

Multi-day tramping tracks

29. Round the Mountain



This is a 4 to 6 day tramp around Mount Ruapehu. It is ideal for those seeking solitude, magnificent mountain views and a backcountry experience and is a more remote alternative to the popular Tongariro Northern Circuit.

The track can be walked at any time of year, but the safest and most popular time is from December to March. During this period the tracks are normally clear of snow and the weather is less severe.

The Round the Mountain Track traverses a myriad of landscapes, ranging from mountain beech forest, tussock-country and alpine herb fields; to desert lands and glacial river valleys. Although a greater part of the track is in an alpine environment, there are no major alpine passes.

People intending to do this walk should obtain more detailed information and maps than those provided in this booklet. See:

- Tongariro National Park 273/04 map
- NZMS 260 series topographical map S20 Ohakune and T20 Ruapehu

Access

Sections of the track can be walked in 1-2 days, or the full trip of up to 6 days can be undertaken. Round the Mountain Track access points are:

- **Whakapapa**
Whakapapa Village – Silica Rapids Track/ Whakapapaiti Track entrance. There are overnight carparks in the village opposite the Whakapapa Visitor Centre.
- **Scoria Flat**
5 km from Whakapapa Village on the Bruce Road.
- **Desert Road (State Highway 1)**
There is a carpark just off the Desert Road, 35 km from Turangi or 21 km from the Rangipo Junction. It is approximately 1.5 hours to the Round the Mountain/ Tongariro Northern Circuit junction, and 5 hours to Rangipo Hut.
- **Ohakune Mountain Road**
There are two access points: Waitonga Falls carpark (at 12 km) and Wanganui Corner (at 15 km) on opposite sides of the road.

- **Tongariro Northern Circuit**

There are two connection points with the Northern Circuit at two points; Whakapapa Village and Waihohonu Track junction.

- **Tukino Road (4 wheel drive)**

This is not a regular track access point. The road leads to the Tukino club ski field. During summer months there is a locked gate beyond the point where the Round the Mountain Track crosses the road. Road conditions vary. It can be rough at any time of the year and in the winter it is often impassable due to snow.

Track description

Note: Enjoyable in either direction.

Whakapapa Village to Waihohonu Hut

5½ hours, 14.3 km

The track begins at the end of Ngauruhoe Place 100 m below Whakapapa Visitor Centre. There are two options. The Lower Taranaki Falls Track crosses tussock and shrubland before following the Wairere Stream through mountain beech forest to the base of Taranaki Falls. On leaving the falls, the track climbs a set of steps and brings you to the junction with the Upper Taranaki Falls Track (1¼ hours to this point). Alternatively, the Upper Taranaki Falls Track takes you over tussock and shrubland to the same point in one hour.

After leaving the Taranaki Falls Track, it is a further 2 hours to Tama Saddle and Tama Lakes junction. From here a side trip can be made to the Tama Lakes. Tama Saddle is exposed and can be windy in bad weather.

From Tama Saddle the track gradually descends for 2½ hours down Waihohonu Stream to Waihohonu Hut (note that a Great Walk pass is required for this hut from October to June). A side trip can be made from the Round the Mountain Track to the historic Waihohonu Hut about 10 minutes before you reach the new hut.

Waihohonu Hut to Rangipo Hut

5 hours, 12.5 km

The track from Waihohonu Hut to Rangipo Hut is in one of the most unique areas in the park. It is the only true desert landscape in the North Island, and as such, features vast plains of wind sculptured sands and volcanic rock. The Rangipo Desert is dryer than most areas in Tongariro National Park as it is sited in the rain shadow to the east of Mount Ruapehu.

The track passes Ohinepango Springs then traverses the eastern side of Ruapehu, past the Tukino Mountain Road and the Whangaehu River, eventually arriving at Rangipo Hut. The hut is perched on the southern edge of the desert with views east to the Kaimanawa mountains.

