

Tongariro Alpine Crossing visitor caps: An iwi view

Perspectives from Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro and Te Ao Māori

Final Report

17 July 2024

Ko Tongariro te maunga
Tongariro is the mountain

Ko Rotoaira te moana
Rotoaira is the lake

Ko Te Wharerangi te tangata
Te Wharerangi is the man

Ko Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro te tangata whenua
Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro are the people of the land

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Background | 3 |
| Four Pillars (reports) | 3 |
| Iwi report summary | 3 |
| Iwi impact assessment | 4 |
| Methodology and structure | 4 |
| Context: Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro and Tongariro Maunga, the connection | 5 |
| Findings | 5 |
| Manaakitanga and manaakiwhenua: The business model | 5 |
| Qualitative over quantitative | 6 |
| Conclusion | 6 |

Background

Crowding issues on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing are currently being addressed by a range of management initiatives. These include practical measures, for example the development of a booking system, encouragement of a one-way walking direction, new concessionaire conditions and improved car park and road safety management.

In addition, a significant focus has been education; improving awareness and understanding of the spiritual and cultural importance of the tupuna, Tongariro Maunga, over which the walk crosses. Information about keeping manuhiri safe on the maunga has been part of this education. These measures have targeted track users, through new, pre-trip online information (website and social media), along with a daily Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro presence at the track entrance. Concessionaires and guides have attended wānanga to learn about cultural tikanga, along with safety factors related to walking on the maunga.

The Four Pillars (Reports)

A proposal to cap daily visitor numbers is a major strategy now under consideration, to address negative impacts of crowds on the maunga. To guide and help determine the details and impacts of this strategy, four independent studies have been undertaken. These examine the 'Four Pillars': Iwi (Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro), environmental, social and economic impacts related to capping visitor numbers, and of various levels of capping numbers.

This report is a partnership between Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro and the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Iwi Report Summary

The mountains at the heart of the Tongariro National Park have cultural and spiritual significance to Ngāti Tūwharetoa and symbolise the spiritual links between this community and their environment.

Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro sit within Ngāti Tūwharetoa as the hau kāinga (true people of the homeland) for the Tongariro territory and are the kaitiaki (guardians) of the tupuna and taonga, Tongariro Maunga.

For Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, integrated management of Tongariro is driven by their customary obligation as kaitiaki and their whanaungatanga (genealogical connection) to ensure the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the maunga and the people, both mana whenua and manuhiri.

From the view of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, the Four Pillars start with Te Ao Māori, the Māori world view.

Te Ao Māori values include rangatiratanga (self-determination), whanaungatanga (genealogical relationships), kaitiakitanga (intergenerational sustainable guardianship), manaakitanga (care, reciprocity, respect and responsibility), and the importance of whakapapa (genealogy).

Te Ngaehe Wanikau, Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro kaumatua, says everything about Te Ao Māori is determined not by numbers but by tikanga. "Economic impacts are not the prime driver. If we begin with Te Ao Māori and get these values right, the economic values will fit."

For Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, everything done on Tongariro Maunga is based on manaakitanga and manaakiwhenua (care for the land). These are the vehicles that carry our kaitiakitanga, says Wanikau.

“Manaakitanga is reciprocal, encompassing the spiritual, cultural, emotional and physical wellbeing for both mana whenua and manuhiri. Our mana is totally dependent on what happens to people in our rohe.

“And we are driven by manaakiwhenua, by what the land can sustain. When you cross that threshold then you have impacts on all of our land, our environment, and our people.”

Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro believe that in managing manuhiri on the maunga qualitative, rather than quantitative values are more important, although they do see room for the two to merge.

“Improved cultural understanding is key to a qualitative approach. New cultural awareness programmes for both concessionaires and manuhiri have already resulted in a huge shift in people’s attitudes. People are better prepared. There is more respect,” says Wanikau.

Partnership, and an improved relationship between Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro and DOC, are also acknowledged, and welcomed. “Our kaupapa now sits under Te Piringa, The Legislative Partnership Agreement – Ngāti Tūwharetoa Settlement 2018.¹ Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro is now ‘sitting at the table’ when management decisions are being discussed for Tongariro maunga,” says Wanikau.

