

Tongariro Alpine Crossing

Tongariro National Park



Introduction

The traverse of the stark and spectacular volcanic terrain of Mt Tongariro is one of the most fascinating treks in the country. Among its highlights are steaming vents and hot springs, old lava flows, beautiful water filled explosion craters and stunning views. On clear days you can see Mt Taranaki in the west, Mt Ngauruhoe, the Kaimanawa Ranges, Lake Taupo and beyond.

The mountains of Tongariro National Park are sacred to Maori - tread carefully with respect.

Tongariro National Park

Tongariro National Park is New Zealand's oldest national park and a World Heritage area. Paramount Ngati Tuwharetoa Chief, Te Heuheu Tukino IV (Horonuku), gifted the peaks of Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngauruhoe to the people of New Zealand in 1887, forming the nucleus of the Tongariro National Park.

The park's dual World Heritage status recognises its important Maori cultural associations as well as its outstanding volcanic features. The mountains of Tongariro are recognised as being central to the lives of Ngati Tuwharetoa, the iwi (people) who have historically occupied this area. The mountains are their matua (parent of the land) and the focus of their mana (pride). The spiritual and cultural values are part of the landscape. The volcanoes and their ecology represent a unique natural community and are considered to be a natural site of universal value. Tongariro is one of only a handful of sites worldwide to have World Heritage status for both natural and cultural values.

Weather

Tongariro National Park weather can change with alarming speed. You must be prepared for all weather conditions. The weather in the car park can be totally different to what's going on nearly 1000 metres higher and further up the track.

Take care at track junctions, especially in poor visibility. Look for and follow poles marked 'Tongariro Alpine Crossing'.

Be prepared to change your plans and turn back, especially when visibility is poor and in strong winds.

Water

There is no drinking water available between Mangatepopo and Ketetahi huts. Water supply at the huts is from rainwater. Conserve water and ensure taps are turned off.

We recommend you treat all water in the Park. Water from the upper Mangatepopo Stream, Emerald Lakes and Ketetahi Springs is not suitable for drinking due to high mineral content.

Other facilities

Huts

If you wish to shelter in huts, please respect overnight users. Leave wet boots and jackets outside the hut.

Toilets

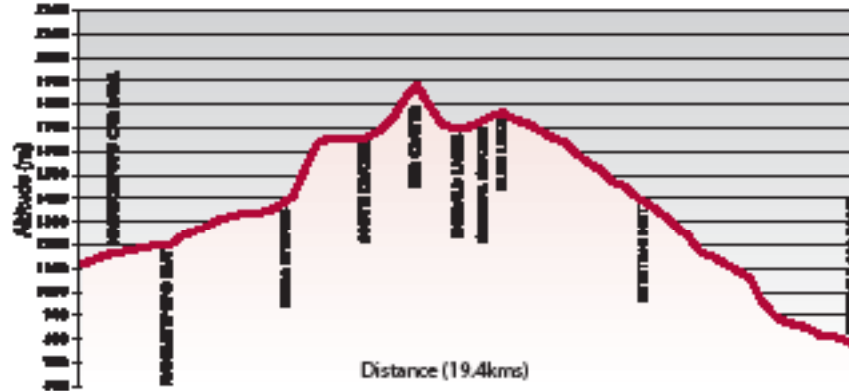
There are toilets at Mangatepopo and Ketetahi car parks, at both huts and at Soda Springs. Between Soda Springs and Ketetahi Hut there are no toilets and the terrain is open with little cover.

Rubbish disposal

Take all rubbish (including cigarette butts) out of the park.



Be prepared for rapidly changing weather conditions on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Photo: Jimmy Johnson



Total track length: 5½ - 7½ hours (not including stops).
19.4 km one way.

The Tongariro Alpine Crossing is a trek over steep volcanic terrain and a reasonable level of fitness is required.

Times given in this brochure are an approximate guide as everyone walks at a different pace. The time taken on each section of the track will also depend on rest and sightseeing stops. Allow longer in winter conditions.

The amount of climbing required is minimised if the crossing is begun at the Mangatepopo Valley. The track can be walked in the reverse direction but this requires more climbing. Allow an extra hour.

