

46. Cape Bird, Ross Island

77° 12' 45'' S, 166° 26' 56'' E
Located in the Ross Sea

ANTARCTIC TREATY

visitor site guide



Key Features

- Ross Island's second largest Adélie penguin colony; northern colony
- Important Bird Area 186, Caughley Beach
- Views of the Cape Bird Ice Cap
- Views of Beaufort Island to the north and of the Transantarctic Mountains to the west
- Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) No. 116 New College Valley - entry strictly by permit



Description

TOPOGRAPHY

Cape Bird lies at the northern extremity of Mount Bird (1,800 m), an inactive volcanic cone on Ross Island. An ice-free area on the lower western slopes of Mount Bird hosts the second largest Adélie penguin colony on Ross Island. This part of the coastline consists of hilly terrain of basaltic geology, glacial moraines and a series of broad, relatively flat, areas of beach sediments. The penguin colony occupies the lower slopes in three distinct groups: the northern, middle and southern colonies (Map 1). The northern colony above Caughley Beach is the largest of the three with ~45,000 breeding pairs (Figure 1).

FAUNA

Confirmed breeders: Adélie penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*), South Polar skua (*Catharacta maccormicki*).

Regularly haul out: Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*).

Also present: Snow petrels (*Pagodroma nivea*), Antarctic petrels (*Thalassoica antarctica*), Emperor penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) and Leopard seals (*Hydrurga leptonyx*) are commonly observed in the area, although are not known to breed at this location.

The ice-free ground above Caughley Beach supports rich invertebrate communities of springtails, mites, nematodes, tardigrades and rotifers, with ciliate and flagellate protozoa also present. Most arthropod species are associated with moss vegetation or algal biomass.

FLORA

Some of the richest stands of moss in the southern Ross Sea and associated microflora (including algae, cyanobacterial communities and lichen encrustations on moribund moss) colonise slopes above Caughley Beach. In recognition of these values, the area of New College Valley was designated an Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA No. 116).

OTHER

New Zealand's Cape Bird field hut (Figure 2) is situated on the hill above Caughley Beach near the ASPA No.116 boundary. The hut was constructed in 1991, replacing the original built in 1966. An Automatic Weather Station (AWS) is set up ~100 m northeast of the Cape Bird field hut.

Visitor Impact

KNOWN IMPACTS

Wildlife disturbance from human activities, cumulative effects of human presence around the field hut, tracking and ground disturbance, including the erosion of a trail down the hill from the hut.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Disturbance to wildlife, trampling of vegetation, erosion of footpaths, tracking, ground compaction, importation of non-native species or disease, litter pollution, disturbance or damage to research, research equipment or the field hut, and potential fuel spills from small boat operations.

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Landing Requirements

SHIPS*

Max pax on board: 200

Ships at a time: 1

Comments: Ships carrying 200 or fewer passengers. One ship at a time.

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

AIRCRAFT

The designated helicopter landing sites at Cape Bird are for support of scientific research and management only.

VISITORS

Maximum number of visitors at any time, exclusive of expedition guides and leaders: 100

Visitors per guide: 15

Comments: No more than 100 visitors ashore at any time, exclusive of expedition guides and leaders. Visitors per guide: 15.

Visitor Area

LANDING AREA

Cape Bird may be accessed by small boat. The preferred landing area for small boats is along Caughley Beach below the field hut (Map 2). However, in difficult ice, swell or wind conditions, landings may also take place towards the northern end of the northern colony. Landings may be made on more southerly beaches according to conditions, with the small embayment north of Keys Point potentially offering more shelter from swell (Map 1). Landings where penguins are transiting between land and sea should be avoided.

CLOSED AREA

Entry into ASPA No. 116 is prohibited without a permit. Entry for tourism purposes is prohibited.

The Cape Bird field hut, stores hut and toilet located on the hill above Caughley Beach are closed to visitors.

GUIDED WALKING AREA

Visits to the hut should only be made by following the preferred walking trail (Map 2). This trail follows steps up to the hut (Figure 2) and an established trail north of the hut extends ~100 m back down to the beach. Visitors may visit the AWS, but this and any other scientific equipment should not be disturbed.

FREE ROAMING AREA

Visitors may roam freely along Caughley Beach under close supervision. Care should be taken when viewing penguins to avoid disturbance to penguin nests, skua nesting sites or vegetation. After Adélie chicks have fledged and adults have returned to sea (February), visitors may under close supervision roam further onto the area where nesting sites were formerly occupied.

