

Tour description & Operational Procedure for Seal Coast Safari 2019

Website tour description:

The Seal Coast Safari is a Half Day tour of Wellington's extraordinary natural flora and fauna including a visit to Tongue Point Fur Seal colony. The wild forces of nature all collide within Wellington's dramatic landscape. It is home to mythical beasts, is the source of wondrous legends, and has been ravaged by earthquakes and cyclones.

Before we get to the seals, the tour departs from central Wellington and we travel past some of the city's most famous icons on our way to the suburb of Karori and soon leave the city limits and drive through a real slice of rural New Zealand.

Enjoy an exhilarating journey through Terawhiti Station to the dramatic Seal Coast south of the city. Home of New Zealand's most modern wind farm, Terawhiti Station is also a working beef and sheep farm. As we drive through the farm we discuss the history of farming and electricity generation in the area. We will drive you across a live active fault line, over rocky beachfront and around headlands to visit a colony of Wild New Zealand Fur seals. The views on this tour are exceptional – weather permitting, you'll see the Tasman Sea meet the Pacific Ocean, the tumultuous waters of Cook Strait separating the North and South Islands, and the distant mountain ranges of the South Island.

Fur Seals are at the colony all year round, but peak Seal numbers are May ~ August. The farm is a working farm, so the animals we see will depend on time of year.

Operational Notes for Procedures at Tongue Point:

Vehicle Approach:

Vehicles will approach Tongue Point from either the East or West directions, with the 'default' approach being from the West first joining the South Coast from the exit of Terawhiti Station.

The approach from the West is a well formed 4x4 track with the only access ending in the gap by the memorial plaque for the SS Penguin.

The approach from the East is across the beach and can change due to weather & tides etc.