Rangipo Hut to Mangaehuehu Hut

5½ hours, 8.5 km

The trip from Rangipo to Mangaehuehu is an undulating traverse. It leaves the desertlands of Rangipo, re-entering the mountain beech forest on the southern flanks of Mt Ruapehu. A feature of this section of track is crossing the awesome Waihanoa Gorge which cuts a path down the mountain into Karioi Forest.

Mangaehuehu Hut to Ohakune Mountain Rd

3 hours, 8.9 km

The gradual downhill traverse from Mangaehuehu weaves through open alpine tussock country and mountain beech stands. After an hour and a half, a track junction gives walkers the option of a side trip to Blyth Hut (1 hour return) or continuing out to the Ohakune Mountain Road. About 20 minutes past the track junction are the Waitonga Falls, reputedly the highest falls in Tongariro National Park. The track out to the road passes Rotokawa, a tarn featuring several alpine wetland species and spectacular views of Ruapehu on a clear day.

A second junction indicates the Old Blyth Track (1½ hours to the 7 km point on Ohakune Mountain Road) on the left, or 15 minutes straight ahead to Waitonga Falls carpark (the 12 km point on Ohakune Mountain Road). There is a 3 km walk up the road to link up with the Round the Mountain Track again.



Mistletoe may be seen on beech trees along the track.

Lahar hazard

Mt Ruapehu is an active volcano. An eruption may generate lahars (volcanic mudflows) in major valleys and in the Whakapapa ski-area. Trampers and skiers should familiarise themselves with known lahar paths and be prepared to move out of valleys should an eruption occur. Check with a local Department of Conservation office for updates on current eruption hazard status and risk level.

Ohakune Mountain Rd to Mangaturuturu Hut

1½ hours, 3 km

The track begins at Wanganui Corner, the 15 km point on the Ohakune Mountain Road, and descends into the Makotuku Valley. It crosses over a lava ridge covered in alpine herbs and then descends into the expansive Mangaturuturu Valley via the Cascades, where a mountain stream tumbles over a spectacular rockfall. The rocks are coated with a creamy-coloured silica deposit left behind by the fast flowing stream. Take care here, as the rocks can be slippery during wet or icy conditions. Mangaturuturu Hut, situated on the valley floor, is maintained jointly by the Department of Conservation and the Wanganui Tramping Club.

Mangaturuturu Hut to Whakapapaiti Hut

5½ hours, 10.3 km

On leaving Mangaturuturu Hut, the track crosses the Mangaturuturu River. The river bed was scoured out in 1975 by a lahar (volcanic mud flow), thus the sides of the river are devoid of established vegetation. Take care crossing the river, particularly after heavy rain. A climb out of the valley brings you to Lake Surprise, a shallow alpine tarn. The staircase that climbs up from Lake Surprise onto the ridge above, was constructed to protect the fragile alpine environment previously destroyed by trampers clambering up the difficult rock face.

The traverse to Whakapapaiti features two magnificent river valleys, the Manganui-o-te-Ao and the Makatote. These rivers merge in the Ruatiti Valley then flow into the Whanganui River. This part of the track features views of Hauhungatahi, a conical peak to the northwest of Ruapehu, as well as spectacular waterfalls tumbling off lava bluffs in the Whakapapaiti Valley. The track junction just before Whakapapaiti Hut gives you the option of continuing on to Scoria Flat on the Bruce Road (1½ hours), or turning off to Whakapapaiti Hut (15 minutes) and on to Whakapapa Village (2½ hours).

Whakapapaiti Hut to Whakapapa Village

1½ hours to Scoria Flat. 2½ hours to Whakapapa Village. 8.7 km

From Whakapapaiti Hut the track continues down the valley. Fifteen minutes below the hut, it crosses Whakapapaiti Stream. If river flow is low it is possible to boulder hop at this point but after heavy rain, it can be unsafe to cross in which case take the alternative return route via the Round the Mountain top track to Scoria Flat, 5 km above Whakapapa Village on the Bruce Road.

