

Central North Island

In the centre of the North Island, south of Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula but north of the Tararuas and Ruahines, are several areas that have long appealed to trampers. To the east, in the Te Urewera region, is the Whirinaki Forest, Whakatane River and the beautiful Lake Waikaremoana. Whirinaki features one of the most impressive forests in the North Island – lush, green, tall and native. Whakatane offers a tramp along a river steeped in Maori lore and peppered with large trout. Skirting the shoreline of Lake Waikaremoana is a scenic track that is one of New Zealand's most popular Great Walks.

In heart of the North Island is Tongariro National Park, and the remote, little-explored Kaimanawa Range. As a tramp through stunning alpine scenery, the Tongariro Northern Circuit – particularly the Tongariro Crossing – rivals some of its more illustrious cousins in the South Island. For a remote and wilderness-like setting, the Urchin-Umukarikari Circuit in Kaimanawa Forest Park does the same.

More than anything, diversity of landscape is the trademark of this region. Tramp enough tracks and the scenery will change from the rippling waters of one of the largest lakes in the North Island, to bubbling hot springs and volcanoes; from stands of giant red beech and rimu to alpine gravel fields; from glaciers to the only desert in New Zealand. And all are easily experienced wearing boots and hauling a backpack.

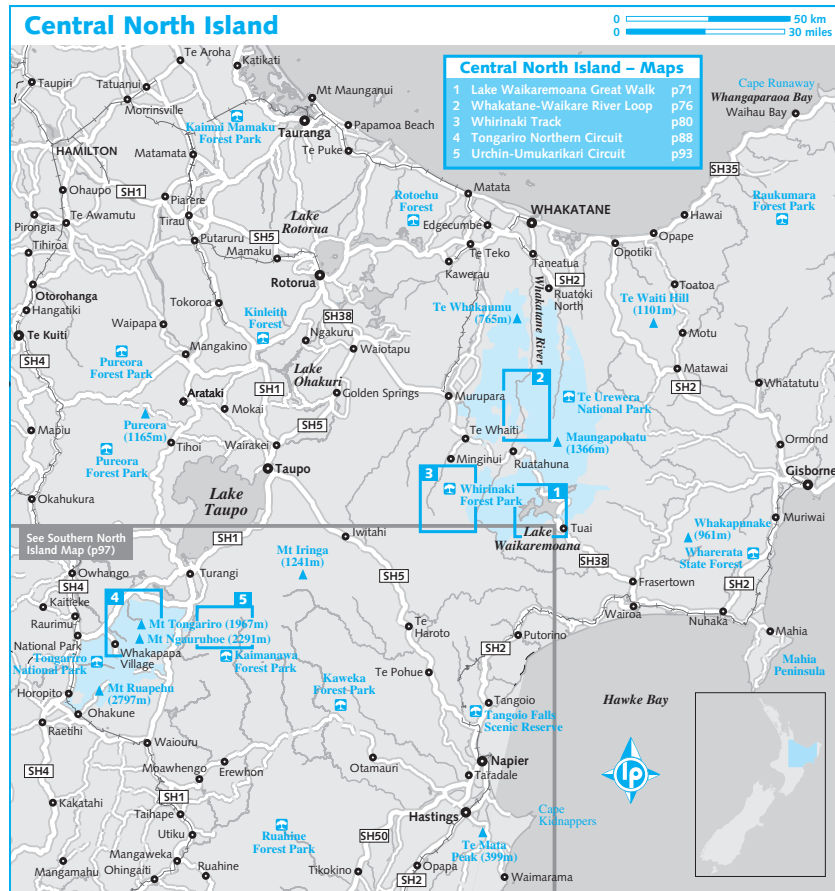
HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the early morning mist rise off **Lake Waikaremoana** (p72) from Panekiri Hut on the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk
- Exploring the large **glow-worm cave** (p81) on the Whirinaki Track
- Peering into steaming craters, vivid lakes and hot springs on the **Tongariro Northern Circuit** (p85)
- Viewing the Tongariro volcanoes from the **Urchin-Umukarikari Circuit** (p92)

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07 & 06

■ www.lakeauponz.com

■ www.nationalpark.co.nz



GATEWAY

Taupo

☎ 07 / pop 21,040

On the northeastern corner of Lake Taupo, this relaxed resort has views across the lake to the volcanic peaks of Tongariro National Park. Taupo is the geographical centre of the North Island, lying halfway between Auckland and Wellington. Supplies, equipment and a little late-night R&R can all be secured in Taupo.

INFORMATION

DOC Taupo Field Centre (☎ 378 3885; 155 Centennial Dr) North of the city centre, but not regularly staffed. You are better off going to the visitor centre or ringing the DOC Tongariro/Taupo Conservancy Office (p85).

Taupo visitor information centre (☎ 376 0027; www.laketapuonp.com; 30 Tongariro St) Next to the Super Loo (large shower and toilet complex), this centre can book accommodation, arrange bus transport, has DOC information and brochures, and sells maps and hut passes.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

The best place for tramping gear, stove fuel and freeze-dried food is the **Great Outdoors Centre** (☎ 378 6628; 29 Heu Heu St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm). Nearby is **Pak'nSave** (☎ 376-0999; cnr Ruapehu & Tamamutu Sts).

SLEEPING & EATING

Taupo Motor Camp (☎ 377 3080; www.taupomotocamp.co.nz; 15 Redoubt St; sites for 2 \$26, cabins \$44) is

Taupo's most central camping ground and is located in a pleasant area along the Waikato River.

Tiki Lodge (☎ 377 4545; www.tikilodge.co.nz; 104 Tuwharetoa St; dm \$24, s/d \$35/70; ☎) is the newest backpacker lodge in Taupo, a friendly, Maori-themed hostel with a huge kitchen, TV and reading lounges and a view of the lake from the balcony.

Go Global (☎ 0800-4645 6225, 377 0044; www.go-global.co.nz; cnr Tongariro & Tuwharetoa Sts; dm/d \$22/\$55) is a party backpacker lodge on top of an Irish pub.

Rainbow Lodge (☎ 07-378 5754; www.rainbowlodge.co.nz; 99 Titiruaupenga St; dm/d \$21/\$58) is a popular backpacker lodge away from the city centre with clean spacious rooms, a sauna, free luggage storage and tramping gear for hire.

Taupo is packed with motels, especially along the lake. A block from the lake is **Suncourt Motor Inn** (☎ 0800-786 268, 378 8265; www.suncourt.co.nz; 14 Northcroft St; s & d \$99-145; ☎) with 52 large, comfortable rooms and a spa.

Lakeside motels tend to be more upscale, such as the **Cove** (☎ 378 7599; www.thecove.co.nz; 213 Lake Tce; d/st \$165/\$285; ☎), with lake-view rooms, balconies and dining in one of Taupo's finest restaurants. Rates include breakfast.

Tuwharetoa and Heu Heu Sts are the main dining areas. **Hell** (☎ 377 8181; 30 Tuwharetoa St; ☎ 5-9pm Mon, 5-10pm Tue, 4-10pm Sun, Wed & Thu, 4-11pm Fri & Sat) has great pizza, big salads and pasta.

Plateau Bar & Restaurant (☎ 377 2425; 64 Tuwharetoa St; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-10pm Sat & Sun) is an excellent restaurant with a range of pasta, steak and seafood.

Great places for breakfast, a light meal or a coffee are **Replete Food Company** (☎ 378 0606; 45 Heu Heu St; breakfast & lunch 55-12; ☎ 6am-3pm) and **Take-A-Break Café** (☎ 377 0041; 38 Heu Heu St; ☎ 8.30am-4pm).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air New Zealand Link (☎ 0800-737 000; www.airnewzealand.co.nz) has direct flights to Auckland (\$120) and Wellington (\$135). In Taupo, ticketing is handled through travel agencies, including **House of Travel** (☎ 377 2700; 37 Horomatangi St).

Long-distance buses, including InterCity, Newmans and Alpine Scenic Tours, arrive at and depart from **Taupo Travel**

Centre (☎ 378 9032; 16 Gascoigne St). The centre also sells tickets for trains (including the *TranzAlpine*) and the *Interislander* ferry. **InterCity** (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has daily buses to Turangi (\$21, one hour), Auckland (\$52, 4½ hours), Rotorua (\$28, one hour) and Hastings (\$43, two hours). **Alpine Scenic Tours** (☎ 378 7412; www.alpinescenictours.co.nz) has a Taupo-Turangi run (return \$35, one hour).

TE UREWERA NATIONAL PARK

Te Urewera National Park has rugged terrain, beautiful lakes and crystal-clear trout streams, but it is the forests that set this wilderness apart and capture the imagination.

The 55-sq-km Lake Waikaremoana (Sea of Rippling Waters) is by far the most popular section of the national park, and is the centrepiece for Te Urewera's most scenic and popular tramp – the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk.

The main access road through Te Urewera is SH38, which connects Rotorua to Wairoa on the east coast. The predominantly unsealed road curves and winds its way through the park's mountainous interior, and then goes around the eastern shore of Lake Waikaremoana, which is bordered to the south by the towering Panekiri Bluff.

The northern part of the park, above SH38, is more remote. It is characterised by the long valleys of the Whakatane and Waimana Rivers, which flow into the Bay of Plenty.

Apart from the huts along the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk, all huts in the national park are Standard (\$5) or free; there are more than 40 of them.

HISTORY

Maori legend says human settlement in Te Urewera began when Hine-Pokohu-Rangi (the Mist Maiden) married Te Maunga (a mountain), producing the fierce Tuhoe tribe (the Children of Mist). Genealogical evidence places the arrival of the Tuhoe at around AD 1350. Tuhoe people evolved into fierce warriors, hardened by difficult lives, and they resisted European invasion

and influence long after other areas were settled and tamed.

The Tuhoe settled the rugged interior of Te Urewera, but not around Lake Waikaremoana. That was home to another coastal tribe, Ngati Ruapani, who believed the lake was formed when one of their ancestors, Mahu, became enraged by his daughter's refusal to fetch water from a sacred well. The father grabbed the girl and held her in a spring until she drowned, but only her body died; her spirit was turned into a *taniwha* (water monster) that desperately tried to escape.

The *taniwha* first thrust north and formed the Whanganui Inlet, before the Huiaurau Range stopped her. Then she formed the Whanganuioparua Inlet, before attempting to escape from the lake's mouth near Onepoto. Time ran out when dawn arrived and the sunlight – fatal to all *taniwhas* – turned her to stone. The Ngati Ruapani identified her as a rock near the lake outlet.

The Tuhoe closely guarded Te Urewera's isolation, clinging to a natural suspicion of Pakehas (Europeans). Missionaries were the first Pakehas to explore the area, when Reverend William Williams travelled through in November 1840 and came across Lake Waikaremoana. The Tuhoe continued to resist any intrusion, joining other tribes in the 1860s to war against government troops.

The tribes had just suffered a severe defeat when, in 1868, Tuhoe destiny took a strange turn. In that year Te Kooti, a charismatic Maori leader, escaped from a Chatham Island prison and sought refuge in Te Urewera. Te Kooti and the Tuhoe tribe formed a pact that led to a three-year running battle with government troops. The soldiers applied a scorched-earth policy in an effort to eliminate Tuhoe food supplies and flush the tribe from the woods.

Te Kooti used unique military manoeuvres to score victories and to stage successful raids on towns, including Rotorua. However, the Tuhoe, with their limited resources, were no match for the government troops. Te Kooti narrowly escaped several times, helped once by a premature gunshot that warned him off. By 1871 disease and starvation had overtaken the Tuhoe and eroded their morale. The tribe finally ended

its involvement in the war by agreeing to swear allegiance to the Crown. Te Kooti, however, refused and the rebel leader escaped once more to King Country, around Waitomo.

In the early 1900s, with a continuing distrust of Pakeha, the Tuhoe turned to another self-proclaimed prophet, Rua Kenana, who founded the isolated farming settlement of Maungapohatu. The tribe met with open hostility the government surveyors and construction workers who were trying to build a road through Te Urewera. This massive undertaking continued only after the Tuhoe were convinced such a road would bring them trade and agricultural benefits. Troops were needed to protect government workers and the road was not completed until 1930.

The idea of preserving the forest as a watershed was first promoted in 1925. After WWII, support for turning the area into a national park grew. In early 1954 the Tuhoe approved the name Urewera National Park, and the new park was officially gazetted later that year.

ENVIRONMENT

The 2126-sq-km Te Urewera National Park is one of the largest national parks in New Zealand, and the largest untouched native forest in the North Island. It is a rugged land that rises to 1400m and forms part of the mountainous spine stretching from the East Cape to Wellington. The forests of Te Urewera form a thick blanket over the mountains, so there are hardly any open peaks or ridges.

Lake Waikaremoana was formed by a landslide that dammed the Waikaretaheke River about 2200 years ago. The lake filled up behind the landslide to a maximum depth of 248m, but was lowered 5m in 1946 by a hydroelectric development.

