

RIMUTAKA TRIG TRACK

PAKURATAHI FOREST



The Rimutaka Trig Track is a 45 minute (return) walk, from near the summit of Rimutaka Hill on State Highway 2 (around 555 metres above sea level) to Rimutaka Trig (725m) on the crest of the Rimutaka Range. On a clear day you gain superb views of southern Wairarapa, including Lake Wairarapa and the Aorangi Mountains extending south-east to Cape Palliser.

How to Get There

The track starts 200 metres below the summit of the Rimutaka Hill Road (SH 2), on the Upper Hutt side of the range. There is a small carpark beside the wooden steps at the sign-posted start of the track. A larger carpark, toilets and refreshments, are at the Summit Tearooms. Travelling time is about 45 minutes from either Wellington or Masterton.

Safety

The Rimutaka Trig Track is a well-graded series of zig-zags. The track surface is rocky in places and strong shoes, or sneakers, are advised. This part of the Rimutaka Range is particularly windy (especially when the crest of the range is reached), so wear a wind-proof jacket. Take your camera!

The Subalpine Vegetation

Vegetation Recovery in a Hostile Climate

The summit of the Rimutaka Hill (555 m) is well known to motorists as a wild place. The road is often shrouded in mist and scoured by severe northwest gales, and sometimes closed by snow in winter. The forest that once covered this mountainous landscape was as luxuriant as that which can be experienced today on the Akatarawa Road just 20 km to the west of here. But the Rimutaka Hill forests were senselessly burned off, more than 130 years ago when the road was built.

The fire damage was particularly severe on the drier northwest-facing slopes. Rains subsequently washed away much of the soil and the slopes were then colonized by that very aggressive, fire-tolerant companion of European settlers - gorse. The track zig-zags its way up the exposed slope, where indigenous trees and shrubs have slowly re-established themselves.

Walk Description

The Rimutaka Trig Track gives the easiest access in the Wellington Region to a wide variety of native subalpine plants. Six interpretive sites along the track are described below. Each is indicated by a numbered peg. The location of the sites is shown on the map on the back of this sheet.

1. Low Forest

The more sheltered lower portion of the track passes through low forest with a stream close-by. Compared with the rest of the track, this is a more favourable site for forest to re-establish. The main canopy tree is kamahi (*Weinmannia racemosa*), along with tall manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*), five-finger (*Pseudopanax arboretum*) and broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*). Note the size of the kamahi trees and their leaves (see below), then compare them with the stunted specimens which you will find at site 4.

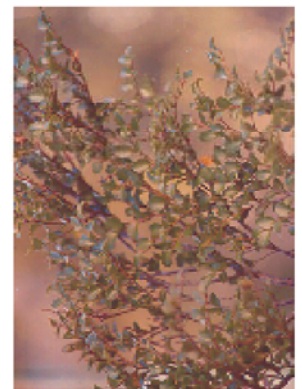
2. Silver Beech and Shrubland

Silver beech (*Nothofagus menziesii*) would have been a common tree in the original forest that covered this site before the fires. This wind-sheared specimen (see below) is probably more than 50 years old (note the base which is at least 20cm in diameter) yet it is still only the height of the surrounding shrubs.

Here the shrubs are tightly packed to provide mutual protection from the northwest winds. There are few gaps in this ground-hugging cover of stunted broadleaf, manuka, shrubby *Coprosma*, *Hebe stricta*, and two shrubby 'tree daisies', heketara (*Olearia rani*) and *O. arborescens*, each a mass of white flowers in spring.



Kamahi
(*Weinmannia racemosa*)



Silver Beech
(*Nothofagus menziesii*)

3. Divaricating Shrubs

'Divaricating shrubs' is the name usually given to a puzzling shape adopted by many of New Zealand's native plants. These shrubby forms have a densely-interlaced network of highly-branched twigs which only carry very small leaves. Two divaricating species are found at this site - *Raukawa anomala* (see over) and *Coprosma rhamnoides*, each hardy and able to withstand the climatic extremes.

Manuka is still widespread but has become quite stunted compared with the lower sites. Mountain flax (*Phormium cookianum*) is now common and more light can reach the ground surface, allowing a profuse mat of *Lycopodium* club moss to develop and silvery carpets of *Stereocaulon* lichen to line the rocky sides of the track.



4. Snow Grass

The gully below you contains many conspicuous large tussocks of a snow grass with large seed heads. This is a 'forest-dwelling' species (*Chionochloa conspicua*) of the snow grasses which are a feature of the low alpine parts of the southern Tararua Range. The snow grass probably prefers the moisture and better soils of the gully. Like the other plants on this mountain slope with parallel-veined 'grass-like' leaves (the flaxes, *Astelia nervosa* and *A. fragrans*, and the cabbage trees *Cordyline banksii* and *C. indivisa*), its tufted shape is ideal for withstanding the severe winds. Note that the kamahi is reduced to a series of small-leaved shrubs which hug the ground as a carpet (compare with site 1).



Raukaua anomala



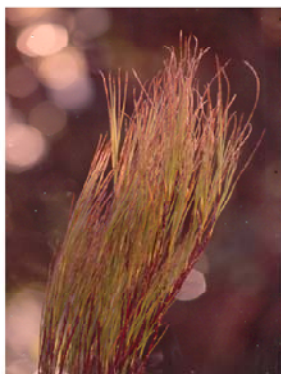
Snowgrass
(*Chionochloa conspicua*)

5. Inanga Shrubland

Here inanga (*Dracophyllum longifolium*) dominates the vegetation. The erect tips of the inanga leaves (see below) become quite red in autumn and winter and impart a welcome warmth to the slopes. Looking back from this point, the remnant silver beech forest can be seen on the ridge to the west and pockets can be seen regenerating to the north across the Rimutaka Hill Road. In summer, a number of flowering herbs shelter among the shrubs - gentians, eyebrights, and orchids (especially species of *Microtis* and *Thelymitra*).