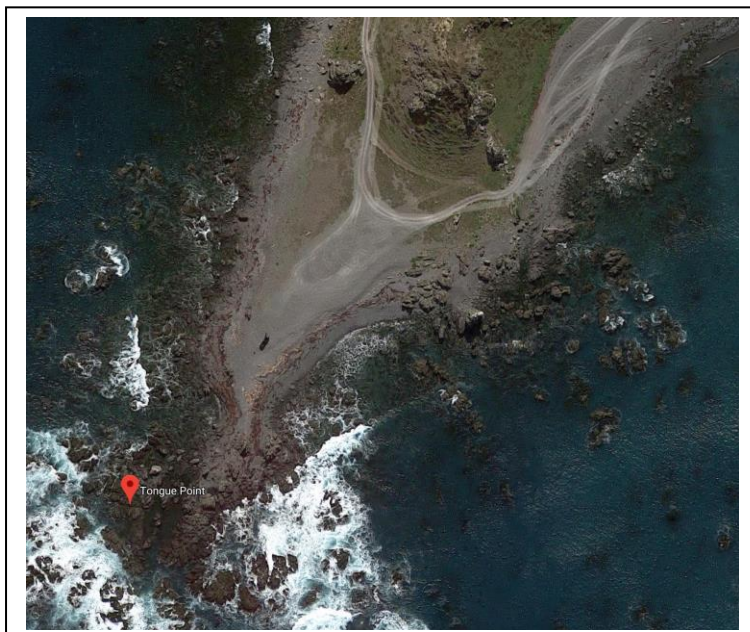
West approach in Yellow

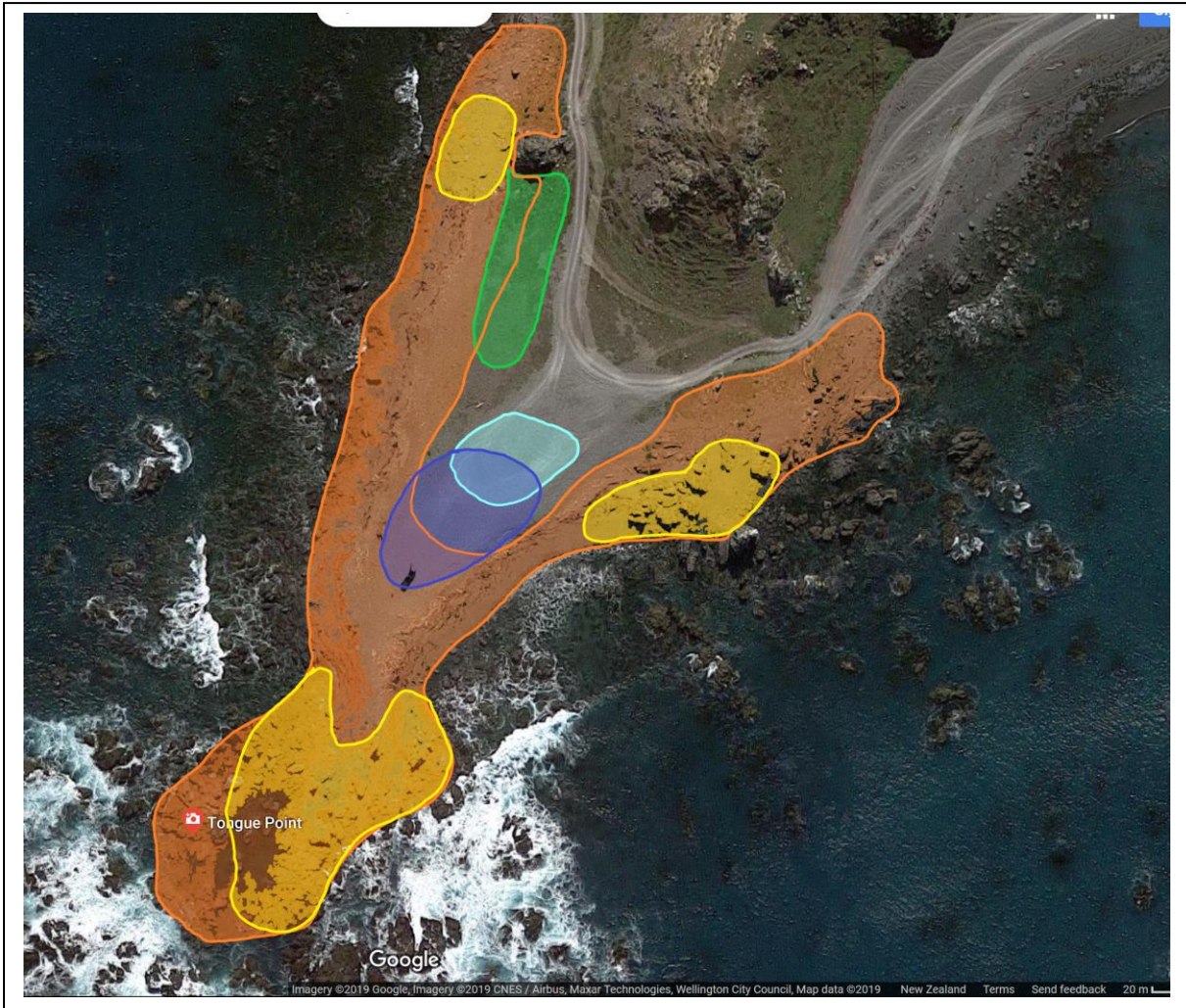
East Approach in Red

Parking and Seal Areas:

NZ Fur Seals can be very habitual and will try and haul out in the same areas and even resting on the same patches day to day and season to season. As this area is fully open to the public, the track through Tongue Point is used regularly in Winter & Summer and as such it is very rare to see any Seals on the tracks or the parking areas.

Below is an image of Tongue Point showing the various designated areas:





Key:

Orange: Winter Seal Locations May~October

Yellow: Summer Season Seal locations November~April

Light Blue: Winter parking area

Dark Blue: Summer Parking area

Green: Banded Dotteral area (no evidence of nesting at this stage)

Parking Vehicles at Tongue Point

Parking vehicles changes due to the weather, in particular the wind. Prevailing winds are from the North West or South. Guides are instructed to always park vehicles into wind and always within the designated areas.

Multipule Vehicles Tours:

Within the tour we run there are 3 stopping points.

1. The lookout at Stellin Memorial Park
2. Farm house at Terawhiti Station
3. Tongue Point Seal Colony

Procedure for 1 or 2 vehicles:

Both vehicles travel together, stopping at the Farm House, then Tongue Point and the lookout on the return to Wellington. This order can be reversed due to traffic and client pick-up locations etc.

Procedure for 3, 4 or 5 vehicles:

Group tours with 3 or more vehicles will be split into 2 'caravans' with a maximum of 3 vehicles in each (maximum 24 pax) with one caravan going directly to the Seal Colony and returning via the Farm House and Lookout.

The second caravan will do the standard order of Lookout – Farm House – Seal Colony.

Cross-over @ Tongue Point:

If all tours run to time there will be no cross-over at Tongue point, the cross-over point should be on the main road between the main farm gate and the farm house.

If one group is delayed and both groups end up at Tongue Point at the same time, the Winter parking zone is to be used for the 2nd group.

For group tours in Winter, the area to the shoreside of the Winter Parking zone will be used if necessary.

Note: Both the Winter & Summer parking zones are large enough to take all the vehicles if there are Seals or other users in these zones.

Passenger Management at Tongue Point Seal Colony:

The maximum operating capacity of tour will be 48pax per departure with up to 2 departures per day.

For departures over 24pax, the tours will be split into smaller groups. This is to avoid overcrowding at the Lookout and the Farmhouse.

The location of the Seal Colony at Tongue point is more than large enough to cater for groups up to 50pax at a time. Previously when Wellington Nature tours (18pax) and Seal Coast Safari (24pax) operated separately, the 2 companies were regularly there at the same time with a total of 42pax, plus 5 guides with no affect on the Seal Colony activity or numbers.

Upon approach to Tongue Point, passengers are given a briefing on the procedure for interacting with the Fur Seals.

Passenger Instructions:

1. Do not approach Seals closer than 20m (60ft)
2. Avoid the area between the Seal(s) and the sea
3. Avoid loud noises as much as possible

Once we arrive at Tongue Point the guides assess where the Seals are located and park accordingly. We then gather passengers together and they are shown where they can stand and how close they can approach.

Approach distance can vary depending on wind direction – approaching from up-wind is more likely to disturb the Seals.

Guides then use natural markers (driftwood, rocks etc) to define a distance that passengers should not approach closer than.

Passengers are then given a talk about the NZ Fur Seal regarding Biology, behavioral & breeding patterns and history regarding hunting and export of Fur Seal products from NZ and subsequent protection and recovery of the species.

Passengers are then left to casually observe, take photos etc while morning/afternoon tea is prepared.

For tours with 2 or more guides. One of the guides is tasked with exclusively monitoring passengers and how close they are getting and looking for any disturbance of the Seals while the other(s) maintain contact with passengers and prepare morning/afternoon tea.

For tours where there is only one guide, the guide can do both tasks due to smaller group size.

Total time at Tongue Point does not exceed 30mins on any visit and all rubbish/waste is taken away and dealt with back at base.

We have full toilet and bathroom facilities at the Farmhouse on Terawhiti station.