

Ōtamahua/ Quail Island



CHRISTCHURCH



Photo: S Mankelov

About the island

Ōtamahua lies in the flooded crater of an extinct volcano, which created the natural haven of Lyttelton Harbour/Te Whakaraupō (Bay of Raupō).

For such a small island—barely 81 hectares—Quail has quite a history. A trip to Ōtamahua/Quail Island offers beautiful scenery and great walks as well as a glimpse into the past.

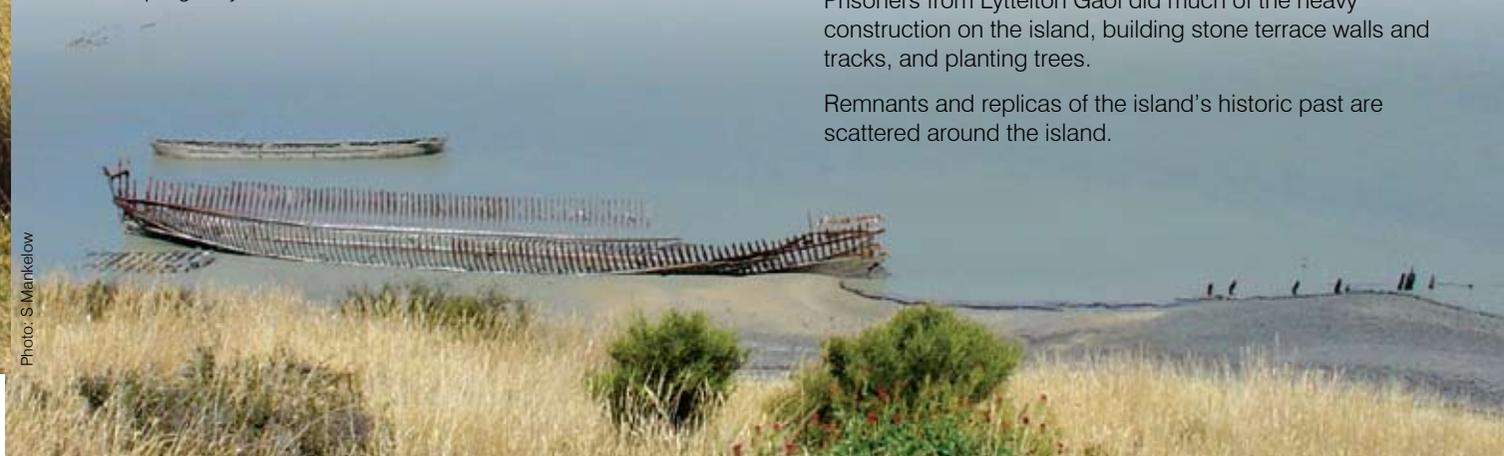
Ōtamahua/Quail Island is easily explored in a day. A short walk to either the heritage centre and/or the beach may be enough for families with small children, who can then spend a leisurely half-day swimming and picnicking. Longer walks around the island offer plenty of things to discover. The main track has a several information panels, while the shorter discovery trail has a series of quiz panels to test your thinking. All these walks start from the main ferry jetty.

Access

A regular bus service runs between Christchurch city and Lyttelton (No. 28) and includes a stop at B jetty. Further information about bus services is available from BUSinfo phone (03) 366 8855.

Black Cat Cruises operate a regular seven-day ferry service to the island during summer and a weekend service during winter; phone (03) 328 9078 or visit their website www.blackcat.co.nz.

The ships' graveyard Photo: S Mankelov



Cultural history

The native quail/koreke which inspired the island's European name was extinct by 1875. Local Māori dubbed the island Ōtamahua, which means 'the place where children collect sea birds' eggs'. Iwi used the island as a base to gather eggs, fish and shellfish. Fine sandstone collected from King Billy Island/Aue, was traded to use for grinding and polishing pounamu/greenstone.

