

# Places to Go - Waihi Beach

Contributed by **Cliff McChesney**

*This month's Places to Go is about Waihi beach. Who better to write the article than a keen aviation enthusiast who lives and flies out of the area, Cliff McChesney. Enjoy the read and remember if you would like to learn more about a particular airfield for 'Places to Go', please let the Editor know for a future issue.*

*Ruth Presland (Places To Go Correspondent).*

**IF WALKS** are your thing then Waihi Beach airfield is the right place to fly to. A 45 minute walk along a well maintained track from the northern end of Waihi Beach will take you through some stunning vantage points to a rather secluded Orokawa Bay. This walk is suitable for all with a moderate level of fitness. The start and end are the only sections that require a few more horsepower but aren't too steep.

Waihi Township has many attractions including some of the best short walks anywhere in New Zealand. If you have the time, take the Waihi Gold Mine Tour which costs \$28 per person for the 1.5 hour trip. The tour commences from the information centre at the top of the main street. You will be taken to the pit rim and explained the history of mining in Waihi and from there you will be bussed to the processing plant and new underground mining entrance.

If you have done this as a morning tour then you will have time to catch the train from the Waihi Railway Station. A thirty minute trip of nostalgia will see you at the Waikino Railway Station and Cafe. They serve good food here for your sustenance. A five minute stroll under State Highway 2 brings you to the Victoria Stamper Battery. Here you will find sign boards which reveal the history of gold and previous processing through the use of cyanide and huge stamper batteries.

If you want more walking then a 5 km walk will take you to the entrance of the rail tunnel that passes 1 km under part of the Kaimai Range. This is now set up as a dedicated walking / cycling track. You can do a loop track that will bring you back without the need to pass through the tunnel twice. Lighting through the tunnel has removed most of the bogey men that once lived there! The 'Windows Walk' is a must before you leave the area. Again, it can be completed as a loop in as little as 45 minutes. You will need a torch on this section of track as some of the tunnels are 40 meters or so and tend to be rather dark when your eyes are not adjusted from the bright light prior to entering. You will be rewarded with spectacular 'window' views high above the Waitawheta River. A number of swing bridges cross the river on your journey.

As you can see there are plenty of things to do in the Waihi / Waihi Beach area. There is also good fishing and golf to be had nearby so you really need to pick a fine spell and plan on staying a few days.

## Getting there

Waihi Beach Airfield is located at the southern end of Waihi Beach Township. The strip is well maintained by owners and a group of local aviators. It does become boggy in winter so if you are planning on flying in, then it will pay to check NOTAM's and also phone the number in the AIP for a briefing about the condition of the strip.

Summer or winter, it is prudent to stick to the crowned centre line, as the areas outside this can be soft and undulating. Waihi Beach will predominantly have a cross wind that can make it somewhat challenging for the low time aviator, with 31 being the preferred runway as this is more often than not slightly more into wind. A curved approach is necessary to avoid overflying the houses at Athenree Heights. Care must be taken in strong westerly winds as the new hangars place you in the lee of these on short finals to runway 31 and sometimes in strong westerlies it may pay to do a non standard right hand approach onto 31. This will cut your ground speed and give a much tidier approach than being pushed along on the standard left hand base turn.

The strip is 600 meters in length, but as it crosses a road you need to time your approach with the road traffic to avoid giving them a fright or taking out your undercarriage on a truck! Despite the hangars looking very close there is plenty of wingtip clearance to land on the crowned centre line, the only exception being if there is a plane parked outside one of the hangars. Having landed, make sure to taxi back on the centre line. Many pilots have needed to be towed from the mire that waits to the sides of the centre line! Several will likely read this and put their hand up to say they agree with that statement having been there done that!

Sadly, the Swell Cafe has closed but there are rumours that a couple of interested parties may be looking at a new venture there. If you plan to stay overnight then there are a couple of options close

by. The Sea Air Motels are just 250 meters from the airfield and the second option is Beaches Motel, 1.9 km along Seaforth Road toward Waihi Beach Township.

Cafes are a bit further to walk to with the closest being The Porch in Wilson Road at 2.8 km. If you fancy a walk along the beach toward the north, you will come across the Flat White Cafe 3.6 km toward the main end of the beach. The cafe has stunning views of Mayor Island and is well worth the visit.

If you do plan to stay, then there is much to see and do in the local area. Talk to the local pilots, they will be more than happy to offer advice for an enjoyable stay, and even collect you from the airfield if you give them a bit of notice.

We look forward to seeing you.

**Cliff McChesney**



*Top: Waihi Beach airfield. Middle: Planes and people at the airfield. Lower: The airfield is 5 miles SE of the 'pit', which is itself only 300m from the Town Centre.*