About 45 minutes below the hut Mangahua Track branches off to the left. The track to the village continues straight on then veers east. Interesting features of this area are the groves of kaikawaka and cabbage trees amongst the beech forest. From here the track undulates for a number of easy climbs and descents before joining the well formed Silica Rapids Track, for the last three quarters of an hour to the village.

Side trips

Historic Waihohonu Hut

See walk 20 (page 19) for more information.

Blyth Hut

1 hour return from track junction

Blyth Hut can be reached by leaving the Round the Mountain Track at a junction just east of Waitonga Falls. A gentle climb through mountain beech forest brings you out into the open, from where the hut is a short climb above the headwaters of the Mangateitei Stream. The hut site features expansive views of the mountain and the countryside to the south.

Tama Lakes

Lower Tama: 20 minutes return from the junction

Upper Tama 1½ hours return from the junction

Tama Lakes, two infilled explosion craters, are named after Tamatea, the high chief of the Takitimu Canoe, who explored the area six centuries ago.

The lower lake (1200 m above sea level), is a ten minute side trip from the junction. Volcanic debris is slowly washing in and filling the crater. The upper lake (at 1314 m), is a further 35 minutes up a steep ridge. This beautiful lake is reputed to be very deep.

Ohinepango Springs

Five minutes return from Round the Mountain Track. 1 hour return from new Waihohonu Hut

The springs are signposted on the Round the Mountain Track heading south towards Rangipo Hut. Crystal clear cold water bubbles up from beneath an old lava flow and discharges at an enormous rate into the Ohinepango Stream.

30. The Tongariro Northern Circuit



A range of trips can be planned around the Tongariro Northern Circuit. Day trips, overnight trips, or a three to four day walk around the complete circuit. The safest and most popular time of year to walk the Tongariro Northern Circuit is during the summer months (December to March) when the tracks are normally clear of snow and the weather is less severe.

The Tongariro Northern Circuit connects with the Round the Mountain Track at two points - Whakapapa Village and Waihohonu.

People intending to do this walk should obtain more detailed information and maps in addition to the material provided in this booklet.

For more information and detailed maps, see:

- Tongariro National Park 273/04 map
- NZMS 260 series topographical map T19 Tongariro and T20 Ruapehu
- Tongariro Northern Circuit brochure

Track description

Whakapapa to Mangatepopo Hut

3 hours (up to 5 hours in bad weather), 8.5 km

Begins 100 m below the Whakapapa Visitor Centre at Ngauruhoe Place and along the lower Taranaki Falls Track. About 20 minutes from the village the Mangatepopo Track branches off the Falls Track. For the last hour the track skirts around Pukekaikiore until it reaches the Mangatepopo Valley. Mangatepopo Hut is 5 minutes off the main Mangatepopo to Ketetahi Hut Track.

Red Crater



The Tongariro Alpine Crossing

The track from Mangatepopo to Ketetahi (described in the next two sections and on page 22) is known as the 'Tongariro Alpine Crossing'. It is one of the best one-day treks in the country and is a highlight of the Tongariro Northern Circuit.

Because much of the terrain is elevated and exposed it is essential to carry adequate clothing even on a day trip. See the recommended gear list on page 8.

Mangatepopo Hut to Emerald Lakes

3½ hours, 8 km

The track follows Mangatepopo Stream up the glacially carved valley, climbing over a succession of lava flows from Ngauruhoe. A five minute detour at the head of the valley leads to Soda Springs, cold springs which emerge beneath an old lava flow.

The steep climb required to reach the Mangatepopo Saddle rewards climbers with views of the valley and if clear, Mt Taranaki to the west. From the saddle the track crosses South Crater, not a true crater but a drainage basin between the surrounding volcanic landforms.

The climb to Red Crater offers splendid views of Oturere Valley and the Kaimanawa Ranges to the east. At the top of Red Crater (the highest point on the Crossing at 1886 m) a poled route to the left leads to Tongariro Summit. The main track continues on along the crater rim. The large flat topped crater seen ahead is North Crater.

