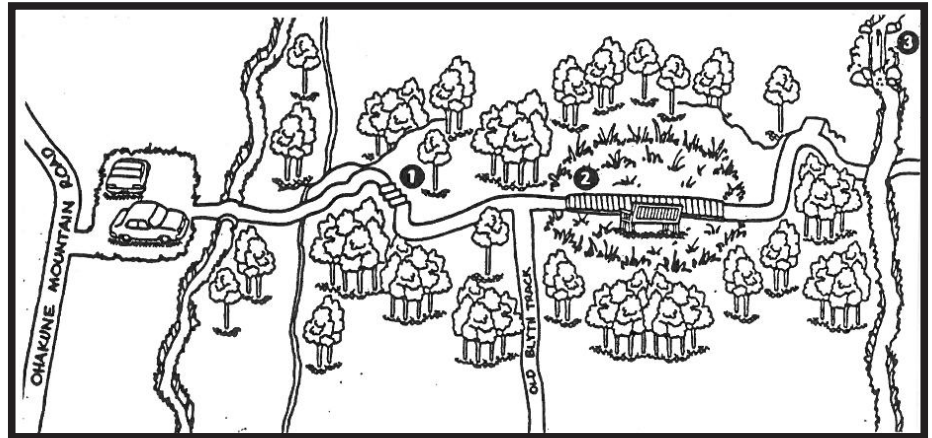


Waitonga Falls Walk

WHERE: Track begins from the parking area 11kms up the Ohakune Mountain Road

WALKING TIME: 1 hour 20 minutes return

GRADE: Walking track with moderate hills; Moderate level of fitness required



Tongariro National Park's highest waterfall, the 39 meter Waitonga Falls

is reached via a well formed track through mountain beech and kaikawaka (mountain cedar) forest. From the car park the track leads you over a stream via a swing bridge and climbs through the forest for about 10-15 minutes over a gentle ridge. Near the end of this climb a good bit of height is gained quickly via the 'gantry' (a wooden staircase) (1). From the top there are sweeping views to the south, back towards Ohakune and the rugged landscape beyond. Take heart from this point, because the worst of the climbing is over.

On your way up keep an eye out for the 'banded' beech trees. These trees are host to the now rare native red mistletoe and are banded with aluminum to prevent possums from climbing the trees and destroying the plant life. Just past the top of the gantry you'll see a junction on your right for the Blyth Old track. This track is part of the original walking route up Ruapehu, built in the early 1900's by local man, Joey Blyth. As you emerge from the forest you will cross the Rotokawa boardwalk (2), which on clear days offers beautiful views of Mt. Ruapehu. Rotokawa is a large open area of alpine wetlands that is believed to have been caused by fire many years ago. Due to the harsh mountain environment it takes hundreds of years for native forest to regenerate. Plants and trees slowly become reestablished in sheltered areas or valleys, then gradually spread. Notice that the mountain beech trees near the clearing are much shorter than relatives lower down the Ohakune Mountain Road. The beech trees here are probably hundreds of years old but are stunted by the cold, icy and windy environment in which they live.

On the far side of the board walk the track re-enters the forest and begins a gradual descent towards Waitonga Falls (3). In summer months, look for flowering native orchids amongst ferns and mosses on the banks beside the track. After descending some 500 meters you arrive at the falls viewpoint. For a better view



— POWDERHORN CHATEAU —
RUAPEHU, NEW ZEALAND