

TONGARIRO ALPINE CROSSING

260 Series Map: Tongariro T19

Topo50 Map: BH34 Raurimu & BH35 Turangi

How to get to START: Exit Taupo on SH1 down the lake for 47km in 45 minutes to Turangi then:

- Follow the Desert Road (**SH1**) and turn off right on to SH46 for Rangipo
- At 13km on **SH46** from the junction there is a turn left on to gravel road for Ketetahi – this is where you will end up
- Continue on **SH46** to the T-junction with **SH47** where you turn left
- At 90km (1:15 min) left on to gravel road for Mangatepopo & Tongariro Crossing – speed limit 40kph
- Park and off-load at car park with toilets at 96km and about 1 hour 30 minutes driving from Taupo.

Distances and times are taken from the Police Station in Taupo and the route can be followed opposite as the bright red line. The tramp route is the blue line.

Rough Description: One of the must-do walks on the North Island which takes 6 – 7 hours of fairly strenuous effort over 19 kilometres (GPS) with a few extra kilometres allowable for height gained, there is a lot of that.

The old, infamous, rocky, steep “staircase” from Soda Springs at the top of the Mangatepopo Valley has been “retired” and there is now an endless series of staircases on an otherwise easy-gradient path up to South Crater. The route of the new staircase footpath is through impressive scoria areas, this new track opened in summer-time 2008. The new path is longer than the old staircase but is actually quicker and it gets continually upgraded

Careful planning and attention to the weather must be applied. The tramp starts at 1100masl at Mangatepopo, rises to about 1800m on Red Crater then falls to 760 at the northern car park near Lake Rotoaira Road so be prepared for some serious temperature drop as the ascent is made. If high winds or other inclement weather is forecast think twice before starting and ensure full wet-weather and cold gear is carried plus, especially in warm weather, in excess of a couple of litres of water – there is no potable water easily available once you start. The path is first rate all the way up and through South Crater then it gets a bit tricky ascending up towards Red Crater and can be downright treacherous on some parts – though this section of track is worse to descend than ascend. The descent from Red Crater to the Emerald Lakes is very loose and rough and caution is needed. The path from near the Blue Lake down to and past the Ketetahi Shelter is good.

Detail: Make an early start from Taupo (6:30 – 7:00am) as it takes 90 minutes to drive the 96km to Mangatepopo car park (**WP1** 1129masl) where car parking can be congested and space to park limited. There are often several coaches, vans and cars off-loading some hundreds of people about to do the crossing – most of these people want to use the toilets so there will be a queue. The path starts on a section of boardwalk near the toilets and heads off up-valley basically in an easterly direction.

Within 1km a new toilet (**T1**) is found then the sign for the path to Whakapapa is reached (**WP2**1186masl) and 5 minutes later there is a branch off left (**WP3**1169masl) to the Mangatepopo Hut – this is intentional to stop all the day trippers going to the hut. After 30 minutes a small valley is crossed and the track becomes undulating as the first gentle ascent of the day is made. There is a level area with boardwalk (**WP4**1283masl) after 55 min walking, then the valley of the Mangatepopo Stream becomes narrower and there are intermittent sections of boardwalk. The path is pretty good up to the sign for Soda Springs - about an hour. Read all the warning notices before starting the “staircase” to pass a bridge (**WP05**1390masl) leading to toilets (**T2**). The view of the ascent is quite daunting, especially with all the ant-like figures following each other up in an endless chain but, in fact, ascending the “staircase” is not too taxing and one requires 45 minutes to an hour depending on fitness and like or dislike of stairs.

Passing Mangatepopo hut



The views back over one’s shoulder are great, especially to see how far above the toilets one climbs so quickly, and a feeling of achievement is felt on reaching the plateau area at the top in about 2 hours (**WP6**1678masl) with the sign for the ascent of Ngauruhoe going off to the right. The pleasure of stretching the stride can now be enjoyed for 15 minutes or so as progress is made through South Crater where the track is billiard table smooth and as wide as a motorway; the midway point (**WP7**1657masl) in the crater is reached in about 2:15 – 2:30 minutes total walking time.

