



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Tramping the Tongariro Crossing

by Amaru & Suzanne, March 3rd 2007

Tongariro Crossing is supposed to be one of New Zealand's best one day hikes. We hadn't done any hiking together, before we arrived in NZ, but we decided that a day hike would be a good way to start.

We had planned to do this hike (or tramp as they call it here in NZ) for quite some time now. We had purchased some good shoes for walking (which are going to be perfect for us when we travel as well), found some good rain coats that take no room in our bags and also an extra daypack since we only had one to start with.

Now we just had to find out how to get to the start of the hike and then home from the end of it. After reading online forums and some travel guides, what seemed to be the best option was to stay in Taupo and then get on a bus that would take us to and from the crossing. The bad thing about this is that it's a bus ride of an hour and a half each way. We didn't quite feel like getting up at 5am, sitting on a bus for 90min, walking for 8 hours and then having to do the bus again.



Tongariro National Park
New Zealand's first National Park

After some more searching on the net we found a place in the national park village that offered a B&B deal and also did drop-offs and pick-ups from the Tongariro Crossing, the place we found was "**Adventure Lodge**".

We booked their "Tongariro Crossing Freedom Package" which includes; two nights accommodation, 1 BBQ dinner, 2 breakfasts and one packed lunch to bring with us on our walk. It was just perfect and you can't complain about the location either. It only takes about 10-15min in the morning to the start of the track and around 20min in the afternoon!



Adventure Lodge
Our home away from home!

Both of us took the Friday off from work and after 5 hours driving we were in the National Park, where the weather was quite bad. It was raining and you couldn't really see more than 100m ahead of you. We checked in and were shown to our lodge (a very nice cabin) and then had a chat with one of the owners, Lorraine, about what the weather might be like the next day during our hike.

She informed us that according to the weather report it should be "mostly fine", but then she said that according to the same weather information there shouldn't be any clouds above us at this time. Great....we might be doing the hike during lots and lots of rain, can't wait.

Tongariro National Park has been granted dual World Heritage status for its natural beauty and the cultural importance it represents to the local Maori. The park exists due to a Maori chief who gave away the area to the New Zealand Government in 1887. This way the mountains were secured for all people, for all time.

The park is surrounded by a trio of active volcanoes; Tongariro, Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, all of them very active volcanoes. Ruapehu, which is the highest peak of the north island, last erupted in 1995.

The National park is also where the scenes of "Mordor" and some other scenes were filmed for the movie the *Lord of The Rings*. If you've seen the movies, can you recall the scene from the last movie when the two hobbits were climbing up the mountain to destroy the ring? Well, that's pretty much part of the walk that we were getting ourselves ready to do.

Well, since the weather was all wet and there wasn't much that we could do that night we spent some time in the spa, had a nice gourmet pizza for dinner and went to bed early, hoping that the weather would clear up for the next morning.



The alarm rings at 7am and we have a quick peak out the window.....we could see blue sky!! We got lucky with the weather.



After a nice and sturdy breakfast we were driven to the start of the track at the Mangatepopo Roadend. And we were certainly not alone.... Remember when I told you about the bus tours from Taupo? Well, there were quite a few of them here, plus a few other buses from other locations as well.

Suz and I started the trek and did it by walking quite slowly so that most people could pass us. It was almost like being in the mids of travelling lemmings.

The Tongariro Crossing is a hike of 17 kilometres (for our Brittish and American friends that's about 11 miles), and it's not like this is just a nice stroll over even flat ground.... no way, you have to climb a mountain or two to get to the end.

The hike is usually divided into 6 differnt parts (I guess to make this hike seem a bit shorter than it really is). These parts are:

1. Mangatepopo Car Park to Soda Springs
2. Soda Springs to South Crater
3. South Crater to Red Crater
4. Red Crater to Blue Lake
5. Blue Lake to Ketetahi Hut
6. Ketetahi Hut to Ketetahi Car Park

The first part of the hike is a very nice stroll alongside a stream (we were told that no water along the track should be used as drinking water due to its high content of minerals), crossing some damper parts on board walks and just making our way to Soda Springs which are some beautiful small waterfalls.



