

Tongariro Northern Circuit

TRACK GUIDE



Duration: 3–4 days
Distance: 43 km (loop)



Great Walks season:
23 October 2015 –
30 April 2016



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

greatwalks.co.nz

Welcome to the *Tongariro Northern Circuit Track*, one of nine unforgettable journeys.

From alpine herbfields to forests, from tranquil lakes to desert plateaux, journey through a landscape of stark contrasts with amazing views in this World Heritage site. Winding past Mount Tongariro and Mount Ngauruhoe, you will be dazzled by dramatic volcanic landscapes and New Zealand's rich geological and ancestral past.



Plants and wildlife

Plants in the area vary considerably, from alpine herbs to thick swathes of tussocks and flax; from the hardy, low-growing shrubs of the Rangipo Desert to dense beech forests. A diverse range of beautiful and unique alpine flowers abounds in the spring and summer months.



Photo: Herb Christophers

North Island robin/toutouwai are sparrow-sized birds found only in New Zealand. Males have dark grey plumage while the female is dark grey-brown. They are inquisitive, friendly and trusting, often coming to within a couple of metres of people.



Photo: Ralph Powlesland

New Zealand falcon/kārearea can fly at speeds of more than 100 km/h and catch prey larger than itself. The falcon does not build a nest. Rather, it makes a scrape on the ground, under a rocky outcrop or in a forest tree into which it lays its eggs.



Photo: Ian McHenry

Bellbird/korimako are easily recognised by their melodious song. Well camouflaged, they are usually heard before they are seen. Females are olive-brown with a pale yellow cheek stripe. Males are olive green with a black outer wing and tail feathers.



Photo: Shellie Evans

Tūi are unique to New Zealand. They belong to the honeyeater family feeding mainly on nectar from flowers of native plants. Tūi are important pollinators of many native trees and will fly large distances for their favourite food. You will recognise tūi by the distinctive white tuft under their throat.



Photo: Janice McKenna

Rifleman/titipounamu are New Zealand's smallest bird. They are constantly on the move, producing a characteristic 'wing-flicking' while foraging up and down tree trunks. Named after a colonial New Zealand regiment as their plumage drew similarities with the military uniform of a rifleman.



Photo: M F Soper

Plan and prepare

It is important to plan and prepare your trip and be well equipped on a Great Walk. Your safety and the decisions you make while walking the Tongariro Northern Circuit are your responsibility.

Before you go, know **The Outdoor Safety Code** — 5 simple rules to help you stay safe:

1. Plan your trip
2. Tell someone
3. Be aware of the weather
4. Know your limits
5. Take sufficient supplies

TELL SOMEONE YOUR PLANS

Tell someone your plans and leave a date to raise the alarm if you haven't returned. To raise the alarm – call NZ Police on 111. Find more information at adventuresmart.org.nz.

Further information and bookings

Visit the Great Walks website or contact your nearest DOC Visitor Centre.

Phone: 0800 NZ GREATWALKS (0800 694 732)

