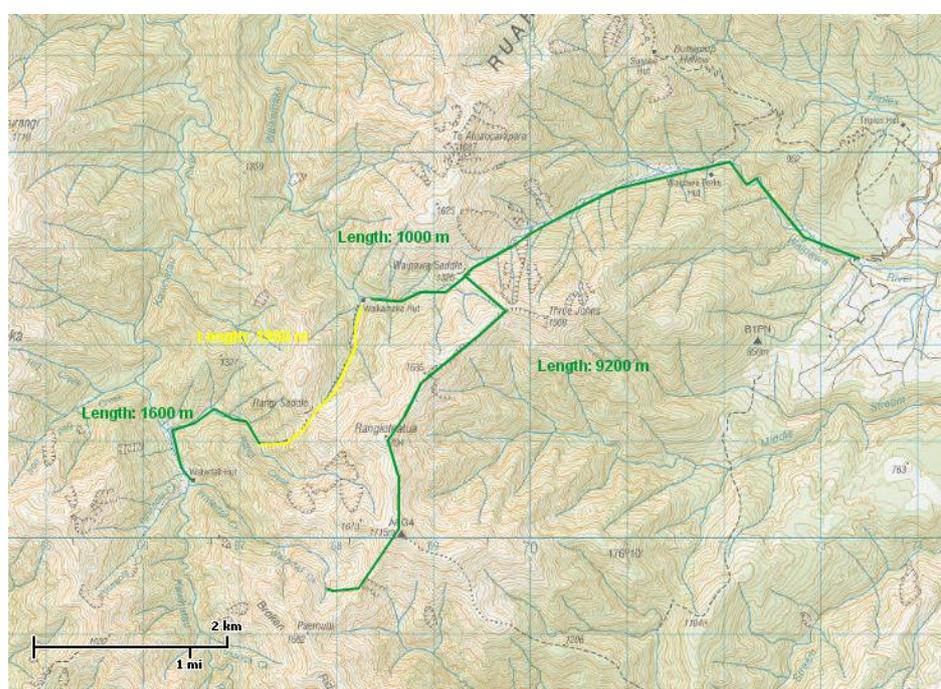


Waterfall Creek

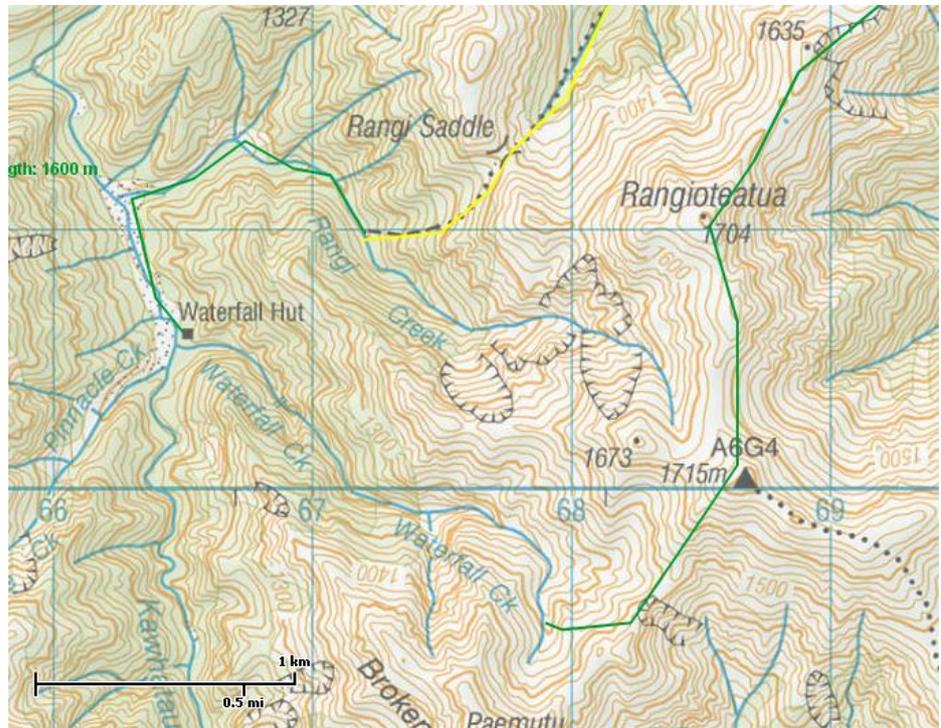
Eastern Ruahines.

Access from Sunrise/Triplex hut road end, via Three Johns and Rangiootea.

Long two day trip. More like really tough 'Waterfall Tramping'. Half day to access, rest of day to descend and a day to return.



R1



R2



R3



R4



R5 (un-descended)

Waterfall Creek.

