

The hills around what is now Waro Lake were forested until 1888 when a fire raged and cleared the area of the native bush. This fire opened up the area for new commercial developments other than timber milling. The first enterprise, near the lake site was a lime works producing burnt lime for agriculture. This was sold and extended to three kilns and a limestone crusher. The limestone was quarried from several faces locally. Wilsons Portland Cement Company bought the site in 1922 and quarried limestone for their cement works until 1974. This lime extraction was a secondary focus for the area as coal (waro in Maori) was more important around Hikurangi. The Hikurangi Coal Company opened its coal mine below the base of the rocks in 1913. This was closed temporarily after the First World War but reopened in 1921 and finally closed in 1933. Further information and pictures can be obtained from the 'History of Lake Waro' by Golden Bay Cement.



Photograph courtesy of Golden Bay Cement

Today the lake is a popular recreational area and is well known for its interesting limestone formations. The reserve was administered by the Lands and Survey Department but now the Whangarei District Council manages the area. They are helped by the Friends of Waro Lake, a community group that helps to care for and beautify the park. The land adjacent to the lake is the Waro Limestone Scenic Reserve administered by DOC. The reserve walk is 1km long but it can be extended to 2.2 km around the lake.



Photographs Lake Waro courtesy of Whangarei District Council

The lake has several features including a floating pontoon, deep water, rocky outcrops used for jumping in, a grassed beach area and water weeds. It is fed from a spring in the west and the water runs into a culvert on the eastern end of the lake when it over flows. This runs into a creek that is bridged. Generally the water has good clarity except after rain and during prolonged hot spells when algae bloom can occur. The lake is not well stocked with fish. Signage indicating deep water is shown but this sign and the local history information board near the toilet block are often defaced or stolen. For example, after the Christmas Eve drowning of a 4 year old in the lake in 2009 the deep water signage was replaced by the Council and lasted two weeks.

Motor boats are not allowed on the lake and there is signage to support this bylaw. Kayaking is a popular activity on the lake. The Tornado Youth group and a triathlon group are regular users of the lake. The local fire brigade use the lake as a practice area and they fill their tanks during periods of water restriction.

The raupō weed is prevalent in shallow areas. Raupō can grow quickly and it helps to maintain good water quality as it can absorb a large range of nutrients and pollutants. Dried raupō leaves were used by early Māori for poi or for weaving, the stalks used for thatching and the rhizomes were gathered for food. The friends are hoping to be able to control its spread and clear one side of the lake.

Waro Lake is tested for water quality weekly during the summer month by the Regional Council. The water quality has improved recently and there has been a decline in domestic water fowl numbers. For more information see Northland Regional Council Annual Environmental Monitoring Report/ Rivers and Streams/Recreational Bathing Water Quality.

Water safety at Waro Lake

(See also Teacher Guide 'Key Water Safety Messages')

Any natural body of water has its own characteristics that can change with the seasons and variations in the weather. Lake users should spend time identifying potential hazards before entering the water. As the lake is a flooded quarry the lake bed will be variable in depth with several drop-off areas leading to deep water. The depth of water near stony outcrops and the pontoon should be estimated before entering the water. Deeper water can be colder than shallow water and so there may be a temperature gradient in the water – both at the surface and at depth. Winds could cause the surface to become choppy and this can limit the vision between swimmers in the water.

The grassed beach area is not like a beach at the coast. There are no tides on the lake but the water level varies up to a meter between summer and winter. The shore line can either be non existent or rocky. The pontoon gives easy and clear access to the water.

When swimming

- take a buddy
- have a safe entry and exit point away from weeds
- wear appropriate swim gear
- avoid swimming by the weeds
- avoid swimming after drinking alcohol
- do not swim at night.
- know where the drop off areas are and keep non swimmers away from these areas
- actively supervise children keeping non swimmers within sight and reach at all times

Photograph to show the drilling that created the drop off areas

By Golden Bay Cement



When jumping in or diving in

- take a buddy
- check the depth and that there are no obstacles under the water in your landing area
- make sure the water is clear before you jump/dive
- if diving in, enter hands and arms first and do not pull out of the dive too early i.e. lead with arms extended to protect head at all times
- feet first entry is safer than head first entry

Tornado Youth raft race Waro Lake

Courtesy of Golden Bay Cement



When kayaking

- kayak with a buddy
- wear a buoyancy vest
- stay away from swimmers

For further information contact the Friends of Waro Lake, Yvonne Stewart on 09 4338866