

Zekes Hut, Hihitahi Forest Sanctuary

There are few 'forest sanctuaries' and those that exist were often designated due to conservation activism. A trip into Zekes Hut takes in the Hihitahi Forest Sanctuary, between Waiouru and Taihape.

Park on the eastern side of SH1 where a DOC sign stands. There's room only for a few cars and be careful not to block the farmer's gate. From here, take the well-marked Hihitahi Forest Sanctuary Track across farmland, over a small stream on the Hihitahi Swingbridge and avoid some slightly swampy land to the south-east. Ensure you have picked up further markers, including a large orange triangle where the track leads into the bush on the northern side of a stream draining from just north of Hihitahi peak. A stile indicates where the forest sanctuary's boundary begins.

At its start, the track is briefly flat and easy going but it soon begins to climb. After 100m vertical gain it flattens out and meanders pleasantly through the forest, which is filled with New Zealand's biggest clusters of remaining kaikawaka (mountain cedar), and further black maire, broadleaf, horopito and wineberry. You may also spot a tītītipounamu/rifleman.

After a total of 300m vertical ascent, the peak of Hihitahi (1116m) is gained. Here, the bush is more sparse and offers spectacular views to Mt Ruapehu and Mt Ngāuruhoe, and often also to the Kaimanawa and Ruahine ranges. Remnants of an old track leading north may be found in the bushes but only for those dedicated to finding it (there is no risk of accidentally following it). The track then descends directly down a grassy slip and sidling into the Kaitapu Valley, losing 160m to arrive at Zekes Hut, a newish (2007) corrugated iron four-bunker with tidy and cheerful red trim.

The hut is named after Turangi hunter Zeke Martin and is the only shelter in the sanctuary. It's close to Kaitapu Stream but has a small tank as its water source. The hut gets plenty of sun and has a woodburner for chilly nights. It's not well frequented aside from hut-bagging trampers and the occasional hunter.

Wild File

Access SH1, 10km south of Waiouru

Grade Easy

Time 2.5-3hr to hut

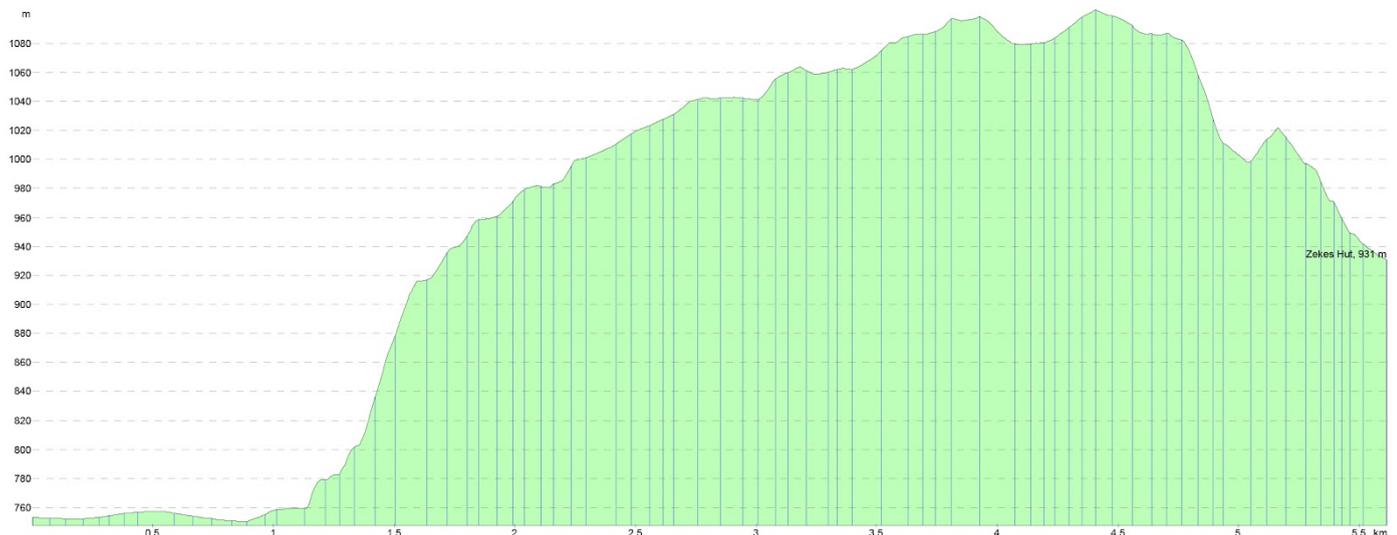
Distance 11.2km return

Total ascent 404m

Accommodation Zekes Hut (\$5, four bunks)

Topo50 map BJ35

Elevation



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