Mangatepopo Valley to Soda Springs 1 to 1½ hours

From the car park at the Mangatepopo Road end, 7 km off SH47, the track makes its way up the Mangatepopo Valley. Twenty minutes from the road a side track leads to Mangatepopo Hut. Continuing at a gentle gradient the main track climbs alongside a stream and around the edges of old lava flows.

It is generally believed that the Mangatepopo Valley was glacially carved out during the last ice age and subsequently partially in-filled by lava flows from Ngauruhoe.

Note the different colours on the lava flows as you walk up the valley. The surface colour of younger lava is darker and absorbs much of the sun's heat – this is a harsh environment for plants to grow and the reason why the youngest flows only have a few plants, lichens and moss. The older flows have progressively more species and large plants, which take advantage of the slow build up of precious soil. The vegetation has also been

modified by fire and farming.

Soda Springs (top of the Mangatepopo Valley) to South Crater. 1 hour

The track climbs steadily, gaining 340m from Soda Springs to South Crater. You will cross over two lava flows from eruptions in 1870 and two pyroclastic flows from 1975. On a clear day there are magnificent views from this section of track.

At the top of the climb the Tongariro Alpine Crossing track continues east across South Crater. Those wanting to climb Mt Ngauruhoe should take the route up to the right.

South Crater to Red Crater 45 minutes to 1 hour

To continue over the Crossing follow the poled route across South Crater to a ridge leading up to Red Crater.

South Crater is not a real crater but a basin that may have been glacially carved and has since filled with sediment from the surrounding ridges. An explosion pit in the southeast part of the crater formed around 14,000 years ago. The lava seen from Ngauruhoe dates to the 1870 eruption.

As you walk up the ridge to Red Crater you may smell sulphur, evidence that the crater is still active. Enjoy the spectacular view to the east over the Kaimanawa Forest Park and Desert Road.

Looking into Red Crater notice the unusual formation within, known as a 'dike'. This feature was formed as molten magma moved to the surface through a vertical channel in the crater wall. Having solidified at its outer surface the dike was later left partially hollow when the magma drained from below. Being more resistant than the surrounding scoria, erosion by wind and rain has now left this structure exposed. The red colour is from high temperature oxidation of iron in the rock. Lava flows from Red Crater extended into Oturere Valley, South and Central craters. From here a side trip can be taken to the summit of Mt Tongariro.

Red Crater to Emerald Lakes 10 to 20 minutes

The summit of Red Crater (1886 m), is the highest point on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. From here the track descends steeply to Emerald Lakes. Minerals leaching from the adjoining thermal area cause their brilliant colour. The Maori name is Ngarotopounamu meaning greenstone-hued lakes. These lakes freeze in winter.

Take care on the steep descent on loose scree terrain.

What to Bring

- Food and plenty of fluid, especially on hot days
- Rainproof coat (overtrousers are a good idea too)
- Sturdy boots - *uneven volcanic terrain can be difficult and tiring to walk on*
- Warm woollen or polypropylene clothing - *cotton clothes don't keep you warm when it's wet*
- Woollen hat and gloves or mittens
- Sun protection
- Personal first aid kit
- Map and compass - *important in poor visibility*

In winter you should also carry:

- Ice axe and crampons - *and know how to use them*
- Snow gaiters

You could also consider:

- Avalanche probe/snow shovel
- Avalanche transceiver
- Cellphone for emergencies

Emerald Lakes to Ketetahi Hut 1 to 1½ hours

The track to Oturere Hut branches off to the right at the lowest lake while the Tongariro Alpine Crossing continues over Central Crater (a drainage basin rather than a crater) to Te Wai-whakaata-o-te-Rangihiroa (Blue Lake). Te Wai-whakaata-o-te Rangihiroa translates as Rangihiroa's mirror. Te Rangihiroa was the son of local chief Pakaurangi, Te Maari (after whom the crater is named) was his sister. Te Rangihiroa is said to have explored the Tongariro volcanoes about AD 1750. This lake is tapu (sacred). Do not swim in or eat food around the lake.

