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In the southwestern corner of New Zealand’s North Island lies a lonely mountain by the name of Taranaki (or Egmont). Rising some 2,518 m (8,261 ft) above sea level, it is recognized as one of the world’s most symmetrical volcano cones, and its Mount Fuji-esque profile exercises a magnet-like pull over those fortunate enough to behold it. For wayfaring types who are interested in experiencing the mountain’s wonders on foot, the area boasts more than 300 km (186 mi) of maintained pathways, the longest and most challenging of which is the Around the Mountain Circuit (AMC).

As the name suggests, the AMC is a complete loop of the Taranaki volcano. Located in Egmont National Park (New Zealand’s second oldest), it is a challenging track best suited to fit, experienced backpackers. Undulating from start to finish, the trail passes through a combination of lush forests and spectacular alpine landscapes as it traverses the flanks of the North Island’s second highest peak. During its course, hikers are presented with multiple high- and low- level route options; the former being more



Given its striking resemblance to Mount Fuji, Taranaki doubled as the iconic Japanese volcano in the Tom Cruise blockbuster *The Last Samurai*.

scenic and difficult, and the latter representing a safer option in foul weather.

Long before the dormant Taranaki—its last major eruption was in 1854—became a renowned hiking destination, the mountain held a special place in the hearts of New Zealand’s original inhabitants, the Māori. According to legend, Taranaki once resided in the central part of the North Island along with fellow volcanoes Tongariro, Ngauruhoe, and Ruapehu. Being hot-tempered and more

than a little explosive by nature, Taranaki had a falling-out with Tongariro over a woman, the lovely forest-clad Pihanga. A fierce battle ensued, which was eventually won by Tongariro. As a consequence, Taranaki fled west toward the setting sun, leaving a trail of tears in his wake that formed the Whanganui River. To this day, he remains in splendid isolation, forever brooding over his lost love. It is said that when the mountain is shrouded in cloud, the nebulous veil is hiding Taranaki’s tears.

Speaking of melancholy, over the years, many AMC hikers have been driven to despair not because of lost love, but instead owing to the mountain’s notoriously changeable weather. In addition to dominating the region’s skyline, Taranaki’s impressive bulk also plays a significant role in the area’s meteorological patterns. In short, it is one of the wettest places in the country, with the summit receiving an average of 8,000 mm (315 in) of rain per year. It’s worth noting that the higher you go up the mountain, the more likely you are ►