A scoria covered ridge leads down to Emerald Lakes. These three lakes fill old explosion craters. Their brilliant colour is caused by minerals washed down from the thermal area of Red Crater. Due to the high mineral content of the water, swimming in the lakes is not recommended. Just beyond Emerald Lakes the track branches right, to Oturere Hut or continues straight ahead to Ketetahi Hut.

Emerald Lakes to Ketetahi Hut

1½ hours, 4.2 km

Leaving Emerald Lakes the track crosses Central Crater which like South Crater is actually another drainage basin. A short climb leads up to the ridge beside Te Waiwhakaiata-o-te-Ranihiroa (Blue Lake). The track then sidles around North Crater. Views can be had of Lakes Rotoaira (foreground) and Taupo. As the track loses



Morning view from Ketetahi Hut

Crossing South Crater



altitude it enters vast areas of red tussock cloaking the hills. The track zigzags down to Ketetahi Hut. Please resist the temptation to take short cuts as it causes accelerated erosion.

From Ketetahi Hut the Tongariro Alpine Crossing Track continues down the hill (see page 22). To complete the Northern Circuit make your way back to Emerald Lakes and the turn off to Oturere Hut.

Emerald Lakes to Oturere Hut

1½ hours, 4.4 km

From Emerald Lakes the track descends steeply into the Oturere Valley with views of the valley and the Kaimanawa Ranges. The track weaves through an endless variety of unusual jagged lava forms created by early eruptions from Red Crater. A magical place to visit especially on a misty day. Oturere Hut is nestled on the eastern edge of these flows.

Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut

3 hours, 7.5 km

After leaving Oturere Hut the track undulates over a number of stream valleys and open gravel fields. The track gradually sidles around the foot hills of Ngauruhoe descending into a valley and crossing one of the

branches of the Waihohonu Stream. Continue through a beech clad valley before climbing towards the ridge top. Waihohonu Hut is in the next valley.

Waihohonu Hut to Whakapapa Village

5½ hours, 14.3 km

From the historic hut the track follows the Waihohonu Stream gradually climbing to Tama Saddle. Tama Saddle is exposed and can be windy in bad weather.

On reaching the saddle a track branches right to Tama Lakes, two partially infilled explosion craters. The lower lake is a ten minute side trip from the junction while the upper lake is up a steep ridge, a one and a half hour side trip.

Whakapapa Village is approximately two hours from the Tama Lakes junction. After the first hour the track meets the Taranaki Falls loop walk. To view the falls, follow the lower track down a flight of stairs to a boulder-ringed pool at the base of the falls. The track then continues beside Wairere Stream through mountain beech forest.

Alternatively the upper track can be taken through tussock and shrubland. Both options take about one hour to return to the village.



Emerald lakes (right)

Taranaki Falls from the lower track (below)



Summit routes (5 - 12 hours)

Warning: These summit climbing routes are unmarked and should only be undertaken by fit, experienced, well equipped people who can make effective judgments about alpine and volcanic hazards. Icy or 'white out' conditions can make all climbs a serious undertaking. Before setting out check at the Whakapapa Visitor Centre for current route and weather conditions, volcanic activity and avalanche risk.

People intending to do any of these routes should obtain more detailed information and maps in addition to the material provided in this booklet.

For more information and detailed maps, see:

- Tongariro National Park 273/04 map
- NZMS 260 series topographical map T19 Tongariro and T20 Ruapehu
- Mt Ruapehu Crater Climb brochure

The weather may deteriorate during the trip – alpine weather can change very quickly. Attempt these trips only in good weather and be prepared to turn back if conditions change.

During winter and times of snow, surface conditions will vary day to day. Depending on the time of year some of the following hazards may be encountered on Mounts Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro: icy slopes, ice cliffs, avalanches, waterfall holes, crevasses and schrunds.

