

Watercare Coastal Walkway opened (17 March 2005)

Watercare's Coastal Walk Open day on 12 March was so well attended that parking was hard to find. Insect specialist and Forest and Bird deputy president Dr Peter Maddison hosted guided walks in the area, discussing the area's history and its fauna and flora.

The Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, had opened the new nature trail the previous day, providing public access to New Zealand's biggest restoration project. The walkway provides access to the Mangere Ihumatao foreshore, an area rich in cultural history, stretching 7 kilometres from Ambury Park to the Otuaataua Stonefields. It will become part of Te Araroa (The Long Pathway), the proposed trail running the length of the country.



Photo: (left to right) Sir Barrie Curtis (Mayor Manukau City), Dr Bruce Hucker (Deputy mayor Auckland City), Government Minister Chris Carter, and Dr Ian Parton (deputy chair, Board Watercare). Photo courtesy Chris Miller, Watercare.

The Manukau coastal walkway is part of the final stage of the \$450 million treatment plant upgrade, which includes New Zealand's largest coastal restoration project. According to Watercare, fish, birds and insects have quickly colonised the restored tidal flats, shoreline and new native plantings. And the population of white-faced herons has increased markedly, an indicator of improved water quality.

"The results have been startling," says Watercare's deputy chairman, Ian Parton. "Migratory birds are returning in droves to the area. Marine life is reclaiming the tidal flats. This walkway gives [Aucklanders] easy access to an extraordinary recreational asset."

For the last four decades, the oxidation ponds dominated the shoreline. The \$150 million coastal restoration project included the removal of 500 hectares of oxidation ponds, the restoration of 13 kilometres of shoreline and construction of seven new beaches. In addition, 27,000 trees and shrubs were planted, sourced from locally grown seeds.

The walkway provides access to one of New Zealand's most abundant migratory bird breeding grounds, an area of international ornithological significance. Two bird hides overlook restored shell banks, favoured roosting areas of wading birds.



Photo: Guided coastal walk. Photo Peter Dentener

The walk can be started from either end, at Ambury Farm Park or the Otuaataua Stonefields. If 7 km is too long, start the walk either at Oruarangi Creek, or from Creamery Road near the Wastewater Treatment plant.

The coastal walk takes in some great views and provides easy access to flora, ranging from lowland flax and saltmarsh ribbonwood, to needle grass, speckled sedge and cabbage tree. Add to that eastern bar-tailed godwits, lesser knots, pied oystercatchers and wrybill, and it is hard to believe that Auckland CBD is only 30 minutes away. Anyone for a relaxed life style?