Email: greatwalks@doc.govt.nz



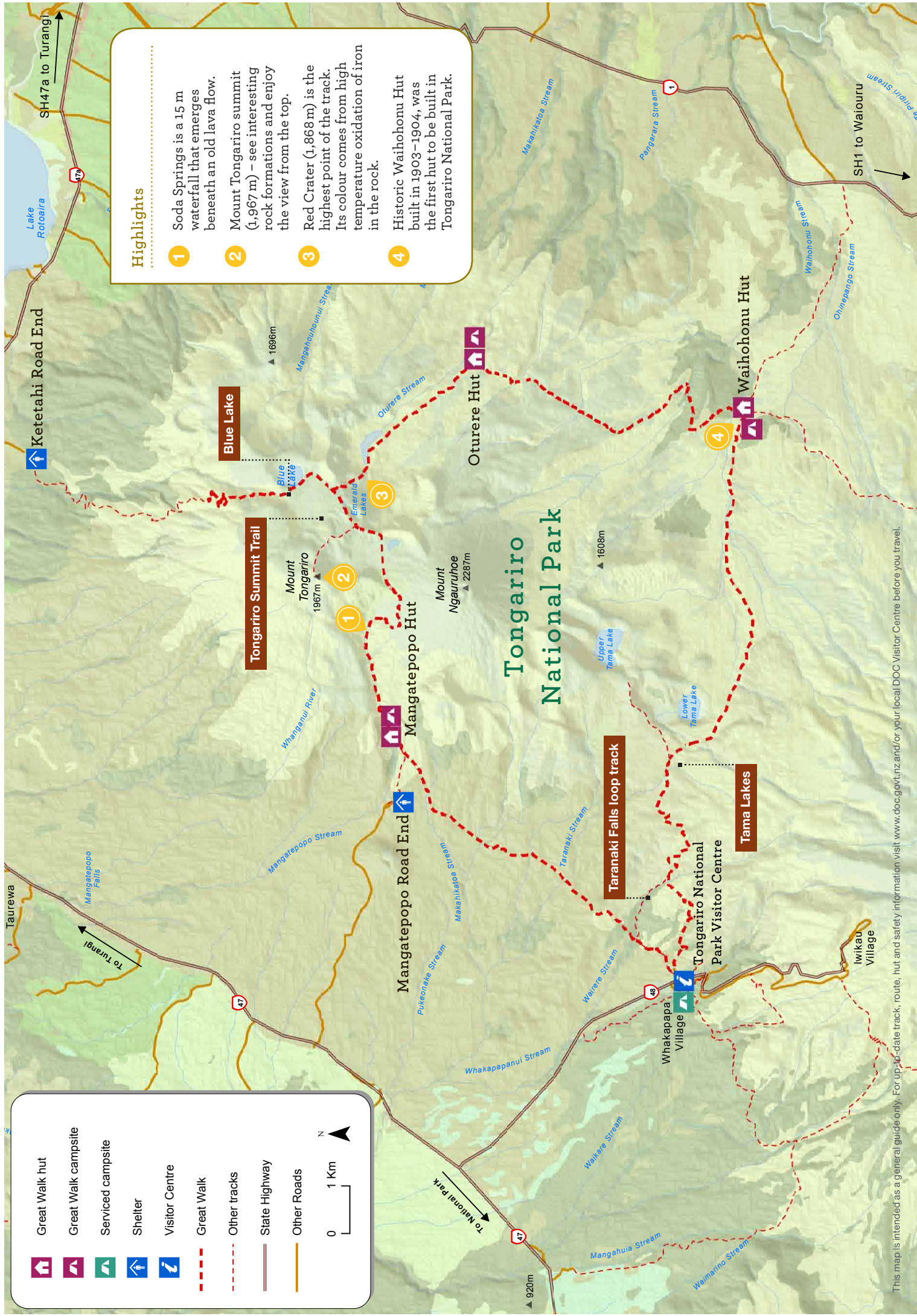
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New Zealand Government




Highlights

- 1 Soda Springs is a 15 m waterfall that emerges beneath an old lava flow.
- 2 Mount Tongariro summit (1,967 m) – see interesting rock formations and enjoy the view from the top.
- 3 Red Crater (1,868 m) is the highest point of the track. Its colour comes from high temperature oxidation of iron in the rock.
- 4 Historic Waihohehu Hut built in 1903–1904, was the first hut to be built in Tongariro National Park.

 Great Walk hut

 Great Walk campsite


 Serviced campsite


 Shelter

 Visitor Centre

 Great Walk

 Other tracks

 State Highway

 Other Roads

 0 1 Km



Track guide


Tongariro Northern Circuit can be walked in either direction. The track is well marked and signposted, but some sections may be steep, rough or muddy. Winter conditions make the track more challenging, and appropriate equipment and experience is necessary. See the Safety section for more information.

The times are approximate and will vary according to your fitness, direction of travel and the weather.

Whakapapa Village to Mangatepopo Hut

3 hr, 8.5 km

Begin behind the Chateau Tongariro at Ngauruhoe Place and go along the lower Taranaki Falls track. After about 20 min the Mangatepopo track branches off from the Taranaki Falls track.

 Heavily eroded in places, the track crosses many stream beds. It can be boggy and challenging in wet weather but stream levels are unlikely to make the track impassable or unsafe.