The island was farmed from 1851. In the mid-1970s the island was gazetted as a recreation reserve.

From 1875 it also served as a quarantine station for both animals and people; firstly for new immigrants who had contracted illnesses while on board the ships that had brought them to New Zealand. But it was also used during the 1917–18 epidemic to isolate those on the mainland who had diseases such as diphtheria, smallpox and Spanish influenza.

In 1881 five acres were set aside as quarantine ground for cattle; this area was increased twice before 1892 when it was extended to cover the whole island. When Antarctic exploration was at its peak in 1901–1929, the island was used to quarantine and train dogs and ponies for Scott and Shackleton's expeditions.

For 19 years (1906–1925) the south side of Ōtamahua/Quail Island was the site of New Zealand's only leprosy quarantine colony. Nine patients lived here, with one, Ivon Skelton dying on the island. His lonely grave can be found on the discovery trail on the southern side of the island. In 1925 the remaining patients were sent to Fiji.

Prisoners from Lyttelton Gaol did much of the heavy construction on the island, building stone terrace walls and tracks, and planting trees.

Remnants and replicas of the island's historic past are scattered around the island.



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Lyttelton Harbour / Whakaraupō

Bird nesting area

View basalt cliffs

Ward's homestead site

Stock water dam

Summit 86 m



Walkway with information panels



Discovery Trail with quiz panels



Toilets



Shelter



Heritage centre

Dog kennels site

Leper colony site

Barracks

Ferry jetty

Ships' graveyard

Whakamaru Beach (swimmers beach)

skiers beach

Historic jetty

Walkers Beach

Ballast quarries

Leper graves

0 100 200 metres



Wildlife

The island is home to birds such as fantails/pīwakawaka and grey warblers/riroriro as well as introduced quail and pheasant, while Canterbury's own white-flipped penguins/kororā, terns/tara, shags/kōau, gulls and oystercatchers are seen on its coastal edge. Native ground beetles and Banks Peninsula tree wētā have been transferred to the island.

Banks Peninsula tree wētā
Photo: G H Sherley



White-flipped penguins/kororā

Track classification:

Easy to moderate walking from a few minutes to a day

Track is mostly well formed, some sections may be steep rough or muddy

Suitable for people with low to moderate fitness and abilities

Clearly signposted

Whakamaru Beach (swimmers beach)

10 minutes

Grade: Walking track

Although the track from the ferry jetty is a little steep, it's worth the climb down to the beach and the track surface is suitable for mountain-buggies. The beach is a safe place for swimming as it shelves out gently and the bay is reasonably sheltered from the winds that might whip up the harbour waters. It is a great spot to spend some time, have a picnic lunch, fossick amongst the rocks or beach-comb for shells and seaweed to decorate a sand sculpture.

Discovery Trail

Time: 1 hour

Grade: Walking track

Take the main track from the ferry jetty. It's a bit of a climb up behind the shelter, through a wooded area above the rocky shoreline to the heritage centre. The heritage centre in the old farmhouse on the island has panels on the cultural and natural history of the island, plus a scale-model of the island.

From the centre, follow the tractor path behind the building that heads towards the island summit at the centre of the island. You will pass through a large area of replanting, the work of the Ōtamahua/Quail Island Ecological Restoration

Trust. The trust and DOC are working in partnership to remove pests, re-plant the island, and re-introduce native wildlife.

When you reach a sign-posted junction, turn left. This will lead you past the dog kennels and then down to Whakamaru Beach.

Ōtamahua /Quail Island Track

Time: 2 hours 30 minutes

Grade: Walking track

The walk, to continue around the island, passes across the front of the heritage centre, through open grassland and along the basalt cliff tops to the Ward brothers' old cottage site. From here it leads to the northern point of the island and the bird observation barricade. Views extend down the harbour and across to Rāpaki.

Turn south-west and skirt the stock dam to reach a vantage point where there is an excellent view of the ships' graveyard, which contains wrecks of at least fourteen ships scuttled off-shore.