6. Rimutaka Trig

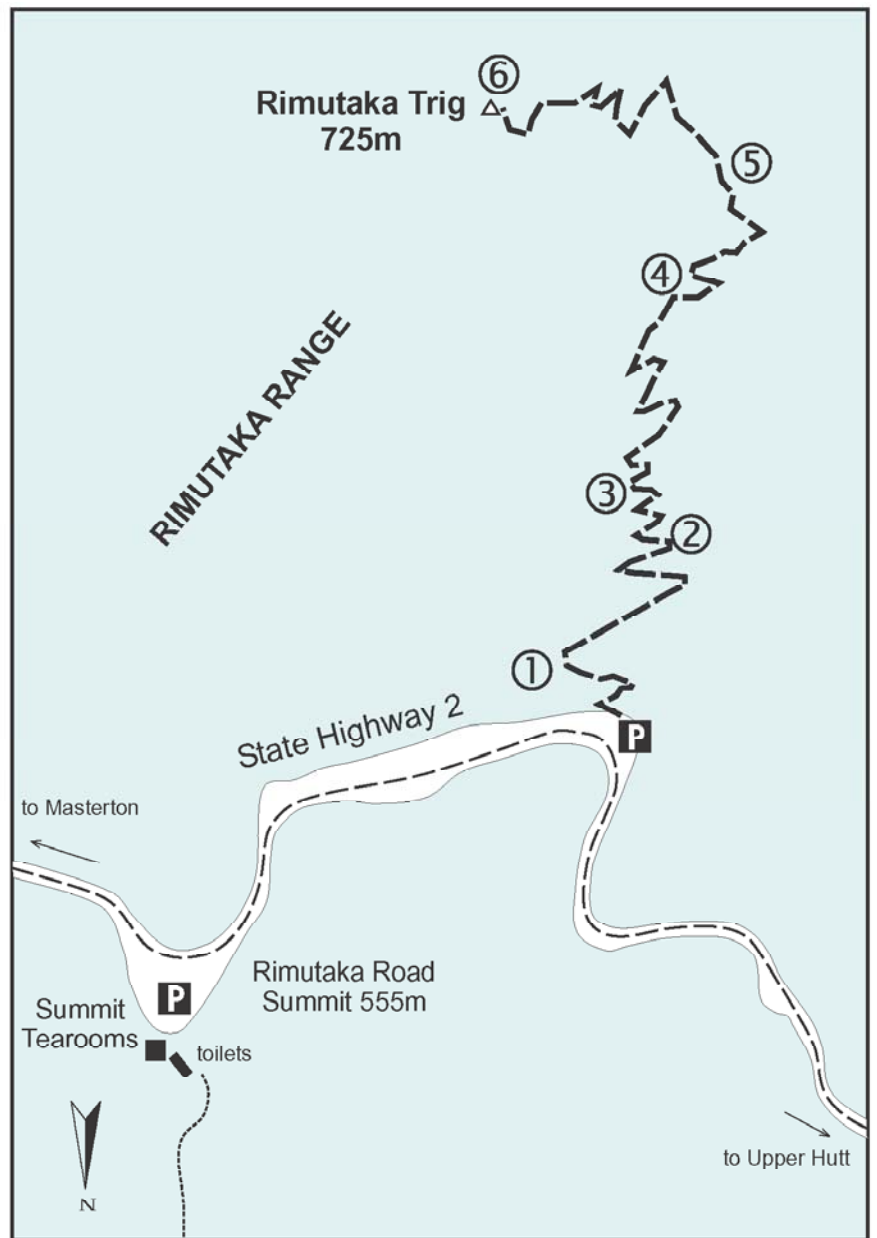
The rocky summit of Rimutaka Trig provides an outstanding view of the Wairarapa Plain and the Aorangi Mountains to the east. The trig marks the northern end of the Rimutaka Range, the southernmost of the line of uplifted ranges that form the backbone of the 'Fish of Maui' (Te Ika a Maui), that part of the North Island running from the Raukumara Range near East Cape to Cook Strait. The Ruamahanga River and Lake Wairarapa occupy the lowest part of the down-faulted depression beyond the Wairarapa Fault which cuts across the eastern base of the Rimutaka Range.



Inanga
Dracophyllum longifolia



Mountain Daisy
Brachyglottis lagopus



Note the thick, tall shrubland on the shadier, south-eastern slopes below the trig. On the exposed Upper Hutt side of the trig you can see the wind-funneling effect reflected in the parallel lines of shrubland. In addition to the shrubs indicated at the other sites, this site carries small shrubs of the bush snowberry (*Gaultheria antipoda*) - a mass of red fleshy berries in summer - and the mountain cottonwood (*Cassinia vauvillersii*). The attractive yellow flowers of the mountain daisy, *Brachyglottis lagopus*, is also a feature of this site in summer.

More Information

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!The information in this publication is correct at the date of printing.

!To help us keep these information sheets up to date, please advise us of any discrepancies in the information given.



Protect plants and animals.
Remove rubbish.
Bury toilet waste.
Keep streams and lakes clean.
Take care with fires.
Camp carefully.
Keep to the track.
Consider others.
Respect our cultural heritage.
Enjoy your visit.

Toitu te whenua
(Leave the land undisturbed)

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