South Crater in winter time

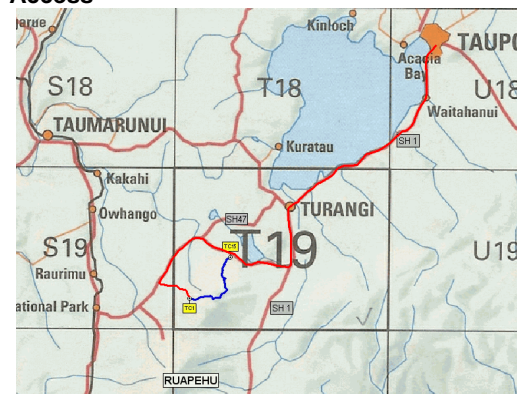


At the eastern edge of South Crater the next “grunt” section begins with a steep, rough and often slippery slope of almost 200m to ascend to get to the turn-off for Mnt Tongariro then the crest at Red Crater. On the way up this slope there is a very noticeable upstanding remnant of “rock-wall” (**WP8**1710masl) or boulder to pass and Red Crater is a fantastic sight on the way up, this crest (**WP9**1876masl) is reached in around 3:30 minutes walking. From the crest there is a spectacular view of the next target – the Emerald Lakes (**WP10**1734masl). However care must be taken on the descent as it is entirely on loose ash and pumice – the fit and agile can “skate” down this in a matter of minutes but the less agile take considerably longer and the use of walking poles can be essential for some. The Emerald Lakes make a good lunch spot.

NZ Grid GPS: Geodetic Datum 1949

NZTM GPS: NZTM on WGS84

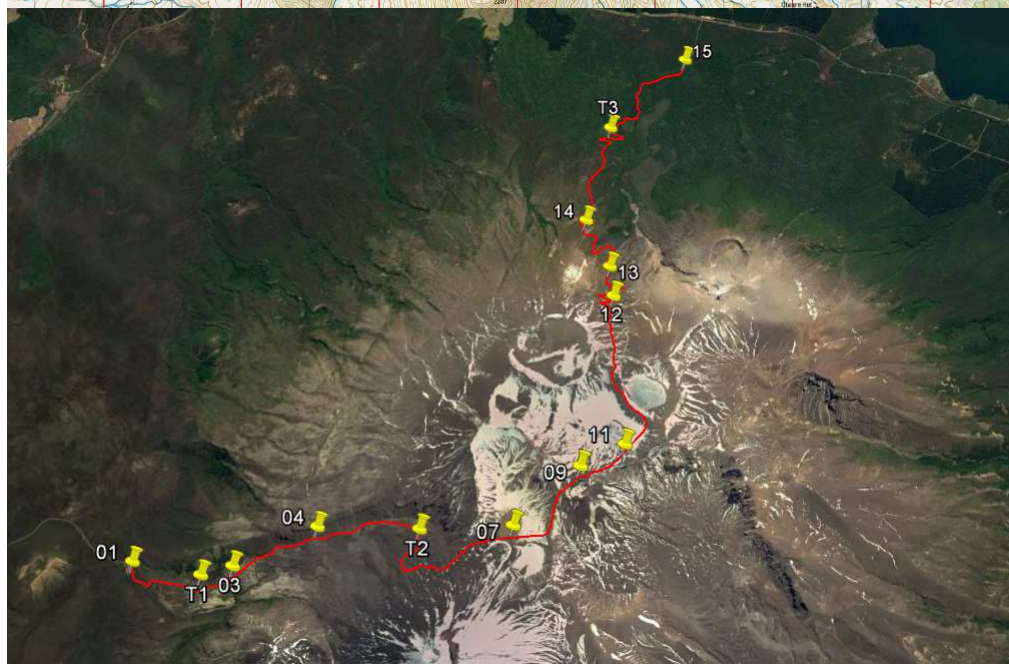
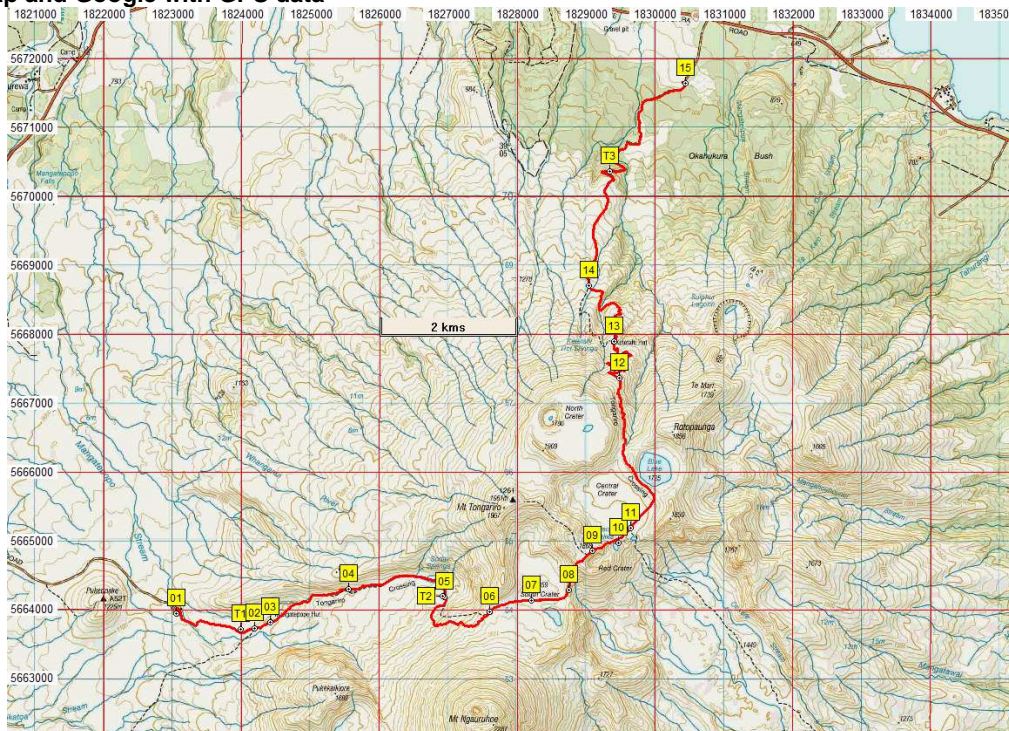
Access