Walking towards Soda springs we could see a small building up ahead with some long lines behind it, this was the last toilet before the Ketetahi Hut (some 4 hours away). And behind the toilets we could see that the trek was about to get harder, it looked like quite a steep climb. Once we cleared the toilet stop we were ready to hit section 2 of the track!



This is where the hike changes from a nice stroll in the park to a murderous climb. This part is called the Devils Staircase and it climbs from 1400 to 1600 meters above sea level.

We dragged ourselves upwards, here and there stopping to catch our breath and have a look down the mountain, far far away we could see people just starting the climb, just small dots from where we were. I ran ahead of Suz on a couple of occasions and snapped a few photos here and there of her, I also took a video or two of her while she struggled up the mountain.....and boy did I get the evil eyes!! I think Suz was starting to regret her decision to do this hike (considering we still had about 6 hours of it to go!)

Good thing I was ahead of her and not within reach at this time =))

After a well deserved rest we set off again and crossed the South Crater, section 3 of our hike. It's very nice to be on a flat surface after such a climb. Walking across the crater was quite eery since the whole section was covered in mist...

But... we soon hit the our next climb and this time we were walking towards the Red Crater, at 1900 meters. At this time we couldn't see much since the clouds were upon us again so we just kept walking upwards.

At the top of the Red Crater we had another small bite and waited for the clouds to clear. We hadn't come this far just to miss out on one of the main events. We stood there staring into the crater and realized that it still looked beautiful, even in the mist and just after we said that the sky opened and the sun came through.... Now we could really see the Red Crater in all its glory. What a sight...!!



A few more steps and we were able to gaze upon the Emerald Lakes, three small lakes which get their colors from the minerals leaked from the surrounding rock. Now this is what we had come to see, now we could just turn around and go back home.... ;))

Well, since we are pretty much halfway through the crossing we continued on ;) (yeah, like we would turn around now!!), passing the blue lake and moving from a Volcanic area to nature more likely to be found in the alps.

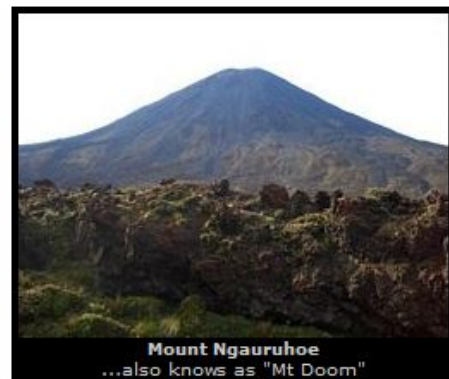
We had a fairly clear view of what lay ahead of us and we could see all the way to Lake Taupo.

Our next stop was the Ketetahi Hut - or more importantly, the next toilet stop - and we could see it waaaaaay ahead of us, it didn't look that far away but there was no direct route there and we just had to follow the small road leading us there.

From here we were just thinking about reaching the car park, after a while you felt like you had seen it all and this part of the hike turned out to be quite boring. Pretty soon we entered a forrest region and thought that we had to be there soon. The forrest was nice to walk through, the only downside was that you couldn't see the end of it.

We passed some nice streams, walked past some other hikers and just wanted to have it all over with.....and finally it was!

We had reached the end of the hike and got our photo taken at the end, just to be able to keep track on how long we were on the hike. We managed to do it in 7 hours and 45 min, we had almost 6l of water with us and drank 5.5 litres between the both of us.



Here at the end of the track we met the other couple that had been driven to the beginning with us, they had been waiting there for about half an hour already.... They must have kept quite a pace!!



We were soon picked up by Ron (the other owner of our lodge) and taken back to the lodge where we had a quick shower to clean off the sweat and dust and then we jumped into the spa.... You can't imagine how nice the spa felt after the hike we had just been through!

Our night was finished by a great BBQ meal and then we literally crashed into our bed.

