



Round the Mountain – Ruapehu (by Alastair McDowell)

NEARBY TOWN/CITY: Whakapapa Village, Tongariro National Park

EXACT LOCATION: Walk up Bruce Rd, past DOC info centre, past Shelter. Whakapapaiti track begins down lane to the right off Bruce Rd.

TOTAL ROUTE DISTANCE: 70 kms

TOTAL ASCENT & DESCENT: Around 2,000m

TIME TO RUN: Elite-12hrs; Weekend Warrior -16hrs+

TYPE OF TRAIL RUN: Loop. Best run anti-clockwise, starting/ending at Whakapapa Village. This way you tackle the tough “Goat” section first on fresh legs, and finish on the easy, board-walked “Tussock Traverse” section over Tama Saddle.

DIFFICULTY: Very Hard. Definitely not a run for novices.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS: Alpine, technical, remote

START GPS: Latitude -39.20316060 S, Longitude 175.53980827 E

FINISH GPS: Same as start

BEST MAP/S: NZ Topo50 BH34, BH35, BJ34, BJ35 (Mostly on BJ34)

RUN IT: The best time to run the Ruapehu circuit is between October – May, as this is an all-day affair you’ll want to maximize daylight hours, and being a remote alpine environment, bad weather can also make this run dangerous. Plenty of food, thermals and a wind-proof jacket are essential. Water is not so much an issue, you can fill up at each hut (spaced roughly 2-3 hrs run apart), and also in the clean streams and rivers. Ruapehu’s east-side is particularly remote. Once you pass Ohakune Mountain Rd, you are miles away from civilization. In good conditions however, this all adds to the experience!

Begin your run along the Whakapapaiti track, through lush Beech forest and crossing several bridged stream crossings until you reach the Whakapapaiti Stream. You will cross to the west side, where you make your way through muddy tussock lands, re-cross at the forked section of the stream shortly before reaching the hut. About 2 hours in, you should wake up the trampers and invite yourself in for some morning coffee fresh off the primus.

Continue on the trail and you'll soon intersect the Round the Mountain circuit track, and begin "The Goat" section – steep, gnarly gullies will work you up and down, but with any luck, stunning views of Paretetaitonga will inspire you onwards. The trail swings you down a spur where you pass the pristine Lake Surprise, descend a steep gulley to Mangaturuturu hut. Follow the boardwalk to the river, cross, and the trail continues to the left, towards the Cascades waterfall. This steep waterfall face is a tough climb which *may* have even reduced Sjors to a power-walk.

Jog down Ohakune Mountain Rd for 3km, and reconnect the track at car park to your left. The section to Mangaehuehu hut is a well groomed trail, and features a 39m waterfall – Ruapehu's highest, a 3-wire bridge crossing, and some interesting sub-alpine running through alpine herb fields. Refill your bladder here before heading into the wilderness that is the Rangipo desert. The trail turns into a poled route shortly after leaving the hut, so a compass would be useful in low visibility conditions. The Waihanoa glacial valley is spectacular, stop for a moment to take it in. Then blitz the descent and carry your momentum up the following, grueling, ascent. Apart from this workout, climbing is moderate; simply follow the undulating traverse across barren desert towards Rangipo hut.

Once you reach the Tukino Ski field road you are on the home-straight, only 27km of fast running remains. The landscape is vast and exposed. Don't venture all the way to Waihohonu hut, instead cut the corner to the left and clip onto the Tama lakes track and begin the (barely noticeable) ascent to Tama Saddle. Switch on the headlamps, and finish strong along the easy board-walked track. Listen out for the gushing Taranaki falls, and flickering lights of the Chateau. You've done it, a complete circumnavigation of the North Island's most predominant mountain. "One does not simply walk into Mordor... one simply runs!"

POST RUN GOODNESS: [The Tussock Bar](#). Drive 50m past Chateau, on the left. This bar/restaurant is an absolute jewel after this epic mission, I highly recommend ordering a plate of Volcanic Wedges, with extra bacon & cheese. Victory is yours.