Visitor code of conduct

BEHAVIOUR ASHORE

- Established walking trails should be followed wherever practicable.
- Do not approach wildlife closer than 5m, increase the distance if the animal is disturbed, and take particular care around nesting birds which may be more vulnerable to disturbance.
- Always give animals right-of-way and keep noise around wildlife to a minimum.
- All waste produced by visitors onshore, including human waste, must be removed from the area.
- Nothing, except for waste, is to be taken from the area.
- Interference with science equipment (e.g., Automatic Weather Station) or buildings (e.g., Cape Bird field Hut) is prohibited.
- Appropriate biosecurity measures should be taken before going ashore, including cleaning all equipment, clothing and footwear.
- Food containing poultry products (e.g., chicken, eggs) is prohibited onshore.

CAUTIONARY NOTES

- Do not enter Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) No. 116 - see maps for boundaries.
- Loose scoria, snow and ice can make hill slopes slippery near the hut, including the steps and trail.
- Pack- and brash-ice can make small boat landings along Caughley Beach difficult, particularly in southerly winds.
- Skuas may attack if their nesting sites are approached too close: if this occurs, retreat the way you came to leave their territory.
- Avoid the risk of ice falls from the Adélie Glacier ice cliffs at the northern extremity of the northern colony.

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Figure 1. View of northern colony from the hill near Cape Bird field hut, including the cruise ship, Beaufort Island and Adélie Glacier ice cliffs (Source: Jenny Ridgen, 22/23).