There is a diverse selection of trees in the park's forests, ranging from tall and lush podocarp and tawa forests in the river valleys, to stunted, moss-covered beech on the higher ranges. The major change in forest composition occurs around 800m, where the bush of rimu, northern rata and tawa is replaced by beech and rimu. Above 900m only beech is usually found. It is estimated that 650 types of native plant are present in the park.

Te Urewera's rivers and lakes offer some of New Zealand's finest rainbow trout fishing. There is good fly fishing for brown trout from the shore on the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk. Fishing with both fly and spinning gear is allowed in most areas.

CLIMATE

Because of the mountainous nature of the area, trampers can expect considerably more rain than in either the Rotorua or Gisborne regions – to the west and east respectively. The yearly rainfall of 2500mm is brought on by northwesterly and southerly winds, and in winter this can turn to snow at higher altitudes. Fog and early morning mist are common characteristics of the lower valleys, but usually burn off by noon. In summer, trampers can generally expect regular spells of fine, dry weather, with temperatures rising to 21°C or higher in February, the warmest month.

PLANNING Maps

For planning purposes, the 1:130,000 Park-map 273-08 (*Urewera*) is ideal; it shows Lake Waikaremoana at a scale of 1:41,000. The best places to purchase maps are DOC's Rangitaiki Area Office (below) and Aniwanuiwa Visitor Centre (below).

Information Sources

Te Urewera National Park is divided in half for administrative purposes, and as a consequence it is managed by two DOC offices. The main one for trampers is **Opotiki Area Office** (☎ 07-315 1001; cnr Elliot & St John Sts, Opotiki), which sells hut and Great Walks passes, maps and books, and makes bookings for the Lake Waikaremoana Track. It also has a handful of displays and exhibits all about the park.

Within the park itself is the **DOC Aniwanuiwa Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-837 3803; SH38), on the shore of Lake Waikaremoana. Operating as both park visitor information centre and a museum, the office sells hut tickets, makes Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk bookings and has some interesting displays.

DOC Gisborne Area Office (☎ 06-869 0460; 63 Carnarvon St, Gisborne) and **DOC Rangitaiki Area Office** (☎ 07-366 1080; SH38), found 1.8km south of Murupara, also both have information on the park.

ACCESS TOWNS Murupara

☎ 07 / pop 1900

If arriving in Te Urewera from Rotorua and the west, this small town is the last one you'll pass through before entering the park. Murupara offers food, lodging and other services, but choices are few. There is no visitor centre and no place to purchase tramping equipment.

Accommodation is limited. **Murupara Hotel** (☎ 366 5871; Pine Dr; s/d \$25/50) has rooms, but tends to be smoky due to the adjoining tavern. If you have your own vehicle, another option is to stay at one of the fishing lodges on Lake Aniwhenua, 20km north of town.

Lake Aniwhenua Lodge (☎ 366 4777; www.troutguides.co.nz; 3836 Galatea Rd; camp sites for 2 \$30, cabins per person \$25, s & d \$90) has motel rooms and small cabins, along with a communal kitchen and lounge and easy access to trout fishing.

There is a **Four Square supermarket** (☎ 366 5835; cnr Oregon & Pine Drs) at the Murupara Shopping Centre.

The best place to eat is **Cocomo Café** (☎ 366 5842; Murupara Shopping Centre, cnr Oregon & Pine Drs; ☎ 4.30am-2pm Mon-Fri), which has pies, sandwiches and light meals.

At the time of research there was no regular bus service between Rotorua and Wairoa, though this could change in the future.

Wairoa

☎ 06 / pop 5228

At the intersection of SH2 and SH36, Wairoa serves as the eastern gateway to Te Urewera. It's much better to pick up supplies, food and equipment here than at either Tuai or in the national park.

INFORMATION

Wairoa visitor information centre (☎ 838 7440; www.wairoanz.com; cnr SH2 & Queen St; ☎) has information on the park and local accommodation, and sells Great Walk and hut passes. The centre also serves as the bus station for InterCity and the park shuttle.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

For camping equipment and fuel there's **Gemmells** (☎ 838 7577; Marine Pde; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat). **Write Price Food Barn** (☎ 838

8588; Paul St), across from the visitor information centre, has food for on the track.

SLEEPING & EATING

Clyde Hotel (☎ 838 7139; Marine Pde; dm \$25, s/d \$35/45) is in the heart of Wairoa and has a pub and a restaurant.

Three Oaks Motel (☎ 838 8204; threeoaksmotel@quicksilver.net.nz; cnr Clyde Rd & Campbell St; d \$70-95; 🍷) is one of a number of places in Wairoa with the usual motel-style comforts.

Marine Pde is where most of the town's restaurants are located, including several Chinese takeaways. The best eatery is licensed **Baz's Bistro** (☎ 838 4080; Marine Pde; 🍷 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat). Closer to SH2 is **Osler's Bakery** (☎ 838 8299; Marine Pde; 🍷 4.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 6am-3pm Sat & Sun), which has been awarded many of NZ's top bakery awards and is a great place for breakfast.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity (☎ 834 2720; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) buses stop at the Wairoa visitor information centre on their way between Gisborne (\$24, 1½ hours) and Napier (\$27, 2½ hours).

LAKE WAIKAREMOANA GREAT WALK

Duration	4 days
Distance	42km
Track Standard	Great Walk
Difficulty	easy-moderate
Start	Onepoto
Finish	Hopuruahine Bridge
Nearest Town	Tuai (p71)
Transport	shuttle service, boat
Summary	One of the most popular tramps in the North Island, this track follows most of the shoreline of Lake Waikaremoana, the largest lake in Te Urewera National Park.

Built in 1962 as a volunteer project by boys from 14 secondary schools, the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk is indeed a great walk, with spectacular views from Panekiri Bluff, numerous beaches and swimming holes, and excellent trout fishing.

All this made for a popular and often-crowded tramp in the past, but in 2001 the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk incorporated a booking system, much like the Routeburn and Abel Tasman Track,

to eliminate overcrowded huts. Annually, close to 8000 trampers tackle this track.

The track, which is well benched and easy to follow, can be walked in either direction, although by starting from Onepoto (as described) you put all the steep climbing behind you in the first few hours. Walking in the opposite direction you'll need an extra hour from Waiopaoa Hut to Panekiri Hut, but then it will take less time from Panekiri Hut to the end of the trail at Onepoto.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

The track is well used throughout the year, and is extremely popular at Easter and during the summer school holidays from mid-December until the end of January.

Maps

Map options include the 1:130,000 Parkmap 273-08 (*Urewera*), which has a 1:41,000 map of the track, the Topomap 1:50,000 260-W18 (*Waikaremoana*), which also covers the route, and the 1:50,000 Terramap *Waikaremoana and Whirinaki Recreation Area*.

Huts & Camp Sites

Lake Waikaremoana is one of only two tracks designated as Great Walks in the North Island, which means hut tickets and annual hut passes cannot be used.

There are five **huts** (adult/child \$20/10) conveniently spaced out along the route: Panekiri, Waiopaoa, Marauiti, Waiharuru and Whanganui.

Because of the increasing number of trampers, **camping** (adult/child \$10/5) is only permitted at the designated sites of Waiopaoa, Korokoro, Maraunui, Waiharuru and Tapuaenui. All camp sites must be booked.

From October through April there is a two-night maximum stay at huts and camp sites. During the rest of the year there is a three-night maximum.

Permits & Regulations

You now must have a booking prior to starting the track to stay at any of the huts or camp sites along the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk. With a credit card you can call or fax your requests to the **Aniwanui Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-837 3900, fax 837 3722) or do so online through **DOC** (www.doc.govt.nz).

You can also make bookings in person at the **Wairoa visitor information centre** (cnr SH2 & Queen St, Wairoa).

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Tuai

☎ 06

The nearest town to the start of the track is Tuai, a small hamlet with a couple of accommodation options and a very small, unreliable store.

The best place to stay is **Big Bush Holiday Park** (☎ 0800-525 392, 837 3777; www.lake.waikaremoana.co.nz; SH38; sites for 2 \$10, dm \$25). Only 4km from the Onepoto car park, the holiday park has a café and bar. Big Bush Holiday Park also runs the shuttle buses through the park (see p72).

Te Urewera National Park

On Lake Waikaremoana, the **Waikaremoana Motorcamp** (☎ 06-837 3826; www.lake.co.nz; SH38; sites for 2 \$20, dm \$20, cabins \$42-84) has camp sites, cabins, chalets and a bunkroom overlooking the lake. It also has a communal kitchen, showers and petrol for sale. The

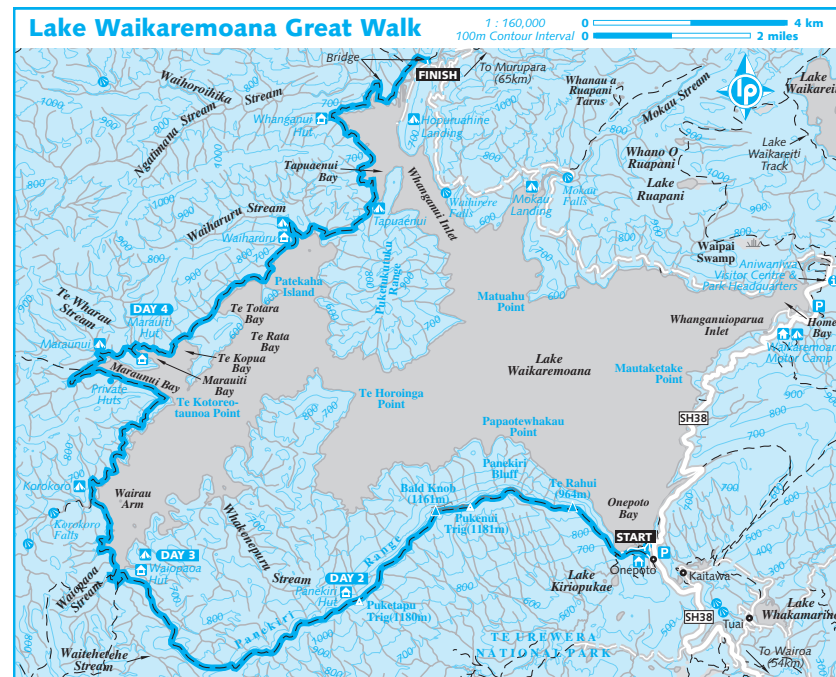
camp store has food, freeze-dried dinners and stove fuel, but you will pay dearly for it. The camp will store gear and provide car storage for guests.

DOC also maintains a number of minimal-facility camp sites throughout the park, which are accessible by road. On the shore of Lake Waikaremoana, 10km northwest of the Aniwanui Visitor Centre, is **Mokau Landing** (adult/child \$5/2.50). Near Hopuruahine (the northern end of the track) is a free DOC camp site.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

Most of the 120km stretch of SH38 through the park is unsealed, winding and extremely scenic. In other words, a very time-consuming drive. There is very little traffic on this route, making it a slow-go for hitching.

Both ends of the track are within easy walking distance of SH38. The southern end is at Onepoto, 10km south of the park headquarters. The northern end is near Hopuruahine Landing, 15km northwest of the park headquarters at Aniwanui.



Unsecured car parking is available at Onepoto and Home Bay; there is a small fee at the latter. There is also free, secured vehicle storage at **Big Bush Holiday Park** (☎ 0800-525 392, 06-837 3777; SH38).

Buses no longer run between Rotorua and Waikaremoana Motor Camp. Big Bush Holiday Park does, however, it does offer a shuttle service between Wairoa and Waikare-moana, picking up trampers at both trailheads (\$30). Pick up the bus at the **Wairoa visitor information centre** (☎ 06-838 7440; cnr SH2 & Queen St).

Waikaremoana Guided Tours (☎ 06-837 3729), Big Bush Holiday Park and the **Waikaremoana Motor Camp** (☎ 06-837 3826; www.lake.co.nz; SH38) all provide ferry services that operate out off Waikaremoana Motor Camp, and will take you from one trailhead to the other (each end \$15).

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Onepoto to Panekiri Hut

5 hours, 8.8km, 532m ascent

The beginning of the track is signposted 500m from SH38, next to the day shelter (where there is track information). Before setting out, make sure you fill your water bottle, because there is no water available along this first leg.

There is little time to warm up at this end of the track because it immediately begins a steep climb up the sandstone cliffs of **Panekiri Bluff**. Plan on 2½ to three hours to ascend 532m over 4km to **Puke-nui trig**, one of the highest points of the trip at 1181m. Once at the trig you begin the second half of the day's tramp, following the track along an undulating ridge of knobs and knolls, from which you get spectacular views of Lake Waikaremoana, 600m below.

Continue along the ridge through mixed beech forest for almost 4km, until you suddenly break out at a sheer rock bluff that seems to bar the way. Closer inspection reveals a staircase and wire up the bluff, where the bush has been cleared.