We finished our trip by driving a different route back to Auckland, we drove past Taupo since we decided that it didn't have anything we needed to see at this time and decided to stop in Rotorua (remember the town we blogged about a while ago that smells like eggs??) and visit the Polynesian Spa, we didn't get the chance last time we were down here. Now we really needed a nice, sulphur bath. We stayed in the

42C water for almost an hour and our joints and muscles felt a lot better after this.

This was our best weekend in New Zealand so far, the Tongariro Crossing was excellent, it's hard work on some occasions but it's really worth it. The views from the top are absolutely amazing and even though we had some clear moments we can imagine how mesmerizing it must be on a clear day. We would recommend anyone to do this!!



Soda Springs
A nice walk up to this point



On the Devils staircase
...Suz giving me the evil eye!



It might not look like it but
this climb is around 300m (in height)



People tramping their
way up to the top



Volcanic Rock
Lots and lots and lots of it



Finally on top
...and what a view!



Just enjoying the view
about 2.5 hours along the way



Suz and I
Having our lunch break



**Suz walking across
the South Crater**



The South Crater
The mist makes it look so eery!



On our way to the Red Crater
Looking back down on the South Crater



The Red Crater
It's quite an impressive sight



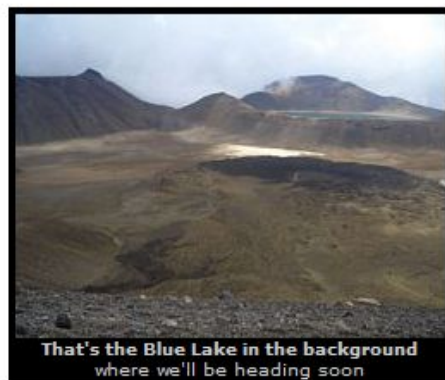
We made it to the Red Crater
and it took us almost 4 hours to get here



Suz and I
Looking down onto the Emerald Lakes



A long line of people
making their way down to the lakes



That's the Blue Lake in the background
where we'll be heading soon



The Emerald Lakes
This is what this area is known for!



Quite steep and very loose so a kind of skiing is required to get down



Suz
Making her way down



A few sulphuric exits here and there makes it smell like.....rotten eggs



Suz at the lake
Taking a well deserved rest



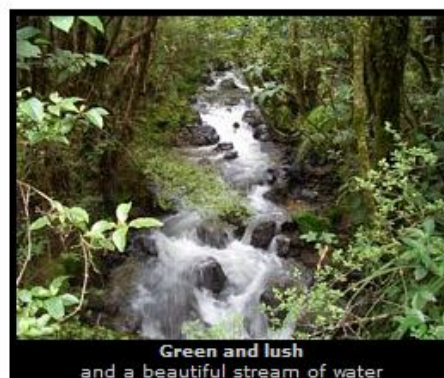
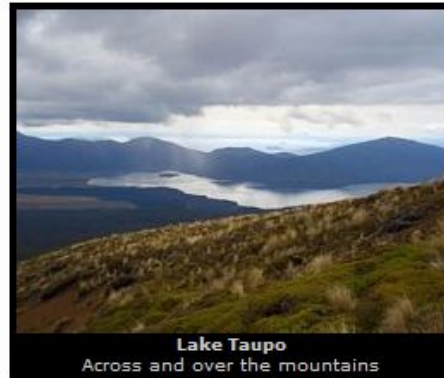
Looking out over Mordor...
It's easy to see why they choose this area



Halfway!
Only another 4 hours to go....



Fresh as a Daisy
...bring it on!





Finally the end of the track!
and we did it in 7 hours 45min



A sign for the Kiwi bird
with Mt Ngauruhoe in the background



Mt Ngauruhoe
at night



A nice hot spa is the best!!
Specially after almost an 8 hours hike



A small model
showing what we'd walked



The Polynesian Spa
In Rotorua



42C water
Does wonders for sore muscles



A bit of rain came over us
and it was great!

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