Do not climb above your level of experience. Turn back as soon as you feel uncomfortable with the weather or route conditions. If travelling alone tell a responsible person of your intentions.

31. Ngauruhoe Summit (2287 m)

6-7 hours, 19 km return via same route. Begins at Mangatepopo road-end.



The 2500 year old near perfect cone of Mt Ngauruhoe entices many visitors to its summit. Relatively quiet since 1975, this parasitic cone of Mt Tongariro is traditionally one of New Zealand's most active volcanoes.

Follow the Tongariro Alpine Crossing Track up the Mangatepopo Valley to the saddle between Ngauruhoe and Tongariro. A poled route leads to the foot of a ridge near the centre of Ngauruhoe's northern slope. From here the route is not marked but climbs a band of red scoria to the summit. Be aware of falling rocks dislodged by others on the steep slopes above.

Avoid entering the inner crater area, where volcanic fumaroles may emit overpowering gases. Descend via the red scoria, then on the loose scree to either side of the ridge.

32. Tongariro Summit (1967 m)



2 hours return from the Tongariro Alpine Crossing

From Red Crater a poled route branches off to the summit of Tongariro. The route offers some wonderful views of the area.

33. Mt Ruapehu Crater Climb (2672 m)



7 hours, 10 km, return via same route. Begins from Iwikau Village at the top of the Bruce Road.

Or 5 hours, 7 km, return via the same route. Take Whakapapa Ski Area chairlift from Iwikau Village. Walk begins at Knoll Ridge.

This is NOT a marked route. You need to be able to find your own way, have a map (Tongariro National Park map 273-04) and be well equipped (see gear list in introduction). It is only suitable for fit, experienced, and well equipped people who can make effective judgments about alpine and volcanic hazards. If unsure, travel with a guided party. Whakapapa Ski Area offers guided trips to the Crater during summer months.

Phone (07) 892 3738. www.mtruapehu.com

If chairlifts or the guided summit walk are not operating, it is a clear indication that conditions are not suitable for tramping on Mt Ruapehu.

The climb is not recommended in winter without mountaineering experience and equipment (such as ice axes and crampons). Many people have enjoyed the climb to the Crater with its panoramic views and volcanic landscape. However, some have met with tragedy because they were either not experienced or were ill equipped to handle the conditions they encountered.

The following descriptions are simplified route guides from Whakapapa Ski Area up to the Dome Equipment Shed, where you can view the crater area. Two standard routes are marked on the photo. The most commonly used early summer route, when snow is still present in the valleys, follows up the left-hand-side of the Knoll Ridge T-bar line and continues up the valley above the last T-bar pylon. At the head of the valley climb up onto the ridge behind Glacier Knob. At this point a narrow foot track zigzagging up the face and onto Dome Ridge may be seen. Follow along Dome Ridge to Dome Equipment Shed.

The second marked route is recommended when most of the snow has disappeared. From the top of the Waterfall Express chairlift travel to your right past pylons indicating the Knoll Ridge T-bar line and over to Restful Ridge. Stay on Restful Ridge as you climb towards the crater area. You will go up a series of rises. The terrain is mainly rock. At the top of Restful Ridge there is a more open face. At this point you may see a narrow foot track zigzagging up the face and onto Dome Ridge. Follow along Dome Ridge to Dome Equipment Shed.



The weather can deteriorate quickly.

