

Whalers Bay

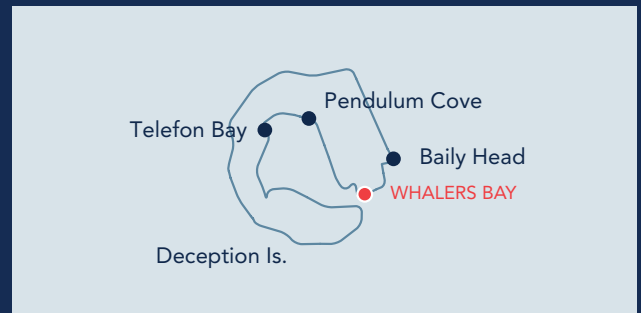
62°59'S, 60°34'W - Port Foster, Deception Island.

Key features

- Historic Site and Monument No. 71, including:
 - the remains of the Norwegian Hektor Whaling Station
 - the site of the Whalers Cemetery and other whaling remains along the beach
 - the abandoned British 'Base B'
- Neptunes Window
- Ronald Hill

ANTARCTIC TREATY

visitor site guide



Description

TOPOGRAPHY

Whalers Bay is a small harbour immediately to the east after passing through Neptunes Bellows. The Whalers Bay site comprises the semi-circular, gently sloping ash beach which is approximately 2km in length and stretches from Penfold Point in the northwest to Cathedral Crags in the southeast. Kroner Lake, a geothermally heated lagoon, is located on the western side of the bay. Ronald Hill (103m) is located 800m north of the lagoon, whilst steep glacier cliffs with dark grey pyroclastic layers rise immediately to the northwest. A collapse of Cathedral Crags on the southeastern side of Whalers Bay is known as Neptunes Window. Of particular importance are the low fluvial terraces behind the site of the whaling station and remains of the lahar (mud slide) which formed as a result of an eruption in 1969.

FAUNA

Confirmed breeders: kelp gulls (*Larus dominicanus*), Wilson's storm-petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*), skuas (*Catharacta* spp.) and Antarctic terns (*Sterna vittata*). Cape petrels (*Daption capensis*) nest in Cathedral Crags, overlooking the site. Other species, such as blue-eyed shags (*Phalacrocorax atriceps bransfieldensis*) and snowy sheathbills (*Chonis alba*), have been observed in the area. The beach is also used as a resting place for seals and penguins, primarily Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazella*), Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*), crabeater seals (*Lobodon carcinophagus*), leopard seals (*Hydrurga leptonyx*), gentoo penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) and chinstrap penguins (*Pygoscelis Antarctica*).

FLORA

Geothermally active scoria outcrops to the east of the whaling station support moss and lichen, which also grow on the timber, iron and brick structures and on the cliffs and massive boulders at Cathedral Crags and Neptunes Window. Rare and important species may also be present. *Usnea* spp., *Xanthoria* spp., *Caloplaca* spp. and *Deschampsia Antarctica* are present in the Cathedral Crags area.

OTHER

The buildings, structures and other artefacts on the shore of Whalers Bay, which date from the period 1906-1931, represent the most significant whaling remains in the Antarctic. Other buildings, structures and artefacts of the British 'Base B' represent an important aspect of the scientific history of the area (1944-1969). The site is designated as Historic Site No. 71.

Visitor Impact

KNOWN IMPACTS

Graffiti on historic structures. Removal of historic artefacts. Erosion of footpaths en route to Neptunes Window.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Damage to or removal of historic artefacts. Trampling of vegetation. Erosion of further paths. Fire. Damage to beach area due to ship operations (anchoring, pollution, maritime accidents, etc.).

Landing Requirements

SHIPS*

Ships carrying 500 or fewer passengers aboard. One ship at a time.

VISITORS

No more than 100 visitors ashore at any time. Maximum visitor numbers are exclusive of expedition guides and leaders. One guide for every 20 visitors.

Visitor Area

LANDING AREA

The recommended landing site for small boat operations is in the area in front of the floating dock, although be sensitive to the presence of birds or seals. The area directly in front of the whalers' boilers can be used as a secondary landing site.

CLOSED AREAS

ASPAs 140 - Access to Kroner Lake is prohibited unless with a permit issued in accordance with provisions in Annex V to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

Access to buildings or other structures including boilers and tanks, is prohibited unless for management purposes, or for shelter in an emergency **.

The geologically important, and fragile, fluvial terraces located to the north of the whaling station.

Visitors should not attempt to traverse the scree slope below Cathedral Crags, which is susceptible to rockfalls.

GUIDED WALKING AREAS

Visitors to Neptunes Window should proceed along the beach on the seaward side of the waterboats.

* A ship is defined as a vessel which carries more than 12 passengers.

** Tour companies visit the site at their own risk. The UK authorities are not liable for any personal injury or damage to property that may be sustained.

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They should then walk up the slope towards the 'window' in single file remaining on existing paths. Extreme caution should be exercised along the steep and friable edge of Neptunes Window. Follow existing paths back down to the beach.

Visitors to Ronald Hill should proceed up the ridge north of the aircraft hangar, towards the peak of Ronald Hill. Distance should be kept from the steep western edge of the ridge which is friable and susceptible to erosion. Follow the same route back to the hangar before returning to the landing site.

FREE ROAMING AREAS

Visitors can move freely under supervision on the seaward side of the whaling station and along the beach.

Visitor Code of Conduct

BEHAVIOUR ASHORE

Visits are to be undertaken in line with the Management Plan for Deception Island ASMA 4.

Do not go beyond the western end of the airplane hangar in order to avoid entry into ASPA 140.

Approach oil and fuel tanks with caution. The foundations are vulnerable to erosion and the tanks are at risk of collapse. Do not enter buildings or tanks or sit or climb on the boats. Maintain a reasonable distance from any structures to avoid injury from collapsing debris.

Maintain at least 20 metres distance from seismic monitoring equipment and other types of scientific equipment, which normally will be marked with a red flag. Do not touch or disturb other types of scientific instruments, markers, or field depots.

Maintain a precautionary distance of 5 metres from wildlife and give animals the right-of-way. Increase this distance if any change in behaviour is observed.

Do not dig bathing pits.

Hiking between Whalers Bay and Baily Head is discouraged as it can damage important vegetated areas, in particular Antarctica's largest recorded stand of Antarctic pearlwort.

CAUTIONARY NOTES

All visits must be planned taking into account the significant risk posed by the threat of volcanic eruption. Real time information can be obtained from the stations operating on the island.

All the buildings on this site are in physically poor condition and there is an ongoing risk that parts of these buildings may collapse or sections be blown off. Entry to any of the buildings is unsafe at all times and a good distance should be left when walking adjacent to buildings. Beware of sharp objects and flying debris in windy conditions. In high winds the whole area should be avoided because of the risk of flying debris.

Beware of hazardous substances.



Overview of Whalers Bay visitor site with Neptunes Window in the background



Details from the cemetery in front, and remains of hunting lodge and fuel tanks in the back.

