

OKIA RESERVE – GUIDE & WALK

A HARD COPY OF THIS GUIDE SHOULD ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE LETTERBOX AT THE ENTRY TO THE RESERVE (APPROX. 1KM FROM THE DICK RD CAR PARK)

This leaflet will guide you around the loop walk through **north end of the Reserve**. The map is below.

In 1991, Okia Reserve was jointly purchased by the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust ('YEPT') and Dunedin City Council. It is managed by a committee which also includes representation from Te Rūnaka o Ōtākou, the Department of Conservation and the NZ Sea Lion Trust.

Originally grazing farmland, countless volunteers and organisations over the years have helped revegetate and restore the natural biodiversity of this 231-hectare Reserve, helping both the endangered yellow-eyed penguin and other wildlife that lives here.

YEPT also controls mammalian pests and weeds throughout the Reserve. As we are working here all year round; on rare occasion you *may* be asked by our Ranger to change your route.

With all of this effort we expect the natural biodiversity of plant and animals to return here at a much faster rate. Imagine coastal forest here in our lifetime!

ABOUT THE WALK: THIS **3.5KM LOOP** WALK TAKES APPROX. **2 HOURS**. ADD ON **20 MINS EACH** IF YOU CLIMB THE LITTLE PYRAMID AND/OR TAKE THE MARGARET HAZEL SLOPE SIDE-TRACK. PLEASE NOTE:

- Okia is a designated wetland; tracks can be flooded, wet and slippery in places.
- Erosion of the dunes near the beach is active. **Access to the beach may be difficult or impossible in places.** Stay safe and if necessary change your route.
- Stick to the marked track (yellow markers).
- No smoking or lighting of fires is permitted.
- Refrain from touching the predator traps.
- Treat all electric fences as live.
- Keep at least 50m from wildlife where possible.
- If you come across injured wildlife please phone: **0800 DOCHOT (0800 362 468)**.

START: FOLLOW THE YELLOW MARKERS UNTIL YOU ARRIVE AT VICTORY BEACH, THEN BACK TO THE PYRAMIDS. POINTS OF INTEREST ON THE MAP ARE:

1. Little Pyramid (optional). Climb the track to the top for the view of the whole Reserve and information about the volcanic history. The Large Pyramid (Pū-wheke-o-Kia) to the north and Little Pyramid (Te Matai o Kia) are large outcrops of hard, columnar basalt formed by volcanic activity during the first eruptive phase of an ancient volcano which was centred in what is now Otago Harbour. In front of the Little Pyramid is a cave; Māori history tells of its use as a shelter for a wounded warrior.

FOLLOW THE SIGN, TAKING THE LEFT FORK 'LOOP WALK'

2. Wetlands. Damp dune hollows are common around the Reserve. In wet spells these can form small lakes enjoyed by aquatic birds and waders such as paradise shelducks. This environment enables wetland plant species such as the giant rush *Juncus gregiflorus* to thrive.

3. Taiaroa Bush. The area on the hill ahead, beyond the Reserve fence line is the largest remaining tract of native forest on the Otago Peninsula. It is largely made up of broadleaf, fuchsia, kōwhai, māhoe and flax.

4. Margaret Hazel Slope (optional). Follow the 4WD track on the left to this slope, named after a dedicated volunteer. There is a seat at the end and conditions here are more sheltered for plants. Planting at the top started in 2000 with broadleaf, cabbage tree, kōwhai, kānuka, mānuka, ngaio and wineberry. Watch out for the native ongaonga, NZ's tree nettle - it stings if touched!

5. Natural Regeneration. Bracken fern has increased in abundance since the retirement of the land from grazing. Importantly it provides shelter for other plants. Look across the Reserve - as birds in the adjoining bush use this area, you'll see where seeds in their droppings have grown and enhanced our revegetation efforts.

6. The Rosette. On your left up the hill is a large circular geological feature – a rock “rosette” about 30m in diameter. It has been formed from radial jointing of an intrusive pod of lava. Due to the inaccessibility of the site to grazing animals the rosette has retained some of the now less common native plants. Notable among these are the Easter orchids *Earina autumnalis* which can be seen at the end of March, early April.



7. Turn right and follow the firebreak. During the summer Okia Reserve can become very dry. The grass here is maintained regularly to keep it low to protect the hoiho breeding areas should a fire occur in this commonly-used part of the Reserve. On a hot day you may see common skinks darting into the vegetation by the trackside as you approach.

8. Hoiho/Yellow-eyed Penguin. Okia is a breeding area for the hoiho (*Megadyptes antipodes*), one of the world's most endangered penguin species. As multiple threats in both the marine and terrestrial environments affect them, hoiho are undergoing a serious decline in abundance, despite conservation management efforts. 15 breeding pairs of hoiho nested at Okia in the 2012/13 season; today there are only 2-4 pairs. Normally they are out to sea during the day, except during breeding season. If you are lucky enough to see one of these shy birds, or hear them calling (hoiho means 'noise-shouter'), do not get close or disturb them, try to keep at least 50m away.

This area was planted in 1993/94 with coprosmas, flaxes, hebes and ngaios to extend hoiho nesting habitats. Not all plants survived, succumbing to salt winds, poor sandy soils and frosts. As some plantings are disappearing with erosion we are now planting new hoiho habitat much further back from the dunes.

9. Relic Dunes/Victory Beach. The hummocky terrain in this area is relic dunes, some of which are several thousand years old. As you approach Victory Beach take care, there may be NZ sea lions/rāpoka resting here and on the track. This is one of a few mainland places in NZ where the rāpoka is known to give birth. They can display aggressive behaviour. Please do not approach them and do not make loud noises or disturb their rest. Give them space, observe them from at least 50m.

Victory Beach is almost 4kms long. It is named after the steamship SS Victory which was bound for Melbourne before it ran aground at the southern end of the beach on 3 July 1861. At low tide the flywheel can still be seen.

To complete the loop, walk down the beach approx. 400m south where you will see a yellow marker (no.10) high on the dune. **At times, access off the beach here can be too high to climb; you may need return the same way.**

10. Follow the yellow markers to the start of the walk, leading you back to the Little Pyramid and the end of the track (no.1). On the way back you may be lucky enough to see a fernbird. Similar in size and colour to a sparrow but with a scruffy long tail, these secretive birds use clicks to identify each other and their location as they hop through dense undergrowth.

Further information about hoiho and the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust can be found on our website:

<https://www.yellow-eyedpenguin.org.nz/>