Te Piringa recognises that the tikanga and cultural practices of nga hapū o Ngāti Tūwharetoa have a role and value in conservation management, that hapū shall have the opportunity to actively participate in conservation within their rohe; and recognises and provides for Ngāti Tūwharetoa mana whakahaere, tino rangatiratanga, tikanga, and kaitiakitanga in the management of land within the Korowai Kaitiaki.

Iwi Impact Assessment

Methodology and Structure

This assessment was based on a structured Te Ao Māori approach to hearing the views about manuhiri and carrying capacity on Tongariro from an iwi perspective. The assessment was primarily based around a wānanga for representatives of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, held in Turangi on 16 February 2024.

Attending the wānanga were Te Ngaehe Wanikau (kaumatua, Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro), Bubs Smith (Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro), Dave Bamford (Project Lead and Tourism Advisor), supported by Kathy Ombler (report writer), Tania Short, Manager Experience Design, Visitor and Heritage, DOC and Deborah Chae, Senior Brand and Marketing Advisor, DOC.

The korero was led by Te Ngaehe Wanikau, with support from Te Maari Gardiner-Ngata and Bubs Smith.

“We represent our hapū, and our parents and their parents who aren’t here now and we have this forever. This is part of who we always were and always will be. We don’t move away.”

¹ Appendix 1: Te Piringa is the Legislative Partnership Agreement – Ngāti Tūwharetoa Settlement 2018.

Context: Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro and Tongariro Maunga, the connection

“We go back 30 generations to our ancestor Ngātoro-i-rangi, when he first arrived in these lands from Raiatea in Tahiti on the waka Te Arawa, and came inland to the maunga, Tongariro,” says Wanikau. “From Ngātoro-i-rangi there is unbroken occupation to today, and we can tell you every story from every generation from then.

“All over the maunga, those stories add texture, where the physical and the spiritual and the tangible merge and overlap. What makes Tongariro so special to you is that you become an ultra-logical reflection of that environment, you merge into that place, it’s inseparable.”

Findings

Manaakitanga and manaakiwhenua: the business model

“We base everything and measure everything on these two things: manaakitanga (to host visitors with care, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility) and manaakiwhenua (to cherish, conserve and sustain the land),” says Wanikau.

“We start at the point of respect that’s embedded in our tikanga. We have an inherent commitment handed down. Everyone, whether tangata whenua or manuhiri, must be treated with respect. These are reciprocal values, all cultures have this, it’s things like courtesy, etiquette.

“The physical process of doing everything within our power for manaakitanga is sometimes hampered by other processes put above us by, for example, the New Zealand Conservation Authority. These processes are meaningless to us but we try to fit into them.”

For Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, people walking over the maunga are trampling the mana. “We know by law we cannot stop anyone entering the national park, so we are dealing with the best we can in the situation. How do we exercise manaakitanga in that sense? It’s about dealing with people in a genuine and caring process and manner.

“When we see people starting a walk ill-prepared, we can send them back to get better equipment. Or one of us will shadow them with an emergency blanket. This is exercising our manaakitanga.

“When someone is injured, or worse, on the maunga, our people with our DOC colleagues will go up and get them. This is exercising our manaakitanga.

“When people die on our maunga we also look after the living, the family left behind who are mourning for their loss. We feel instantly responsible, so it’s about holding them. People who don’t understand our culture understand a hug, they understand the sadness in our eyes. This is exercising our manaakitanga.

“The emotional impact on Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, when people are hurt or die on the maunga, is massive.

“So, we say manaakitanga is the best business model for visitor numbers and the development on Tongariro maunga.”

Wanikau points out how the genesis of tourism in New Zealand was born in Rotorua, because of manaakitanga. “There are geysers in many parts of the world, in Iceland, and Yellowstone, much

closer to where most people live than the geysers of Rotorua. The difference was made by the guides. Because of their manaakitanga and manaakiwhenua, Rotorua became world famous. So, our customary practice of kitanga was the genesis of tourism in this country.”

When it comes to manaakiwhenua and numbers – we are driven by what the land can sustain, he adds. “When you cross that threshold, then you have impacts on all of our land, our environment and our people.

