke Road end, which is surrounded by private farmland. Permission is needed to pass across Richard Gorrings farm on the way in and Colin Thompson's farm at the end of the tramp (contact details are in the Wild File).

Cross the farmland following Mangakokeke Stream before heading up a ridge into the forest. Once in the forest, it is another hour or so to Purity Hut, which has panoramic views to Mt Ruapehu. Continue along the ridge above the treeline on an exposed route to Iron Peg (1703m). There are good, though exposed, spots for camping beside several tarns near Iron Peg.

From Iron Peg, traverse the ridge south-east towards Ohuinga (1686), about six-kilometres away and with about 550m of ups and downs. From Ohuinga, continue south along Sawtooth Ridge to Tiraha (1668m). This 3km-long section is along a steep-sided knife-edge ridge, often demanding three or four points of contact. There is a sheltered bivvy spot off the west side of Tiraha on the eastern side of the saddle at 1600m, or alternatively, Howletts Hut on Daphne Ridge is a further 300 vertical metres below.

From Tiraha, continue to Taumataemekura (1682m) where there can be scores of tarns following high rainfall. The crux of the route is a cheval near the summit of Te Hekenga which looks somewhat gnarly. At the base of the steep craggy section leading up to the cheval a trail branches off around the base of Te Hekenga on the southern side, which offers a less exposed alternative to crossing the knife-edge ridge. The route over the cheval requires steady nerves.

From Te Hekenga, continue along the tops to Maungamahue (1661) and on to Pourangaki. The top off Dirty Spur offers a camping spot, but this area can be prone to drying up and there is no other water source nearby. Alternatively, head down through the forest towards Kelly Knight Hut, 600m below. At about 1200m, there is a small babbling brook on the ridge, which provides a good camping spot. Beyond Kelly Knight Hut, the last couple of hours of the tramp are through native forest, tracing the Pourangaki River and then across farmland, back to the Mangakukeke Road end.

Wild File

Access Mangakukeke Road end, in and out via private farmland. Access permission can be gained from Richard Gorrings (06 382 5856) and Colin Thompson (06 382 5577)

Grade Difficult

Time Road end to Iron Peg, 4.5-5hr; Iron Peg to Tiraha bivvy, 8-9hr; Tiraha bivvy to Maungamahue, 6-7hr; Maungamahue to road end, 5hr

Distance 33.5km

Total ascent 2990m

Map BK36, BL36

Elevation Profile



