

Tararua Southern Crossing

TARARUA FOREST PARK 3 days, 35 km 2,500 m ascent/descent

The Southern Crossing is a classic 3-day tramp of the Tararua Range. This was the original route from Otaki Forks to the Wairarapa Plains (and, in later years, the Kaitoke basin). The alpine tops section from Table Top to Alpha (1,361 m) takes around 6–8 hours and, in fine weather, offers panoramic views of Wairarapa, Wellington Harbour, South Island mountains, and Kapiti Island and coast.

Please note: times and distances are approximate.

Getting there

Start/finish: Otaki

Otaki Forks is 19 km inland from Otaki township – approximately 1 hr 30 min drive from Wellington or Palmerston North. The easiest turn-off from State Highway 1 is at Otaki Gorge Road, just south of the State Highway 1 bridge over the Otaki River. The last 5 km of this road is unsealed, narrow and windy – please drive carefully. Taxis/shuttles can be booked from Waikanae railway station to Otaki Forks.

Start/finish: Kaitoke

Turn off State Highway 2 onto Marchant Road (signposted on the western side of the Remutaka Range) at the YMCA Camp Kaitoke turn-off. Near the end of Marchant Road, turn right into Kiwi Ranch Road. The car park is located approximately 500 m along the road on the left. The only public transport is by taxi to/from Upper Hutt, which has a train station.

Huts

A backcountry hut pass or hut tickets are required for overnight stays. These can be purchased from all Department of Conservation (DOC) visitor centres, some sports shops, service stations and i-SITEs. Children under 11 years of age can stay free of charge.

Field Hut: Standard, 20 bunks

Kime Hut: Standard, 20 bunks

Alpha Hut: Standard, 20 bunks

1 standard ticket per person per night.

Safety

Experience

This is an Advanced track for experienced trampers. You need to be confident that you and your group have the necessary skills, fitness and equipment.

Equipment

Tararua Forest Park often has severe weather conditions throughout the year. Always carry sufficient clothing and wet weather gear for cold conditions. Carry extra food for your journey in case of delays.

Maps

Good navigation skills are required, as route finding can be difficult, particularly in misty conditions. Carrying a map and compass and knowing how to use them is essential. Ensure you have at least one experienced navigator in your party.

Maps are available from DOC visitor centres, some sports shops and book shops.

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Weather



The alpine tops can be exposed to severe weather all year round, with high winds making the route impassable. In winter, the tops can be covered with wind-blown snow and ice. Check the Tararua Forest Park weather forecast at www.metservice.com and the latest track alerts and hut information on the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz. Be prepared to wait out severe weather in the huts or to turn back if the conditions are worse than expected.

Tell someone before you go

Safety is your responsibility so remember to leave details of your trip (return date and time, planned route, party member names and vehicle licence plates) with a trusted contact, and don't forget to let them know when you return. Information on the Outdoor Intentions System can be found at www.adventuresmart.org.nz.

Remember to fill in hut books during your trip, even if you do not stay in the hut. They can assist in search and rescue operations, and may help save your life.

Party size

Do not travel alone – always travel with one or more companions. Stay together. Where people in big groups are travelling at different paces, form two groups and nominate a leader and tail-ender for each party.

Please carry out all your rubbish.

Track Guide

Day 1: Otaki Forks – Field Hut 3–4 hr, 5 km

From the car park next to the caretaker's house, follow the marked track through the trees to the swing bridge over the Waiotauru River. Cross the bridge onto a grass terrace and follow a track towards Judd Ridge climbing up into bush. It is a climb from 150 m all the way to Field Hut, which appears in a small clearing below the bushline at 835 m. Depending on the start time and length of daylight hours, Field Hut may be a better overnight option for the first day.

 Field Hut has mattresses, woodburner & rainwater tank.
1 standard ticket per person per night.

Field Hut – Kime Hut 3–4 hr, 5 km

Continue the climb from Field Hut beyond the bushline into Table Top alpine tussock. Pass the signposted junction to Penn Creek Hut and another junction to Maungahuka Hut. Follow the signposted route to Kime Hut at 1,405 m. A mobile phone signal is usually available along the ridge line near Kime Hut.

 Kime Hut has mattresses and a rainwater tank. There is no fire and it can be extremely cold.
1 standard ticket per person per night.

Day 2: Kime Hut – Alpha Hut 5–6 hr, 7.5 km

Follow the ridge over Field Peak to Mount Hector (1,529 m), the highest point of the route. Mount Hector bears a large wooden cross that was erected in 1950 (and replaced in 1980) as a memorial to trampers who lost their lives during World War II. The exposed ridge of the Dress Circle takes you to the top of Aston, where there is a signposted junction to Elder Hut. Continue along the ridge route over Alpha (1,361 m) and descend to Alpha Hut, just below the bushline.

 Alpha Hut has mattresses, woodburner & rainwater tank.
1 standard ticket per person per night.

Day 3: Alpha Hut – Kaitoke 7–9 hr, 17 km

Continue from Alpha Hut and descend from 1,187 m to the saddle at Hells Gate. From there, climb up to Marchant Ridge, passing the Bull Mound, Omega and Block 16 track turn-offs. These tracks into the Tauherenikau valley offer alternative routes to Marchant Ridge, but involve a river crossing, which may be dangerous after heavy rainfall. Marchant Ridge is a long stretch of bush that is rough underfoot and muddy when wet, so the pace is usually slower. The section from the Smith Creek Shelter junction along Dobson Loop Track has mobile phone reception to book your transport. Look carefully for the track turn-off into the Kiwi Ranch Road car park, next to the YMCA gate.

 **Advanced: Tramping track:** Challenging day or multi-day hiking. Track may be rough and steep. Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Suitable for people with high-level backcountry (remote area) skills and experience; navigation and survival skills required. Tramping boots required.