Continue along to the southern-most point of the island above Walkers Beach and past the quarry workings. The grave of Ivon Skelton, the only leprosy sufferer to die on the island, is found here within a neat picket fence.

Around the point the track turns north to the terraces behind the skiers' beach where the leprosy colony buildings once stood. View the replica cottage (built by students of Catholic Cathedral College) and walk past the stone terraces, admiring the craftsmanship of early twentieth-century prisoners from Lyttelton Gaol. Turn left to climb a short distance to the dog kennels' site, and a replica of these also built by students.

Return back to the main track through the oak grove, and then descend to Whakamaru Beach and the human quarantine barracks. Wind around the beachfront past the historic stock jetty and back to the ferry jetty.

Ōtamahua/Quail Island

For your safety

- Most track surfaces on the island are evenly graded or grassed, but sturdy footwear is recommended for the longer walks, for your comfort and safety.
- Carry adequate clothing and be prepared for sudden changes in the weather—parts of the island are very exposed.
- All walking times are approximate.

Important:

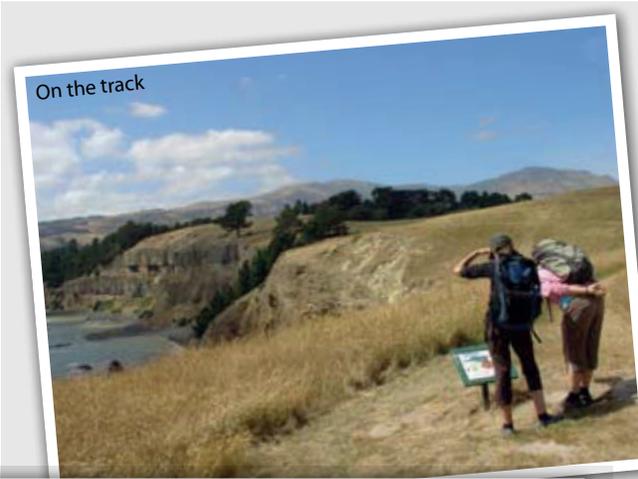
Ōtamahua/Quail Island is at times subject to extreme fire danger. Take care

If fire breaks out on the island

- Head to the nearest beach or coastal area, if it is safe to do so
- If you have a cellphone, dial 111 for fire

Please note:

- All wildlife, plants, natural and historic features are protected. Avoid damaging recently planted trees.
- Animals, including dogs, are prohibited, as is the carrying of firearms.
- Take home all your rubbish
- No unauthorised vehicles (including mountain bikes) are allowed.
- No fires except gas-fired BBQs in the picnic area on Whakamaru Beach (swimmers beach)
- No camping
- Bait stations and predator traps are in use at all times, please read the warning signs on the wharf and around the island.
- Do not use the historic stock jetty—it is unsafe.
- Do not remove rocks in the sea wall along the beach



Skiers beach



Whakamaru Beach



Photos: S Mankelov



The Ōtamahua/Quail Island Ecological Restoration Trust was established in 1998. This non-profit group aims to re-plant about one third of the island with natives, reintroduce native fauna, recognise historic sites and respect historic values, foster environmental education, and encourage recreational use.

The Trust has an on-going pest eradication programme targeting rabbits, stoats, rats, feral cats and hedgehogs.

Contact: The Ōtamahua/Quail Island Trust, P O Box 127, Lyttelton.

Further information

Ōtamahua/Quail Island – a link with the past, Peter Jackson, Second Edition 2007 published by Ōtamahua/Quail Island Trust

For further information, or to report any incidents, issues or sightings of conservation interest, contact the

DOC Christchurch Visitor Centre

Level 4
Torrens House
195 Hereford St
Christchurch
phone 03 379 4082

Mahaanui Area Office
PO. Box 11089
Sockburn 8443
Christchurch

Dial 111 for fire emergency
www.doc.govt.nz



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