Panekiri Hut is 100m further on, at Puke-tapu trig. At 1180m and only 10m from the edge of the bluff, this 36-bunk hut offers the park's best panoramas, which include most of the lake, Huiarau Range and, at times, the east-coast town of Wairoa. A rainwater tank is the sole water source at the hut. Gas

stoves are no longer provided and camping is not allowed next to the hut.

Day 2: Panekiri Hut to Waiopaoa Hut

3–4 hours, 7.6km, 580m descent

Continue southwest and follow the main ridge for 3km, gradually descending around bluffs and rock gullies until the track takes a sharp right swing to the northwest. If the weather is good there will be panoramas of the lake and forest. At this point the gradual descent becomes steep, with the track heading off the ridge towards the Wairau Arm of the lake, and at one section it drops 250m in about 1km. Trampers are aided here by a staircase.

On the way down there is an interesting change in the vegetation as the forest moves from the beech of the high country to tawa and podocarp, with a thick understorey of ferns. The grade becomes more gentle as you approach the **Wairau Arm** and, eventually, you arrive at the **Waiopaoa Hut** (30 bunks) and camp site, near the shoreline. The hut has a wood stove (for heat only) and tank water, and is a short stroll from a sandy bay with good places for fishing and swimming.

Day 3: Waiopaoa Hut to Marauiti Hut

4–5 hours, 12.1km

Start the day early to take advantage of the many places where you can linger and whittle away the afternoon. The track turns inland from Waiopaoa Hut to cross Waitehete Stream, then follows the lakeshore across grassy flats and terraces of kanuka scrub. In the first hour you'll encounter a number of streams that are bridged.

The signposted junction to **Korokoro Falls** is 3.5km from Waiopaoa Hut, a 1½-hour walk for most trampers, and makes for a scenic diversion. It's 15 minutes to the falls, which drop 20m over a sheer rock face in one of the most impressive displays of cascading water in the park. The Korokoro camp site is 200m past the swing bridge and makes for a very scenic place to set up a tent. The main track continues around the lake, climbing 50m above the shore and sidling along a number of small sheltered bays, accessible only by bushwhacking.

The track rounds Te Kotoreotaunoa Point and then drops into Maraunui Bay. It's 30 to 40 minutes along the southern

shore of the bay, past a Maori reserve and private huts, to **Te Wharau Stream**, a popular fishing spot. Located at the stream, a 6.8km or 2½-hour walk from the Korokoro Falls junction, is Maraunui camp site. From here the track climbs over a low saddle in the Whakaneke Spur and, in 1.7km, dips to Marauiti Bay and the 200m side track to **Marauiti Hut** (22 bunks) on the lakeshore.

Day 4: Marauiti Hut to Hopuruahine Bridge

6 hours, 13.5km

Return to the main trail and immediately cross the stream at the head of Marauiti Bay. The track follows the northern side of the bay before swinging northeast to skirt **Te Kopua Bay**, 30 minutes from Marauiti Hut. This is one of the most isolated and beautiful bays on the lake, featuring white, sandy beaches and protected waters favoured by anglers.

The track leaves the bay, climbs to a low saddle in the Te Kopua headland and descends to **Te Totara Bay**. It then passes Patekaha Island, no longer a true island, and hugs the shoreline, which is dotted by a number of small sandy beaches. It's 1.5km from the island to **Waiharuru Hut** (40 bunks), or a 6.3km, two-hour walk from Marauiti Hut. Constructed in 1999, Waiharuru Hut is the newest hut on the track and was built to replace Te Puna Hut, which has been pulled down. Its bunkrooms are separated from a large dining area by a deck with views of the lake. Next to it is the Waiharuru camp site.

The track swings inland to cross Waiharuru Stream, then returns to the shoreline and climbs over a saddle, returning to the lakeshore at **Tapuaenui Bay** in the Whanganui Inlet, 2km or 1½ hours from Waiharuru Hut. Tapuaenui camp site is located here. For the next hour follow the shoreline (with a short diversion up Tapuaenui Stream) until it reaches **Whanganui Hut** (18 bunks), in a grassy flat between two streams, close to a nice beach.

The last leg of the trip begins with a scenic walk around the lakeshore and through a short section of bush to the Waihoroihika Stream. Once across the bridge, the track continues up through the grassy flats on the northwestern side of the Hopuruahine Stream to a point opposite the access road.

Thanks to a swing bridge, trampers no longer have to ford the river or endure an extra 30-minute walk to a road bridge on SH38.

Camping is allowed along the access road, and there are usually a few tents and caravans among the grassy sites because the Hopuruahine Stream and its mouth are popular fishing spots. It's 1km up the gravel access road to SH38, but the shuttle bus picks up from both the Hopuruahine Landing camp site and the bridge.

WHAKATANE–WAIKARE RIVER LOOP

Duration	5 days
Distance	65.5km
Track Standard	tramping track
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Mataatua Rd
Nearest Town	Ruatahuna (p74)
Transport	private
Summary	This route includes an all-weather track along the Whakatane River, and a day going along – and fording – the Waikare River. Both rivers offer excellent trout fishing.

This route can be done as a through-tramp or a loop. The Whakatane River tramp is a four- to five-day trip from the end of Mataatua Rd to another access road near Ruatoki North. To turn the tramp into a loop (as described), trampers head southeast once they reach Waikare Junction Hut, and follow the Waikare River to return to the Whakatane River.

The traditional Whakatane River route, a historic one for the Maori, is along – and often through – the river. The DOC have built an all-weather track that sidles the Whakatane and allows trampers to avoid any dangerous fords. Climbing is only necessary to avoid sharp bends in the river.

The loop can be hiked in either direction, but the location of the huts makes it best to follow the Whakatane River first. The section from the road's end to Waikare Junction Hut is well cut and formed, with bridges crossing the major streams. The moderate rating applies only to this all-weather track. If the water levels are normal and you don't mind getting your boots wet, you can follow the river route and save a bit of time, but the walking track is not that

much longer and the views from above the river are worth the extra climbing.

The stretch along the Waikare is along the river and streams, where there is no formed track, and it is rated moderate-demanding.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

This tramp is best done from November to March.

What to Bring

Pack some extra food in case a swollen Waikare River holds you up for a while. Trout fishing is one of the highlights along the Whakatane–Waikare River Loop, especially on the Waikare River, but plan ahead; there is no place to purchase tackle or a licence in Ruatahuna.

Maps

The 1:50,000 Topomap 260-W17 (*Urewera*) covers the loop, although if you are hiking the traditional route through to Ruatoki North you will also need 260-W16 (*Waimana*). Some trampers are content with the 1:130,000 Parkmap 273-08 (*Urewera*), but at that scale the detail is lacking.

Huts

Tawhiwhi Hut (\$5), **Ngahiramai Hut** (\$5), **Hanamahihi Hut** (\$5), **Waikare Junction Hut** (\$5) and **Takurua Hut** (\$5) are Standard huts. None are equipped with cooking facilities. Although the huts are considerably smaller than those on the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk, the tramp is not nearly as popular, so obtaining a bed is usually not a problem.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Ruatahuna

☎ 07 / pop 100

This small village straddles SH38, 113km from Rotorua and 49km from the park visitor information centre at Lake Waikaremoana. Ruatahuna is only 11km from the start of the track but offers very few services. The DOC field centre once located here is gone, so you must buy hut tickets and leave intentions at the **Rangitaihi Area Office** (☎ 366 1080; SH38), 1.8km south of Murupara.

The only real business in town is the **Ruatahuna General Store** (☎ 366 3393; SH38; r \$65), which has four very basic rooms for rent.

The small store also has a petrol station and café. Tramping supplies are very limited, so it's best to bring in all you need.

In 2006, Big Bush Holiday Park discontinued its shuttle bus service between Rotorua and Wairoa, meaning there's no longer any public transport to Ruatahuna. Call **Destination Rotorua** (☎ 0800-768 678, 348 5179; www.rotoruanz.com) to see if it or anybody else has resumed the service. Otherwise, private transport or slow hitching are the only ways to reach Ruatahuna.

DOC Camp Sites

There are several camp sites along SH38. The closest to Ruatahuna is 12km to the east, along the upper Whakatane River. It's a pleasant **camp site** (adult/child \$5/2.50) with access to trout fishing.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

From Ruatahuna it's 11km (a two-hour walk) to the end of the access road, where the track begins. Hitching along the road is tough because there is very little traffic. **Ruatahuna General Store** (☎ 07-366 3393) will drop off trampers in their own vehicle and look after your car (per day \$10). The store will also drop off and pick up trampers without vehicles (each way \$20).

BLOOD-SUCKING LAWYERS OF THE BUSH

Some overseas trampers might not understand or appreciate the common name of *Rubus cissoides*, but North Americans certainly do. In New Zealand this thorny vine is best known as bush lawyer.

Found across the country, up to a height of 1000m, the plant has hand-shaped leaves with three to five toothed 'fingers', white flowers and a yellowish-red fruit. The berry is shaped like a small blackberry and was used by early Europeans to make jam and jelly. The plant's most noticeable feature is its thorns; the backward-pointing prickles on the stems help the vine to climb to a forest's open canopy...and to snare unwary trampers who stray from the track.

You'll immediately know bush lawyer when you encounter it, as the thorns will painfully scrape across your bare thighs or arms, quickly drawing blood. And, like any good North American lawyer, once it gets hold of you, it doesn't let go easily.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Mataatua Road to Tawhiwhi Hut

3–4 hours, 9km

Mataatua Rd has a large display of the Whakatane Track system, and ends at a farm gate with a small 'Track' sign on it. From here, the track swings west and quickly emerges high above the **Whakatane River**. It sidles the valley for 3km, then splits. A 'Walking Track' sign points the way to the all-weather route, while the other track leads down to Paripari Flat and the river route along the Whakatane.

After 20 minutes the track descends quickly, crossing Te Mania Flat then **Mahakirua Stream**. From here it continues to follow the valley for 4km above the river's true right (east) side, occasionally dropping close to the river, where it is joined by the river route. Keep an eye out for orange triangular tags when confronted with a choice of tracks.

At **Manangaatiuhi Stream** you pass a junction with a track heading southeast to the six-bunk Waiawa Hut (4½ hours); the main track crosses the stream on a walkwire. From the stream, **Tawhiwhi Hut** (18 bunks) is just 30 minutes away, in the middle of Taumapou Flat. It's a good place to spend the first night.

Day 2: Tawhiwhi Hut to Hanamahihi Hut

4–5 hours, 14.5km

Once across both Taumapou Flat and Mangatawhero Stream, the track re-enters the forest and, in 10 to 15 minutes, you enter Te Urewera National Park for the first time, although there is no signposted boundary. Up to this point you have been crossing private Maori land, with camping and hunting restrictions. The track remains level and, in 45 minutes to one hour, breaks out onto a small clearing and the one-room **Ngahiramai Hut** (eight bunks).

From the hut the track continues to follow the true right bank of the river, and there are often good views of it below. The **Tarakena Rapids** are passed 30 minutes beyond Ngahiramai Hut, just before the track descends into Ohaerena Flat. Beyond the flat the track crosses two major streams; the second is **Moawhara Stream**, from where the track climbs to a swing bridge across the Whakatane River.

For the first time the track follows the true left side of the Whakatane (west bank), and immediately drops to the river, once to cross Mangaehu Stream and a second time to cross Rerehape Stream. It then climbs a terrace and emerges at **Hanamahihi Flats**, re-entering Maori land. The track follows a horse trail across the flats, where in spring and summer the grass can be above waist height.

The last 2km to **Hanamahihi Hut** is an up-and-down tramp in bush, before you emerge at a small, grassy flat. The one-room hut has eight bunks and a wood-burning stove. It also has a veranda that overlooks a scenic bend in the Whakatane River.