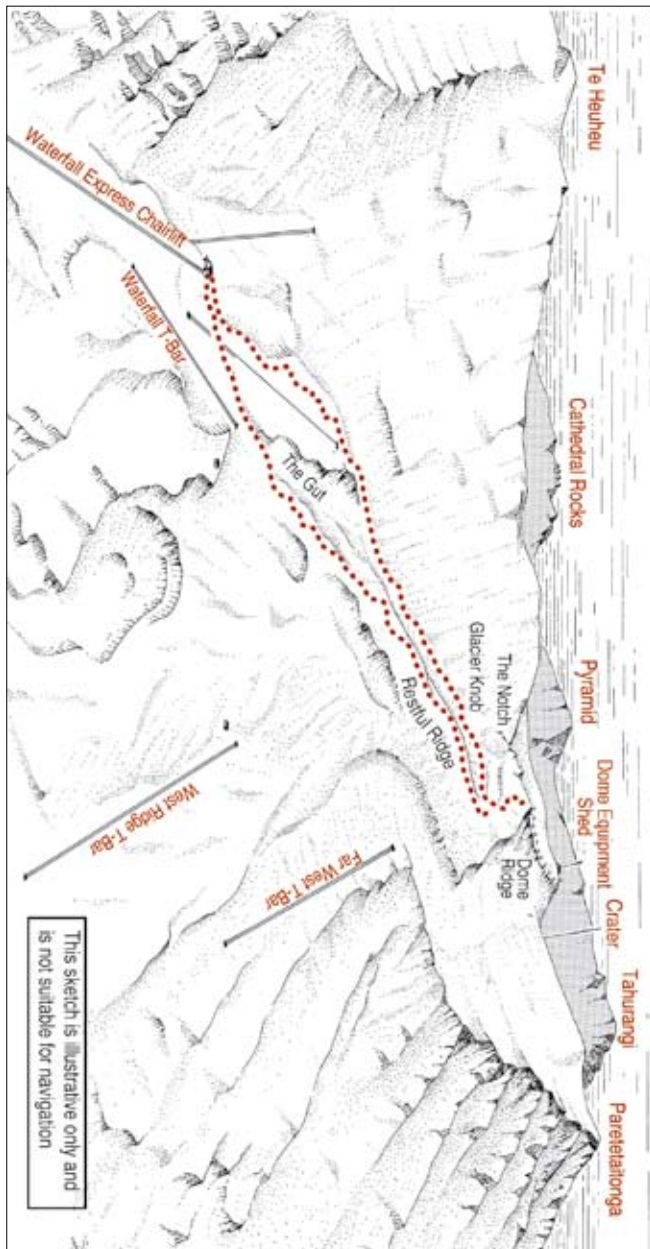
Lost and found

When travelling in the back country, especially on unmarked routes, it is essential to have excellent navigational skills and equipment as well as favourable weather conditions. Otherwise you may find yourself lost.

If you lose your way - **do not panic!**

- Try to retrace your steps to the last point where you recognise the route
- Mark your current position e.g. with a hat on a rock and only move within sighting distance of this object so that you do not stray further from your known route.
- Do not split up the party.
- Do not travel in 'white out' conditions or in the dark.
- If you can not find the route, and visibility allows, head for the best shelter that you can find (e.g. any building, the leeward side of a ridge, a large rock). Then stay in one place.
- Make your position as conspicuous as possible.

Mt Ruapehu Crater Climb



Tongariro's unique flora and fauna

Wildlife

New Zealand's plants and animals have developed during 80 million years of isolation from the ancient super-continent of Gondwana, as a result many of them are unique and found only in this country.

Birds found in Tongariro National Park include blue duck, North Island brown kiwi, the North Island robin, whitehead, kereru, fantail, silveryeye, chaffinch, tui, tomtit, blackbird, yellow-crowned parakeet, morepork and kaka. While the birds are mostly active during the day, many of the park's other unique creatures, such as bats and kiwi, only come out at night. Tongariro is home to New Zealand's only native land mammals, the short and long tailed bats. Skinks and geckos are also found in the park, but are more likely to be visible during the warmer summer months.

Insects found in the park include many varieties of cicada, New Zealand's largest beetle (the huhu), the rare forest ringlet butterfly, weta and several species of moth.

Most notable amongst introduced animals are deer, goats, possum and hare, all of which cause severe damage to alpine and forest vegetation. Wasps also pose a threat to native bird species with whom they compete for nectar and other food. Red deer provide sport for hunters, but unfortunately also severely affect the health of our native forests.

Blue duck or whio