Ahead and to the right is Pukekaikio, thought to be one of the older vents of the Tongariro complex. To the left is Pukeonake, a low scoria cone. Both Pukekaikio and Pukeonake witnessed the last ice age when glaciers from Tongariro carved down through Mangatepopo Valley. The giant cone of Ngauruhoe and the flatter form of Tongariro are visible ahead. Ngauruhoe is a younger 'parasitic' cone on the side of Tongariro.

For the last hour the track skirts around Pukekaikio until it reaches the Mangatepopo Valley track. The Mangatepopo Hut is 5 min off the main track.

Mangatepopo Hut to Emerald Lakes

3 hr 30 min, 8 km

The track follows Mangatepopo stream up the valley, climbing into an alpine environment over a succession of old lava flows from Ngauruhoe. The youngest, very black, lava flows erupted from Ngauruhoe in 1949 and 1954.

Side trip – Mount Tongariro summit (1967 m)


1 hr 30 min (return)

See interesting volcanic rock formations and enjoy fantastic views of the mountains and landscape – including Mount Ruapehu from Tongariro summit. At Red Crater, turn left, and follow the pole-marked trail to the Summit of Mount Tongariro. The trail undulates another 100 metres up to the summit of the volcano.



Photo: Kate, DOC

The steep climb known as the Devil's Staircase, required to reach the Mangatepopo Saddle rewards climbers with views of the valley and, if clear, Mount 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 trail from South Crater up to Red Crater is steep and crosses loose material for much of the way. Care must be taken in freezing conditions, as the steep slopes surrounding the trail may be icy even if the trail is ice-free.

The main track continues past the rim of Red Crater, offering splendid views of Oturere Valley and the Kaimanawa Ranges to the east. From the high point of Red Crater, the trail descends down a steep scree slope to the Emerald Lakes. The lakes remain frozen for most of winter.

The Tongariro Alpine Crossing continues from Emerald Lakes to Ketetahi.

Emerald Lakes to Oturere Hut

1 hr 30 min, 4.8 km

From Emerald Lakes the track descends steeply into the Oturere Valley with views of the valley, the Kaimanawa Ranges and the Rangipo Desert. The track weaves through an endless variety of unusual jagged lava forms from early eruptions from Red Crater, which filled the Oturere Valley.

This is a magical place to visit especially on a clear day. Oturere Hut is nestled on the eastern edge of these flows. There is a pretty waterfall over the ridge from the hut.

Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut

3 hr, 7.5 km


After leaving Oturere Hut the track undulates over a number of stream valleys and open gravel fields. Plant life here has been constantly repressed by volcanic eruptions, altitude and climate.

The track gradually sidles around the foothills of Ngauruhoe, descending into a valley and crossing a branch 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

14.3 km, 5 hr

The track follows the Waihohonu stream and gradually climbs to Tama Saddle (1,300 m).

 This area can be very windy as wind is channelled between the mountains.

Whakapapa Village is about two hours from the Tama Lakes junction. After the first hour the track meets the Taranaki Falls loop walk. Follow the lower section of the track down the steps and along the Wairere stream back to the village. Alternatively take the upper section of track through open tussock and shrubland back to the village.

Side trip – Tama Lakes (1,314 m)

20 min return to Lower Tama from the junction; 1 hr 30 min return to Upper Tama from the junction.

Two in-filled explosion craters are named after Tamatea, the high chief of the Tākitimu Canoe, who explored the area six centuries ago. Lower Tama's volcanic debris is slowly washing in and filling the crater. The Upper Tama lake is reputed to be very deep.