From Te Wai-whakaata-o-te-Rangihiroa the track sidles around the flanks of North Crater (a cooled lava lake) and descends to Ketetahi Hut.

To protect the fragile soil and plants it's important that you stay on the formed track.

Ketetahi Hut to Ketetahi Car Park 1½ - 2 hours

Note the steam from Ketetahi Springs. The acid sulphate water is high in boric acid and some springs are high in ammonia. They also contain magnesium, calcium and iron. The hot acid water has 'cooked' the rocks and this, added to by mineral deposits and the red and blue/green algae in the water has created the array of colours in the rocks. The temperatures range from 74°C to 91°C. The temperature of steam from the hottest fumarole (steam vent) is 138°C.

The track continues to descend through tussock slopes to the forest bushline. The cool podocarp-hardwood forest provides a final contrast on the long descent to the road-end. At two points the track passes over the tongue of a lava flow from Te Maari Crater and for a distance follows alongside the Manga-a-te-tipua Stream (polluted with minerals from the Ketetahi Springs). Towards the end of the track a short path takes you to a lookout over a waterfall.

Side trips

Soda Springs

Near the head of the Mangatepopo Valley a short sidetrack leads to Soda Springs. The springs are an oasis for the moisture loving yellow buttercups (*Ranunculus carsei*). Allow 15 minutes return.

Ketetahi Springs are on private land and hiking the Tongariro Alpine Crossing does not convey any right of access to the springs. Please respect this as trespassing through the springs may result in loss of access to this part of the park. Follow the poled route.



Mt Ngauruhoe (2287 m)

This is not a poled route. From the base of Mt Ngauruhoe at Mangatepopo Saddle, climb directly up to the crater via the rocky ridge to the left of the scree slopes. The summit area is dangerous and should be avoided if there are signs of increased volcanic activity. Take extra care in poor visibility and on loose scoria during your descent. Allow 1½ hours up from the saddle and 30 minutes down.

Mt Tongariro Summit (1967 m)

From Red Crater follow the poled route leading to the summit. Allow 1½ to 2 hours return.



Protect plants and animals

Remove rubbish

Bury toilet waste

Keep streams and lakes clean

Take care with fire

Camp carefully

Keep to the track

Consider others

Respect our cultural heritage

Enjoy your visit

*Toitu te whenua
(Leave the land
undisturbed)*



Transport

The Tongariro Alpine Crossing begins and ends at different points and return transport must be arranged. This can be done directly with commercial shuttle operators or through visitor information centres. Transport operators are responsible for collecting all people whom they have delivered to the start of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. You must ensure that they are told about any change in your plans.

Transport leaves from Whakapapa Village, National Park, Turangi, Taupo and Ohakune.

It is important to have appropriate outdoor clothing, equipment and fitness (see the essential gear list). Theft from and vandalism to cars left at road ends is a continuing problem. Do not leave valuables in vehicles.

Volcanic Hazards

Mounts Ngauruhoe and Tongariro are active volcanoes. Trampers intending to trek the Tongariro Alpine Crossing should check the current Volcanic Alert Level of these volcanoes at a local Department of Conservation office or www.geonet.org.nz before starting out.

Look out for areas of volcanic activity. In particular be aware of noxious gases escaping from vents and potentially accumulating in the bottoms of craters. Be prepared to move off the mountains quickly if there are any signs of volcanic activity (earthquakes, rumbling, ash or flowing clouds or flying rocks). Move away from the eruption vents in the Summit Hazard Zones and stay on ridges. Do not remain in valleys around the volcanoes during eruptions. Stay in safe areas until advised otherwise by authorities

Restrictions

- All native animals, plants and other natural features (including rocks and stones) are protected - do not take them out of the park
- Do not bring any animals into the park
- Observe fire regulations
- Carry out all rubbish
- No mountain biking

For further information

Whakapapa Visitor Centre

Private Bag, Mount Ruapehu 3951

Tel: (07) 892 3729

Fax: (07) 892 3814

Email: whakapapavc@doc.govt.nz

Visit the Department of Conservation website:

www.doc.govt.nz

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Safety Watch
0800 999 005
Report any safety hazards