“Manaakitanga and manaakiwhenua are what we judge ourselves by. It’s upholding who we are, the mana of the people and the marae and of our people who work on the maunga. If we create a business model that is about manaakitanga and manaakiwhenua we’ve created a model that’s of more value to them. We don’t want a McDonald’s, we want a Michelin!”

Qualitative over quantitative

From a Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro view, if people are going to be on the maunga, let’s make the experience about quality, for both the people and for the environment.

“From a cultural perspective our response is linked to environment and social factors and with some degree to economic. Our Dual World Heritage Status is about culture and environment, so let’s start from there and tie the others in,” suggests Bubs Smith.

In this respect, Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro believe in the ‘weighting’ of importance of the Four Pillars, the reports considering the capping of visitor numbers. While the reports are all intertwined, Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro suggest that they have the following rating of importance:

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Iwi | 40% |
| Environmental | 30% |
| Social | 20% |
| Economic | 10% |

Improved iwi cultural understanding is key to developing a qualitative approach. This is already evident, says Smith, through the outcomes of iwi cultural awareness and safety education programmes introduced over the past six to seven years.

“These have resulted in a huge shift in peoples’ attitudes. They are better prepared. More have appreciation of iwi and cultural values on the maunga. They have a better and deeper understanding, and a more meaningful experience. There is more respect.”

There have also been significant improvements in the relationship between Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro and DOC, says Wanikau. “That the voice of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro is now sought, and specifically that the cultural impacts of visitor caps on the maunga can be resonated into the next writing for management of people on the maunga, is acknowledged and welcomed.”

Conclusion

Qualitative values outweigh quantitative values. Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro believe it is very hard to argue against values of iwi, environment and social when the economic report is considered.

Qualitative values relate to the increased understanding and respect already evident, a result of recent education and awareness measures for both concessionaires and manuhiri. These will be further enhanced by new initiatives proposed such as:

- A Cultural Awareness Programme for Tongariro Alpine Crossing manuhiri (currently under development by DOC and Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro).
- Pou whenua, standing at the entrance to the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, at Mangatepopo, will make a powerful statement to manuhiri that they are walking onto sacred land. (The pou is well advanced, design and carving has been completed.)
- Attendance at an annual, full day wānanga for all drivers and guides will be a concession requirement for operating on and around the maunga. The wānanga will cover cultural tikanga, understanding and safety. In turn, these concessionaires will be able to pass on appropriate messages about cultural tikanga to their clients, to increase their knowledge, safety, understanding and respect.

Further measures that will enhance qualitative values include:

- Staggering start times, thus less ‘trampling of the mana of the maunga’. Currently most walkers start their trips between 6am and 9am. By late morning much of the Mangatepopo Valley is deserted. By 3pm the red crater area is largely deserted. By 4pm there are few people on the maunga. In summer, peak walking season, daylight hours allow for staggering times with later starts, thus ‘spreading the load’ and enabling a more serene, less crowded experience, in keeping with the mana of the maunga.
- Encouraging more guided walks, led by guides who have attended wānanga with Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro. With knowledge, understanding and respect for the kaupapa of Ngāti Hikairo and the maunga, guides will enhance the understanding and experience for their client/walkers, and safeguard the mana of the maunga.
- Increased presence of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro representatives at the track entrance, offering a mihi whakatau to manuhiri to welcome and safeguard them, along with waiata and personal engagement/korero/ advice with and for manuhiri. This will increase awareness and help give manuhiri understanding that they are entering a special place. This presence will be most effective during summer peak season (logistically it would be difficult to be there at quieter times throughout the year).

Suggestions mooted for daily number caps range from 600 to 800 to 1,000 to 1500. Current figures show that more than 1,000 people walk the crossing on up to 30 days per year, while more than 2,000 people walk the crossing on up to five days per year. (These figures relate to the years immediately preceding COVID.) Thus the majority of days see fewer than 1,000 on the maunga.

Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro believe the qualitative work that has been started, along with the implementation of these additional measures, and the improved understanding and respect these measures will engender for our tupuna, Tongariro, hold more importance than concern about specific numbers walking on the maunga on any given day.