Day 3: Hanamahihi Hut to Waikare Junction Hut

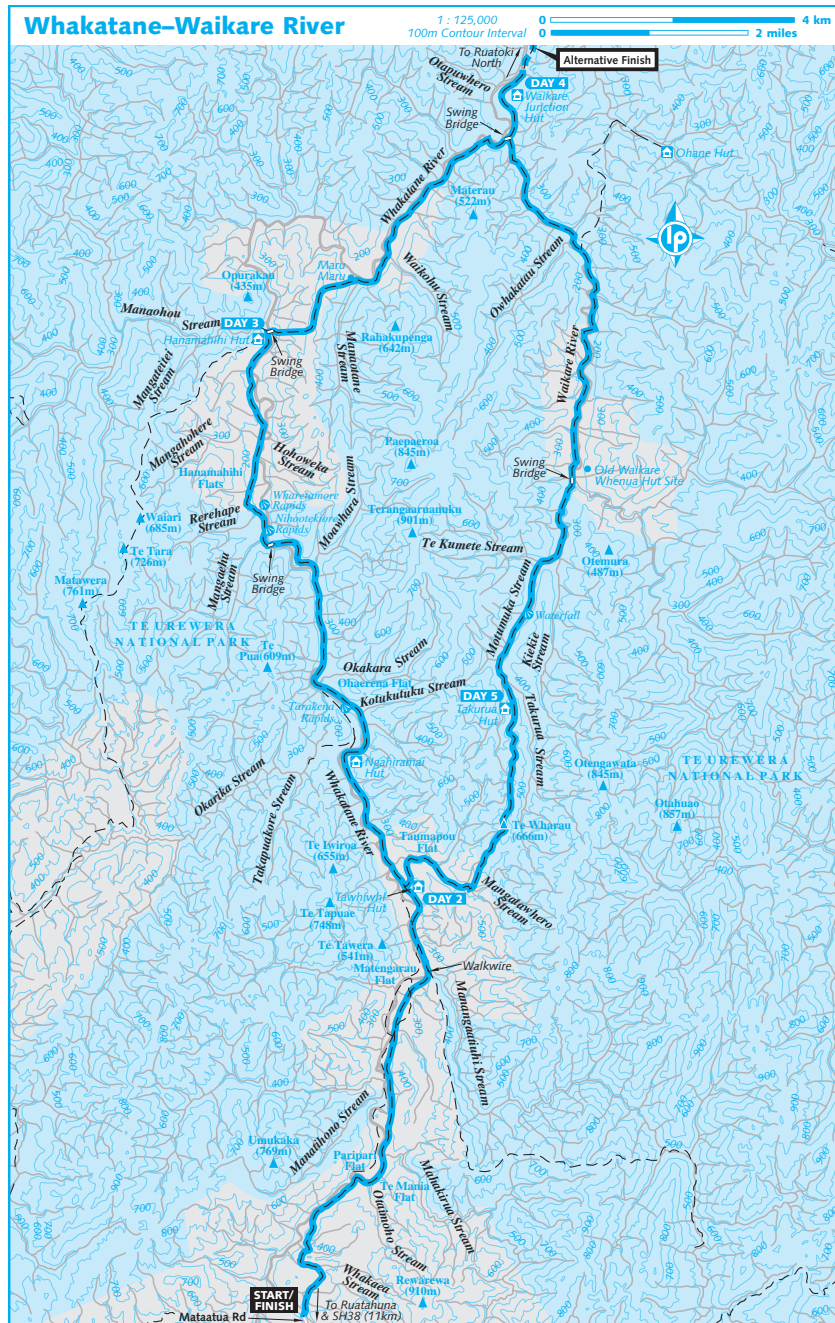
3 hours, 9.5km

To continue along the all-weather track, cross the swing bridge in front of the hut, then follow the track as it begins a steep climb towards a saddle on a forested ridge, allowing you to bypass a large bend in the Whakatane River. The track levels off briefly on top and then descends rapidly on the other side. An hour or so from the hut you should return to the river at a spot called Maru Maru.

Once on the Whakatane River the track follows the true right side for 4.5km, until it reaches the bridge over the **Waikare River**. The valley is steep in many places, so there is quite a bit of climbing to do. In some places it cuts through grassy terraces, where it might be difficult to see the track, although the route is well marked with orange metal tags.

If the weather is good and water levels are normal, an easier and more pleasant route is to drop to the Whakatane once you have crossed the saddle. By following and fording the river at appropriate places, you will avoid the bluffs and still arrive at the junction of the Whakatane and Waikare Rivers, where a sign points the way back up the bank to the swing bridge. If you can follow the river you can reach the confluence in two hours from Hanamahihi Hut.

Near the bridge is a sign explaining that the Waikare Junction Hut has been shifted and is now 25 minutes away on the all-weather track. The time is a little misleading – in fact, it may be the most



misleading track sign in New Zealand. Once over the swing bridge you begin a very steep climb as the track ascends around the bluff at the confluence. This is a knee-bending, two-rest climb. The only consolation is an immense view of the upper Whakatane valley.

The track drops quickly from the top, crosses a terrace (do not drop back down to the river), passes through a stand of bush and reaches **Waikare Junction Hut** (eight bunks). Most people need 40 minutes to one hour to reach the hut from the confluence.

The hut sits on a grassy terrace, 50m above the river bed. From its veranda you can enjoy a superb panorama of the upper portion of the river, made even more spectacular by a sunset on a clear night.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: RUATOKI NORTH

6 hours, 18km

Trampers wanting to make this a through-walk to Ruatoki North (the small town just north of the national park) should continue down the Whakatane River from its confluence with Waikare River, along the all-weather track. The track is well cut and bridged, and from Waikare Junction Hut it's a three-hour walk to **Ohora Hut** (22 bunks) and then another four hours to the road's end, south of Ruatoki North.

Day 4: Waikare Junction Hut to Takarua Hut

4½–5½ hours, 16km

To complete the river loop, most of this day is spent following the Waikare River and crossing it numerous times. There is no all-weather track along the Waikare, and during heavy rains this segment will not be passable.

From Waikare Junction Hut, return to the swing bridge at the confluence, but don't cross the bridge – instead, descend to the **Waikare River** and begin walking upstream. For 4.5km (about the first 1½ hours) there is no track, so just follow the river bed, crossing when necessary. This part of the Waikare runs through a gorge, and you will probably have to ford the river often.

An hour up the river, a signpost on the true right (east) side marks the start of a track (left) to the six-bunk Ohane

Hut (1½ hours). After another 1km the river valley opens up and it's possible to find a track along the true left side of the Waikare. This track continues for quite a distance – and is even marked occasionally by metal tags – before it is necessary to begin fording the river again.

About 1½ hours (5km) past the Ohane junction, you pass a track on the true right (east) side of the Waikare, to the site of the old Waikare Whenua Hut, which burnt down in the mid-1990s. The one-room hut was a favourite of anglers because of the excellent trout fishing in the Waikare River.

The route to Takarua Hut swings up the **Motumuka Stream**, which empties into the Waikare River on its true left (west) side, 50m downstream from a swing bridge (useful during floods). There is a small sign marking the stream's mouth, but no continuous track up the stream for the first 3km, only short paths here and there. The tramp involves fording the stream too often to think about trying to keep your boots dry – but it's not unpleasant on a warm day. After 3km pass Kieke Stream, which flows into the true right (east) side, but is easy to miss. Trampers usually notice Te Kumete Stream first, a few hundred metres upstream on the opposite bank.

Another 1km upstream, an obvious track appears and climbs steeply to avoid a very narrow gorge along the stream. The gorge can be seen only by departing from the track for a short distance. Further upstream the track veers off to avoid a thundering waterfall.

For the final 2km to **Takarua Hut** (six bunks) there is a well-worn track (even marked in a few places), mostly on the true right (east) bank, although occasionally it swings to the other side. Eventually the track leaves the stream and climbs a grassy terrace to the hut.

Day 5: Takarua Hut to Mataatua Road

4½–5 hours, 16.5km

A cut and well-marked track begins behind the hut and immediately climbs the ridge. The climb is steep for the next 2km and eventually brings you to the crest of the Te Wharau ridge. The track follows the ridge for about 1km, until it reaches the high

point of **Te Wharau** (666m), where it begins a very steep descent.

The long track down (2.5km) levels out at **Mangatawhero Stream** and then heads west towards the Whakatane River, emerging from the bush above Taumapou Flat and Tawhiwhi Hut. It is 1½ to two hours from Takarua Hut to Tawhiwhi, but if you're heading in the other direction the hike is considerably more difficult, so you should allow 2½ to three hours.

From **Tawhiwhi Hut**, backtrack along the all-weather track you started out on until you reach the end of the access road. Plan on three to four hours to the road, and another 1½ to two hours if you have to walk back to Ruatahuna – don't expect to hitch a ride.

WHIRINAKI FOREST PARK

The 609-sq-km Whirinaki Forest Park is the latest addition to New Zealand's forest-park system. What sets Whirinaki apart from other forest parks is the sheer majesty and density of its trees. It has examples of podocarps (rimu, miro, matai, totara and kahikatea) that are similar to the forests that blanketed Gondwana in the Jurassic period, more than 150 million years ago. For this reason Whirinaki is often referred to as the 'dinosaur forest'.

HISTORY

From the beginning of their recorded history, the Ngati Whare, a *hapu* (clan) of the Tuhoe tribe, lived in harmony with the forest of Whirinaki, and plenty of evidence of their occupation remains.

Intense logging of the area's native bush began in the 1930s, and by the mid-1970s more than 130 people were employed in the forest industry at Whirinaki, harvesting up to 30,000 cu metres of native trees annually. The land became a heated battlefield in 1978 and 1979, when conservation groups challenged government policy on managing the forests. What most irked conservationists was the practice of removing native trees and replacing them with fast-growing exotic species.

The result of the bitter conflict was an effort to preserve the remaining native bush. The forest park was formed in 1984, and a

year later all logging of native trees ended. Today, about 88% of the trees are native.

ENVIRONMENT

The northern half of the forest park is relatively low, its tree-covered hills and gullies rising from 360m to only 730m. The southern half is steep, rugged greywacke country, which tops off at 1373m at Maungataniwha, the highest point in the park.

The most striking feature of Whirinaki is its unique podocarp forest. Dominating the forest are towering kahikatea, totara, matai, rimu, miro and tawa. Podocarps are slow-growing species; many of the trees in the park are 500 to 700 years old, and some have been dated at more than 1000 years of age. The size of the trees along the first half of the Whirinaki Track is truly amazing. If you don't know a rimu from a miro, there are some tree-identification signs at the beginning of the track, along with a few interpretive displays on podocarp forests.

The dense podocarps support a diverse bird population, including North Island kaka, red- and yellow-crowned kakariki, New Zealand pigeon (*kereru*) and the endangered New Zealand falcon (*karearea*) and blue duck (*whio*). The other animal that thrives here is trout; there is good fishing in the Whirinaki, Rangitaiki and Whaeo Rivers.

CLIMATE

Whirinaki shares Te Urewera National Park's climate (see p69).

PLANNING

Information Sources

DOC Rangitaiki Area Office (☎ 07-366 1080; SH38), 1.8km south of Murupara, sells hut tickets, maps, books and brochures about the forest park's tracks. You can also leave your intentions here.

Guided Tramps

Whirinaki Guided Walks (☎ 07-377 2363; www.rainforest-treks.co.nz) offers a three-day tramp in the remote Okahu valley of the Whirinaki Forest (adult/child \$745/550). The experience includes transport from Rotorua or Taupo, and accommodation in safari tents.

ACCESS TOWN

See Murupara (p69).

WHIRINAKI TRACK

Duration	2 days
Distance	25km
Track Standard	easy tramping track
Difficulty	easy
Start/Finish	River Rd car park
Finish	Plateau Rd car park
Nearest Town	Minginui (right)
Transport	shuttle service
Summary	An all-weather track offering an easy tramp along the scenic Whirinaki River; it's so level it uses a tunnel through a hill.

This track is a surprisingly easy walk, which is ideal for families, novice trampers and overseas travellers who want to ease themselves into backcountry tramping. While Whirinaki lacks the dramatic alpine and volcanic features many trampers come to New Zealand to see, it is still an interesting tramp, with highlights such as Te Whaiti-nui-a-toi Canyon, thundering Whirinaki Falls and the caves near the southern end of the track. Trout fishing is very good in the lower reaches of the Whirinaki, up to the waterfall, but is more challenging above. Best of all, this is one of the few places in New Zealand where you will encounter trees of such size and density.

If you don't have time for an overnight tramp then the Waterfall Loop, a round-trip of three hours, is an excellent way to get a glimpse of the podocarp forest. The trip can also be easily extended into a four- or six-day loop, or an even longer tramp. Ways to do this have been described in the Alternative Finishes (p81).

PLANNING

When to Tramp

The track is a wide, well-cut path with no difficult fords, and it can be walked year-round.

Maps

Terramap's 1:50,000 *Waikaremoana & Whirinaki Recreation Area* covers this track (and the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk).

Huts

Central Whirinaki Hut (\$10) is a Serviced hut. All other huts in the Whirinaki Forest Park

are Standard (\$5); they are basic, with no cooking facilities.

NEAREST TOWN

Minginui

☎ 07

This former sawmill town is near the end of Minginui Rd, only around 7km from the beginning of the track. Although there is no accommodation to be found in Minginui itself, there are some places to stay along Minginui Rd. You will need to bring your own supplies along with you, as there is no place in Minginui to stock up on anything essential.

SLEEPING & EATING

Whirinaki Forest Holidays (☎ 366 3235; Farm Rd; dm/d \$20/85) is 1km along Minginui Rd from SH38 and offers a backpacker lodge, basic motel rooms and meals.

For a pampered night before or after your tramp, **Hukitawa Country Retreat** (☎ 366 3952; www.hukitawa.co.nz; SH38; s/d \$280/410) in nearby Te Whaiti is pricey, but includes three gourmet meals, a spa, laundry service and 'pre-dinner refreshments'. What else do you need after a long walk in the woods?

Mangamate Waterfall camp site (Minginui Rd; \$6) is south of town. This DOC facility is basic – tables, toilets and a couple of barbecues – but its location is excellent. You can pitch your tent on the banks of the Whirinaki River, overlooking beautiful Mangamate Waterfall.

