

Marsden Point

An all-year dog-friendly beach in the lee of Whangarei Heads.

Location: Marsden Point, Ruakaka, 2km north of SH1.

Access: Carpark at end of Station East Road: turn east off Marsden Point Road onto Sime Road (next to Ruakaka Tavern), then right at the end along Te One Street, then 1st left.

Length: ca. 2 km (one-way)

Configuration: There-and-back

Grade: Flat; beach

Status: off leash (under control), all year

Cafes and restaurants: Several cafes in Ruakaka shopping centre (1 km); Ruakaka Tavern at corner of Sime Road

More information:

Like most of the other east coast beaches in this part of the world, Marsden Point offers an open, sandy shore, backed by dunes, and washed by weary, but rarely fierce, waves.

Unlike most other beaches, however, it's open dogs all the year round, 24 hours a day. The main reasons we have to thank for this are the power station that stood just behind the beach until recently, and the oil refinery at the northern end. Neither have ever really spoiled the walk - and the refinery still gives it a bit of extra, industrial interest.

The best place to access the beach is from the carpark at the end of Station Road East, near the NIWA research station. Southwards of here it's a no-no for dogs, but climb through the dunes and turn left and there's a two kilometre or more stretch of golden sand, just waiting to be explored.

The history of energy generation at Marsden Point is a rather sad one (in economic terms at least), and is worth pondering as we walk northwards. Two power stations were in fact built here in the 1960s: Marsden A and Marsden B. Both were 250 MW oil-fired plants. Marsden A was used as an emergency reserve power station for Auckland, but Marsden B was never commissioned. By the early 1980s, Marsden A was also more-or-less redundant, due to the opening of the gas-fired power station at Huntly. As oil prices rose in the 1990s, it was moth-balled, though the long seawater pipe that was used to cool it took on a new use, feeding seawater into the NIWA aquaculture site. In 2004 Mighty River Power put forward a proposal to turn it into a coal-fired plant, but this provoked fierce protests, including occupation of the site by Greenpeace. Despite these, resource consent was given for the conversion in 2005, but a series of appeals and counter appeals followed until, eventually, in 2007 the proposal was abandoned. In 2009 the plant was sold to an Indian company for \$20 million, and then dismantled for shipping to India.

Whilst reflecting on these follies, however, don't ignore the scenery, for there are good views across to Whangarei Heads. It's also entertaining to watch the gannets diving for fish, or the boats queuing to enter Marsden Point harbour. Look out, too, for dolphins and sharks. One

memorable day we watched a shark stalking a small kayak as it paddled through the surf 20 metres off-shore.