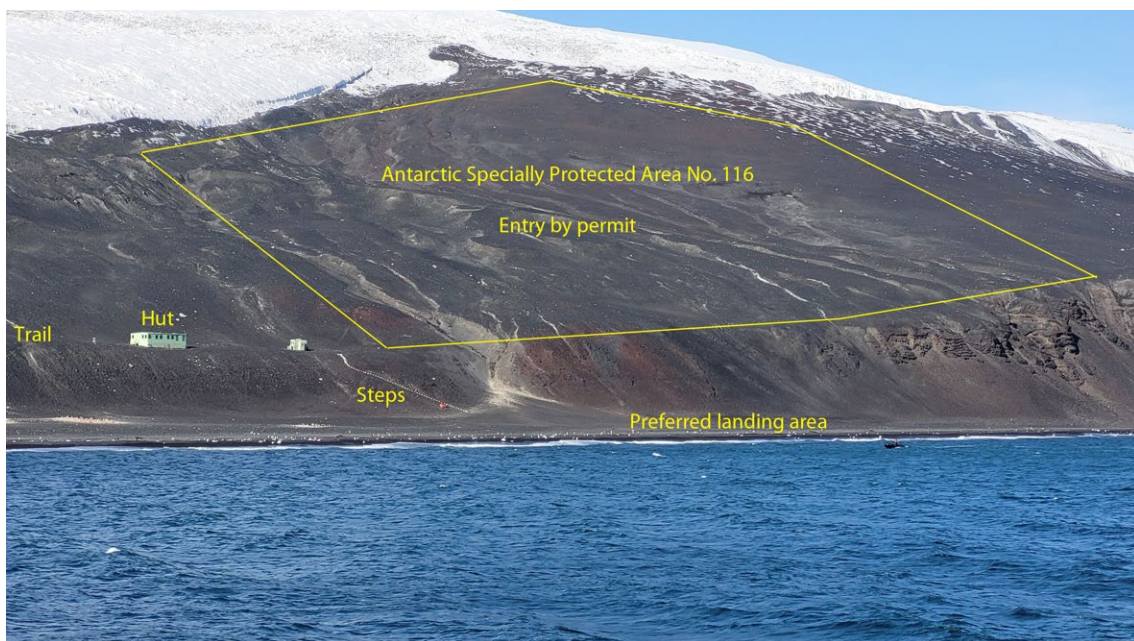


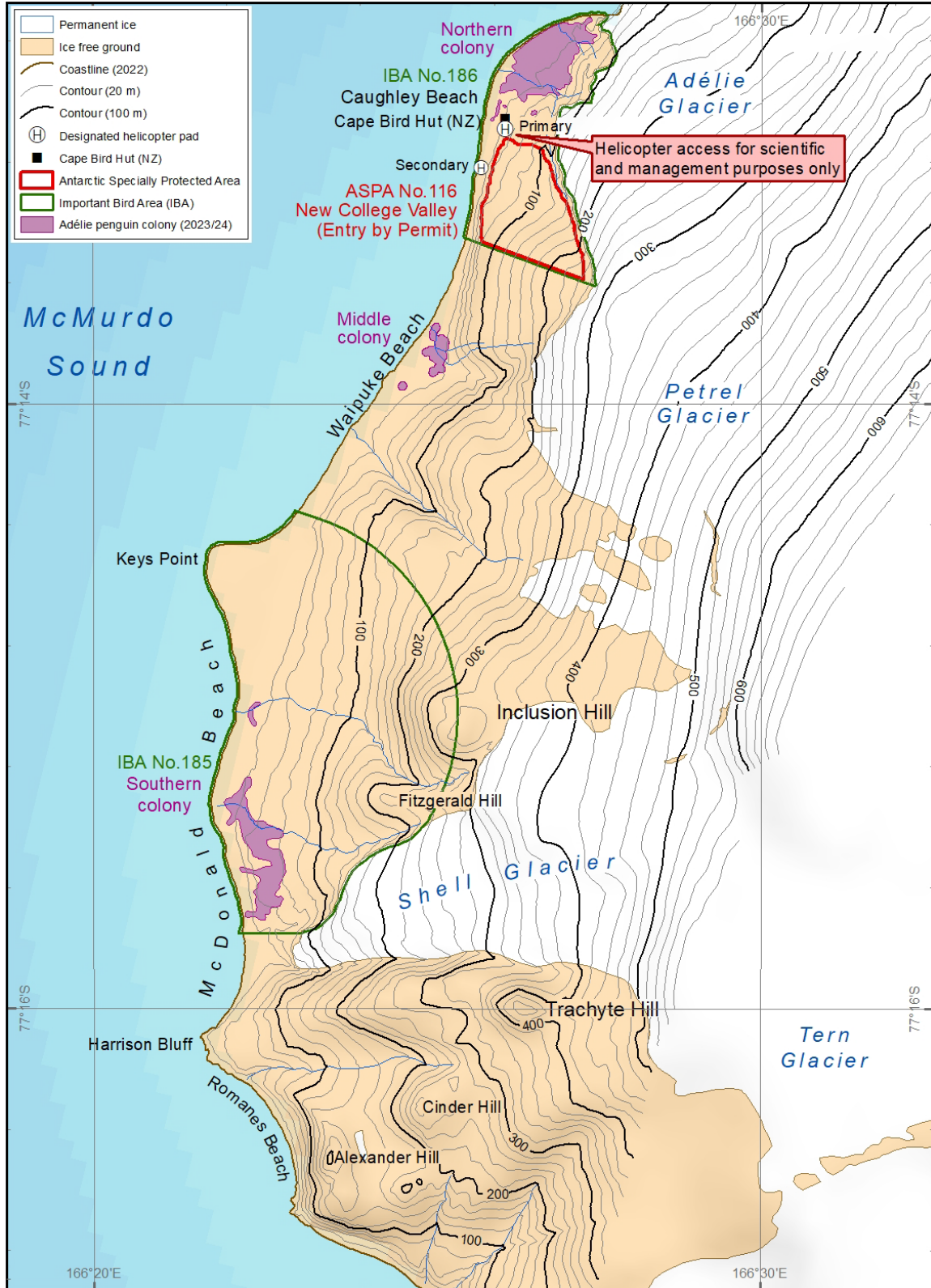
Figure 2. View of Caughley Beach from tour ship, including ASPA 116, Cape Bird field hut, steps to hut, Adélie Glacier and the trailhead that leads back down the hill to Caughley Beach (Source: Cornelia Vervoorn, 23/24).

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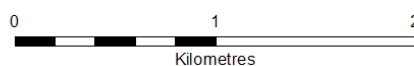


Map 1: Cape Bird Visitor Site Guidelines - overview

25 Jan 2025 Environmental Research & Assessment



Antarctica
New Zealand



Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic
 Horizontal datum: WGS84; Vertical datum: MSL.
 Data sources:
 ASPA boundary, contours: Gateway Antarctica (2012);
 Coastline / streams / hut / AWS /
 penguin colony: from ASPA 116 maps (2024) /
 high resolution orthophoto Ballard pers. comm. (Nov 2023).