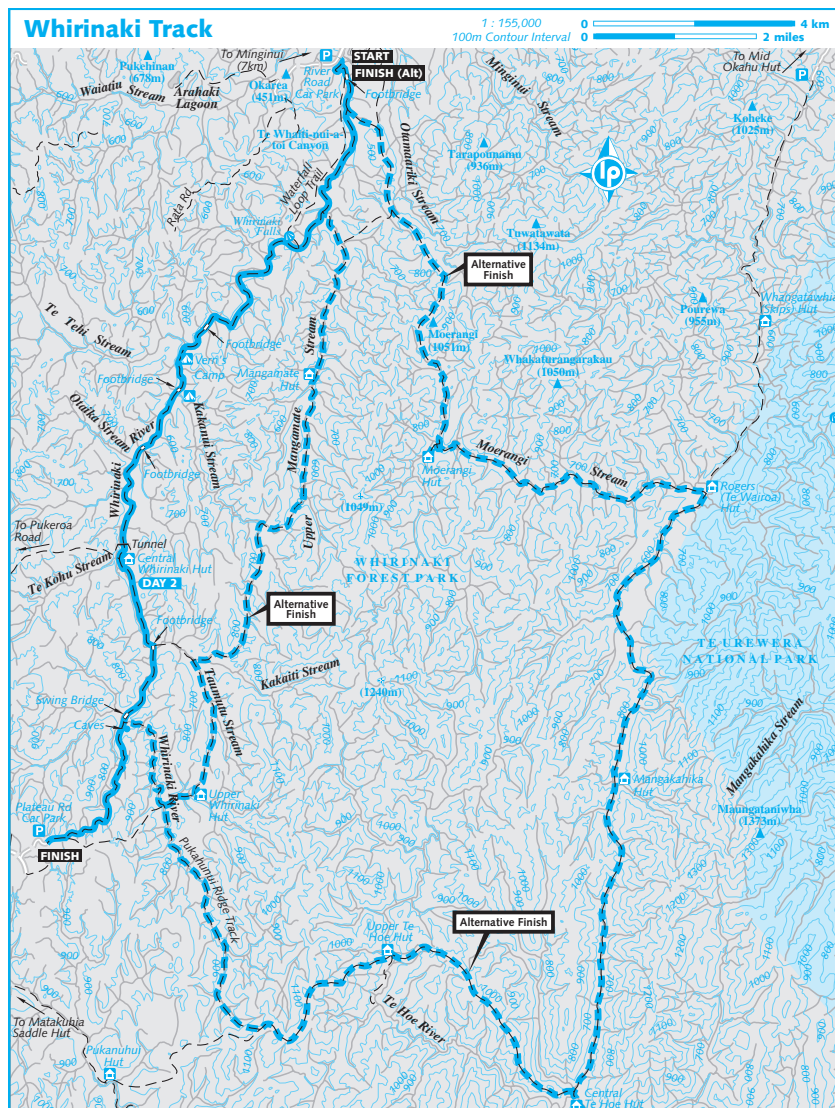
GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Murupara, head east for 18km on SH38 to Te Whaiti junction, site of a former sawmill town. Turn south along the road to Minginui, which is 8km away.

There is no longer a bus service between Rotorua and Wairoa that can drop you at the start of Minginui Rd, making a private vehicle or hitching the only options.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

The northern end of the track is 7km from Minginui, near the end of River Rd, which is picked up west of the village. It's a 1½- to two-hour walk along River Rd from Minginui. Hitching is possible because the popular Waterfall Loop day walk begins at the car park.



Whirinaki Forest Holidays (☎ 07-366 3235) offers trampers transport and car storage. If you have your own wheels, it's \$50 per vehicle to be dropped off at River Rd car park from the Forest Holidays office near Minginui and then picked up at the track's southern end. Without your own vehicle it is \$110 for two people. **Hukitawa Country**

Retreat (☎ 07-366 3952; www.hukitawa.co.nz) will also provide trumper transport.

The southern end of the track is at the end of Plateau Rd, which is accessible either by forest roads from Minginui or from SH5 (Napier-Taupo Rd), 2.5km south of Iwitihi. From SH5, turn north onto Low Level Rd and follow it for 27km,

until it intersects with Arterial Rd. A sign for Whirinaki Forest Park South directs you to turn right. Continue for another 7km, then turn right at the signposted intersection and follow the signs for 'Whirinaki Track'.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: River Road Car Park to Central Whirinaki Hut

5 hours, 16km

The start of the track is signposted at the car park and a map of the forest park here shows walking times. The entire route to the hut is surprisingly level, considering the steepness of the banks and bluffs along the river.

In less than 1km the track passes the return track of the Waterfall Loop and then descends to a bridge over the impressive **Te Whaiti-nui-a-toi Canyon**. From here you follow the true right bank of the **Whirinaki River** for the rest of the day.

Thirty minutes from the car park you pass a junction with the track to Moerangi Hut (five hours, 13km). In another 30 minutes the track crosses Upper Mangamate Stream and then passes a signposted junction to Mangamate Hut (2½ hours, 4.5km).

From here it's a short distance to a side track to **Whirinaki Falls**. The five-minute walk is well worthwhile. The cascading water drops 8m into a large pool in the river, an impressive sight that can be viewed from several angles. To position yourself in front of the falls you have to cross the bridge and head down the Waterfall Loop. Within a few minutes you see an unofficial side trail off the main track.

Return to the Whirinaki Track, which remains in view of the river, often sidling the steep bluffs above it. About 3km from the junction with the Whirinaki Falls track you reach **Vern's Camp**. This signposted, grassy spot is about 8km from the car park and makes an excellent camp site. In another 1.5km the track makes one of the few descents of the day, passes a noticeable camp site on the edge of the river and arrives at the signposted **Kakanui Stream**.

Once over the stream the track stays just above the river for nearly two hours. Along the way it passes deep pools that will intrigue any angler (keep in mind, however, that the largest trout will be found

back before Whirinaki Falls). There is very little climbing at this point. About 20 minutes before Central Whirinaki Hut the track passes through a short and unusual **tunnel**.

Central Whirinaki Hut (25 bunks) is in a small, grassy clearing near the river. A hut warden is stationed here in summer.

Day 2: Central Whirinaki Hut to Plateau Road Car Park

2½–3 hours, 9km

A dated directional sign next to the hut points the way to the track heading south. The tramp resumes along the bluffs above the river, and in 30 minutes arrives at **Taumutu Stream** and a junction with a track to Upper Whirinaki Hut (1½ hours). From the stream there is a long but gradual ascent before the track descends back to the river. An hour from the hut you reach a swing bridge across Whirinaki River.

A major track junction is well signposted from the eastern side of the bridge. Cross the swing bridge to reach the end of Plateau Rd, or to see the caves; trampers heading for Upper Whirinaki Hut or Upper Te Hoe Hut (see the Alternative Finishes, p82) should continue along the eastern bank of the river.

To reach the **caves**, turn south once you've crossed the bridge and follow the track for about 70m. When the main track begins to ascend, look for a partially obscured track that continues along the river – it will quickly lead to the main cave. The huge cavern is interesting and at night it is possible to see glow-worms. The track is wide and it's an easy night-time excursion from Central Whirinaki Hut if you take a torch.

The main track climbs the ridge above the river and then heads southwest to the car park at the end of Plateau Rd.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: MINGINUI VIA UPPER MANGAMATE STREAM

3 days

From the swing bridge (north of the caves) continue southeast along the Whirinaki River for another hour, fording it perhaps a dozen times. A track, signposted on the true right side of the river, leads to Upper Whirinaki Hut (nine bunks), 20 minutes from the main track or 1½ hours from the caves.

The hut is on a grassy flat, and a track departs from its northwestern corner to follow the Taumutu Stream to its confluence with Kakaiti Stream. Here a sign points the way towards Mangamate Hut. This is a secondary track, marked with metal tags, but not cut and bridged. From Upper Whirinaki Hut, it is 3.3km (one hour) to the confluence of the two streams, and then three hours over a low saddle to **Mangamate Hut** (nine bunks).

The next day it is a three-hour tramp out to the River Rd car park, the final hour backtracking along the northern end of the Whirinaki Track.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: MINGINUI VIA PUKAHUNUI RIDGE

5–6 days

An even longer tramp involves passing the junction to Upper Whirinaki Hut and hiking to **Upper Te Hoe Hut** (nine bunks). This is a challenging tramp along the Pukahunui Ridge Track, and takes six hours from Central Whirinaki Hut.

The next day involves a five-hour tramp along the ridge track to **Central Te Hoe Hut** (15 bunks), followed by another five-hour tramp to **Rogers (Te Wairoa) Hut** (six bunks), a rustic but charming hut built in the 1950s.

The trip ends with an easy three-hour walk to **Moerangi Hut** (nine bunks), then a 5½-hour return to the River Rd car park, the final 20 minutes of which is on the Whirinaki Track. This option is much more demanding than the Whirinaki Track.

TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK

The heart of the North Island, and the heart of New Zealand's national-park system, is Tongariro. The park is a sacred, ancestral homeland to the Maori, and a beautiful volcanic walking region to trampers. This has earned Tongariro an unusual dual World Heritage status; it's cited on both natural and cultural grounds.

The park's trademark features are its active volcanoes. Three of them – Mts Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro – form the 'top of the roof' for the North Island.

Tongariro is the southern end of a volcanic chain that extends northwest through the heart of the North Island, past Taupo and Rotorua, to finally reach Whakaari (White) Island. The volcanic nature of the region is responsible for Tongariro's hot springs, boiling mud pools, fumaroles and craters. It is the three volcanoes themselves, however, that attract most of the attention.

Ruapehu, at 2797m, is the highest mountain in the North Island and its snowfields are the only legitimate ski area north of Wellington. Northeast of Ruapehu is the almost symmetrical cone of Ngauruhoe (2291m), the most active volcano on the mainland. Tongariro (1967m) is the lowest in height and northernmost of the three peaks.

Since its establishment in 1887, the park's 795 sq km have been well developed for recreational use. The park contains the famous Bayview Chateau Tongariro (also known simply as the Grand Chateau), a golf course, various ski fields and a network of tracks and day walks. Most of the tracks lead through tussock or areas left devoid of vegetation by eruptions – which makes Tongariro the best alpine tramping area in the North Island.

The variety of scenery and recreational activities makes Tongariro the most popular national park in New Zealand, with more than one million visitors each year. Many come to ski, but more than 250,000 people arrive each summer to tramp, climb to the crater of Ruapehu, or to just spend their holidays day hiking around Whakapapa Village. Although the number of visitors and the commercialisation of the park can be overwhelming at times, most trampers consider this a small price to pay for the chance to experience its outstanding natural features.

HISTORY

To the Maori the volcanoes of Tongariro were *tapu* (sacred) and they sought to prevent anybody from climbing them. They believed Ngatoro-i-rangi, high priest of the Ngati Tuwharetoa tribe of Lake Taupo, arrived in the Bay of Plenty and travelled south to claim the volcanic plateau for his people. He climbed Ngauruhoe to view the land but, upon reaching the top, suddenly found himself in the middle of a raging snowstorm. It was something the high priest

had never experienced and he cried out to priestess sisters in the north to send him warmth.

The sisters responded by sending fire from the earth. It burst from throughout the North Island, creating the craters of Ngauruhoe and Tongariro, thus saving Ngatoro-i-rangi. The high priest slew a female slave named Auruho, then climbed to the newly formed crater and tossed the body in to give his prayer more strength. Then he claimed the surrounding land for his people.

The volcanoes, especially Tongariro, have been sacred to Maori ever since. They often travelled to Ketetahi Hot Springs to bathe, but were forbidden to go any further. Europeans were also discouraged from visiting the area. In 1839 John Bidwill, a botanist and explorer, became the first Pakeha to scale Ngauruhoe.

For the next 12 years the local tribe was successful in keeping intruders from its sacred grounds. However, in 1851, Ruapehu fell to a climber's passion when Sir George Grey ascended one of the volcano's peaks and then hid from his Maori guides to avoid their discontent. In 1879 George Beetham and JP Maxwell became the first Europeans to scale Ruapehu and see Crater Lake.

The Ngati Tuwharetoa clan could not keep other Maori tribes from claiming the land. After the New Zealand Wars (Land Wars), during which Ngati Tuwharetoa chief Horonuku Te Heuheu Tukino IV aided the rebel Te Kooti, those tribes loyal to the Crown wanted the area redistributed. In 1886, at a schoolhouse in Taupo, the Native Land Court met to determine the ownership of land around Taupo.

Horonuku pleaded passionately with the court to leave the area intact. At one point, he turned to the rival chiefs who were longing for the land and asked: 'Where is your fire, your *ahi ka*? You cannot show me for it does not exist. Now I shall show you mine. Look yonder. Behold my fire, my mountain Tongariro!'

The forcefulness of his speech dissuaded Maori from dividing up the sacred land, but Horonuku was equally worried about Pakeha, who were eyeing the area's tussock grassland for grazing.

The chief saw only one solution that would ensure the land's everlasting pres-

ervation. Before the Native Land Court, on 23 September 1887, Horonuku presented the area to the Crown for the purpose of a national park, the first in New Zealand and only the fourth in the world. With incredible vision for a man of his time, the chief realised that Tongariro's value lay in its priceless beauty and heritage, not as another sheep paddock.

An act of parliament created Tongariro National Park in 1887, but the park's development was slow. The main trunk railroad reached the region in 1909. By then there were huts at Waihothonu, in the east, with a track leading to them and to Ketetahi Hot Springs. The railroad brought a large number of tourists to the western side of the park, and by 1918 a track and hut were built at Mangatepopo for skiers on Ngauruhoe.

Development of the park mushroomed in the 1950s and 1960s as roads were sealed, tracks cut and more huts built. By the early 1970s annual visitor numbers to Tongariro reached 400,000; today the number tops one million visitors a year.

ENVIRONMENT

Geologically speaking, the Tongariro volcanoes are relatively young. Both Ruapehu and Tongariro are less than 300,000 years old, and are still active. They were shaped by a mixture of eruptions and glacial action, especially in the last Ice Age. At one time, glaciers extended down Ruapehu to below 1300m, leaving polished rock far below their present snouts.

Ngauruhoe is even younger. Its first eruptions are thought to have occurred 2500 years ago. Until 1975 Ngauruhoe had erupted at least every nine years, including a 1954 eruption that lasted 11 months and disgorged six million cubic metres of lava.

One eruption on Ruapehu began in March 1945 and continued for almost a year, spreading lava over Crater Lake and sending huge dark clouds of ash as far away as Wellington. Ruapehu rumbled again in 1969 and 1973, but its worst disaster was on Christmas Eve 1953, when an ice wall that held back a section of Crater Lake collapsed. An enormous volcanic mud and water flow, called a lahar, swept down the mountainside, taking everything in its path, including a railway bridge. Moments later a

THE TONGARIRO CROSSING *Jim DuFresne*

The Milford Track may be 'the world's finest walk', but the Tongariro Crossing is fast becoming New Zealand's most popular tramp of any length.

The Tongariro Crossing is a 17km walk in Tongariro National Park, which starts at the end of Mangatepopo Rd. The tramp begins with a climb to the saddle between Mts Ngauruhoe and Tongariro, and then passes such volcanic wonders as Red Crater, Emerald Lakes and old lava flows that look like prehistoric rock gardens. You end the seven- to eight-hour tramp descending to the end of Ketetahi Rd, where a fleet of buses whisks trampers away (for a full description see Day 2, p89).

In places such as Taupo, Turangi and National Park, the 'Crossing' has reached the status of a religious pilgrimage in India. A half-dozen shuttle-bus companies transport walkers to Mangatepopo Rd daily during summer. DOC estimates more than 25,000 trampers complete the walk annually, compared with only 7000 who walk the entire Tongariro Northern Circuit. The most crowded times on the track are the first nice days after Christmas and Easter, when there can easily be more than 1000 people strung out between the two road ends. There are so many trampers waiting for a bus at Ketetahi Rd that vendors will be set up in the car park selling hot drinks and sandwiches.

The Crossing is spectacular in clear weather, but if it's cloudy and misty – as it often can be – then the tramp is little more than a steep climb and descent. You'll see little but the next pole marking the route. If there is a strong wind blowing on top, you'll be practically crawling along the ridge of Red Crater, the high point of the trek at 1886m.

It's also important to remember this is an alpine crossing. You need a reasonable level of fitness to complete it, and must be prepared for all types of weather. Still, it's shocking how improperly equipped some people are, because for many this is the only tramp they'll do during their stay in New Zealand. I once saw a trumper dressed in jeans, tennis shoes and wrapped in a blanket because he had no rain jacket. You also need to take plenty of water, as there is none available between Mangatepopo and Ketetahi Huts. Even at the huts, which rely on rainwater, water is often in short supply.

If you do arrive with hordes of others at Mangatepopo Rd, wait 15 to 20 minutes and you'll be behind that tidal wave of humanity most of the day. There is no reason to arrive at Ketetahi Rd more than five or 10 minutes before your bus does.

crowded train plunged into the river, killing 151 people; it was one of New Zealand's worst accidents.

In 1995 Ruapehu sprayed rock, and emitted massive clouds of ash and steam in a spectacular eruption. The ski runs were spared from the destructive lahars but the volcanic activity emptied Crater Lake, a popular destination for climbers.

The lake immediately began refilling, but further eruptions in 1996 emptied it again. The volcanic debris formed a 7m-high dam across the old outlet, which will eventually collapse when the lake has filled up behind it, sending a lahar down the Whangaehu River. DOC and other agencies have been continually monitoring the lake level and have put in place contingency plans and structures to reduce the impact of the expected lahar. Crater Lake has been refilling and, as of 2006, was less than 2m below the old lake outlet.

CLIMATE

Because most of Tongariro is mountainous, it has its own unpredictable weather patterns. The western slopes of all three volcanoes experience sudden periods of bad weather, with heavy rain and even snow on the peaks as late as the start of summer. The winds, usually from the west, can reach gale force on the ridges. At Whakapapa Village, rain falls an average of 191 days a year. Average annual precipitation is 2743mm.

It is usually drier on the eastern side of the mountains, where the Rangipo Desert nestles in the rain shadow of Ruapehu. Rangipo is a barren landscape of dark, reddish sand and ash, with small clumps of tussock. This unique area is the result of two million years of volcanic eruptions, but especially the Taupo eruption about 2000 years ago, which coated the land with thick deposits of pumice and destroyed all vegetation.

**PLANNING
Maps & Brochures**

The best map for planning a tramp at Tongariro National Park is the 1:80,000 Park-map 273-04 (*Tongariro*), which shows Mt Ruapehu summit and the Tongariro Crossing at 1:50,000. Tongariro is also covered by four maps in the 1:50,000 Topomap 260 series: T19 (*Tongariro*), T20 (*Ruapehu*), S20 (*Ohakune*) and S19 (*Raurimu*).

Several brochures are available from DOC centres, including *Turangi Walks*, *Whakapapa Walks*, *The Tongariro Northern Circuit* and *The Tongariro Crossing*.

**ACCESS TOWN
Turangi**

☎ 07 / pop 3900

Taupo's smaller cousin is at the southern end of Lake Taupo. Its main attraction is trout fishing, but it is also a major access point to the northern tracks of Tongariro National Park, particularly the Tongariro Crossing.

INFORMATION

DOC Tongariro/Taupo Conservancy (☎ 386 8607; ttinfo@doc.govt.nz; Turanga Pl) Near the junction of SH1 and Ohuanga Rd, selling hut tickets, maps and books, and providing the latest weather forecasts. It's a good place to leave your tramping intentions.

Turangi visitor information centre (☎ 386 8999; turangivc@laketauponz.com) Opposite the Turangi Shopping Mall, just off SH1, this has a detailed model of the national park and lots of information on the area's many activities. The centre also sells hut tickets, fishing licences and is a booking agent for InterCity buses.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

It's best to pick up any necessary tramping equipment and supplies in Turangi, as you are limited in what you can purchase in National Park and Whakapapa Village, the nearest towns to the park.

Sporting Life (☎ 386 8996; Turangi Shopping Mall, SH1; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun) has tramping gear, clothing and freeze-dried food. Also in found in the mall are **New World Supermarket** (☎ 386 8780) and **Morar's Fruit Market** (☎ 386 8561), with a good selection of bulk food, including dried fruit and vegetables.

SLEEPING & EATING

Turangi Cabins & Holiday Park (☎ 386 8754; www.turangicabins.co.nz; Ohuanga Rd; sites for 2 \$20,

cabins \$36), near the centre of town, once served as quarters for a powerstation's construction workers – hence all the cabins.

Extreme Backpackers (☎ 386 8949; www.extremebackpackers.co.nz; 26 Ngawaka Pl; dm \$20-21, s/d \$43/58; ☑) is an excellent and spacious lodge, with a pleasant lounge, inner courtyard and an indoor climbing wall.

Bellbird Lodge (☎ 386 8281; www.bellbird.co.nz; 6 Rangipoia Pl; camp site for 2 \$12, dm/d \$20/46) is a small and friendly place with a spacious lounge and kitchen, and its own transport for the Tongariro Crossing (\$25).

Club Habitat (☎ 386 7492; clubhabitat@xtra.co.nz; 25 Ohuanga Rd; camp site for 2 \$10, dm/d \$19/46; ☑) is a huge complex with a restaurant, micro-brewery, sauna and spa.

There are a handful of places to eat in or near the Turangi Shopping Mall, including **Alpine Smokehaus** (☎ 386 0235; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2.30pm Sat) for good coffee, salads and quiche, and **Valentino's** (☎ 386 8821; ☎ 6-8.30pm Wed-Sun), a good Italian restaurant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity and Alpine Scenic Tours buses stop at **Turangi Bus & Travel Centre** (☎ 386 8918; cnr Ohuanga Rd & Ngawaka Pl). **InterCity** (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has buses to Rotorua (\$39, two hours), Wellington (\$62, five hours) and Auckland (\$59, six hours). **Alpine Scenic Tours** (☎ 378 7412; www.alpinescenictours.co.nz) has a Taupo–Turangi run (\$18, one hour).

TONGARIRO NORTHERN CIRCUIT

Duration	4 days
Distance	50km
Track Standard	Great Walk
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Whakapapa Village (p87)
Nearest Towns	National Park (p86), Whakapapa Village (p87)

Transport bus

Summary A spectacular alpine tramp, the Northern Circuit winds its way around Mt Ngauruhoe on a well-marked and easy-to-follow track. It includes the Tongariro Crossing, the best one-day walk in the country, passing unique craters and volcanic formations.

Although it only circumnavigates Ngauruhoe, this track is a Great Walk for a number of good reasons. The route can be

easily walked in four days from Whakapapa Village, Mangatepopo Rd or Ketetahi Rd, which are all connected to Turangi by public transport. Although there is some moderate climbing, the track is well marked and well maintained, putting it within the ability of people of medium fitness and tramping experience.

But, most of all, the Northern Circuit includes the most spectacular and colourful volcanic areas that have resulted in the park being designated a Unesco World Heritage Area.

The traditional place to start and finish the tramp is Whakapapa Village, the site of the park's visitor information centre. However, many trampers begin at Mangatepopo Rd to ensure they have good weather for the tramp's most dramatic day. This reduces it to a three-day tramp, with stays at Ketetahi and Waihohonu Huts, ending at Whakapapa village.

Don't confuse this circuit with the separate Round-the-Mountain Track (p95); this four- to six-day tramp is a longer route around Ruapehu only.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

The safest and most popular time to tramp the circuit is December to March, when the tracks are normally clear of snow and the weather is less severe. In winter it is a full alpine adventure, requiring alpine experience, an ice axe and crampons.

Maps

The excellent 1:80,000 Parkmap 273-04 (*Tongariro*) is more than adequate for this track. The 1:50,000 Topomap 260-T19 (*Tongariro*) and 260-T20 (*Ruapehu*) maps also cover the track.

Huts

From October to June a **Great Walks pass** (huts adult/child \$20/10, camp sites adult/child \$15/7.50) is required for the four huts (Mangatepopo, Ketetahi, Oturere and Waihohonu) on the circuit. Camp sites have been established near each of the huts. The huts have mattresses, gas heating, gas stoves, a water supply and toilet facilities. It's best to obtain the passes in advance to avoid the premium rates charged by hut wardens. Local DOC and visitor information

centres sell Great Walks passes, as do some backpacker lodges.

The five other huts in the park cost \$10 per night, and camping is \$5.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

National Park

☎ 07

This small settlement is on the intersection of SH4 and SH47, and is 15km from Whakapapa Village. National Park feeds off trampers in the summer and skiers in the winter. There is no visitor information centre here, but the website of the **National Park Village Business Association** (www.nationalpark.co.nz) is very useful.

SLEEPING & EATING

National Park Backpackers (☎ 892 2870; www.npbp.co.nz; Finlay St; dm \$21-26, d \$52-56; ☑) is a popular facility, with great views of the volcanoes, a spa, TV lounge, and even an indoor climbing wall – in case you have energy left after your tramp.

Ski Haus (☎ 892 2854; www.skihaus.co.nz; cnr Carroll & McKenzie Sts; dm \$18-20, d \$50) also has a spa and a delightful, Alpine-style lounge with a sunken fireplace, as well as a bar and restaurant.

Howard's Lodge (☎ 892 2827; www.howardslodge.co.nz; 11-13 Carroll St; dm \$20-22, s/d \$50/60; ☑) is another excellent place with a variety of rooms, a spa and a *sauna*, a comfortable lounge and large kitchen.

A good place to eat, which also hops at night, is **Schnapps Bar** (☎ 892 2788; Finlay St; ☎ noon-9.30pm), next door to National Park Backpackers. You can purchase limited grocery supplies at the **BP National Park Station** (☎ 892 2879; cnr SH4 & SH47; ☎ 7.30am-7pm).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are daily **InterCity** (☎ 378 9032, 09-623 1503; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) buses which go north to Auckland (\$56, five hours) via Hamilton (\$38, three hours), and also south to Palmerston North (\$32, four hours). The buses arrive and depart outside Ski Haus, which sells tickets. **Alpine Scenic Tours** (☎ 378 7412; www.alpinescenictours.co.nz) has daily shuttles making a return trip between Turangi and National Park (\$18, one hour) via Whakapapa Village.

Another option is to catch a train, as some *Overlander* services between Auckland and

Wellington stop at National Park. Tickets are sold at Ski Haus.

Whakapapa Village

☎ 07

This small resort village is the traditional start and finish of the tramp. **DOC Whakapapa Visitor Centre** (☎ 892 3729) has maps, track brochures and books for sale, as well as interesting exhibits and displays on the park's geological history. A weather report and extended forecast are posted daily.

SLEEPING & EATING

The **Whakapapa Holiday Park** (☎ 892 3897; whakapapaholidaypark@xtra.co.nz; SH48; sites for 2 \$28, dm/d \$22/69, cabins \$46) is a popular and well-maintained camping ground 150m from the Whakapapa Visitor Centre. It has a communal kitchen, laundry, drying room and a small store with limited groceries, coffee and sandwiches.

Skotel Alpine Resort (☎ 0800-756 835, 892 3719; www.skotel.com; Ngauruhoe Pl; dm \$30, d \$70-120; ☑) is a cosy hotel with a relaxing ambience behind the Grand Chateau. The many amenities include luggage storage, a bar, restaurant, sauna and two spas, indoors and outdoors.

Grand Chateau (☎ 0800-242 832, 892 3809; www.chateau.co.nz; SH48; d \$180-280; ☑ ☎) was built in 1929 and is now one of New Zealand's best-known hotels. Recently refurbished, the hotel has four restaurants, two bars and a cinema.

Along with a tavern, there is **Fergusson's Cafe** (☎ 378 7412; SH48; ☎ 7am-3.30pm; ☑), with espresso, sandwiches and light meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Alpine Scenic Tours (☎ 378 7412; www.alpinescenictours.co.nz) operates a daily shuttle service that departs Taupo at 6.30am, stops in Turangi at 7am, and continues on to Ketetahi Rd, Mangatepopo Rd and Whakapapa Village (from Turangi/Taupo \$30/35).

Many of the lodges and hostels in National Park offer bus transport to Whakapapa Village, Mangatepopo Rd and Ketetahi Rd, serving primarily the Tongariro Crossing day hikers. **Tongariro Track Transport** (☎ 892 3716) departs National Park Backpackers at 7am and 7.45am, and heads up to Whakapapa Village (\$10) before heading off for Mangatepopo Rd (\$25). **Howard's Lodge** (☎ 892 2827) also runs a tramper transport bus.

Hitching to Whakapapa Village is never easy because traffic is usually light. If you're coming south from Turangi, use the shorter saddle road, SH47 – the locals no longer use the SH46 route linking SH1 to SH47.

Tongariro National Park

There are two basic DOC camping grounds in the park, both with cold water and pit toilets. **Mangahuia Campground** (SH47; adult/child \$4/2) is between National Park and the SH48 turn-off heading to Whakapapa Village. **Mangawhero Campground** (Ohakune Mountain Rd; adult/child \$4/2) is near Ohakune, on the road heading up to Ruapehu.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

If you don't want to start in Whakapapa, another option from Taupo and Turangi is transport to the end of either Ketetahi or Mangatepopo Rds (\$20). At last count there were more than a dozen operators of such bus services, including **Alpine Scenic Tours** (☎ 07-378 7412; www.alpinescenictours.co.nz) and **Tongariro Expeditions** (☎ 07-377 0435; www.tongariroexpeditions.com). Most depart early in the morning so they can arrive at Mangatepopo Rd between 7am and 9am.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Whakapapa Village to Mangatepopo Hut

3–5 hours, 8.5km

Many trampers skip this first day of the circuit because, in the past, the Mangatepopo Track had a reputation for being uninteresting and extremely muddy. The scenery has not changed but the track has. DOC has upgraded it with additional planking and bridges, making it a considerably easier walk than it once was.

From 100m below the Whakapapa Visitor Centre, head up Ngauruhoe Pl to the signposted Mangatepopo Track on your left. The tramp begins here, along a well-maintained track that wanders through tussock grass and a few stands of beech for 1.5km. At Wairere Stream it passes a signposted junction with a track that leads to Taranaki Falls, and eventually to the Tama Lakes.

Mangatepopo Track (left fork) heads northeast through tussock and many small streams. In the past the streams had eroded parts of the track, making it sloppy when it rained, but now many are bridged.

on private land. The Ketetahi Trust, which represents the landowners, has given trampers permission to cross part of their land, but this does not include soaking in the hot springs. Maori hold the same reverence for the springs that they extend to the mountain peaks within the national park. Trampers are asked to respect the *tapu* (sacredness) of this area, and when descending to Ketetahi Rd, to carefully follow the poled route around the springs.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: KETETAHI ROAD

2–3 hours, 6.5km, 700m descent

You can depart the circuit at Ketetahi Hut by joining the day walkers and descending to the car park at Ketetahi Rd. Most of the first half of the descent is above the bush-line and the rest is in lush podocarp forest. So many trampers depart at Ketetahi Rd that there is usually a vendor selling drinks and sandwiches. There is also a shelter and a toilet, but no drinking water.

Day 3: Ketetahi Hut to Waihohonu Hut

6–7 hours, 16.5km, 240m ascent, 400m descent

This day is spent tramping along the eastern side of Ngauruhoe. Return up the track towards North Crater, ascending 200m to the top. Plan on two hours to reach the junction to Oturere Hut, even longer if the sights along the way make you pause to again ponder their unusual features. At the junction follow the signposted track to the south (left) as it skirts one of the **Emerald Lakes** before working its way to the old lava flow that descends steeply into Oturere valley.

It's 30 minutes from the junction to the valley floor, where the track follows Oturere Stream, passing clumps of tussock grass and piles of rocks in a moonscape terrain. The walk is fairly level in the valley, until you begin a gentle descent to Oturere Hut, reached 8km (2½ to three hours) from Ketetahi Hut.

Oturere Hut (24 bunks) is at 1350m, with a view of a small waterfall from the edge of the gorge. There are picnic tables outside the hut, making it a good place for lunch.

The track leaves the hut and swings southwest through open country as it skirts the eastern flanks of Ngauruhoe. It descends straight towards Ruapehu, working its way across numerous streams, before a lengthy 120m descent bottoms out at a bridge over

the upper branch of Waihohonu Stream, 1½ to two hours from Oturere Hut.

On the other side, climb through a beech-clad valley, topping out on the 1269m crest of an open ridge before making a final descent to **Waihohonu Hut** (29 bunks) in the next valley. The hut, the second to be built in this area, is in a pocket of beech trees near a branch of the Waihohonu Stream; nearby are camping sites.

The first hut is still standing and makes for an interesting side trip after you drop your pack (see the boxed text, opposite). A another short side trip is to follow the Around-The-Mountain Track south to **Ohinepango Springs**, a 20-minute walk from Waihohonu Hut. The springs are cold and they bubble up from beneath an old lava flow. A huge volume of water discharges into the Ohinepango Stream.

Day 4: Waihohonu Hut to Whakapapa Village

5½–6 hours, 16km

The final day begins with the track crossing a bridge over a branch of Waihohonu Stream. On the other side is a signposted junction. The Round-the-Mountain Track continues south along the slopes of Ruapehu, and the Waihohonu Track (not part of the Tongariro Northern Circuit) heads east towards Desert Rd (1½ hours).

Turn right at the junction, following the Waihohonu Track west. The track follows the upper branch of Waihohonu Stream, dropping and climbing out of several streams that have eroded through the thin covering of tussock grass. The walking is tiresome at times, but beautiful if the weather is clear; Ngauruhoe's perfect cone is on one side and Ruapehu's snowcapped summit is on the other. Eventually the track rises gently to **Tama Saddle**, between the two volcanoes, and in another 1.5km arrives at a junction to **Tama Lakes**. The lower lake is a short trip up the side track, but it's 45 minutes along an exposed ridge to the upper lake.

The main track continues west, working down and across another six streams until it descends to Wairere Stream, where there are two routes returning to Whakapapa Village. To the right the track passes **Taranaki Falls**, where the Wairere Stream spills over a 20m rock face into a boulder-ringed pool, and then merges into Mangatepopo Track

WAIHOHONU HUT: STILL STANDING STRONG

Old Waihohonu Hut is New Zealand's oldest mountain hut, and it's certainly one of the most beloved among Kiwi trampers.

The hut was built in 1904 by the Tourist and Health Resorts Department, as a stop-off for stage coaches on the Grand Tourist Route from Wanganui to Taupo, through what is now Whanganui and Tongariro National Parks. After the Main Trunk railway was opened on the other side of the park in 1908, Waihohonu Hut became the base for the first recreational skiing in New Zealand in 1913. Later it served as shearers' quarters before becoming popular with trampers. Tongariro's oldest hut was finally retired in 1968, and was eventually declared a historical structure.

The fact that it has endured a century of extreme weather is testament to the Kiwi ingenuity of its builders. The hut was constructed from pit-sawn totara wood beams, and clad with corrugated iron, with all materials being carried up by men or horses. Workers then filled the wall cavities with pumice stones to insulate the hut and protect it from fire. The hut was so well designed that it has survived the foul weather buffeting the slopes of Ruapehu, occasional trampers' mishaps with stoves, and even a few volcanic eruptions.

Today, the classic red structure, the oldest example of an early two-room alpine hut in the country, is a museum with an interesting series of displays of early equipment and photos. But the hut also serves as a monument to New Zealand's passion for mountain recreation and adventure. The fact that this museum has to be reached on foot seems only right.

1.5km from its start on Ngauruhoe Pl. To the left the track makes a steady descent to Whakapapa Village, passing through grasslands and small patches of beech forest. It's 30 to 45 minutes to the village along either route.

KAIMANAWA FOREST PARK

Just to the east of Tongariro National Park is Kaimanawa Forest Park, a 773-sq-km conservation park dominated by the Kaimanawa Range and the beech forest that covers much of the area. The park contains the upper catchments of four major rivers: the Mohaka, the Rangitikei, the Ngaruroro and the Tongariro.

For trampers, Kaimanawa is a complete contrast to Tongariro National Park: one is well known, well used and easily accessible; the other is little known, little used and difficult to reach by public transport. In Tongariro, tracks are benched and well marked; in Kaimanawa, you need good bushcraft and river-crossing skills to travel from hut to hut.

HISTORY

There is little evidence of a widespread Maori presence in Kaimanawa, but Europeans had

arrived by the 1880s, looking for gold and burning the forest for farms. From the late 1930s to the 1970s, splitting of red beech (a method of producing fence posts and other products without the use of a sawmill) took place in the north of the park.

In 1965 the Forest Amendment Act was passed to protect sections of forest as parks, and Kaimanawa was gazetted in 1969.

ENVIRONMENT

Kaimanawa can be divided into two general regions. The central and southern portions of the park are mountainous, with forested valleys, extensive scrublands and alpine grasslands. In contrast, the area to the north and east is less rugged and almost entirely forested – making it easier for tramping.

Most of the park is covered in beech forest, with red and silver beech dominating in the north and east, and mountain beech in the south and interior valleys. Towards the west, including along the Urchin-Umukarikari Circuit, podocarps (*rimu*, *matai* and *totara*) are encountered more frequently. The bush-line lies between 1160m and 1370m, and marks the point where the forest is replaced by tussock grassland and subalpine vegetation.

Sika (Japanese deer) and red deer mean hunters flock here during the roar (mating season) in late March and April. Native birds include the New Zealand pigeon

(*kereru*), the rifleman, the New Zealand falcon (*karearea*), fantails, bellbirds, whiteheads, fernbirds, kiwis, and sometimes blue ducks (*whio*).

The Kaimanawa area is known for its trout, and is one of the best spots in the North Island for trampers with a rod and reel. Most rivers in the park contain trout. Some (Rangitikei, Mohaka and Ngaruroro) have brown and rainbow trout; the Waipakihī, on the Urchin-Umukarikari Circuit, has only rainbow.

CLIMATE

The area receives an average of 3500mm of precipitation a year, yet summers are generally good, with long dry spells and mild temperatures from December to April. The southern, mountainous sections of the park can be unpredictable, with heavy rain, sleet or even snow developing quickly at high altitude during early or late summer.

PLANNING

The most practical map for planning a tramp here is the 1:100,000 Parkmap 274-11 (*Guide to Kaimanawa State Forest Park*), which covers the entire park, but can be hard to find. The best place to look is the DOC Tongariro/Taupo Conservancy (p85).