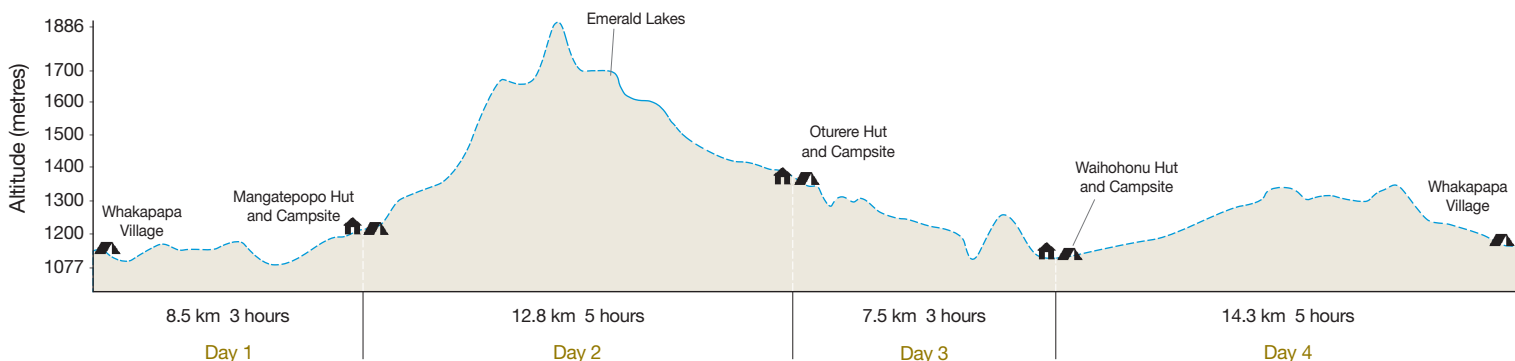
 Beware of strong crosswinds on the ridgelines up to the Upper Tama Lake lookout



Photo: Jimmy Johnson

Elevation profile



Track history

Horonuku Te Heuheu Tukino IV, (Paramount Chief) of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, one of the tribes who have mana whenua (occupational authority) over the land in this region, extended the kaitiakitanga (custodianship) of the peaks of Tongariro, Ngāuruhoe and part of the peak of Ruapehu to the people of New Zealand September 23 1887. Described as a 'tuku', or offer to extend custodianship, it was a way to ensure that the Central North Island mountains would stay pristine and protected with joint ownership between the mana whenua and the Crown. They were later set aside by law as a national park. Due to the insight of Horonuku and his people, Tongariro National Park was the first national park to be established in New Zealand and the fifth in the world.



Mangatepopo valley. Photo: 90 Seconds

Side trip – Blue Lake (near Emerald Lakes)

15 min (one way)

Blue Lake's Māori name Te Wai-whakaata-o-te-Rangihiroa translates as Rangihiroa's mirror. Blue Lake is tapu (sacred) – do not swim in or eat food around the lake. From the track junction near Emerald Lakes, continue further along the Tongariro Alpine Crossing to see closer views of Blue Lake.



Photo: Jimmy Johnson

Side trip – Taranaki Falls loop Track (before Whakapapa Village)

At the Taranaki Falls junction, turn right and go down the steps to the base of the waterfall. Then retrace your steps, and continue along the Upper Taranaki Falls Track to Whakapapa Village.



Photo: Robert Dickinson

Tongariro Northern Circuit safety

This track is not recommended for children aged under 10 years, due to the exposed mountainous environment and often adverse weather conditions.

Tongariro Northern Circuit is considered challenging – most of it is open exposed terrain and has uneven track surfaces.

ACTIVE VOLCANIC HAZARD ZONE

The section of the track from Red Crater to Te Maari craters is an Active Volcanic Hazard Zone. There is still an increased volcanic risk following the eruption of the Te Maari Crater (near Ketetahi Shelter) in 2012. Eruptions are possible without warning. Please pay attention to signs.

Overnight camping is not permitted in the Active Volcanic Hazard Zone.

OUTSIDE THE GREAT WALKS SEASON

While the track can be walked year round, outside the Great Walks season (May to October) the track is no longer classed as an easy tramping track due to additional risk factors which include the risk of avalanche, snow storms and limited daylight hours.

Walkers must have alpine equipment and experience.

Facilities are reduced (e.g. no gas for cooking, water supply might be limited, no DOC rangers or access to emergency radio facilities and visitors will need to be well-equipped and experienced for winter conditions.

TRACK CLOSURE

In the unusual situation of the track being closed there will be signs at track entrances and information will be available at i-SITES, DOC information centres and on the DOC website.

STRONG WINDS

In alpine areas or exposed areas you could be caught in strong and/or gusty winds. Winds over 60 km/h may knock you off your feet. Dress warmly as wind-chill danger is worse at these times.

For detailed safety information and a comprehensive gear list, see greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro.