

# Southern North Island

Trampers often overlook the southern half of the North Island, because it lies between the stunning volcanoes of Tongariro National Park and the sunshine and beaches of Abel Tasman and the Marlborough Sounds, but New Zealand can trace its tramping roots here. Climbing Mt Taranaki was so popular at the turn of the 20th century that the Egmont National Park was established in 1900, while the country's first tramping club was formed in Wellington in 1919.

Today the region offers a variety of tramps, from alpine to bush, of which the vast majority are lightly used. This is where you can find your solitude as a trumper, avoiding crowded huts such as those on the Routeburn Track. In the southwest, you can hike around a near perfect volcanic cone, dipping in and out of the alpine zone along the Mt Taranaki High-Level Circuit. Or you can reach alpine country along the Pouakai Track in Egmont National Park, and watch New Plymouth fall asleep at night from a lofty perch.

In nearby Whanganui National Park, you can skip the mountains and stay entirely in the forest along the Matemateaonga Track until it ends on the banks of the Whanganui River – New Zealand's longest navigable river. Further south, you can climb to an alpine hut in the Ruahines for an evening, or enjoy an easy low-elevation tramp in the rugged Tararua just north of Wellington.

The tramps described are just a few of those available in the region – the Rimutaka and Haurangi Forest Parks, for example, contain fascinating tramping routes.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Taking in the many waterfalls along the **Mt Taranaki High-Level Circuit** (p102)
- Watching the sunset and then the city lights of New Plymouth emerge from the veranda of **Pouakai Hut** (p109)
- Combining a wilderness tramp on the **Matemateaonga Track** (p111) with a jetboat ride on the Whanganui River
- Spending a day on alpine ridges along the **Mt Holdsworth Circuit** (p121)

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 04 & 06 ■ www.wellingtonnz.com ■ www.taranaki.co.nz

## CLIMATE

The weather in the southern half of the North Island varies greatly, but one common trait is the possibility of strong winds and sudden storms. In the high-altitude areas of Mt Taranaki, the Ruahines and the Tararua, trampers can be exposed to quick changes in weather, with winds, storms or squalls replacing clear skies in a matter of hours.

## INFORMATION Books

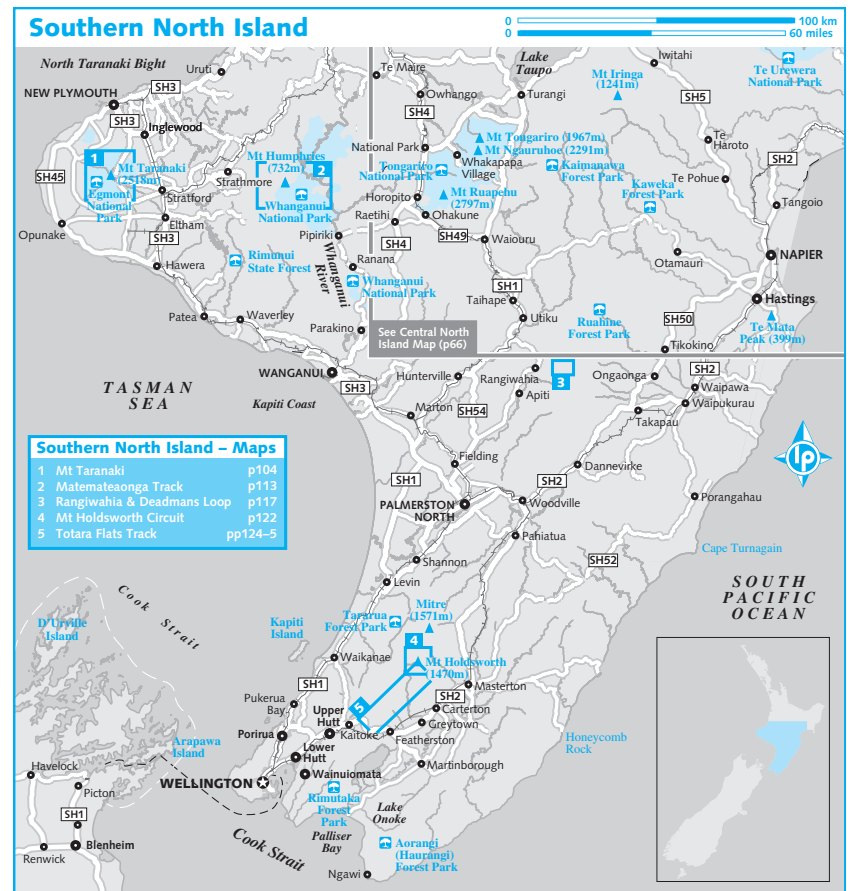
There are a number of tramping guides to many areas in this region. *Top Walking Tracks of the Wellington Region*, by Geoffrey Churchman, is a slim volume that covers 17 tramps around the capital city, while

*Day Walks of Greater Wellington* by Marios Gavalas covers 69 walks from Hutt Valley to the Rimutaka Range. Gavalas also wrote *Day Walks of Wanganui, Manawatu & Horowhenua*, outlining 50 tracks from Whanganui National Park to Ruahine Forest Park.

## GATEWAY Wellington

☎ 04 / pop 205,500

The major city in the southern half of the North Island is Wellington, the country's capital. Hemmed in by a magnificent harbour, windy Wellington prides itself as a centre for culture and arts, but it is also a major travel crossroads, serving as the junction between the North and South Islands.



**INFORMATION****DOC Wellington Conservation Information Centre**

(☎ 472 7356; Old Government Bldg, Lambton Quay; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Opposite the Cenotaph, this is the best place to gather tramping and park information. It has brochures on tracks, outdoor activities and camping, and sells books, maps and hut tickets. **Wellington visitor information centre** (☎ 802 4860; [www.wellingtonnz.com](http://www.wellingtonnz.com); Civic Sq, 101 Wakefield St) can supply tourist information for the region and make bookings for accommodation and transport.

**SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT**

There are numerous outdoor stores where you can pick up tramping gear and stove fuel, including **Bivouac Outdoor** (☎ 473 2587; 39 Mercer St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) and **Mainly Tramping** (☎ 473 5353; Grand Arcade, 16 Willis St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 6pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat).

For a map of anywhere in the country there's the **Map Shop** (☎ 385 1462; 193 Vivian St). For road and a selection of tramping maps and guidebooks, head to **Whitcoulls** (☎ 472 1921; 312 Lambton Quay).

Fill the food bag at **New World Supermarket** (☎ 384 8054; 279 Wakefield St) in the city centre.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

**Hutt Park Holiday Village** (☎ 0800-488 872, 568 5913; [www.huttpark.co.nz](http://www.huttpark.co.nz); 95 Hutt Park Rd, Lower Hutt; sites for 2 \$33, cabins \$52-89; 📶) is the closest camping ground; it's 13km northeast of the city centre, but only a short walk from a bus stop.

**Nomads Capital** (☎ 978 7800; [www.nomads.capital.com](http://www.nomads.capital.com); 118 Wakefield St; dm/d \$22/85; 📶) has the most central location of any backpacker lodge in Wellington. Amenities include luggage storage, laundry, a café-bar and a giant plasma screen TV.

**Wildlife House** (☎ 381 3899; [www.wildlifehouse.co.nz](http://www.wildlifehouse.co.nz); 58 Tory St; dm \$25-27, d \$65; 📶) has spacious rooms, free Internet, and a spa in a can't-miss zebra-striped building.

For something more upscale there's **Just Hotel** (☎ 801 8118; [www.justhotel.co.nz](http://www.justhotel.co.nz); 166 Willis St; d \$135-165; 📶), Wellington's newest hotel. It has 60 comfortable rooms loaded with amenities and is located in the heart of the city. On weekends, rates drop to \$99.

Cuba St and Courtenay Pl serve as Wellington's entertainment centres, and they have any kind of cuisine you might crave

after a long tramp. Go ahead, indulge, you've earned it.

**Mr Bun Bakery & Coffee Shop** (☎ 384 4792; 104 Cuba St; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun) serves breakfast all day to a bustling crowd, and has display cases full of great cakes, sweets and meat pies. This is where to come to sate your hankering for bacon, eggs and baked beans on toast.

**Catch Sushi Bar** (☎ 801 9352; 48 Courtenay Pl; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun) keeps an impressive and affordable selection of seafood revolving past you at the bar, while **Shish Mahal** (☎ 801 7080; 25 Courtenay Pl; ☎ 5.30-11pm) is one of Wellington's best curry houses – a BYO restaurant located next to a wine shop...how convenient!

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Wellington airport has both a domestic and an international terminal. **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800-737 000; [www.airnz.co.nz](http://www.airnz.co.nz)) has direct flights to many places in NZ, including Auckland (from \$170) and Christchurch (from \$140). **Origin Pacific Airways** (☎ 0800-302 302; [www.originpacific.co.nz](http://www.originpacific.co.nz)) has daily flights to Nelson (from \$90) and New Plymouth (from \$100).

Wellington is an important junction for bus travel throughout the North Island. **InterCity** (☎ 385 0520; [www.intercitycoach.co.nz](http://www.intercitycoach.co.nz)) buses depart from the **Wellington train station** (nr Bunny St & Thorndon Quay), with services to Auckland (\$103, 10½ hours), Taupo (\$75, six hours) and Palmerston North (\$31, two hours).

There's also **White Star** (☎ 478 4734), with buses that depart from Bunny St and run the west coast to Wanganui (\$27, 3½ hours) and New Plymouth (\$45, 6½ hours). Purchase tickets nearby at **Freeman's Lotto & Newsagency** (☎ 472 3120; Rutherford House, 23 Lambton Quay).

**Tranz Scenic** (☎ 0800-872 467, 04-495 0775; [www.tranzscenic.co.nz](http://www.tranzscenic.co.nz)) operates the *Overlander* train between Wellington and Auckland (\$170, 12 hours, daily), stopping at most major towns in central North Island.

Departing from the ferry terminal north of town, **Interislander** (☎ 0800-802 802, 498 3302; [www.interislander.co.nz](http://www.interislander.co.nz)) ferries shuttle up to six times daily between Wellington and Picton (adult/child \$60/40). The *Lynx* is a high-speed catamaran that cuts the trip to little more than two hours.

## EGMONT NATIONAL PARK

Mt Taranaki (also called Mt Egmont) first tantalised the Maori, and then enamoured Captain James Cook when he sailed past in the *Endeavour*. Today, thousands make the pilgrimage to the summit of this lonely volcano, which dominates the region. Snow-capped on a clear winter day, it is surely one of the country's most stunning sights, and from its peak there are magnificent views of patchwork dairy farms, the stormy Tasman Sea and the rugged Tongariro peaks.

The entire mountain, along with the Kaitake and Pouakai Ranges, lies in Egmont National Park. The park includes 335 sq km of native forest and bush, more than 145km of tracks and routes, and scattered huts and shelters. There are three main roads into the park, and motorists can drive to a height of 900m (almost to the bush-line) on each one.

**HISTORY**

According to Maori myth, the volcano was called Taranaki and was originally part of the North Island's central range. Taranaki and Tongariro eventually came into conflict over the lovely maiden Pihanga, and a battle ensued. Taranaki lost and was exiled. The volcano retreated west, carving out the Whanganui River, and settled on the coast. When Maori saw the summit surrounded by mist, they believed the volcano was weeping.

Taranaki was a sacred place to the Maori – a place where they buried the bones of their chiefs and where they could escape from the terrorism of other tribes. The legendary Taurangi was said to be the first person to climb to the summit, and when he lit a fire on it he claimed the surrounding land for his tribe.

The first European to see Mt Taranaki was Captain Cook in 1770, and he later wrote that it was 'the noblest hill I have ever seen'. Two years after Cook's visit, Mt Taranaki was the first thing French explorer Marion du Fresne saw of New Zealand. Both Cook and du Fresne recorded seeing the fires of Maori settlers, but never made contact with them. Naturalist Ernest

Dieffenbach did, however, in 1839. While working for the New Zealand Company, which had been awarded large tracts of land and was responsible for the English settlement of them, Dieffenbach told the local Maori of his plans to climb to the summit. The native tribes tried passionately to dissuade him, but Dieffenbach set off in early December. Although the first attempt was unsuccessful, the naturalist set out again on 23 December and, after bashing through thick bush, he finally reached the peak.

The volcano soon became a popular spot for trampers and adventurers. Fanny Fantham was the first woman to climb Panitahi – the cone on Mt Taranaki's southern side – in 1887, and it was quickly renamed Fanthams Peak in her honour. A year later the summit route from the Plateau (Stratford Plateau) was developed. In 1901, Harry Skeet completed the task of surveying the area for the first topographical map.

Tourism boomed and, to protect the forest and watershed from settlers seeking farmland, the Taranaki provincial government set aside an area roughly 9.5km in radius from the summit. The national park, only the second in New Zealand, was created in October 1900.

**ENVIRONMENT**

Volcanic activity began building Mt Taranaki 70,000 years ago, and in about 30,000 years produced a 150m-high cone. Geologists believe that the mountain then entered a dormant stage that ended a mere 3000 years ago with a series of eruptions. When they'd finished, Taranaki was left with the almost symmetrical cone you see today.

There is debate among geologists over whether Mt Taranaki is still active. Some point to dormant periods that have lasted for several thousand years, and say the last eruption was too recent to be sure of its inactivity; others believe its days of lava and streaming ash are over, and that erosion by rain and ice will gradually wear down Taranaki, as has happened to Kaitake and Pouakai.

The very high rainfall, and Taranaki's isolation from New Zealand's other mountainous regions, have created a unique vegetation pattern. Species such as tussock grass, mountain daisy, harebell, koromiko

and foxglove have developed local variations, and many common New Zealand mountain species are not found here; in particular, trampers will notice the complete absence of beech.

The lush rainforest that covers 90% of the park is predominantly made up of broad-leaved podocarps. At lower altitudes you find many large rimu and rata. Further up, around 900m, kamahi (often referred to as 'goblin forest' because of its tangled trunks and hanging moss) becomes dominant.

## CLIMATE

Mt Taranaki has a maritime climate. February is the warmest month, with an average temperature of 18°C, while in July it drops to 10°C. The air temperature drops around 6°C for every 1000m you climb; the freezing level in winter is at around 1750m. Snow is rare in summer, but rain is not. The average annual rainfall at 1000m is 6500mm a year, and at 2000m it is a soaking 8000mm.

Mt Taranaki's high altitude means that trampers can be exposed to strong winds, low temperatures and foul weather at any time of year. The mountain is notorious for sudden changes, from clear, fine weather to storms or squalls.

## PLANNING

### When to Tramp

Most tracks in Egmont National Park should be walked during the traditional tramping season of October to May. The best time to climb to the Mt Taranaki summit is January to April.

### What to Bring

The weather on the mountain can change quickly in any season, so trampers need to be prepared with a warm hat, gloves and good rain gear. You also need a stove, as there are no cooking facilities in the huts.

## Maps

The 1:50,000 Parkmap 273-9 (*Egmont National Park*) can be used for tramping in the park. Both the High- and Low-Level Circuits, as well as the Pouakai Track, are covered by the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-P20 (*Egmont*). If you plan to explore the park's northern area, including Mangorei Track,

you will also need the adjoining 260-P19 (*New Plymouth*).

## Huts & Lodges

Most huts in the park, including those on the Taranaki circuits, cost \$10 a night; Kahui Hut is \$5.

You can also break up your tramp on the mountain with a night at **Konini Lodge** (☎ 027-443 0248; Manaia Rd, Dawson Falls; dm \$20), near the visitor information centre. This large lodge has 38 beds, showers, a full kitchen and good views of the mountain from an outdoor deck. Hut tickets and annual hut passes cannot be used.

You can also splurge during your tramp by staying at a tourist lodge. **Dawson Falls Mountain Lodge** (☎ 0800-695 6343, 06-765 5457; www.dawson-falls.co.nz; Manaia Rd; s/d \$175/275) is an upscale Swiss-theme resort, a three-hour tramp from Lake Dive Hut, with a restaurant, pub and spa. Rates include breakfast and dinner. Another 1½ hours towards North Egmont is **Mountain House Motor Lodge** (☎ 0800-668 682, 06-765 6100; www.mountainhouse.co.nz; Pembroke Rd; s & d \$125-165), with a restaurant, sauna and spa to ease those tired legs.

## Information Sources

DOC operates two visitor information centres on the mountain, selling maps and providing the latest weather forecasts and track conditions. **North Egmont Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-756 0990; nthegmtvc@doc.govt.nz; Egmont Rd, Inglewood) is the closest to New Plymouth, and the major departure point for trampers. The centre also contains displays, a video room and the Mountain Café, which serves, among other things, ice-cold beer – something to keep in mind when you're finishing a long tramp.

On the other side of the mountain is **Dawson Falls Visitor Centre** (☎ 027-443 0248; Manaia Rd, Kaponga; ☎ 8am-4pm Wed-Sun).

## Guided Tramps

If you want to climb or tramp with other people, there are various possibilities. DOC can put you in contact with local tramping clubs, while New Plymouth-based **Taranaki Outdoor Professionals** (TOP Guides; ☎ 0800-448 433, 021-838 513; www.topguides.co.nz) and **MacAlpine Guides** (☎ 06-765 6234; www.macalpineguides.com) have guided trips to the summit year-round.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

More than 30 roads go to, or near, the national park, and from most of them a track leads into the park. Three roads – Egmont, Pembroke and Manaia – take you up the mountain. These roads are the most common access points, as all three terminate near the Taranaki circuits.

Many trampers access the park along Egmont Rd, because it's the closest entrance to New Plymouth; 13km southeast of New Plymouth it turns off SH3, then it's another 16km to the North Egmont Visitor Centre. Those without transport will find it easy to hitch to Egmont Village, the turn-off to Egmont Rd on SH3, but harder to get a ride to North Egmont.

Pembroke Rd extends for 18km from Stratford to the Plateau (1140m), on the eastern side of the volcano. Manaia Rd is 15km southwest of Stratford, on the Opunake Rd just north of Kaponga, and it runs for 8km to Dawson Falls.

Public buses don't go to Egmont National Park, but **Cruise NZ Tours** (☎ 06-758 3222, 027-497 3908; www.kirkstall.co.nz) runs a daily service that departs New Plymouth at 7.30am and returns from North Egmont Visitor Centre at 4.30pm (one-way/return \$40/45). Also providing a shuttle service to North Egmont is **Taranaki Tours** (☎ 06-757 9888; www.taranakitours.com).

## ACCESS TOWNS

### New Plymouth

☎ 06 / pop 49,100

The principal centre of the Taranaki region, this city is a good base from which to explore the park, with a wide range of activities, accommodation and restaurants.

## INFORMATION

**DOC Area Office** (☎ 759 0350; 220 Devon St W) Maps and information on the park.

**New Plymouth visitor information centre** (☎ 759 6060; www.newplymouthnz.com; Puke Ariki Bldg, 1 Ariki St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, to 9pm Wed, to 5pm Sat & Sun) Tramping and general travel information, and helpful staff.

## SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Gear can be obtained at **Kiwi Outdoors Centre** (☎ 758 4152; 18 Ariki St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 5.30pm Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat). For food supplies there's a **Pak'nSave** (☎ 758 1594; City Centre Mall,

cnr Gill & Liardet Sts) and **New World Supermarket** (☎ 758 5527; 200 Mangorei St).

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Belt Road Seaside Holiday Park** (☎ 0800-804 204, 758 0228; www.beltroad.co.nz; 2 Belt Rd; sites for 2 \$28, cabins \$40-85) is the closest camping ground to New Plymouth, 1.5km south of the city centre on a scenic bluff overlooking the Tasman Sea.

**Egmont Eco Lodge YHA** (☎ 753 5720; www.taranaki-bakpak.co.nz; 12 Clawton St; dm/d \$25/55) is a tranquil hostel in a park-like setting, complete with a babbling brook.

**Shoestring Backpackers** (☎ 758 0404; www.shoestring.co.nz; 48 Lemon St; dm/d \$21/54; ☎ ) is in a large, stately, centrally located home with lots of amenities, including a sauna, laundry and shuttles to North Egmont.

Lodging that will pamper you includes **Airlie House B&B** (☎ 757 8866; www.airliehouse.co.nz; 161 Powderham St; s \$100-115, d \$135-150; ☎ ), a beautifully restored, century-old home with everything from full breakfast to bathrobes, hair dryers and toasty heated bathroom tiles.

Devon St is loaded with restaurants, Chinese takeaways and fast-food shops. Among them is **Sandwich Extreme** (☎ 759 6999; 52 Devon St E; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) good for toasted sandwiches, extreme salads and reasonably priced breakfasts.

**Zanzibar Café & Bar** (☎ 757 8147; 440 Devon St E; ☎ 10.30am-late) is a walk east of the city centre but worth it. The restaurant has a relaxing atmosphere and daily specials that always include curry of the day, pasta of the day and vegetarian dish of the day.

If you're craving a burger after the big tramp, they don't come bigger or juicier than at **Burgerfuel** (☎ 769 9102; 66 Eliot St; ☎ noon-10pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri, to 11pm Sat).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**InterCity** (☎ 759 9039; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) stops at the **Travel Centre** (☎ 759 9039; 19 Ariki St), where you can buy tickets for buses north to Auckland (\$68, 6½ hours) and south to Wellington (\$62, seven hours). **White Star** (☎ 758 3338) services also leave from the Travel Centre, with two buses a day on weekdays and one on weekends to Wellington (\$45, 6½ hours) via Wanganui (\$27, 2½ hours) and Palmerston North (\$31, 3½ hours).

## Stratford

☎ 06 / pop 9730

Named after Stratford-upon-Avon in England (William Shakespeare's birthplace), almost all the streets in Stratford are named after Shakespearean characters. It is on SH3, about 48km southeast of New Plymouth and 18km from the Plateau on Mt Taranaki.

### INFORMATION

**DOC Area Office** (☎ 765 5144; Pembroke Rd) Located about 10km from Stratford, as you head up the mountain, this office offers maps and information on Egmont National Park.

**Stratford visitor information centre** (☎ 0800-765 6708, 765 6708; www.stratfordnz.co.nz; Broadway South) This is an excellent tourist centre, with heaps of brochures on the town and the national park.

### SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

**Stratford Leisure** (☎ 765 7580; 420 Broadway; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) stocks camping gear, and there is a **New World Supermarket** (☎ 765 6422; Regan St) for food supplies.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Stratford Holiday Park** (☎ 765 6440; stratford.holpark@hotmail.com; 10 Page St; sites for 2 \$28, cabins \$45-55; 📺) boasts, among other amenities, a TV lounge and an on-site store.

**Taranaki Accommodation Lodge** (☎ 765 5444; www.mttaranakilodge.co.nz; 7 Romeo St; camp site \$12, dm/d \$20/45; 📺) is a large pink place close to the visitor information centre, with luggage storage, laundry and a van for transport up the mountain.

The main street has numerous fast-food places. Good cafés include **Urban Attitude Café** (☎ 765 6534; Broadway; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat), which doubles as a wine bar, and the **Collage** (☎ 765 7003; Percy Thomson Complex, Broadway; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Wed, to 7.30pm Thu-Sat, to 3pm Sun).

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**InterCity** (☎ 759 9039; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has daily bus services running between Wellington and New Plymouth that stop at the Stratford visitor information centre (\$63, 5½ hours). **White Star** (☎ 758 3338) buses also make a daily stop in Stratford (\$45, 6½ hours) on their New Plymouth-Wellington run.

## MT TARANAKI HIGH-LEVEL CIRCUIT

<b>Duration</b>	4 days
<b>Distance</b>	45km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start/Finish</b>	North Egmont
<b>Nearest Towns</b>	New Plymouth (p101), Stratford (left)
<b>Transport</b>	shuttle service
<b>Summary</b>	The classic tramp around the cone of Mt Taranaki, with stunning views on clear days.

The traditional Around-the-Mountain Circuit (AMC) is a high-level route that takes the average trumper around 20 hours to complete. It is not, as many visitors imagine it to be, all above the bush-line. A good portion of the track drops into forested areas, climbs across scree slopes and takes you through herb fields. However, especially on clear days, it is an extremely scenic tramp, dishing up spectacular alpine scenery and providing the very best views of Mt Taranaki.

There is a fair bit of climbing involved on this walk, but most of the track is well cut and easy to follow. Although the circuit can be tramped in either direction, by heading anticlockwise – as described here – you spread the climbing evenly over the four days. If the weather is foul, the high-level route can be extremely dangerous, in which case you should definitely consider switching to the Low-Level Circuit (p106), which shares some sections of the route and all of the overnight stops.

### WARNING

Trampers should be aware of the dangers of Mt Taranaki before embarking on the High-Level Circuit. The mountain often gives a false appearance of safety. The high altitudes reached on the track mean that inexperienced people are within easy reach of icy slopes, and each year there are numerous accidents – more so than in other alpine areas because of the sudden weather changes. Make sure you have enough warm clothing and rain gear to avoid suffering exposure.

## PLANNING Maps

The 1:50,000 Parkmap 273-9 (*Egmont National Park*) and the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-P20 (*Egmont*) both cover the route.

## NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

See New Plymouth (p101) and Stratford (opposite).

## Mt Taranaki Lodges

There are a number of tramping lodges scattered about the mountain. The best known is the **Camphouse** (☎ 0800-688 272; www.mttaranaki.co.nz; Egmont Rd, North Egmont; dm adult/child \$25/20), a historic bunkhouse beside the fully-restored visitor centre. Just down the road is **Rahiri Cottage** (☎ 0800-688 272; www.mttaranaki.co.nz; Egmont Rd; d \$145), built in 1929 to house the park board's gatekeeper, who collected a toll at the entrance into the park. Today it's a quaint, gingerbread B&B.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

See p101 for details on how to get to Egmont National Park.

A number of trampers beginning at North Egmont will walk only as far as the Plateau and then hitch down Pembroke Rd to SH3 and Stratford, which cuts a day off the tramp. This is a better alternative than ending the tramp at Dawson Falls because Manaia Rd can be very quiet, especially in the middle of the week.

## THE TRAMP

**Day 1: North Egmont to Holly Hut** Map p104

3½ hours, 8km, 348m ascent, 200m descent

The tramp begins on the Razorback, or Holly Hut Track, which is signposted near the Camphouse. The track climbs steadily as steps, gaining 240m and passing the Ambury Monument on the way to **Tahurangi trig** (1181m), where, if the day is clear, you are rewarded with spectacular views of Mt Taranaki and the valleys below. The track continues beyond the trig and up the **Razorback ridge**, ascending another 100m, along a narrow ridgeline at one point, before leaving the lava flow and sidling around the slope. Within an hour (3km) of leaving the Camphouse you reach a junction with the AMC.

Take the right fork (northwest) and follow the well-marked AMC track as it climbs

around Waiwhakairo River and along the base of **Ambury Bluff** – impressive grey-rock cliffs that rise above you. In recent years this track has been greatly improved and now includes a series of interpretive signs on the way to Holly Hut – education while you tramp. Pass the signposted junction with a summer route to Maketawa Hut (left fork, 1½ hours) and then, for the next hour, enjoy views of New Plymouth while skirting the mountain's northern flanks.

The track descends slightly to cross a branch of Kokowai Stream and cut across **Boomerang Slip**. Extreme care must be used when tramping across this slide of loose rocks and dirt. From the slip the track works around the head of Kokowai Stream, and then gently climbs a prominent ridge to the junction with the signposted Kokowai Track.

Head west (left), following the AMC as it dips in and out of two streams and descends 244m over 2.5km to the junction with the Ahukawakawa Track (right). The AMC continues south, and within five minutes crosses a branch and gully of Minarapa Stream and reaches **Holly Hut** (38 bunks), a huge place with solar-powered lighting. This is a popular place to spend a night, with Mt Taranaki looming behind and good views of the Pouakai Range from the veranda.

## Day 2: Holly Hut to Waiau Gorge Hut

5–6 hours, 13km

The AMC heads west across Holly Flats, turning south (left) at a junction into Peters Stream gully, named after Harry Peters, the Camphouse caretaker.

It climbs out the other side and sidles around the mountain for the next 3km. The tramping is surprisingly easy and the views are excellent. After passing beneath Skinner Hill the track begins to climb up beside **Pyramid Gorge**. The erosion caused by Pyramid Stream has left the gorge so unstable that the track climbs beside it to the tussock grassland above before crossing branches of the stream. Poles mark the route around the gorge; at one point you climb to 1160m, where you are rewarded with excellent views of Stony River (northwest) and the distant Pouakai Range.

The route descends from its high point through tussock and tall scrub, becomes a

track again, and passes the junction with Punihō Track. From here it's 1km through the bush to **Kahui Hut** (six bunks) at 880m. Located 7km from Peters Stream, this makes a good halfway point for lunch.

From Kahui Hut, the AMC becomes the Kahui Track as it descends gently through forest for 2.3km until it reaches a junction.

The AMC continues south along the Oaonui Track for 2.5km. This section is tedious and often muddy, as the track climbs in and out of numerous gullies for 1½ hours. Finally you arrive at **Oaonui Fork Stream** and from the middle of the swing bridge you can enjoy a view of the mountain. The track quickly crosses the Oaonui Stream and arrives at

the Ihaia Track junction (right) at the site of the old Oaonui Hut; the Ihaia Track heads southwest for 4km to the end of Ihaia Rd.

The AMC continues along Brames Falls Track for another 15 minutes before reaching the short spur track to **Waiaua Gorge Hut** (16 bunks). Built in 1984, the hut is situated on the cliffs above the deep **Waiaua Gorge** and provides great views of Taranaki's western slopes.

Heading southeast (right) from the junction, you descend the infamous **Egmont Steps**, which drop 360m in just 1km on the way to the three-sided Hooker Shelter (1140m). The steps continue to drop (240m in 1.5km) before reaching the car park at the Dawson Falls Visitor Centre. Plan on three hours from Lake Dive for this first leg.

If you want to spend a night at Dawson Falls, find the visitor centre manager (if the manager's not at the centre, just ask around) for a key to **Konini Lodge** (p100). If you're just passing through there's a tea-room at Dawson Falls.

The route continues along the extremely well-benched and well-maintained Wilkie Pools Track, which climbs northwest away from the car park. The tramp starts in a forest and, within 30 minutes, arrives at **Wilkie Pools**, an interesting series of small pools and cascades. You then climb northeast into mountain totara and cedar, and emerge in subalpine scrub near the Plateau car park. There's a scenic lookout nearby and toilets, but no shelter. It's about one hour from Dawson Falls to this point.

Follow a ski-field road to a flying fox, and then a track in and out of Manganui Gorge to the public shelter facing the ski field. The track ascends the tussock slopes, passing the old lava flows known as **Ngarara Bluff** and **Warwick Castle**. Around one hour from the car park you reach Taurangi Lodge (locked), with a huge TV transmitter nearby. To the left (west) is the North Ridge route up to Mt Taranaki (see p107). There's also a 4WD track heading east (right) down to North Egmont, but there are better views if you continue north along the poled route that descends beneath Humphries Castle to the AMC. It is a 30-minute descent, retracing your steps from Day 1 to the Camphouse.

### Day 3: Waiaua Gorge Hut to Lake Dive Hut

6 hours, 8km, 900m ascent, 640m descent

Continue from Waiaua Gorge Hut on the Brames Falls Track. It immediately descends the gorge, via an aluminium ladder and a steep track, to the Waiaua River, and then climbs to the other side. It follows the steep edge of the gorge for 500m before arriving at a junction with the Taungatara Track. Continue east (left fork), reaching the best view of **Brames Falls** 2km from the hut.

From here the track begins its 700m climb to the impressive rock bluffs of **Bobs Ridge**. It takes most trampers three hours to march from the falls to the bluffs, but the views are superb for most of the climb and from the base of the ridge.

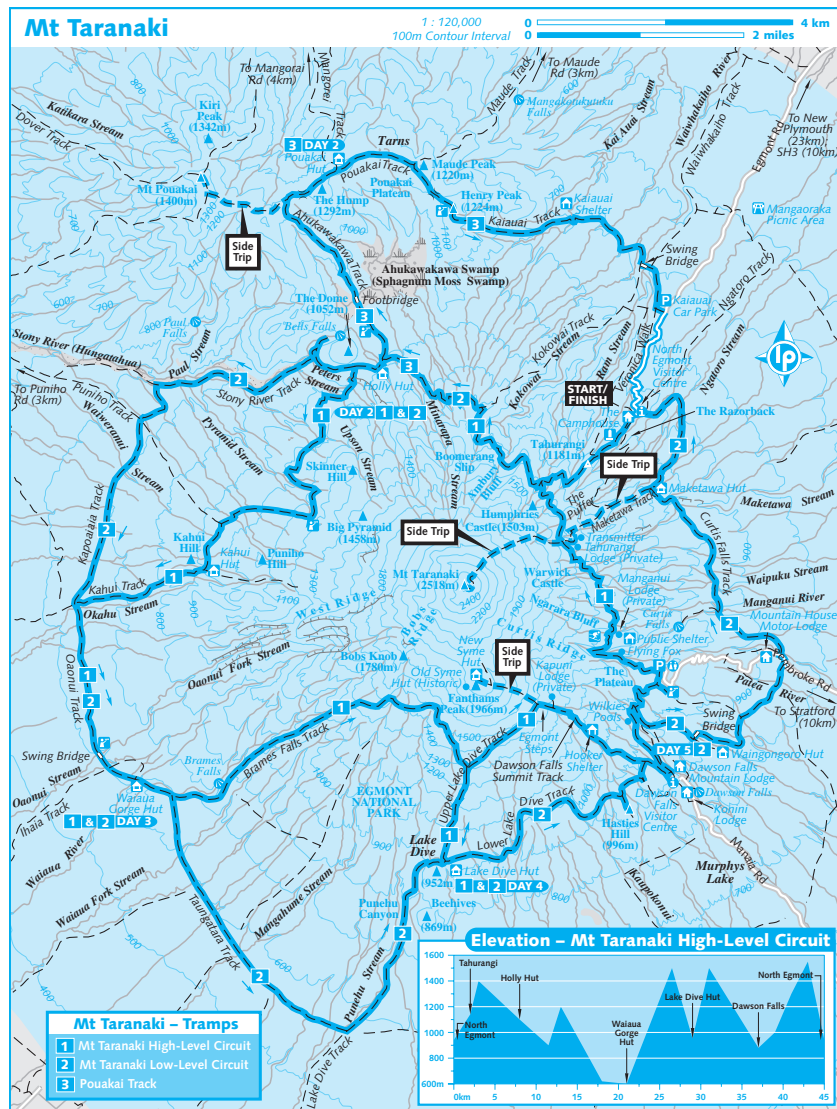
The track then sidles around the bluffs for almost 1km before dipping to cross Mangahume Stream. On the other side the route is marked by snow poles. You have to climb in and out of three more streams before the track begins sidling along the slopes and makes a gentle descent to the signposted Upper Lake Dive Track junction. The left fork leads to Dawson Falls (two hours). The right fork descends south to **Lake Dive**, a 45-minute (1.5km) tramp along a seemingly endless and tiring set of steps and short wooden ladders.

**Lake Dive Hut** (18 bunks), built in 1980, is situated at the eastern end of the lake, and on a windless day a reflection of Fanthams Peak graces the water in front of it. If you're contemplating a swim after a hot day above the bush-line, keep in mind that the water is very cold and the bottom is very muddy.

### Day 4: Lake Dive Hut to North Egmont

6–7 hours, 16km, 600m ascent, 590m descent

Backtrack to the junction at the end of Brames Falls Track; this time it's a steep ascent north. At the junction turn right along



opportunity to drop your backpack and scale **Fanthams Peak** (1966m). Head northwest (left), ascending along a poled route. The views from the top are well worth the climb.

## MT TARANAKI LOW-LEVEL CIRCUIT

<b>Duration</b>	5 days
<b>Distance</b>	49km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start/Finish</b>	North Egmont
<b>Nearest Town</b>	New Plymouth (p101), Stratford (p102)
<b>Transport</b>	shuttle service

**Summary** A low-level alternative route around the cone of Mt Taranaki that allows you to keep tramping during foul weather, while still providing some great views.

In 1987, a low-level all-weather Around-the-Mountain Circuit was established, with huts placed a comfortable day's tramp apart. The circuit is almost entirely through bush, and is certainly less scenic than the High-Level Circuit (p102), with which it shares some sections and most of the huts. However, this route is much safer than the High-Level Circuit in foul weather.

## PLANNING

### Maps

The 1:50,000 Parkmap 273-9 (*Egmont National Park*) and the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-P20 (*Egmont*) both cover the route, although neither shows the Kapoiaia Track.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

See p101 for details on how to get to Egmont National Park.

A number of trampers beginning at North Egmont will walk only as far as the Plateau and then hitch down Pembroke Rd to SH3 and Stratford, which cuts a day off the tramp. This is a better alternative than ending the tramp at Dawson Falls because Manaia Rd can be very quiet, especially in the middle of the week.

## THE TRAMP

Map p104

### Day 1: North Egmont to Holly Hut

3½ hours, 8km, 348m ascent, 200m descent

Follow Day 1 (above) of the Mt Taranaki High-Level Circuit.

### Day 2: Holly Hut to Waiaua Gorge Hut

4½–5½ hours, 12km

Head west across Holly Flats and turn right at the track junction, continuing west on the Stony River Track. The track swings north around the Dome, and then steadily descends on steps to the spectacular 31m-high **Bells Falls**, 30 minutes from the hut.

Continue in a generally westerly direction beside Stony River, reaching a track junction about 4km from Holly Hut. Turn south (left) onto Kapoiaia Track. This track mainly stays in the bush, crossing the Puniho Track and contouring around to the junction of the Kahui and Oaonui Tracks, about 4km from the Stony River Track. At this point there is the option of turning uphill (left) to Kahui Hut or continuing southeast along the Oaonui Track (which is shared with the High-Level Circuit) to Waiaua Gorge Hut.

Follow the Oaonui Track for 2.5km. This section is tedious and usually muddy, as the track climbs in and out of numerous gullies for 1½ hours. Finally you arrive at **Oaonui Fork Stream** and from the middle of the swing bridge you can enjoy a view of the mountain. The track quickly crosses the Oaonui Stream and arrives at the Ihaia Track junction (right) at the site of the old Oaonui Hut; the Ihaia Track heads southwest for 4km to the end of Ihaia Rd.

Continue southeast along Brames Falls Track for 15 minutes to reach the short spur track to **Waiaua Gorge Hut** (16 bunks). Built in 1984, the hut is situated on the cliffs above the deep **Waiaua Gorge** and provides excellent views of Taranaki's western slopes.

### Day 3: Waiaua Gorge Hut to Lake Dive Hut

7 hours, 10km, 340m ascent

The Brames Falls Track immediately descends the gorge – via an aluminium ladder and a steep track – to the Waiaua River, and then climbs to the other side. It follows the steep edge of the gorge for 500m before arriving at a junction with the Taungatara Track.

Follow Taungatara Track to the southeast (right fork), a 6km tramp through thick forest, crossing eight streams, until you reach the junction with Lake Dive Track, one of the lowest points of the tramp at 535m. Count on Taungatara Track being very

muddy; some trail signs say it's a three-hour walk, but most trampers need up to four hours to cover it. There are no views whatsoever.

Head northeast (left fork), along the Lake Dive Track, steadily climbing 340m in 4km. It takes two hours to tramp this stretch, which is not as muddy as Taungatara Track. Along the way you swing close to **Punehu Canyon** and have good views of the steep gorge. The track then sidles around the Beehives peaks and arrives at **Lake Dive**.

**Lake Dive Hut** (18 bunks), built in 1980, is situated at the far end of the lake, and on a windless day a reflection of Fanthams Peak graces the water in front of it. If you're contemplating a swim after a hot day above the bush-line, keep in mind that the water is very cold and the bottom is very muddy.

### Day 4: Lake Dive Hut to Dawson Falls

3–4 hours, 7km

Head east along the Lower Lake Dive Track, working your way through the forest to join the Hasties Hill Track. The Lower Lake Dive Track is not nearly as muddy as the Taungatara Track, although the scenery is very similar. From the track junction it's a 10-minute climb south (right fork) to **Hasties Hill** (996m), from where you can see the Beehives (two lava formations) over to the west.

Return to the junction and continue northeast for the shortest route to Dawson Falls. The Hasties Hill Track descends into the deep ravine of the middle branch of the Kaupokonui Stream, and climbs out to a junction with the Dawson Falls Summit Track, about 500m from the Lower Lake Dive Track junction. Take the right fork, following the summit track southeast as it descends through a **goblin forest** to the Dawson Falls Visitor Centre.

For details on accommodation at Dawson Falls see p100.

### Day 5: Dawson Falls to North Egmont

6–7 hours, 12km

The route continues along the extremely well-benched and maintained Wilkies Pools Track, which climbs northwest away from the car park. The tramp starts in a forest, and within 30 minutes arrives at **Wilkies Pools**, an interesting series of small pools and cascades.

From Wilkies Pools continue climbing northeast along the AMC until you reach a track junction. Here you head south (right fork) along the Ridge Track. Shortly after, the Waingongoro Track splits to the southeast. Follow this signposted, low-level route as it descends past a track to **Waingongoro Hut** (16 bunks) and then to a swing bridge across Waingongoro River. Once across the river a well-benched track leads to **Mountain House Motor Lodge** (p100), 1½ hours from Dawson Falls.

The route continues across Pembroke Rd as Curtis Falls Track. It's a difficult three- to four-hour tramp to Maketawa Hut, which includes climbing in and out of five gorges. The first, Te Popo Stream, is crossed minutes after Pembroke Rd, and the last two, branches of Maketawa Stream, are just before you reach Maketawa Hut; these involve the steepest descents and climbs. Although most trampers push on to North Egmont, **Maketawa Hut** (16 bunks) is one of the nicest in the park. Built in 1987, it includes a large kitchen, gas heater and an outdoor deck where you can sit and admire views of Mt Taranaki. This is also a great base if you want to climb Mt Taranaki (see below for more).

The final leg is a one-hour tramp along a well-benched track to North Egmont. For the most part the track descends gently through the bush. The final 10 minutes involves a steep climb on a series of steps to the visitor information centre.

### SIDE TRIP: MT TARANAKI

6–8 hours, 8km return, 1438m ascent

Under ideal weather conditions any reasonably fit trumper can make it to the top of Mt Taranaki, the most-climbed mountain in New Zealand. However, because of sudden weather changes (generally for the worse), it is essential that you have the right gear, supplies (including drinking water as there are very few streams) and conditions before attempting to climb to the summit. If you want to include the summit from the Low- or High-Level Circuits, you should schedule an additional day, with an overnight stop at Maketawa Hut.

From Maketawa Hut, follow Maketawa Track as it climbs west to Translator Rd, a 4WD track. Continue climbing along the 4WD track past a huge TV transmitter

to Tahurangi Lodge (locked), reached less than an hour from the hut.

From the lodge a track continues to climb, via steps, into Hongis Valley. At 1950m you move onto the scree slope of North Ridge, and follow poles as they zigzag up the loose rock to Lizard Ridge. Be extremely wary of falling rocks here.

The poles up Lizard Ridge lead to the north entrance of the crater, where you will encounter snowfields and icy rocks. This is where an ice axe is useful, although most trampers don't pack one during summer. Once in the crater, at 2450m, it is a 15-minute climb on the west rim to the true summit of **Mt Taranaki**, around four hours from Tahurangi Lodge.

You return along the ascent route, although it doesn't take nearly as long.

## POUAKAI TRACK

<b>Duration</b>	2 days
<b>Distance</b>	28km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start/Finish</b>	North Egmont
<b>Nearest Towns</b>	New Plymouth (p101), Stratford (p102)
<b>Transport</b>	shuttle service
<b>Summary</b>	This loop offers superb views from above the bush-line, and one of the best huts in the national park.

For those who can't spare the time to do the High- or Low-Level Circuits, the Pouakai Track offers a shorter, but equally scenic tramp in Egmont National Park. It includes spectacular views from the top of the Pouakai Range, which at one time was a volcano of similar size to Mt Taranaki. Natural erosion has reduced it to a rugged area of high ridges and rolling hills of subalpine bush.

In the past this tramp's drawback was the deteriorated condition of some stretches of the track, leading to excessive mud whenever it rained. At the time of research, the circuit was undergoing considerable renovation. The Mangorei Track and the top of the Pouakai Range had already been upgraded, with the Henry Peak section undergoing similar treatment in 2006. Eventually, Pouakai Track could be

the premier recreation track in Egmont National Park.

You can also leave this route at Pouakai Hut and follow the Mangorei Track, a 2½-hour tramp, to the end of Mangorei Rd. This road leads to New Plymouth, a mostly downhill walk of 15km (there is usually very little traffic this far up).

## PLANNING Maps

The most commonly used map is the 1:50,000 Parkmap 273-9 (*Egmont National Park*). You can also use the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-P20 (*Egmont*) for much greater detail. If you plan to exit along Mangorei Track, you will need the adjoining Topomap 260-P19 (*New Plymouth*).

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

See p101 for details on how to get to Egmont National Park.

## THE TRAMP Map p104 Day 1: North Egmont to Pouakai Hut

5–6 hours, 13km, 348m ascent, 200m descent  
Begin at the Camphouse, and follow Day 1 of the Mt Taranaki High-Level Circuit to Holly Hut (p106). After you reach the signposted Kokowai Track, you'll be able to view Ahukawakawa Swamp and much of the track up the Pouakai Range. If you're getting an afternoon start from North Egmont, you should plan on staying at Holly Hut, 3½ hours from North Egmont. In that case, take the left fork at the junction with the Ahukawakawa Track to reach the hut within five minutes.

Trampers continuing to Pouakai Hut should follow the Ahukawakawa Track, which heads north (right). Within 500m the track reaches an elaborate **viewing platform** and then descends to the southwest end of **Ahukawakawa Swamp**. Thanks to considerable planking you can stay dry while crossing the open sphagnum moss swamp. It's 1km across the swamp, which includes an unusual arched bridge over Stony River.

On the northern side of the swamp the track begins a long climb along a forested ridge. The 304m ascent to the junction with the Pouakai Track is a one- to 1½-hour effort, with the first 20 to 30 minutes the steepest part. The track then levels briefly, before continuing at a more gentle incline.

If the day is nice, views of the swamp and Mt Taranaki rising above it are well worth the knee-bending climb. If it's raining, this can be a bit of a slog, even with all the steps that have been installed.

Two hours from Holly Hut you top out at a **saddle** that opens up to views of New Plymouth, and reach Pouakai Track at a signposted junction. Head northeast (right), as the track sidles around the north side of the **Hump** (1292m) and then makes a short descent to a signposted junction with Mangorei Track. Those with sharp eyes will see a corner of Pouakai Hut 15 to 20 minutes before reaching it.

**Pouakai Hut** is just five minutes down Mangorei Track (left), or 2½ hours from Holly Hut. The 16-bunk hut is nestled on the west side of the ridge, and from its veranda you can gaze out over a curved coastline and the city of New Plymouth. The sunsets can be spectacular from this perch, followed by the city lights of New Plymouth gradually flickering away.

## SIDE TRIP: MT POUAKAI

2 hours, 6km return, 200m ascent

Pouakai Hut is in such a scenic location that you may be tempted to spend a spare day here. If so, use part of it to climb **Mt Pouakai** (1400m) for even better views of the Taranaki region. Head west (right) on Pouakai Track, and it's a one-hour (3km) climb from the hut along a route that marches straight to the top of the peak.

## Day 2: Pouakai Hut to North Egmont

5–6 hours, 15km, 524m descent

Hope for clear weather as you traverse the backbone of the Pouakai Range, because the views are superb. Return to the Pouakai Track and head northeast (left) to follow the ridge for a level and scenic stretch, with New Plymouth on one side of you and Mt Taranaki on the other – if only every track in New Zealand was this easy and this beautiful. Within 1km of the hut you reach **Pouakai Plateau**, marked by a pair of tarns. If the day is clear and windless, Mt Taranaki will be reflected off the surface of them, much to the delight of photographers.

The track sidles around **Maude Peak** (1220m) with very little climbing, then drops southeast into a low saddle at the base of Henry Peak, reached 45 minutes from

Pouakai Hut. The 152m climb to the top of **Henry Peak** (1224m) looks more daunting than it is, thanks to all the steps. Most trampers are standing on the peak within 20 minutes, where upon they find another large observation deck to soak in the 360-degree view.

From the peak the track begins a long, steady descent on the south face, at first on an endless series of steps. Eventually the steps run out and you're left slipping through deep, muddy troughs. Someday this stretch will be totally rebuilt – until then be thankful for whatever has been done. Within an hour you emerge at the edge of Kai Auahi Stream, where you can peer down into its gorge. The track skirts the gorge for another 30 minutes before arriving at **Kaiauui Shelter**.

This three-sided shelter was built for trampers to wait in when the stream is too flooded to ford. In normal conditions you can cross it and barely get your boots wet. First, however, you have to climb down into the gorge via tree roots and then, after crossing the stream, climb back out. This sets the tone for the remainder of the tramp. For the next hour the track climbs in and out of a couple of small gorges and two major ones. Ladders and steps assist you but there is still considerable climbing required, on tree roots and over boulders.

Less than 1½ hours from the shelter you reach a signposted junction with Kokowai Track, which heads north (right) to the AMC. You head south (left) and in five minutes arrive at a swing bridge across the **Waiwhakaiho River**.

On the other side is a junction with Waiwhakaiho Track (left fork), which heads south. You're now less than 30 minutes from North Egmont Rd. Head north (right) on Kaiauui Track, as it climbs out of the gorge, passes a signposted junction with Ram Track (right fork) and then breaks out on to asphalt at the Kaiauui car park.

North Egmont is still 6km – a good hour's walk – up the road. The alternative is to follow Ram Track back to North Egmont, a 2½-hour walk from its junction with the Kaiauui Track. Most trampers take the road, knowing they are that much closer to a cold beer at the Mountain Café.

## WHANGANUI NATIONAL PARK

The 742-sq-km Whanganui National Park is a lowland forest that lies between Mt Taranaki (Egmont National Park) to the west, and Mt Ruapehu (Tongariro National Park) to the east. The park's dominant feature is the 329km-long Whanganui River, the second longest (and longest navigable) river in the country. Although access to the park is difficult, it attracts trampers keen to explore remote wilderness areas.

### HISTORY

Maori legend says the Whanganui River was formed in the aftermath of the fight between Taranaki and Tongariro; as Taranaki fled, he tore a long deep gash in the earth. A stream of clear water from Tongariro's side gushed forth and healed this wound.

Maori arrived permanently around 1350. They flourished in pre-European days because food in the valley was plentiful – it included produce from cultivated terraces, and eels and lamprey caught in sophisticated weirs on river channels. At each bend of the river, *kaitiaki* (guardians) ensured preservation of the *mauri* (life force) of the place. Many *kainga* (villages) were located in the rugged hill country. The many steep bluffs and ridges made suitable sites for *pa* (fortified villages), which were needed because intertribal warfare was common in this well-populated region.

The Maori conflicts ceased only with the arrival of European missionaries in the 1840s. The Church of England's Reverend Richard Taylor was the most influential minister to travel up the Whanganui River, and numerous churches and missions were built along its banks. At Maori request, Taylor bestowed new names on many of their settlements: Koriniti (Corinth), Hiruharama (Jerusalem), Ranana (London) and Atene (Athens) survive today. The ministers persuaded the tribes to abandon their *pa* and begin cultivating wheat, especially near the lower reaches of the Whanganui River, where several flour mills were established.

By the early 1900s, a fleet of 12 boats was plying the river; the largest one

was capable of carrying 400 passengers. Visitors to the region stayed at Pipiriki House. This grand hotel, with an international reputation, was in the bustling river town of Pipiriki at the north end of Whanganui River Rd. The hotel burnt to the ground in 1959, and now all that remains are some old steps and foundations, just some of the historic relics in a much more low-key Pipiriki.

In 1912 the Whanganui River Trust was established, and by 1980 it covered an area of 350 sq km. A national-park assessment began in 1980 and Whanganui National Park, the country's 11th national park, was gazetted in 1986.

### ENVIRONMENT

Whanganui National Park is predominantly covered by broad-leaved podocarp forest. Several species of beech are also present, including black beech, which often crowns the crests of ridges. The park's central area, its most isolated section, is also a noted haven for bird life. The most commonly seen species are fantail, tui, North Island robin, tomtit and New Zealand pigeon (*kereru*). The Brown kiwi may be more numerous here than in any other region of the North Island.

### CLIMATE

Whanganui National Park has a mild climate with few extremes. Annual rainfall ranges from 1000mm in some lowland areas, to 2500mm in the high country. Frost and snow occur only occasionally on high ridges in winter. Morning mist is common in summer, and is usually the forerunner to a fine day.

### PLANNING

#### Maps

The 1:160,000 Parkmap *Whanganui National Park* was reprinted in 2005 and is ideal for planning and organising tramps.

#### Information Sources

Maps and information about the park are available at the **DOC Area Office** (☎ 06-348 8475; 74 Ingestre St, Wanganui). There are also the **Pipiriki DOC Field Base** (☎ 06-385 5022; Owairua Rd, Pipiriki) and **Taumarunui DOC Field Base** (☎ 07-895 8201; Cherry Grove Domain, Taumarunui) but these offices are not always staffed.

### ACCESS TOWNS

See Stratford (p102).

### Wanganui

☎ 06 / pop 40,700

Halfway between Wellington and New Plymouth, Wanganui is an attractive city on the banks of the Whanganui River.

#### INFORMATION

**DOC Area Office** (☎ 348 8475; 74 Ingestre St) Maps and information on Whanganui National Park.

**Wanganui visitor information centre** (☎ 349 0508; www.wanganuinz.com; 101 Guyton St) Located between St Hill and Wilson Sts, it has general information and a relief map that will give you a good perspective on the remoteness and ruggedness of Whanganui National Park.

#### SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

For any tramping equipment, stove fuel and freeze-dried meals, there's **Eides Sports World** (☎ 345 5391; 184 Victoria Ave; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat). For other food supplies head to **Countdown** (☎ 345 8720; Trafalgar Square, cnr Taupo Quay & St Hill St).

You can rent a variety of equipment – including tents, stoves, sleeping bags and mats – from **Rivercity Tours** (☎ 0800-377 311, 025-443 421; rivercity-tours@xtra.co.nz).

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Avro Motel & Caravan Park** (☎ 345 5279; www.wanganuiaccommodation.co.nz; 36 Alma Rd; sites for 2 \$16, d \$80-85; 🚰) is the closest camping ground to Wanganui. It's 1.5km west of the city centre, with a laundry but no kitchen facilities.

**Braemar House YHA** (☎ 347 2529; www.braemarhouse.co.nz; 2 Plymouth St; camp sites for 2 \$24, dm/s/d \$20/55/70) is in a historical house opposite the river, and is part guesthouse and part YHA hostel.

**Tamara Backpackers Lodge** (☎ 347 6300; www.tamaralodge.com; 24 Somme Pde; dm \$21-22, s/d \$35/46; 🚰) also overlooks the river, and has free bikes for your day off from tramping.

Whatever you're craving for dinner can be found on, or near, Victoria Ave. **Victoria's** (☎ 347 7007; 13 Victoria Ave; ☎ 5.30-9pm Sun-Thu, 11am-2pm & 5.30-9pm Fri & Sat) is a long-time favourite, with a traditional New Zealand menu, while **Redeye Café** (☎ 345 5646; 96 Guyton St; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 10pm Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) is a funky and artsy place, with light fare and meals.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**InterCity** (☎ 04-472 5111; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) operates from the **Wanganui Travel Centre** (☎ 345 4433; 156 Ridgeway St) and has buses to Auckland (\$75, 10 hours), Wellington (\$38, four hours) and New Plymouth (\$30, 2½ hours).

## MATEMATEAONGA TRACK

<b>Duration</b>	4 days
<b>Distance</b>	42km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track
<b>Difficulty</b>	easy-moderate
<b>Start</b>	Kohi Saddle
<b>Finish</b>	Whanganui River
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Stratford (p102), Wanganui (left)
<b>Transport</b>	bus, boat
<b>Summary</b>	Penetrating deep into the wilderness of Whanganui National Park, this is one of the most remote tramps in the North Island, ending at the spectacular Whanganui River.

This is one of two major tracks in Whanganui National Park. It was opened in 1980 by the New Zealand Walkway Commission as the first major stage of a proposed tramp from Cape Egmont to East Cape. It follows old Maori tracks and a settlers' dray road across the broken and thickly forested crests of the Matemateaonga Range, at altitudes between 400m and 730m. There are vantage points that offer impressive views of the rugged countryside and glimpses of the peaks of Tongariro National Park. The main interest, however, is the lush bush and wilderness.

Surprisingly, the tramp is easier than the rugged nature of the countryside suggests, because the old graded road reduces the amount of steep climbing. Although it lacks the alpine appeal of many other tracks, especially those in Tongariro National Park, when you combine its isolated nature with a jetboat tour of the Whanganui River at the end, the Matemateaonga Track becomes one of New Zealand's great bush adventures.

### PLANNING When to Tramp

The tramp can be done year-round, although snow may occasionally be encountered in winter and early spring.



## What to Bring

Take good rain gear; the prevailing winds along the Matemateaonga Range are westerlies, which often bring heavy rainstorms.

## Maps

The 1:50,000 Topomap 260-R20 (*Matemateaonga*) covers the track.

## Huts & Lodges

There are now only three huts along the Matemateaonga Track, as the Humphries and Otarake Huts were removed in 2000 due to their poor condition. The remaining huts, **Omaru Hut** (\$10), **Pouri Hut** (\$10) and **Puketotara Hut** (\$10), are all good Serviced huts.

There is also a lodge in the park that trampers can reach from the Matemateaonga Track. Staying at the **Bridge to Nowhere Lodge** (☎ 0800-480 308, 025-480 308; www.bridgetonowhere.tours.co.nz; camp sites for 2 \$20, dm \$45, d & tw \$250), on the river near the end of the track, is a pleasant alternative to spending your final tramping night at Puketotara Hut. The resort has just what you need after a long tramp: a licensed bar and dining room with a generous buffet.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

### To the Start

The western end of the Matemateaonga Track, at Kohi Saddle, is 60km from Stratford. Take SH43 northeast to Strathmore, and then head east along Brewer Rd to Makahu. Kohi Saddle and the track are well signposted from Brewer Rd. They are at the upper end of Upper Mangaehu Rd, about 15km east of Makahu.

There are also several people who transport trampers from Stratford to the start of the tramp; **Jim Hopkirk** (☎ 06-762 3807) charges \$60 for two people. **Eastern Taranaki Experience** (☎ 06-765 7482; www.eastern-taranaki.co.nz) provides transport between Wanganui and Kohi Saddle (four to 11 people \$300), and between Pipiriki and Stratford for (four to 11 people \$320).

**Whanganui Tours** (☎ 06-347 7534, 027-201 2472; www.whanganuitours.co.nz) runs a minibus to Kohi Saddle, departing Wanganui at 1pm Monday through Friday and arriving at the track at 3.30pm (\$40 per person, \$160 minimum). On Saturday and Sunday the departure time varies.

## From the Finish

The eastern end of the track is at Tieke Reach, an isolated bend on the Whanganui River, 25km upriver from Pipiriki. Apart from retracing your foot steps, a 30-minute ride on a commercial jetboat is the only way out.

**Whanganui River Adventures** (☎ 0800-862 743, 06-385 3246; www.whanganuiriveradventures.co.nz) will pick up or drop off trampers (adult/child \$50/25). For \$95 the company will also include you on its Bridge to Nowhere Tour. This four-hour trip takes you into the spectacular sections of the upper river, past steep cliffs and narrow, moss-laden gorges. You will also have the opportunity to tramp in to New Zealand's most famous bridge and enjoy a few 'Hamilton turns' (360-degree spins) before heading to Pipiriki.

From Pipiriki, Whanganui River Rd (a winding, and single-lane road) heads 79km south to Wanganui, or 28km east to Raetihi. For transport to Wanganui, you can hop on the Rural Mail Coach Tour operated by **Whanganui Tours** (☎ 06-347 7534, 027-201 2472; www.whanganuitours.co.nz), which departs Pipiriki at 10.30am Monday through Friday (\$17.50). On Saturday and Sunday transport can be arranged through the same company (\$40 per person, \$160 minimum).

## THE TRAMP

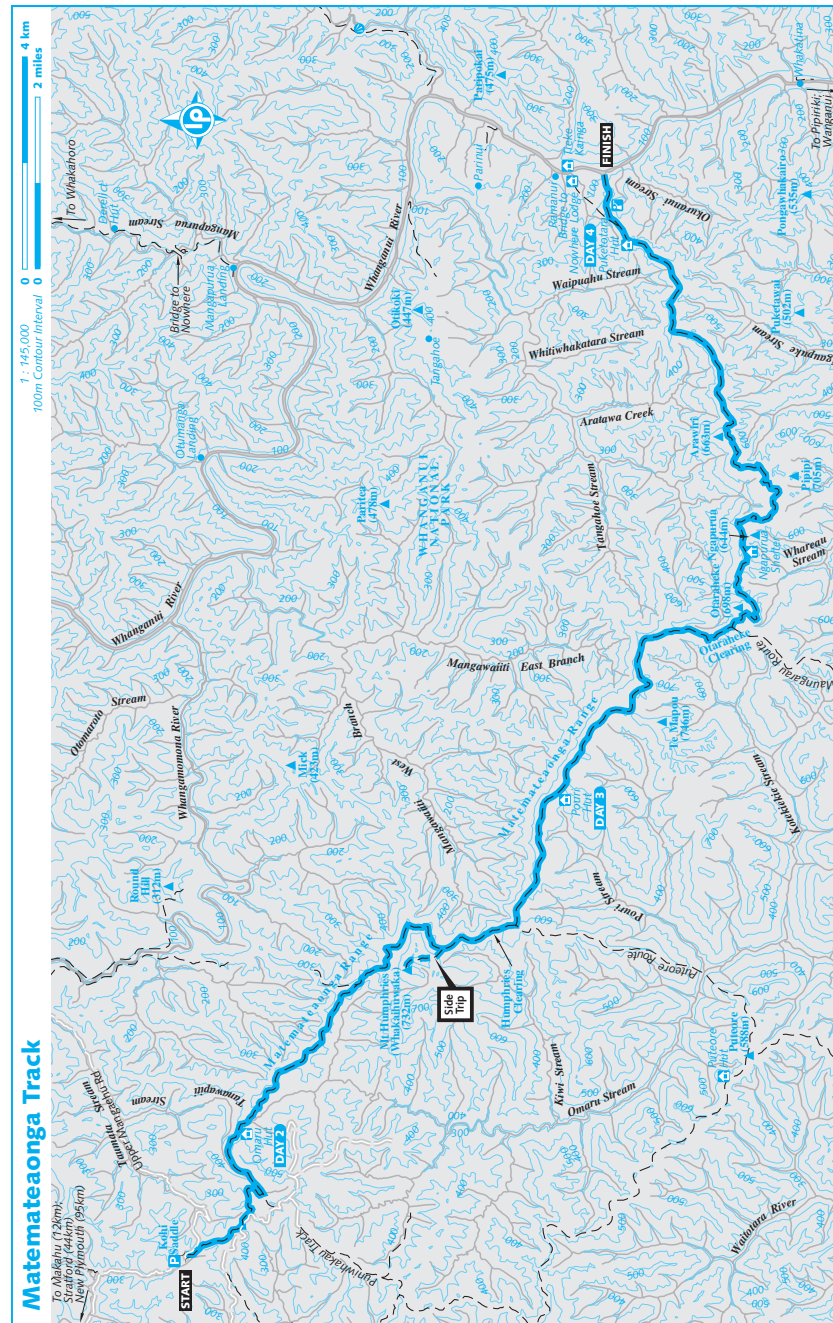
### Day 1: Kohi Saddle to Omaru Hut

2 hours, 7km

There is a large car park at the saddle, and a large sign that marks the beginning of the track. Begin by climbing through regenerating bush along a spur, towards the crest of the Matemateaonga Range. Within 30 minutes you move into a thick forest of kamahi and tawa, the dominant feature for the rest of the tramp.

The track eventually becomes a 3m-wide trail as it follows the remains of the **original dry road** that was cut all the way to Pouri Hut. Sidle the narrow Tanawapiti valley and follow it to the signposted junction with Puniwhakau Track (right), 1½ hours from the car park. Puniwhakau Track heads southwest to Puniwhakau Rd and, until 1983, served as the western access to the Matemateaonga Track.

At the junction the Matemateaonga Track reaches the crest of the **Matemateaonga Range**. It continues east (left fork), then north,



**A SOAK AT THE END OF THE MATEMATEAONGA** *Jim DuFresne*

After four days on the Matemateaonga Track, most trampers jump on the jetboat and rush off to their next tramp or destination. But those of us who have been tramping longer than we care to admit, who spend evenings on the track massaging creaky knees and aching feet, know there's a better way to end this walk in the bush.

We book a night at the **Flying Fox** (☎ 06-342 8160; www.theflyingfox.co.nz; Whanganui River Rd; camp sites for 2 \$30, cottages \$70-120).

The inn, a 45-minute drive south of Pipiriki, is really an extension of your bush adventure. The mail bus drops you off on the east side of the river. The inn is on the west side. To reach it you climb into a flying fox – a small cage with two seats that dangles from a steel cable – and are slowly pulled across the Whanganui River.

The Flying Fox is a collection of colourful cottages, each with kitchen, and gardens in an *Alice In Wonderland*-like setting. For a little extra cost the proprietors will make sure there are a few cold beers or a good bottle of Chardonnay in the refrigerator, something us lead-legged trampers appreciate after a few days on the track. You can also arrange for a gourmet meal to be delivered to your cottage.

But the reason many of us end up here is the inn's outdoor bath – a huge cast-iron tub, complete with claw feet, set in a beautiful enclave of native bush and flowers. It's filled with spring water from the nearby ridge and then heated by a wood fire built underneath it.

When you arrive for your soak the tub is illuminated by a dozen candles and blanketed by a layer of steam. Next to it is a glass of that Chardonnay. You slowly slide in – holding your breath at first because the water is hot – and, within minutes, every tight muscle, every sore joint begins to magically melt away. You lean back, sip your wine and slip into that spiritual state that lies somewhere between the purity of cleanliness and the serenity of the bush.

And with eyes half-closed you admit for the first time that the youthful spring those old legs had 20 years ago is gone. But, hey, with end-of-tramp therapy like this, there's still a few good tramps left in them.

descending easily for 30 minutes. The track levels out at a small saddle, where **Omaru Hut** (12 bunks) is in a clearing. The hut, featuring mattresses, a wood-burning stove and rainwater tank, is surrounded by forest near the source of the Omaru Stream.

**Day 2: Omaru Hut to Pouri Hut**

5 hours, 13km

The track heads southeast from the hut and continues in this direction practically the whole day. It follows the southwestern slopes of the Matemateaonga Range, but there are few views through the thick forest of mostly kamahi and rata.

After two hours you cross to the northern flank of the range; if the day is clear there is an occasional glimpse of the three Tongariro National Park volcanoes through the trees. The track, which is muddy in places, continues through the forest until it reaches a junction with the trail (right) to Mt Humphries (see right), 3½ hours from Omaru Hut.

The track continues roughly southeast from the junction, and after 30 minutes or so

passes through **Humphries Clearing**, the site of the former Humphries Hut, an animal-control hut that was removed in 2000.

Just beyond the clearing the track arrives at a junction with the Puteore Route, which heads southwest into the Waitotara Conservation Area. From the junction it is another hour to **Pouri Hut** (12 bunks), in a large clearing at the end of the dray road.

**SIDE TRIP: MT HUMPHRIES**

1½ hours, 2km return, 100m ascent

Mt Humphries Track climbs to the 732m summit of Mt Humphries (Whakaihuwaka). The views are excellent – you can see the King Country around Waitomo to the north and Mt Taranaki to the west. On a clear day you can see three national parks: Egmont to the west, Tongariro to the north and Whanganui at your feet.

**Day 3: Pouri Hut to Puketotara Hut**

7 hours, 20km

This is the longest leg of the trip, but it is an easy tramp along a well-graded track,

passing through the most pristine forest in the national park. Before leaving Pouri Hut make sure your water bottle is full, because the only water source along the ridge is the water tank at Ngapurua Shelter.

For most of the day the track remains on the crest of the ridge, at an altitude of about 640m, so there is very little climbing. You begin in a tawa and mixed podocarp forest and then move into a predominantly kamahi forest. Within three hours you pass a junction with the Maungarau Route, which heads southward. The Matemateaonga Track continues southeast, and quickly descends to **Otarakehe Clearing**, where another small animal-control hut was removed in 2000. If you're not ready for a break it's less than one hour to **Ngapurua Shelter**, also in a clearing.

Near Pipipi peak, 30 minutes beyond the shelter, it's possible to see fossilised shells embedded in the track, and at this point the track swings northeast. Within 1½ hours, it begins the final descent towards Puketotara Hut. It takes one hour to descend the 200m to the ridge-top clearing where the hut is located, and here the bush is rich with bird life, including *kereru*, parakeets and long-tailed cuckoos. **Puketotara Hut** (12 bunks) is a fitting place for a final night on the track – just beyond it are sweeping views of the Whanganui River, while the volcanoes of Tongariro National Park crown the skyline to the east.

If you're planning on spending a night at **Bridge to Nowhere Lodge** (p112), a private track departs from the water tanks at Puketotara Hut and heads northeast. After one to 1½ hours you reach the lodge, perched high above the river. Rooms here have balcony views of the water or the thick native bush.

**Day 4: Puketotara Hut to Whanganui River**

1 hour, 2km

A short final day is welcome if you are meeting a jetboat for the trip back to civilisation. You must make sure you reach the river well before the jet-boat does; there are pick-ups throughout the day during summer, but only by prior arrangement. The track quickly drops 100m to a **lookout** along the crest of a spur. It then descends steeply another 250m reaching the Matemateaonga

Track sign above the sandy banks of the Whanganui River.

## RUAHINE FOREST PARK

Located only 12km from Palmerston North, Ruahine Forest Park spans 936 sq km, from the Manawatu Gorge north to the Tararua and Ngaruroro Rivers which form its boundary with Kaweka Forest Park. Ruahine is long (95km), narrow (only 8km wide at its southern end) and very rugged. It encompasses the main Ruahine Range, as well as the Mokai Patea, Hikurangi, Whanahua and Ngamoko Ranges.

The park is laced with tracks and poled routes, and within its boundaries are 67 DOC and club huts available to trampers. East-west crossings over the Ruahines are popular, but the area is not well served by public transport, making it twice as hard for trampers to arrange a drop-off on one side of the mountains and a pick-up on the other.

The lack of transport, however, leads to the park's most endearing quality; a lack of other trampers. If you're looking for an alpine adventure, where it's possible to spend an afternoon tramping alone along a ridge and through tussock, then the Ruahines are well worth the effort needed to reach the tracks.

### HISTORY

There has been human activity in and around the park area for almost 1000 years, beginning with the Maori. In pre-European times the forests and streams were a good source of food for the descendants of the Rangitane, Ngati Apa and Ngati Kahungunu people.

The first European to explore the Ruahine Range was Reverend William Colenso. After arriving in New Zealand in 1834, Colenso became a travelling missionary and crossed the range seven times. He was a skilled botanist whose observations became the basis of the first botanical records of the area. Eventually the Maori track he used became known as Colenso's Track.

In the early 1900s the forests in the Ruahine foothills were cleared for farms and milling. Red deer were released in the mid-1920s for game hunting, but their numbers

increased so rapidly their browsing caused extensive forest destruction. That resulted in the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) building many of the park's tracks and huts in the 1960s for deer cullers.

Ruahine's most famous hut, Rangiwhia, was originally a shepherd's shelter, built in 1930 just above the bush-line on the western side of the range. It became the focal point of a ski hill in 1938, after a group of young men, drinking pints in the Rangiwhia Hotel, formed the Rangiwhia Ski Club – only the second ski club to be incorporated in New Zealand. The skiers winched a bulldozer up the valley to level out the slopes, built a tow rope that used an engine from an Indian motorcycle and added a wing to the hut.

The club's membership peaked with 80 skiers, but sadly it was disbanded during WWII and never reformed. In 1967 the NZFS rebuilt Rangiwhia Hut, and the classic corrugated-iron structure served trampers for almost two decades, finally being replaced in 1984. Sitting at almost 1300m, on the edge of a vast alpine area, 'Rangi Hut' (as most locals refer to it) is still an important gateway into the Ruahine Range for trampers, deer hunters and the occasional skier.

## ENVIRONMENT

The Ruahine Range forms part of the North Island's main divide. The southern end of the range is generally lower than the northern end, which includes Mangaweka – the highest point in the park at 1733m. The range is geologically young, and is still uplifting. This, along with the weather, contributes to high rates of erosion in the park. In general the terrain is steep and rugged, and features sharp-crested ridges.

The forests within the park extend to 1100m. Broad-leaved podocarp is found on the lower slopes, while beech, kamahi and kaikawaka dominate higher altitudes. Above the forest, leatherwood and sub-alpine vegetation takes over, giving way to tussock and alpine herb fields.

A number of common native birds can be found in the park, including the tui, bellbird (*korimako*), fantail (*piwakawaka*), whiteheads (*popokotea*), kereru, rifleman (*titipounamu*) and grey warbler (*riroriro*). If you're lucky you'll see blue ducks (*whio*),

## WARNING

Like the nearby Tararua Range, trampers need to keep an eye on the weather and the possibility of strong winds when hiking in the Ruahines. The predominant north-west winds are the main ones you need to watch carefully. Often it can be sunny and calm on the surrounding plains, and even at the trailhead, but by the time you reach the bush-line on the Ruahines a northwesterly will be blowing across the ridges, exposing you to strong gusts and cold rain.

parakeets (*kakariki*), falcons (*karearea*) and hear kiwis and kakas.

## CLIMATE

The park's climate is both wet and dry. The dividing range traps moisture carried by prevailing westerly winds, causing heavy rainfall and a damp climate on the west and a rain-shadow effect on the east, where there are drier conditions. Annual rainfall varies from 1150mm near the northeastern foothills, to a soaking 5000mm on the crest of the range. Snow may occur in the alpine areas any time of year, and often lies above 1400m from May to October.

## INFORMATION

The entire park is covered on the 1:100,000 Parkmap 274-05 (*Ruahine*), currently out of production but occasionally still seen in shops. The map is good for planning, but has insufficient detail once you are on the track.

## ACCESS TOWN

### Palmerston North

Located on the banks of Manawatu River, and in the shadow of Wellington, this city can fulfil any trumper's needs before or after a walk.

## INFORMATION

**Destination Manawatu visitor information centre** (☎ 350 1922; www.manawatunz.co.nz; The Square) General travel and accommodation information.

**DOC Palmerston North Area Office** (☎ 350 9700; 717 Tremaine Ave) On the north side of town, this is the best place to purchase maps and hut tickets, or obtain information on tracks.

## SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

There are a handful of outdoor stores, including **Mountain Equipment** (☎ 359 2162; 400 Ferguson St; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun). Along with the usual tramping gear, the shop also sells stove fuel in small quantities, maps and hut tickets. To restock the food bag head to **Pak'nSave** (☎ 356 4043; 335 Ferguson St).

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Palmerston North Holiday Park** (☎ 358 0349; 133 Dittmer Dr; sites for 2 \$24, cabins \$30-60), off Ruha Pl and next to Esplanade Park, is a pleasant and shady camping ground 2km from the city centre.

**Peppertree Hostel** (☎ 355 4054; peppertreehostel@clear.net.nz; 121 Grey St; dm/d \$20/46), a YHA associate, has a kitchen, off-street parking and a homely atmosphere.

**Ann Keith's Bed & Breakfast Hotel** (☎ 358 6928; www.backpackersbnb.co.nz; 123 & 146 Grey St; dm/s/d \$20/65/95) consists of a B&B next door to the Peppertree, and a hostel down the street.

Popular city-centre eating places include **Roma** (☎ 952 5579; 198 The Square; ☞ 6-10pm Mon-Sat, to 9pm Sun) for pizzas baked in a wood-fired oven, and **Cafe Nero** (☎ 354 0312; 36 Amesbury St; ☞ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun), with good coffee and outdoor tables to watch Palmerston North bustle past.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Air New Zealand** (☎ 351 8800; www.airnz.co.nz; 30 Broadway Ave) has daily direct flights to

Auckland (\$117 to \$224, one hour), Wellington (\$100 to \$175, 30min) and Christchurch (\$130 to \$247, one hour).

**InterCity/Newmans** (☎ 355 5633; www.intercity.coach.co.nz) have buses to most places in the North Island, including Wellington (\$31, two hours), Taupo (\$46, five hours) and Auckland (\$76, 10 hours). Book tickets at the **Destination Manawatu visitor information centre** (☎ 350 1922; The Square). **White Star** (☎ 358 8777) operates from the **Tranzit Bus Stop** (Main St) and has daily services to Wellington (\$22, two hours) and New Plymouth (\$31, four hours).

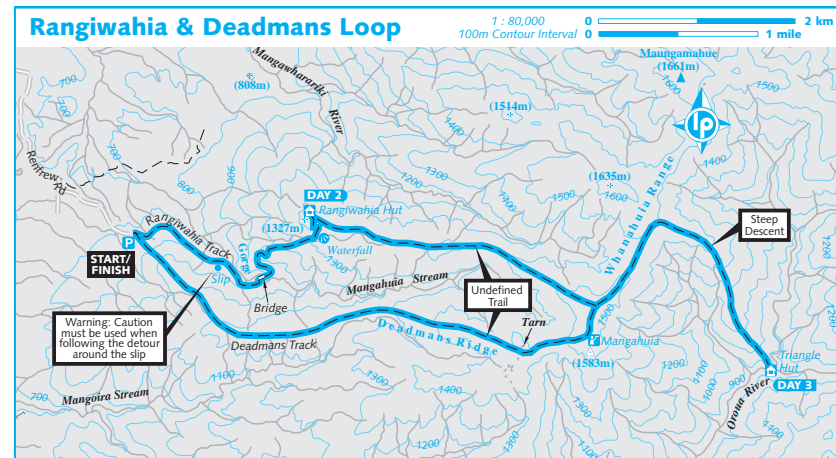
If you want to rent a vehicle, try **Budget** (☎ 358 1575; Palmerston North airport).

## RANGIWAHIA & DEADMANS LOOP

<b>Duration</b>	3 days
<b>Distance</b>	24.5km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track & route
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate-demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Rangiwhia car park
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Palmerston North (opposite)
<b>Transport</b>	private

**Summary** This tramp takes you on an exploration of the little-visited, but beautiful, Ruahine Forest Park. It includes sections of tramping above the bush-line and excellent views on clear days.

The 4km walk to Rangiwhia Hut, at the start of this tramp, is one of the more



popular tracks in Ruahine Forest Park. However, a major slip in 1999 took out a 30m section of the track and forced trampers to undertake a difficult climb around it. The track was repaired, but additional slips have since occurred and geologists now suspect the entire slope is unstable and may continue to give way.

DOC is currently weighing up possible solutions to this problem, which range from rerouting the track totally off the hill, to moving the popular hut to Deadmans Track. Until a decision has been made and a plan enacted, however, the only real option is a steep detour around the slip area – making what used to be a quick and easy route to the bush-line in the Whana-huia Range a little more challenging. Check with the visitor information centres in Palmerston North on the status of the track and its repairs.

If you are unsure about your tramping ability, plan on just a 15km return tramp to Mangahua, staying two nights at Rangiwahia Hut; the extension into Oroua valley involves a steep descent that is dangerously exposed and difficult in bad weather, and the second half of the loop along Deadmans Ridge can be demanding.

## PLANNING

### When To Tramp

The season is from late November to April, but because of the rain and strong winds that often occur in the Ruahines, the best time to undertake this tramp is January and February.

### What to Bring

Good rain gear is essential. In places the track and poled routes can be muddy, making gaiters handy. You might also want to pack a stove; in Rangiwahia Hut there is a gas stove but in Triangle Hut there is only a wood stove.

### Maps

The tramp is covered by two maps in the 1:50,000 Topomap 260 series: U22 (*Ongawa*) and T22 (*Mangaweka*).

### Huts

**Rangiwahia Hut** (\$10) is Serviced, while **Triangle Hut** (\$5) is Standard; both huts are in excellent condition.

## NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Palmerston North (p116).

### Makoura Lodge

Only 30 minutes drive from the Rangiwahia Track trailhead, near Apiti, **Makoura Lodge** (☎ 06-328 4746; www.makouralodge.co.nz; Pohangina Valley E Rd; s/d \$70/115) is in a stunning location on the edge of the Makiekie Creek Gorge with the Ruahines looming overhead. Four trampers can share a room for \$168.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

From Palmerston North head northwest on SH3 and then northeast on SH54. At the hamlet of Rangiwahia turn right onto Te Parapara Rd. Within 4km turn left on Renfrew Rd and follow it for 5km to its eastern end, where there is a car park and information board.

There is no regular public transport to Ruahine Forest Park. Contact the **Destination Manawatu visitor information centre** (☎ 06-350 1922) to see if there are any organised tramps heading into the area. Makoura Lodge (☎ 06-328 4746; www.makouralodge.co.nz; Pohangina Valley E Rd) can arrange transport from Palmerston North to the trailhead for guests.

## THE TRAMP

### Day 1: Rangiwahia Car Park to Rangiwahia Hut

3 hours, 4km, 470m ascent

The information board at the car park will give the current condition of the track and the status of the slip.

A well-benched track departs the car park and begins ascending through beech forest, passing some impressive red beech along the way. Within 10 minutes you're sidling along the side of the steep Mangahua valley, enjoying views of the Whana-huia Range. Within 30 minutes you arrive at the **slip**, where DOC has cut a semi-permanent detour around the affected area and back onto the track again. This detour is a steep, but manageable and well-marked climb, and it takes most trampers 30 minutes to return to the track.

Just beyond the slip, or 1.5km from the car park, is an impressive arched wooden bridge over a deep narrow gorge. This is the third bridge to have been constructed over the gorge. An earlier one, dating from the

1930s, can be seen dangling from the sides of the gorge below.

Beyond the bridge the ascent becomes steep, and occasionally you have to scramble over large boulders and grab tree roots. The track climbs to the head of a gully marked by a beautiful **waterfall** cascading into a small pool. From here the track moves into leatherwood and then tussock, reaching **Rangiwahia Hut** (12 bunks) 10 minutes from the waterfall.

Rangiwahia Hut, or 'Rangi Hut' as is posted above its door, is a great place to spend a night or even two. The large hut has two sleeping rooms, a gas stove and heater, and water. Located just above the bush-line, its L-shaped veranda gives a panoramic view of the expansive farm country below, while on the horizon are the volcanoes of Tongariro.

### Day 2: Rangiwahia Hut to Triangle Hut

3–4 hours, 8km, 335m ascent, 775m descent

The track heads east towards Mangahua and, in the beginning, is very badly rutted. The tramp up this broad alpine ridge, however, is easy, and if the weather is clear the views of the surrounding peaks and ridges are excellent. Within 30 minutes you climb to a flattish high point at 1400m, cross it, descend briefly and then begin climbing again. Snow poles appear here and, about 30 minutes from the flattish high point, you reach a marked junction. The route south is to the top of Mangahua (a 20-minute climb), and then along Deadmans Track back to the car park.

The route to Triangle Hut (left) is marked by snow poles, and descends north from the junction for 1.5km towards Maungamahue. At times you're tramping along the edge of some steep cliffs and can see the red roof of Triangle Hut far below. About 40 minutes from the junction the poled route swings east and begins to descend a side ridge into Oroua valley. This section involves a steep descent that is dangerously exposed and difficult in bad weather.

For the first 20 or 30 minutes you descend through tussock, until you arrive at a marked track at the bush-line. Next is one of the most difficult sections; a wide swath cuts through the leatherwood and you must use roots as handholds to descend. The track eases up for a bit but then resumes its

steep descent until you reach Oroua River. **Triangle Hut** (six bunks) is on the other side of the river, an easy ford when water levels are normal. From the junction it takes one to two hours to reach the river, depending on the weather and your conditioning.

Built in 1966 to aid deer cullers, Triangle Hut overlooks the upper waters of the Oroua River from the bottom of a deep, narrow valley. You feel as if you're in the heart of the Ruahines, isolated from the rest of the world...and for all practical purposes you are. The hut was recently refurbished and is in good shape. There is a wood stove.

### Day 3: Triangle Hut to Rangiwahia Car Park

5–7 hours, 12.5km, 723m ascent, 753m descent

Return to the track junction. Most trampers do not find this stretch so daunting the second time; you are hitting it first thing in the morning, while you are fresh, and, as is so often the case, climbing the steep track is easier than descending it. Still, if it took you two hours to descend to the hut, plan on three hours to climb back to the junction.

At the junction, continue south along a poled route, and after 20 minutes climb easily to **Mangahua trig** (1583m). If the weather is clear this is a great spot for lunch, with views in every direction – including east to the Sawtooth Ridge and northward to the Hikurangi Range.

Snow poles lead west from Mangahua, along a route that begins as a steady descent off the high point and then skirts a very steep edge of **Deadmans Ridge**. In poor weather and whiteout conditions this section is dangerous, and well worthy of its name, but in good conditions it's an amazing place to tramp. You can see more than 700m straight down into a steep-sided valley. At the bottom is a stream that flows into the rugged interior of the Ruahines.

From the edge of the ridge you descend to a saddle with a tarn just off the route. There are a number of these small pockets of water in the area, and for the most part they are the only source of water above the bush-line.

You climb 60m out of the saddle and follow snow poles along the crest of the ridge, remaining in the tussock for 1km and then dropping into leatherwood for the next 2km. At one point the ridge is so narrow you can easily peer into the valleys on both

**WARNING**

It is the sudden storms – fierce and full of rain – that set Tararua apart from other parks in the country. They arrive with little warning and have dumped as much as 333mm of rain in a single day. Trampers must be prepared to spend an extra day in a hut if such storms blow in, because they quickly reduce visibility in the uplands and cause rivers to flood dangerously.

sides. As might be expected, the views are excellent on a clear day.

About 4km from Mangahua trig you reach the bush-line, where Deadmans Track enters the forest. It's a gentle descent at first, then a rapid one as you drop 300m in the final 2km. Steps assist you much of the way, however, and less than one hour after entering the trees you bottom out at Rangiwahia Track, only a few minutes east of the car park.

**TARARUA FOREST PARK**

North of Wellington is a place where the wind whips along the sides of mountains and the fog creeps silently in the early morning. It's a place where gales blow through steep river gorges, snow falls on sharp, grey-wacke peaks and rain trickles down narrow ridges. It is Tararua Forest Park.

The park is centred on the Tararua Range, which stretches 80km from Featherston north to the Manawatu Gorge, a natural gap that separates the Tararuas from the Ruahine Range. The tallest peak is Mitre (1571m), in the eastern central region, but there are many other peaks close to that height throughout the park. The ridges and spurs above the bush-line are renowned for being narrow, steep and exposed.

Only 50km from Wellington, the park used to be an exclusive weekend retreat for trampers from the windy city. Today, trampers from around the country are attracted to the Tararuas' broken terrain and sheer features, which present a challenge to even the most experienced trampers.

The park has an extensive network of tracks and routes, and more than 60 huts and shelters. However, the tracks are not

as well formed as those in most national parks, so it's easy to lose them; they are mostly of 'tramping track' and 'route' standard (see the boxed text on p340). On the open ridge tops there are rarely signposts or poles marking the routes, only the occasional cairn.

The tramps described in this section are less demanding than most routes through the Tararuas, and are therefore undertaken by a greater number of trampers.

**HISTORY**

Although the range was probably too rugged for any permanent Maori settlements, the local Maori did establish several routes through the range to the west coast. It was Maori guides who led JC Crawford to the top of Mt Dennan in 1863, the first recorded European ascent in the range. From the 1860s to the late 1880s, prospectors struggled over the ridges and peaks in search of gold, but little was ever found.

The Tararua Tramping Club, the first such club in New Zealand, was formed in 1919 by Wellington trampers keen to promote trips into the range. Independent trampers, however, have been visiting the range since the 1880s.

When the New Zealand Forest Service was established in 1919, a move began to reserve a section of the Tararua Range, but it was not until 1952 that the government set aside the area as New Zealand's first forest park. It was gazetted in 1967 and now covers 1116 sq km.

**ENVIRONMENT**

The sediments that would later form the Tararua Range were laid down in a deep sea basin 200 million years ago. Earth movements along a series of faults that extended through the Upper Hutt valley and the Wellington region then resulted in a complicated uplifted mass of folded and faulted rock. This mass was subsequently eroded by wind, rain and ice, resulting in the rugged Tararuas.

There is a good variety of plants in the park, and many species reach their southern limits here. The forest is predominantly beech, with scattered rimu and northern rata in the lowlands. Silver beech is the species along the bush-line. Above 1200m the forest gives way to open alpine tussock and snow grass.

**CLIMATE**

Wind, fog and rain are the park's trademarks. The entire park is exposed to westerly winds that funnel through the gap between the North and South Islands. The range is often the first thing the airstreams hit, which they do with full force, smacking against the high ridges and peaks. At times it's almost impossible to stand upright in the wind, especially with a backpack on.

Calm afternoons and days of gentle breezes do occur during summer, along with cloudless evenings that give way to glorious views of sunsets from the mountaintops. But, on average, the summits and peaks are fogbound two days out of three.

Rainfall averages around 1500mm in the lowlands, 2500mm in the foothills and 5000mm or more above the bush-line. Snow may lie above 1200m for three to four months of the year, and snowstorms can be expected at any time in the alpine region.

**PLANNING Maps**

The 1:100,000 Parkmap 274-02 (*Tararua Forest Park*) covers all the tracks and huts along the range.

**Information Sources**

There is a caretaker at **Holdsworth Lodge** (☎ 06-377 0022), and his office serves as a visitor information centre. When present, he will collect hut and camp fees.

**ACCESS TOWNS**

See Wellington (p97).

**Masterton**

☎ 06 / pop 19,900

This town is the hub of a large rural region northeast of Wellington, known as Wairarapa.

**INFORMATION**

**DOC Wairarapa Area Office** (☎ 377 0700; South Rd) Provides information on the Tararua Forest Park and sells hut tickets.

**Masterton visitor information centre** (☎ 370 0900; www.wairarapa.co.nz; 316 Queen St) Tourist information for Wairarapa.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

**Mawley Park Motor Camp** (☎ 378 6454; www.mawleypark.co.nz; 15 Oxford St; sites for 2 \$20, cabins \$35-45) is

a pleasant, clean camping ground on the banks of the Waipoua River.

**Channel Court Motel** (☎ 378 2877; channelcourtmotel@xtra.co.nz; 14-18 Herbert St; dm/d \$30/50) has dorm accommodation, as well as some en suite rooms.

A huge step up is **Masterton Motor Lodge** (☎ 378 2585; www.masterton-motorlodge.co.nz; 250 High St; d \$115-125; 🍷 🍷), with a variety of rooms and a licensed restaurant in a park-like setting.

Queen St has a variety of restaurants, including **Café Strada** (☎ 378 8450; 🕒 8am-9.30pm) for great vegetarian selections.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

From Wellington, **Tranz Metro** (☎ 04-498 3325, 04-801 7000; www.tranzmetro.co.nz) trains are a faster and cheaper way to reach Masterton (\$13) than buses. There are five services daily on weekdays and two on weekends.

**MT HOLDSWORTH CIRCUIT**

<b>Duration</b>	3 days
<b>Distance</b>	22km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track & route
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate-demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Holdsworth Lodge (p122)
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Masterton (left)
<b>Transport</b>	private

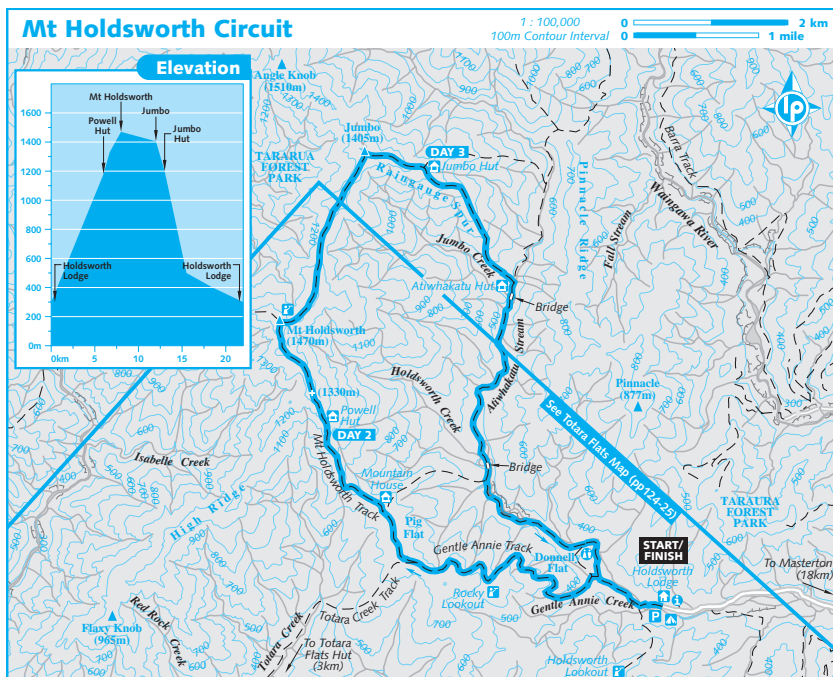
**Summary** A favourite with Wellington trampers, this circuit includes nights at two scenic huts above the bush-line, and a day following alpine ridges.

The Mt Holdsworth recreation area, where Holdsworth Lodge is located, is a beautiful spot to begin any tramp in the forest park. It is surrounded by rugged hills and graced by the rushing waters of Atiwhakatu Stream.

Although you can cover this route in two days, it is probably a better idea to schedule three, just in case bad weather intervenes and forces you to sit out a day in one of the alpine huts.

**PLANNING When to Tramp**

Attempting this tramp out of season is not recommended – the season is October through to May.



## Maps

The walk is covered on the 1:50,000 Topo-map 260-S26 (*Carterton*), in 1:50,000 detail on an insert of the 1:100,000 Parkmap 274-02 (*Tararua Forest Park*) and on the 1:50,000 Terramap *Tararua Recreation Area*.

## Huts

The huts on this track include the Serviced **Powell Hut** (\$10) and **Jumbo Hut** (\$10) and the Standard **Atiwhakatu Hut** (\$5). There is also **Mountain House** (free).

## NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Masterton (p121).

## Holdsworth Lodge

At the start of the track is **Holdsworth Lodge** (☎ 06-377 0022; camp sites for 2 \$8, dm \$8). The large, roomy lodge is popular with school groups and tramping clubs, but is also available to individual trampers passing through.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

Holdsworth Lodge, in the Mt Holdsworth recreation area, is reached from SH2 by

turning west onto Norfolk Rd, just south of Masterton. Norfolk Rd leads into Mt Holdsworth Rd, which ends at the recreation area, 15km from SH2.

If you don't have your own vehicle, getting to Holdsworth Lodge can be a bit tricky. **Masterton Radio Taxi** (☎ 06-378 2555) charges around \$50 for the trip. Or you can call the Holdsworth Lodge caretaker, who is more than happy to provide a lift into the park if he's coming into town. Then there's hitching. The roads aren't quite the hitchhiker's nightmare they appear to be on the map – there are a number of sheep stations along the way, and between the farmers and day visitors to the park, you can usually pick up a ride if you're patient.

## THE TRAMP

**Day 1: Holdsworth Lodge to Powell Hut**  
3–4 hours, 6km, 880m ascent

The track departs the lodge west, on a wide gravel path, crosses a footbridge over Atiwhakatu Stream and passes a track (left) to Holdsworth Lookout (30 minutes away). Another junction lies 200m further on.

## TARARUA BISCUITS

It would be impossible to pinpoint the birthplace of tramping in New Zealand, but the Tararuas (north of Wellington) have as much right to claim the title as anywhere else. Interest in cutting a track dates back to 1895, and by 1917 the famed 'Southern Crossing' route had been marked and two huts built along it. In 1919, New Zealand's first tramping club, the Tararua Tramping Club, was formed in Wellington. Within a few years there were several others in the Hutt Valley, Masterton and at Victoria University.

The rugged range was also responsible for a bit of unique Kiwi cuisine: the Tararua biscuit. Loaded with rolled oats and sugar, these biscuits were hard, heavy and practically indestructible. Trampers loved them; they were packed with calories, never lost their shape in the bottom of a backpack and were still edible months after they were baked. How hard are they? At one time mothers used them for their teething babies.

These days you rarely see Tararua biscuits in a hut, and some Kiwi trampers don't even know the history behind them, much less ever consume one. But if you are a patron of the past and want to make a batch before your next tramp, here is one recipe:

- 2½ cups of rolled oats
- 1½ cups of flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup of butter
- 1 tablespoon of molasses
- ½ teaspoon of salt

Cream the butter and mix with the other ingredients. Add enough water to make a stiff, nonsticky dough. Roll out the dough on a flour-dusted board to a thickness of 10mm. Cut into 50 round biscuits (which some trampers claim better resist breakage), or square ones (which are easier to pack). Bake at 180°C for 10 to 15 minutes, or until golden but not brown.

Follow the well-graded Gentle Annie Track southwest (left fork), climbing steadily towards Mountain House. Approximately one hour from Holdsworth Lodge you reach **Rocky Lookout**, from where there are good views of Powell Hut and, for those with sharp eyes, the trig on Mt Holdsworth.

The track sidles around to the junction with Totara Creek Track (the route of the Totara Flats Track, p125), approximately 45 minutes from Rocky Lookout. Continue north (signposted) to Pig Flat, and cross to a track leading to **Mountain House**.

Built by the Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club, Mountain House is about two hours from Holdsworth Lodge. It is listed as having accommodation for 20 people, but it is badly run-down, with no mattresses and a shabby interior. Powell Hut is a further one- to two-hour tramp and a much more pleasant place to spend the night.

A benched track has been extended past Mountain House towards Powell Hut. The well-marked track begins with a steep climb

and in 45 minutes emerges from the bush-line into subalpine scrub. The track is badly rutted in places along this stretch, and can be something of a slosh when it's raining. Follow the track along the ridge line up to **Powell Hut** (32 bunks).

Originally built in 1939, rebuilt in 1981 and then burnt to the ground in 1999, the hut was rebuilt again within a year because it is one of the most popular spots in the park to spend a night. The new hut has a gas heater and gas stove. There is also an excellent view of the surrounding mountains and valleys from its veranda. If the night is clear you can watch the lights of Masterton appear after sunset.

## Day 2: Powell Hut to Jumbo Hut

3½–4 hours, 7km, 270m ascent, 260m descent

The rest of the climb to Mt Holdsworth is technically a route, with very few markers or cairns, but the trip is so popular that a track has been worn to the peak and most of the way to Jumbo Hut. Fill your water bottle before leaving Powell Hut, because there is little water along the ridge.

Heading northwest, climb steeply for 15 to 20 minutes until you reach a small knob at 1330m with a battered sign on top. Below is Powell Hut; above, in good weather, you can see the trig on Mt Holdsworth. It takes another 30 to 45 minutes of tramping along the ridge to reach the trig. From the summit of **Mt Holdsworth** (1470m) there are excellent views of Mt Hector, the main Tararua Range, and the small towns along SH2.

Three ridges come together at Mt Holdsworth. The track from Powell Hut follows one ridge, while another is marked by an obvious route that heads first northwest, then west towards Mid Waiohine Hut (two hours). Those heading to Jumbo Hut (sign-posted) need to go east. You almost have to backtrack a few steps from the trig to pick up the partially worn track that drops quickly to the ridge below.

Once on the ridge it takes 1½ to two hours to reach Jumbo Hut. The route climbs a number of knobs: the first is marked with a rock cairn near the top, the second involves working around some rock outcrops on the way up, and the third, **Jumbo**, is really a pair of knobs with several small tarns between them. As a side trip you can continue along the main ridge to Angle Knob, about 40 minutes away, where there are some good views.

Jumbo peak's southern knob has a small cairn at one side; a track running along the east-sloping ridge begins here, and it's a steady 30-minute descent to Jumbo Hut. Within 20 minutes you come to a spot on

the ridge where it's possible to see the hut far below. **Jumbo Hut** (30 bunks) was built in 1982, upgraded in 1993, and has excellent views from its veranda. At night you can see the lights of Masterton, Carterton and Greytown, and if you get up early on a clear morning the sunrise is spectacular.

It's a reasonably short tramp from Powell Hut to Jumbo Hut, so an enjoyable afternoon can be spent exploring the ridges to the north and viewing prominent features such as Broken Axe Pinnacle or the Three Kings.

### Day 3: Jumbo Hut to Holdsworth Lodge

3–4 hours, 9km, 890m descent

Just south of the hut is a benched track heading southeast. This is the beginning of the descent along Raingauge Spur. The track is well marked, although steep and slippery, especially during wet weather. It should take about one hour to reach the bottom of this track.

The hut, built in 1968, is clean and well maintained, although its location is less than inspiring. Just upstream are some shaded river flats, used occasionally as camp sites.

The track from the hut to Holdsworth Lodge is well defined and level. In the past, Jumbo Creek and Holdsworth Creek posed problems in wet weather – in fact they were downright dangerous. Now they are bridged, making for an all-weather track. Soon after the bridge across Holdsworth

Creek, you come to a junction. The trail to the west (right) climbs steeply to Mountain House (one to 1½ hours).

The main track is well formed at this point, and runs along the stream, past a small gorge, to **Donnelly Flat**. This is a traditional camping area, and only 1km from Holdsworth Lodge. A 15-minute loop track at the flat passes through tall stands of podocarp forest – rimu, matai and kahikatea. The walk from Donnelly Flat to Holdsworth Lodge backtracks along the starting route for part of the way. It's about 15 minutes to the lodge from the junction with Gentle Annie Track.

## TOTARA FLATS TRACK

<b>Duration</b>	3 days
<b>Distance</b>	37km
<b>Track Standard</b>	tramping track
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start</b>	Holdsworth Lodge (p122)
<b>Finish</b>	Kaitoke car park
<b>Nearest Towns</b>	Masterton (p121), Wellington (p97)
<b>Transport</b>	private
<b>Summary</b>	Although located in the rugged Tararua Range, this tramp involves no alpine crossings and follows river valleys most of the way.

This is a good tramp for less-experienced trampers who may be unsure about crossing

open, unmarked, alpine ridge routes in the Tararuas. This is a low-level tramp – the maximum altitude gain is only 740m – along a track that is well marked and signposted at every junction.

Although it can be tramped in either direction, vandalism and theft are problems at Kaitoke car park so trampers with their own vehicles are better off starting at Holdsworth Lodge, where there is a safer car park.

## PLANNING

### When to Tramp

This tramp can be done year-round.

## Maps

The 1:100,000 Parkmap 274-02 (*Tararua Forest Park*) is handy for this tramp.

## Huts

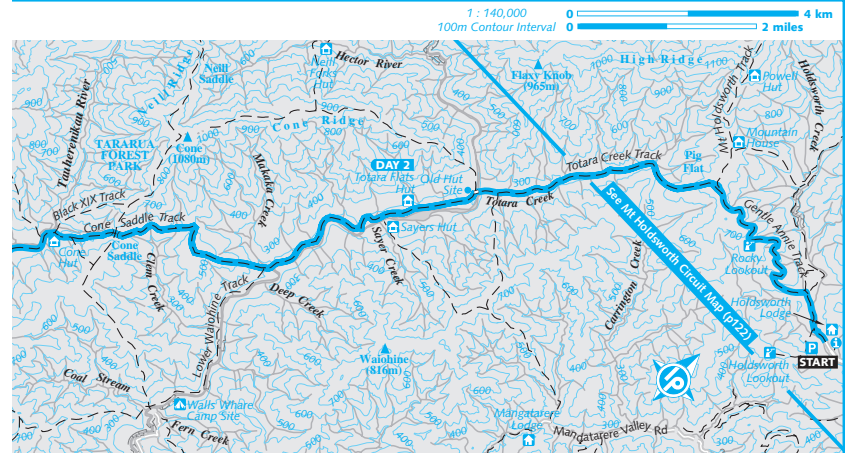
Huts en route are the Serviced **Totara Flats Hut** (\$10) and **Tutuwai Hut** (\$10), and the Standard **Sayers Hut** (\$5) and **Cone Hut** (\$5), as well as the **Smith Creek Shelter** (free).

## GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

For information on getting to Holdsworth Lodge see p122.

The Kaitoke car park, on Marchant Rd, is a 30-minute walk from SH2 and Kaitoke. **Tranz Metro** (☎ 04-891 7000; www.tranzmetro.co.nz) trains make the trip between Wellington and Upper Hutt (\$6) five times daily on weekdays, and twice daily on weekends.

## Totara Flats Track



Unfortunately, the train does not go to Kaitoke, which is 11km north of Upper Hutt along SH2.

## THE TRAMP

### Day 1: Holdsworth Lodge to Totara Flats Hut

4–5 hours, 12km

The track departs west from the lodge on a wide gravel path, crosses a footbridge over Atiwhakatu Stream and immediately passes a track to Holdsworth Lookout (30 minutes away). Another junction is 200m further on.

Follow the well-graded Gentle Annie Track southwest (left fork), climbing steadily towards Mountain House. Approximately one hour from Holdsworth Lodge you reach **Rocky Lookout**, from where there are good views of Powell Hut and, for those with sharp eyes, the trig on Mt Holdsworth.

The track sidles around to the signposted junction to Totara Flats. Take the left fork (south), which begins with a steep descent along a well-worn track – so worn in places it looks like a gully. The track drops 400m in less than one hour before crossing Totara Creek – an easy ford most of the time. On the true right (west) side the track becomes a level walk, only occasionally climbing to avoid steep embankments. Look for discs and rock cairns to help you stay on the track.

One hour (2.5km) from the creek crossing, the track reaches the confluence of Totara Creek and the Waiohine River. Crossing the footbridge, the track continues south, immediately coming to the site where the Old Totara Flats Hut once stood, now a nice place to camp.

The track descends near the river and then emerges onto **Totara Flats**, a 2km-long grassy area, easily the largest clearing in the Tararuas. Across the flats, 20 minutes from the old hut site, the track leads around a stand of trees to the new **Totara Flats Hut** (24 bunks), at the edge of the bush-line. The hut is by far the most pleasant place to stay along the route. It has gas cookers, mattresses, a warden (on weekends) and a sweeping view of the flats. You can also see Mt Holdsworth to the north, as well as the foothills you'll soon be climbing over to the south.

For an interesting side trip, tramp up the Waiohine River Gorge – best done in the water when the river is at a normal level.

If Totara Flats Hut is too crowded, there's always **Sayers Hut** (eight bunks), on the opposite side of the river, halfway down the flats. It's an older hut with an interesting interior, but it's easy to miss.

### Day 2: Totara Flats Hut to Tutuwai Hut

4½–5 hours, 12km

Cut across the grassy area, past Sayers Hut, to the bluff at the southern end of Totara Flats, where the track ascends to the right (southwest). It returns to the Waiohine River and immediately climbs another bluff. When water levels are normal this extra climbing can be avoided by simply following the Waiohine and fording it as needed.

About 1½ hours from Totara Flats Hut, the track swings inland. It's identified by its sharp descent and the distinctive S-curve of the Waiohine at this point. Cross Makaka Creek several metres upstream from its confluence with the Waiohine, then pass through a dry creek bed and climb a short distance up a steep embankment.

On top of the embankment, the track swings right and climbs again to reach a signposted junction with the Cone Saddle Track (southwest) and the track to Walls Whare camp site (which continues south along the river terraces).

Cone Saddle Track (right fork) begins with a steep climb of 300m to a roundish knob, and then sidles down to Clem Creek; the track reappears on the other side of the creek and is marked by a large cairn. It then makes a gentle ascent to **Cone Saddle** and a signposted junction of four tracks.

Continue southwest towards the Tauherenikau River, following the track down a steep, 240m descent over the next 30 minutes. The path arrives at **Cone Hut** (12 bunks), a historic slab hut still used occasionally by those who like to reminisce about tramping in days gone by. There are excellent camp sites just a short way downriver.

The last segment of the day is a 3km tramp across grassy flats. Most of the time the track remains just below the bush-line, but it's easy to make your own way across the flat for a much more scenic tramp. Eventually a sign points to a hut on a terrace above the river (one hour from Cone Hut).

**Tutuwai Hut** (20 bunks) has mattresses, a gas stove and a nice view of the river flats.

### Day 3: Tutuwai Hut to Kaitoke Car Park

5–6 hours, 13km

Twenty minutes after leaving Tutuwai Hut, you arrive at a swing bridge across the Tauherenikau River. If the river is flooded, an all-weather track on the true right (west) side will keep you away from the water by ascending the bluffs that surround most side streams. There are some steep climbs around Blue Rock and Boulder Streams, but the views of the valley are worth the effort.

The alternative is to tramp along (sometimes in) the river to Smith Creek Shelter; in normal conditions this would involve following the flats most of the way, with an occasional ford to avoid the steep bluffs.

As the track nears Marchant Stream it swings inland. The stream is easily identified by the cable strung across it to assist trampers during flooded conditions. When the water level is normal you can cross it without getting your boots wet. **Smith Creek Shelter** (20 bunks), 10 to 15 minutes from the stream, is in sad shape because of its close proximity to the road; there are no mattresses, no tables and no water.

The track from the shelter is a popular day walk. It's a wide path most of the way, and soon passes a track (right) to the former Dobsons Shelter site (the hut was removed in 1994). It crosses a tributary of Smith Creek after one hour, and then begins a steep climb to **Puffer Saddle**, reached after the track sidles the ridge for the last few hundred metres. From the saddle there are impressive views of the sheep stations and farms in the Hutt River valley.

From here it's a 30-minute descent, with good views, to the car park. You'll also pass the signposted Southern Crossing Track (right) to Marchant Ridge and Alpha Hut.

## MORE TRAMPS

### WAIRARAPA COAST Honeycomb Rock Track

This easy track leads 9km to Honeycomb Rock, a large outcrop on the Wairarapa coast with a surface that resembles the cell-like pattern of a honeycomb. Foul weather

is responsible for the unusual rock, and also for the wreck of the *Tuvalu*, a Fijian vessel that ran aground a few metres south of Honeycomb Rock in 1967. As if a wreck and a rock weren't already enough reason to walk the track, a fur seal colony can also be viewed. The trailhead is 60km east of Masterton at the end of Glenburn Rd. Pick up DOC's *Honeycomb Rock Walking Track* from the **DOC Wellington Conservation Information Centre** (☎ 04-472 7356; Old Government Bldg, Lambton Quay) – and possibly other DOC offices and visitor information centres – and plan on five to six hours for a return walk.

### WHANGANUI NATIONAL PARK Mangapurua Track

This is a 40km track between Whakahoro and the Mangapurua Landing, both on the Whanganui River. The track skirts the Mangapurua and Kaiwhakauka Streams, both tributaries of the Whanganui River.

Between these valleys a side track leads to the Mangapurua trig (663m). This is the highest point in the area, from where, on a clear day, you can see the volcanoes of the Tongariro and Egmont National Parks. The route passes through land that was cleared by settlers earlier last century but later abandoned. The famous Bridge to Nowhere, a large concrete structure built in 1936, is 40 minutes from the Mangapurua Landing end of the track.

The track takes 20 hours and is usually tramped in three to four days. Apart from the Whakahoro Hut, at the Whakahoro end of the track, there are no huts. There are, however, many fine places for camping, with toilets, and water available from numerous small streams. There is road access at the Whakahoro end, and from a side track leading to the end of the Ruatiti Valley–Ohura Rd coming from Raetihi. Most trampers catch a jetboat downriver from Mangapurua Landing to Pipiriki; **Whanganui River Adventures** (☎ 0800-862 743, 06-385 3246; www.whanganuiriveradventures.co.nz) will pick up or drop off trampers for \$80 per person. You will need three maps of the 1:50,000 Topomap 260 series: R20 (*Matemateaonga*), S19 (*Raurimu*) and S20 (*Ohakune*). For information contact the **DOC Area Office** (☎ 06-348 8475; 74 Ingestre St, Wanganui).



### Atene Skyline Walk

This 18km-long, virtually perfect loop, is located along the Whanganui River Rd, just north of Parakino and around 36km north of Wanganui. The tramp starts off slightly ominously, with a steep 260m climb, but then follows a ridge line to Taumata trig (523m) and sandstone bluffs, before descending back down to the road. There are spectacular views of Mt Taranaki, Mt Ruapehu and the Whanganui River from numerous vantage points along the track. The total tramping time is six to eight hours, and the route is rated as moderate. Follow the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-T22 (*Mangaweka*), and for more information about the tramp and the area contact the **DOC Area Office** (☎ 06-348 8475; 74 Ingestre St, Wanganui).

### RUAHINE FOREST PARK

#### Sunrise Track

This is the most popular tramp on the east side of Ruahine Forest Park, as it's the easiest route to the alpine world above the bush-line. The well-benched and maintained track climbs steadily for about 2½ hours to **Sunrise Hut** (\$10), nestled in a tussock basin overlooking a small tarn. From the eight-bunk hut it's a 30-minute climb west to Armstrong Saddle, with views across the Ruahine Range to Mt Ruapehu on clear days. Sunrise Track starts at a car park at the end of North Block, reached from SH50 via Wakarara Rd, just north of Ongaonga. The 1:50,000 Topomap 260-U22 (*Ongaonga*) covers the track. For details contact the **DOC Palmerston North Area Office** (☎ 06-350 9700; 717 Tremaine Ave, Palmerston North).