First recorded descent; 17-19 Mar 06. Travis Holman, Andy Hueni, Enrico

“Andy and I had been busy in the preceding weeks exploring canyons and not-really-canyons in the gorge and felt we were needing to get out and have more of a full on adventure. This meant we needed to find a remote stream that would require a full weekend to complete. Andy had recalled a hut in the Ruahine’s that had caught his interest in the past, aptly called Waterfall Hut. According to the map, a few hundred yards upstream from the hut was a waterfall. Now, up until this point none of the streams we had gone down had actually been marked on the map as having a waterfall, despite the many obvious falls along them; perhaps this should have been our first clue. “Brilliant!” We thought, “If this stream actually has a marked waterfall on it then the rest of it must be spectacular as well. At least we know we are guaranteed at least one abseil.” After doing a bit of planning and organising we had three people keen for this mission: Andy, Andy’s mate from Wellington - Enrico, and myself.

As Enrico had to take the train up from Wellington on Friday night we decided to have dinner at my place and then bivy in the car park on Friday night so we could get an early start on Saturday. The bivy out turned out to be horribly sleepless for all three of us. A combination of mosquitos, drizzle, heat, and bivy bags made getting up and going very easy in the morning. The one benefit of no sleep that night though was that Andy and I both heard what we are all but certain was the call of a male Kiwi. While we were both only half awake, listening to a recording later on nearly confirmed it for us. After a long wet slog through a low drizzly cloud cover, we finally begin climbing our way up to the tops where sunshine was beginning to fight it’s way through. Our route called for stream climbing/bush bashing around and up to the top side of waterfall creek. The walk was quite easy until we broke above bush line and away from the creek, at which point we were forced to slog up an incredibly steep hillside which seemed to go on for ages. Once we gained the ridge and got our bearings we found our aim was slightly off and had to wander along the ridge for a ways. This turned out to be one of the highest points in the Ruahine range - no wonder the climb seemed to go on for bloody ever.

After a bit of ridge walking and scrambling down some tussock slopes, we were finally at the top of Waterfall Creek! By this point the sun was out with a few scattered clouds drifting by. The stream was flowing and rocky and appeared to descend into a fairly narrow gully. It was still early in the day and all was looking perfect. It didn’t take long before we came to the first descent drop. It was basically a two stage waterfall but we avoided to short top section by scrambling around to the true right. The second drop could potentially have been down climbed to the right but since we were here for the abseiling we decided to go for it. Since we were still above bush line we were forced to sling a boulder as an anchor. After a couple of failed attempts at recalling Chucky’s description for a retrievable sling, we decided just to sacrifice the sling to the canyon gods and leave it around the boulder to complete the abseil. Not long after the first abseil we came to another narrower waterfall. Looking down over the lip we were amazed at the features that some of these falls carve into the stone. This particular one was pouring into a very nice tube shaped formation with one open side, then at the bottom the stream made an abrupt left hand turn. Once again we slung a boulder and had a slightly wet abseil down into the rocky tube.

At this point the sides of the stream were beginning to get steeper and we were beginning to anticipate some bigger falls. After a fair bit of scrambling the stream began to cut a narrow slot into the rock and we could see up ahead through the trees what looked like open air – a good sign of a big drop. By this time it was starting to get later in the day and we were anticipating getting to the hut before too long. We arrived at the waterfall and quickly found a semi-dodgy leatherwood shrub to anchor to. We could see clearly that there would be at least two abseils in a row, so we just

planned on to abseil the first drop then re-anchor for the next one. Andy and Enrico abseiled first. When I got down to them Andy was scouting out the next drop, when he climbed back up to our platform he stated that we were going to have to climb up and around. Not willing to give up an abseil so easily and curious why the fearless swiss man would retreat so readily I decided to have a look myself. Scrambling down to the lip of the falls and peering over I became convinced - the river dropped down to at least two more deep pools before immediately plunging over a large fall at which point we could not see the bottom. The two large pools were set deep with vertical featureless rock walls - clearly there would be no anchor. We would need at least two 60m ropes to get down this - and even that may not be enough. Clearly we must be at the waterfall marked on the map. Up and around it was. Andy first climbed out of our narrow position in the gully and secured the rope around a tree as a handline which Enrico and I followed up. After a bit of bush bashing looking for the best descent route, we finally came to the conclusion that we were going to have to invent a new sport: bushbash abseiling. While our hillside was covered in leatherwood and other sorts of fantastic New Zealand flora, it was still steep enough to be dangerous in a fall. We managed to sling the first tree without completely tying the rope in a huge scrambled knot. I abseiled with the rope in a coil in an effort to keep it semi-tidy. Even so every branch and limb seemed to reach out and attempt to tie our rope into the most impossible of knots.

After two abseils and much cursing we were finally down to the basin which the waterfall emptied into. Looking around we found ourselves in an amphitheatre type surrounding with small waterfalls and large rock walls surrounding us, all leading into the main stream which we had descended. We walked over underneath the large waterfall and decided that next time we would need two ropes and possible another method of anchor building. The rest of the walk to the hut was uneventful. We found the hut empty and after hanging up our wet gear and eating a fine meal we hit the sack after a long 11 hour day. The next day was a good walk out, only taking about 5 hours when we expected it to take closer to 7. Overall this was a fantastic trip, but some keen canyoneer must still descend the final falls to complete the canyon. Let that be a challenge!

Travis Holman"