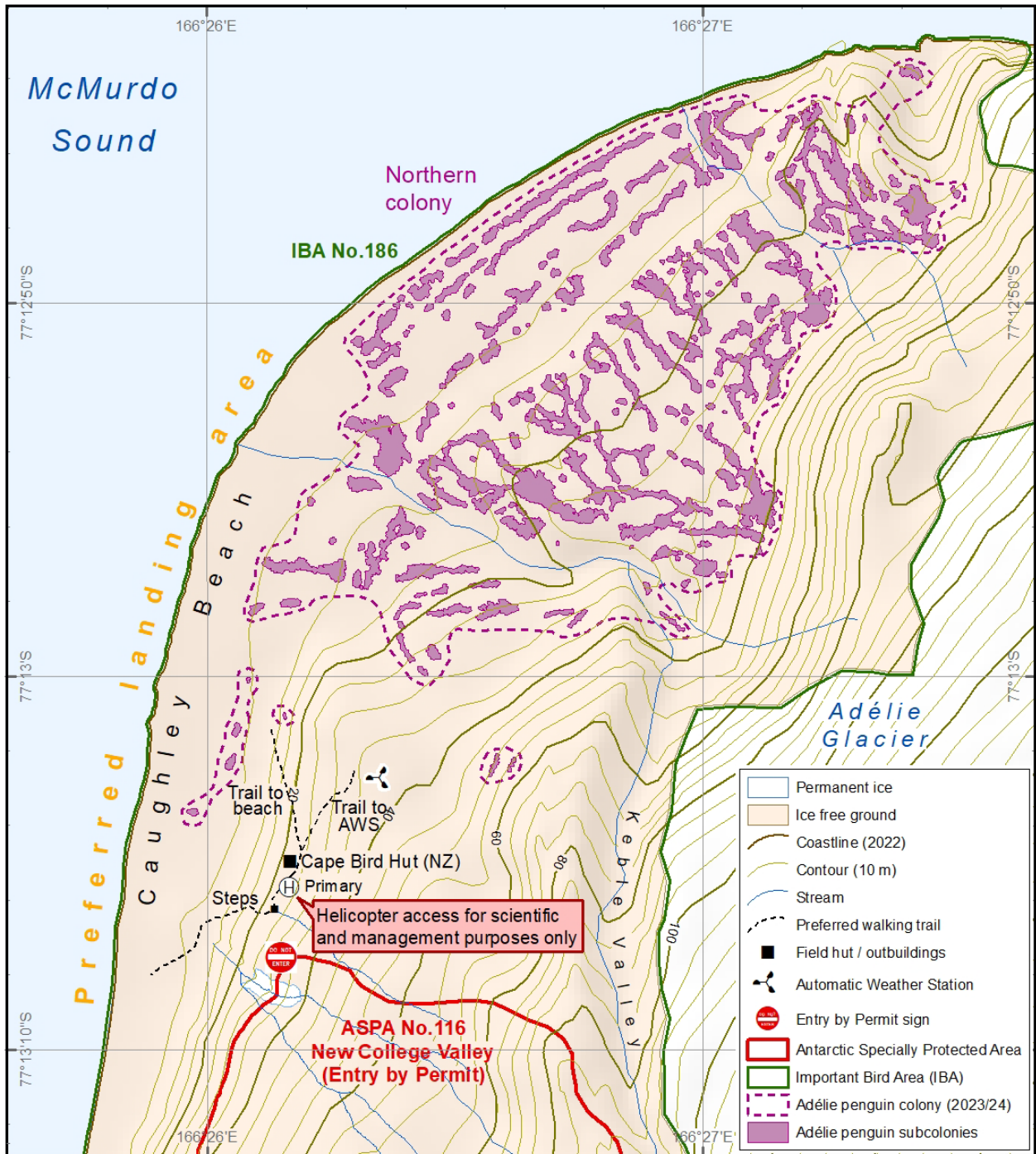
Map 1. Cape Bird coastline, Ross Island.

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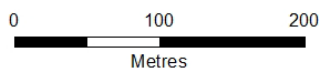
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Map 2: Cape Bird Visitor Site Guidelines - detail

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 Horizontal datum: WGS84; Vertical datum: MSL
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 from ASPA 116 maps (2024) / high resolution
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Map 2. Caughley Beach, Cape Bird, Ross Island. Including the preferred walking trails and small boat landing area.