ACCESS TOWN

See Turangi (p85).

URCHIN-UMUKARIKARI CIRCUIT

Duration	2 days
Distance	32km
Track Standard	tramping track & route
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Urchin car park
Finish	Umukarikari car park
Nearest Town	Turangi (p85)
Transport	bus

Summary This is the most popular tramp in the lightly used Kaimanawa Forest Park. It includes segments above the bush-line, where on clear days there are good views of the Tongariro volcanoes.

As well as its scenic attractions, this tramp is one of the easiest to reach in the forest

park. It includes tramping up the Waipakihī River, which is an easily travelled river bed that will attract the attention of tramping anglers.

The circuit can be tramped in either direction, but is described here entering the Waipakihī River valley on the Urchin Track. From the river it is easier to pick up the Umukarikari Track, which begins near Waipakihī Hut, than the Urchin Track.

PLANNING

When to Tramp Summer and autumn are the best times. In November and early December heavy rain and low clouds can make travel difficult.

Maps

The best map for this tramp is the 1:50,000 Terramap *Kawaeka & Kaimanawa Recreation Areas*. The 1:50,000 Topomap 260-T19 (*Tongariro*) also covers the entire route.

Huts

On the banks of the Waipakihī River is the **Waipakihī Hut** (\$10), one of four huts in the park.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Turangi (p85).

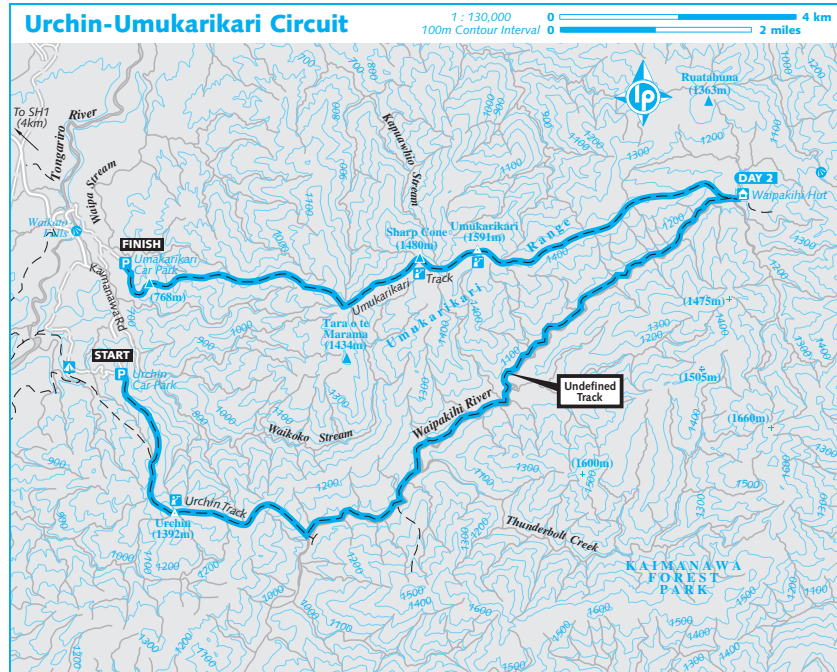
DOC Camping Ground

There is a basic **DOC camping ground** (adult/child \$4/2), with tables and a toilet, on the unsealed road to the start of the Urchin Track.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

Most of the tracks in the Kaimanawa Forest Park are isolated and difficult to reach without a vehicle. The Urchin-Umukarikari Circuit is the exception, located off a major road, SH1, and near a major town, just 15km south of Turangi.

From SH1, head east on Kaimanawa Rd and cross the bridge over the Tongariro River above the Waikato Falls. Beyond it, follow signs to either Urchin Track or Umukarikari Track. It is 8km from SH1 to the start of the Urchin Track, ending with a steep climb along a rough gravel road. It is 6km between SH1 and the Umukarikari car park. For those who have to return to their vehicle at the end of the tramp, it's a 6km walk from one trailhead to the other.



InterCity (☎ 07-386 8918; www.intercitycoaches.co.nz) will drop you off at the start of Kaimanawa Rd, but you have to clear it with the driver first and purchase the full fare for Turangi to Waiouru (\$24, one hour, four days). **Alpine Scenic Tours** (☎ 07-378 7412; www.alpinescenictours.co.nz) will also drop off and pick up at the trailheads, but it is a flat fare of \$100 for up to 10 people. For four or more trampers this would be the way to reach the tracks.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Urchin Car Park to Waipakihī Hut

6–8 hours, 18km, 569m ascent, 436m descent
The Urchin Track is unforgiving. From the car park it begins climbing immediately towards Urchin, an effort of almost 600m. It's not an overly steep climb, just a steady march up. Within 2km the track tops off, levels out briefly and then makes its final climb towards **Urchin trig**, breaking out of the bush-line just before reaching the high point of 1392m. It's a 1½-hour climb, but you're rewarded with views in all directions. What

captures the eye, however, is the volcanic trio of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro to the west.

A poled route leads east across the tussock and quickly reaches a 1391m high point. It then continues to follow the crest of the open ridge for another 1km. Less than an hour after breaking out above the bush-line the track is ready to dive back into the trees. The final 1km of the Urchin Track is a steep descent off the Umukarikari Range into the Waipakihī valley. Take extra care with this section if conditions are wet.

From the car park it takes two to three hours to reach **Waipakihī Hut**, where you head upstream. There is no defined track along the river, but it is easy walking. The key is to ford the river when necessary (and you will have to often) and to keep tramping upstream through grassy flats and beech terraces.

A confluence with a major stream is reached 3km upstream, followed by another confluence 2.5km beyond. If you intend to fish, the best pools will be found before the second stream is reached. Beyond the

second major stream is a small **gorge**, and then it's another 6km of river walking before the **Waipakihi Hut** appears on the east side of the river. Built in 1968, this 12-bunk hut is located on a grass terrace overlooking the river. Travelling upstream you'll also pass many good places to camp.

Day 2: Waipakihi Hut to Umukarikari Car Park

4–6 hours, 14km, 500m ascent, 911m descent

Most of this day is spent tramping along the open ridges of the Umukarikari Range. Pay homage to the weather gods – sacrifice a bag of scroggin if you have to – because if they smile on you with clear weather conditions, this is an outstanding tramp for panoramic views.

From the hut, a track heads west, quickly crosses the river and begins climbing. The slope is steep, but not nearly as knee-bending as the one at the end of the Urchin Track. In less than 1km you ascend 200m and reach the bush-line. A poled route takes over and the next 4km is an easy tramp across the wide, open ridge of the Umukarikari Range. If only all alpine treks were this easy.

Eventually, about two to three hours from the hut, the route ascends **Umukarikari trig**, the high point of the entire tramp at 1591m. From this flat peak there are views all around, particularly of the grassy plains and river valleys of Kaimanawa Forest Park to the east.

Descend Umukarikari's western flank and then begin climbing again, reaching **Sharp Cone** (1480m) within 1km. From the top of this peak, and along the descent to the west, you enjoy more views of Tongariro National Park's skyline. Three to four hours from the hut you reach the bush-line again.

The final 4km is a steady descent towards Umukarikari car park. Around 20 minutes from the car park the track makes one last climb to reach a 768m high point. From there it's all downhill, passing some impressive rimu along the way.

MORE TRAMPS

PIRONGIA FOREST PARK Mt Pirongia

The ancient volcano of Mt Pirongia is the most recognisable landmark in the 17,000-hectare Pirongia Forest Park south

of Hamilton. **Pahautea Hut** (\$5), with eight bunks, is near the 959m peak – making it a popular weekend tramp for Aucklanders. The Mahaukura and Tirohanga Tracks can be combined for an eight- to 11-hour circuit to the summit and hut from Grey Rd. For a map, use the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-S15 (*Te Awamutu*) and for more information contact the **DOC Waikato Area Office** (☎ 07-838 3363; Northway St, Te Rapa).

TE UREWERA NATIONAL PARK Lake Waikareiti Track

This track begins along SH38, 100m north of the Aniwanui Visitor Centre. It's an easy 3.5km to the secluded lake, where there's a day shelter. The track continues along the western side of Lake Waikareiti, and in three hours reaches Sandy Bay Hut (18 bunks). The hut is now part of the Great Walks system, so you must book through **Aniwanui Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-837 3803). This is a pleasant overnight trip that is rated moderate. To avoid backtracking the entire route you can return to the SH38 trailhead via the Lake Ruapani Track, a three-hour tramp rated moderate-demanding. Use the 1:50,000 Terramap *Waikaremoana & Whirinaki Recreation Areas*, or the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-W18 (*Waikaremoana*).

Waihua–Mangamako Stream Route

There is a network of ridge and stream routes with small huts in the northwestern section of Te Urewera National Park. From Murupara the area is reached by heading north along Galatea Rd – just east of town – to Te Teko, and watching out for a national park sign about 300m past the Waihua Stream bridge. A road here takes you to the bush edge and the start of the track. It's a 4½-hour tramp to Waihua Hut (six bunks) from the bridge, or three hours if you drive to the edge of the bush. The next day you follow Te Onepu Stream – often actually walking in it – to Casino Bivouac (three bunks) and then drop down to Mangamako Stream and Mangamako Hut (six bunks). It's a three-hour walk from Waihua to Mangamako, and then 3½ hours out to the Murupara–Te Teko Rd. For this route use two maps of the 1:50,000 Topomap 260 series: W16 (*Waimana*) and V16 (*Tarawera*).

For information on this route, contact the **DOC Rangitaiki Area Office** (☎ 07-366 1080; SH38). There is no public transport to the trail.

Whakataka Trig

This track is rated demanding, and should only be considered by experienced trampers. The route is posted along SH38 at Taupeupe Saddle, east of Ruatahuna. It's a 4½-hour tramp via a slatted and undulating ridge track to the trig, from which there are superb views of the national park, including Lake Waikaremoana. Whakataka Hut (eight bunks) is nearby. From the hut you can continue on a second day, along a steep rugged route for four hours to Hopuruahine Landing, at the northern end of the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk. Almost the entire route is on the 1:50,000 Terramap *Waikaremoana & Whirinaki Recreation Areas*. For information on this tramp, contact the **DOC Aniwanui Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-837 3803; SH38). There is no public transport to the trail.

Manuoha Trig

This tramp takes you to the highest point in the park (1392m), where you'll find Manuoha Hut (six bunks) and excellent views. The track begins 1km from the northern end of the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk at Hopuruahine, and climbs along a ridge for 6km to the summit, a seven-hour return walk. Experienced trampers can continue on the Pukepukete route to Lake Waikareiti, descending for six hours before reaching Sandy Bay Hut. The third day is an easy tramp along the Lake Waikareiti Track (opposite) to SH38. This trip is rated demanding, and the Pukepukete route should be considered waterless. Use the 1:50,000 Terramap *Waikaremoana & Whirinaki Recreation Areas*. For information on this tramp, contact the **DOC Aniwanui Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-837 3803; SH38). There is no public transport to the trail.

TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK Round-the-Mountain Track

More challenging than the Tongariro Northern Circuit, this 71km, four- to six-day

tramp, circles Ruapehu and passes through a variety of terrain, ranging from mountain beech forest, tussock country and alpine fields, to deserts and glacial river valleys. The track can be accessed from Ohakune and Whakapapa Village, and is best walked from December to March. The route is well posted and poled, but because of the 1995 Ruapehu eruptions, some alternative routes may have to be used on the southern slopes.

There are six huts around Ruapehu: Whakapapaiti, Mangaturuturu, Blyth, Mangaeuehu, Rangipo and Waihothonu. Since Waihothonu Hut is part of the Tongariro Northern Circuit it requires a dated Great Walks pass to stay there from October to June. Use the 1:50,000 Terramap *Ruapehu & Tongariro Recreation Areas*.

Tongariro Traverse

This five-day tramp crosses Tongariro National Park from its southern border near Ohakune, across the western slopes of Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, to the Ketetahi Rd car park. The trip, a mix of segments from the Round-the-Mountain Track and the Tongariro Northern Circuit, includes the scenic craters and lakes between Ngauruhoe and Tongariro, and a night at Ketetahi Hut. Public transport is available to the Ketetahi Rd car park (see p87) but getting to the top of Ohakune Mountain Rd can be tough in summer. The best bet for hitching is to start early in the morning. In addition to the mountain huts, there is accommodation in Ohakune and Whakapapa. For this traverse, use the 1:50,000 Terramap *Ruapehu & Tongariro Recreation Areas*.

Whakapapiti Valley

This 11km track is practically a loop. The southern end is at the Round-The-Mountain Track entrance on Bruce Rd, 5km south of the Whakapapa Visitor Centre. The northern end is 250m above the visitor centre. The track takes you into a beautiful glaciated valley, and along the way passes alpine herb fields and waterfalls dropping over lava bluffs. Almost halfway along the track is the **Whakapapiti Hut** (\$10). Use the 1:80,000 Parkmap 273-04 (*Tongariro*).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'