Morning tea below the old staircase



Map and Google with GPS data



Staircase track



The rock wall



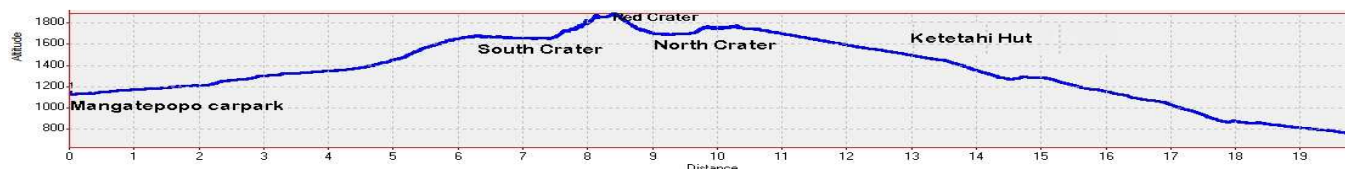
Red Crater



Descent to Emerald Lakes



Emerald Lakes



N...	Easting	Northing	Alt(m)	Description
01	1823054	5663943	1129	Car park at end of Mangatepopo access road
T1	1823996	5663723	1177	Toilet before Mangatepopo Hut (New 2017)
02	1824188	5663728	1186	25min (1.43km); Junction to track from Whakapapa
03	1824421	5663824	1169	30min (1.7km); Sign for Mangatepopo Hut off to LHS
04	1825546	5664294	1283	52min (3km); Level area with boardwalk then narrow valley and intermittent boardwalk
05	1826946	5664182	1390	Bridge to new toilets (2017)
T2	1826919	5664198	1390	1:30min (4.7km); Toilets (New 2017)
06	1827608	5663970	1678	2:03min (6.3km); Notice for turn off to Ngauruhoe (3hrs return trip)
07	1828203	5664136	1657	2:32min (7km); Motorway like path in middle of South Crater
08	1828749	5664285	1710	2:44min (7.6km); Below large rock wall on lower slope of Red Crater ascent
09	1829094	5664852	1876	3:15min (8.4km); Summit of Red Crater short distance past T-junction off left for Tongariro summit
10	1829477	5664972	1734	3:39min (8.9km); Above Emerald Lakes (good lunch spot in good weather)
11	1829651	5665188	1701	3:43min (9.2km); Junction with path off right to Oturere Hut
12	1829480	5667358	1619	4:32min (11.8km); Section of path with view of Ketetahi Shelter
13	1829404	5667890	1450	5:04min (13.5km); Ketetahi Shelter
14	1829044	5668701	1287	5:38min (15km); 20min from Ketetahi Shelter at junction where new track (2011) meets old track
T3	1829339	5670369	1000	Toilet at bushline (New 2017)
15	1830439	5671641	783	6:54min (19.9km); Northern car park at end of Tongariro Crossing

On leaving the Emerald Lakes the route follows NNE across the eastern side of the Central Crater, passing the sign-posted track off right to the Oturere Hut (**WP11 1701masl**) then climbs up on to the ridge above the Blue Lake which runs to the NW. When there is snow on the ground it can be easier to track almost due north through the Central Crater and avoid the icy climb up on to the above mentioned ridge but only experienced trampers and navigators should do this – in fact the inexperienced should not expose themselves to the risks in this location when there is snow and ice on the ground, unless they are with an experienced winter guide. Once past Blue Lake the path goes downhill pretty rapidly but the path is good with many zigzags to reduce the slope and strain on the knees – a view of the Ketetahi Shelter is found on a section of recently refurbished path at about 4:30 min (**WP12 1619masl**) and the hut (**WP13 1450masl**) is reached about 40 minutes later.

The Ketetahi Hut was quite smart with sleeping capacity for around 20 until the Te Mari Crater blew up and rocks smashed the hut rather badly. The basic structure has been left so that the deck can act as basic shelter for day walkers – there is no access to the hut. There are toilets for the day walkers and there are still rumours that the hut will be relocated to a safer location to offer sleeping accommodation but this seems to only be a rumour.

The previously mapped track path immediately below and north west of the hut was not of good standard, especially the section past the hot springs. But this section of track has been closed (2011) the way down heads virtually due north from the east edge of the deck in front of the shelter – estimated time down is 90 minutes. This new section of track joins the previous track at **WP14 1287masl** some 20 minutes from the hut. The old track can be seen on the extract of the topographic map above.

Virtually all of this section of the track was quite recently upgraded and going is fast and easy till the tree line is reached where there is a seat and yet another new toilet (**T3**). From here onwards there are numerous steps and care should be taken since tiredness will set in and trips and slips can occur. Once over the first “real” bridge the slopes ease and progress speeds up again but be aware there are two or three very rough, rocky areas where no upgrading has been done and extreme caution must be taken by the tired and weary.

There is also the odd sting in the tail via short ascents but none of these ascents are large. Once over the third bridge the tramp is nearly over and the car park (**WP15 783masl**) is arrived at after around 6 to 7 hours of hard walking.

Cool author trying to use camera



Ngauruhoe with lava flows and new DoC track



As previously mentioned, during summer 2008 the “Devil’s Staircase” was closed and a new path opened. This new path as shown on the map is routed to the east of the old route and passes through impressive scoria landscape. However, though longer with many steps and stairs involved the path may be easier to some and is quicker but tired legs can still fail and trips and spills still happen. Careful study of the photograph on the left can determine the line of the new track as it winds up the lower slopes of Ngauruhoe. The original Devil’s Staircase was in the middle of the eroded area lying to the left of the obvious bluffs.

<p>Notes:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPS Garmin GPSMap60 CSx • WP = Waypoint as taken by GPS unit • masl = metres above sea level as recorded by GPS unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Time: 7hrs 00 min • Total Walk Time: 6hrs 30 min • Refreshment Time: 30 mins • Total walk (km): 20+ km • Overall altitude gain: 720m • Total ascent: 1,138m (GPS Data)
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