

GOLD HARBOUR

Visitor Management Plan

(Including Extended Walk Guidelines)

v2015



Gold Harbour landing site

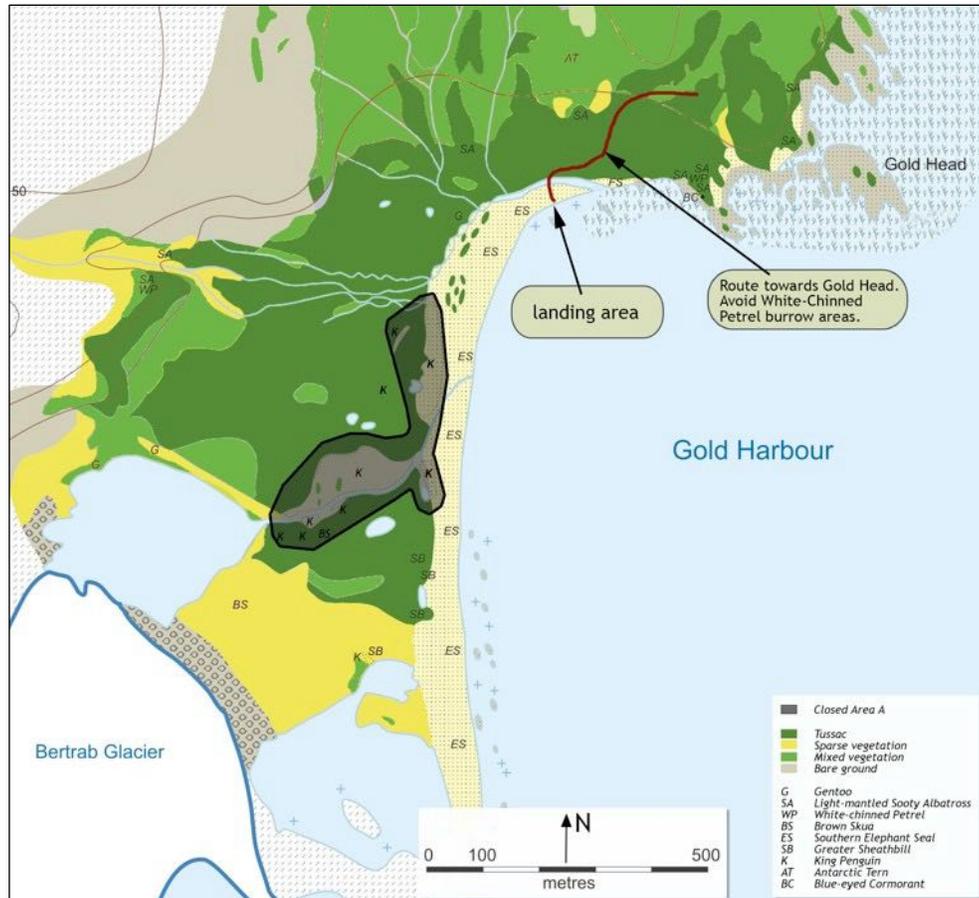


Near the edge of the colony

GOLD HARBOUR VISITOR MANAGEMENT PLAN (INCLUDING EXTENDED WALK GUIDELINES)



LOCATION



- Latitude: 54° 37' S
 - Longitude: 35° 56' W
- 20km north of Cape Vahsel.



KEY FEATURES

- King penguins
- Elephant seals
- Light-mantled sooty albatross

DESCRIPTION

○ Topography

Gold Harbour is backed by an amphitheatre of hanging glaciers and cliffs at the base of the Salvesen Range. The rapidly retreating Bertrab Glacier has left a series of lagoons, the largest of which is lined by a wave-swept moraine which marks its former recent extent.

The northern entrance to the bay is protected by Gold Head and a series of bluffs and cliffs which jut out to the east. Nestling between the bluffs of Gold Head and a steep-sided lateral moraine to the south, lies a tussac-covered glacial outwash plain riddled with small streams and pools, site of a large king penguin colony.

○ Fauna

Confirmed breeders: king penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*), gentoo penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*), light-mantled sooty albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*), white-chinned petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*), blue-eyed shag (*Phalacrocorax atriceps georgianus*), snowy sheathbill (*Chionis alba*), kelp gull (*Larus dominicanus*), brown skua (*Catharacta lonnbergi*), Antarctic tern (*Sterna vittatae georgiae*), South Georgia pintail (*Anas georgica georgica*), elephant seal (*Mirounga leonina*), fur seal (*Arctocephalus gazella*).

The habitat restoration project to remove the brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) is scheduled for early 2015

○ Flora

The area behind the beach is covered in tussac and Antarctic hairgrass. Large patches of Acaena herbfield cover the steep slopes encircling the site between the lateral moraine ridge and Gold Head. Sparse lowland fellfield is found along the top of the moraine ridges while the undulating plains on the plateau above Gold Head host a mix of mainly Festuca grassland, tussac and mire and bog communities.

○ Other

Kelp beds and a number of isolated reefs fringe the coastline around Gold Head. A few isolated rocky outcrops, some of which are partially submerged at high water, extend from the landing beach near the north end of the bay.

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VISITOR IMPACTS

- **Known Impacts**

None known

- **Potential Impacts**

Disturbance of wildlife, trampling of vegetation on slopes leading to Gold Head.

LANDING REQUIREMENTS

- **Ships ***

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

Maximum 2 ships per day (midnight to midnight).

- **Visitors**

No more than 100 visitors ashore at any time, exclusive of expedition guides and leaders.

1 experienced guide (minimum) per 20 visitors.

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



VISITOR AREAS

- **Landing Area**

Landing beach is in northern corner of the bay close to Gold Head cliffs.

- **Closed Areas**

Closed Area A: king penguin colony and a 10m buffer zone around its perimeter.

- **Guided Walking Areas**

(see Extended Walk section)

- **Free Roaming Areas**

Upper beach area between landing site and the king colony - wildlife permitting.



VISITOR CODE OF CONDUCT

○ Behaviour ashore

Walk slowly and carefully. Maintain a precautionary distance from wildlife and give animals the right-of-way. Increase your distance if any change in behaviour is observed. Keep 10 metres from breeding light-mantled sooty albatross nests and from the king penguin colony edge.

Be alert to fur seals hidden in the tussac and elephant seals in wallows.

Do not stray into the king penguin colony. Avoid the king penguin access routes between the colony and the beach. Take particular care not to disturb, or shift, moulting king penguins.

When lower beach area is crowded with wildlife, particularly during elephant seal breeding period, visitors should be encouraged to stay on the upper beach area.

Do not remove or disturb any historic artifacts.

○ Cautionary notes

Gold Harbour is exposed to the south and east and may be subject to swell. Strong katabatic winds can descend from the Bertrab Glacier with little warning.

Beware of waves caused by ice falls from the Bertrab Glacier when walking near the shore of the lagoon area.

Take care near the cliff edges surrounding Gold Head, particularly in strong winds.

Minimise use of ship lights at nightfall to reduce risk of bird strikes and remain vigilant

○ Biosecurity

All landings must comply with GSGSSI biosecurity measures and rigorous self-audit checks must be carried out prior to landing.



GOLD HARBOUR EXTENDED WALK GUIDELINES

○ **Walk Grading**

Extended walks have all been graded on the basis of length, terrain and technical difficulty.

The Gold Harbour Walk has been graded as green.

Green Walk:

- Straightforward walk, which might cover large distances, but poses little technical difficulty and does not require difficult navigation or route choices en route.
- Minimum staff (guide) to visitor ratio: 1:20. Additional staff should accompany the walk to ensure adequate staffing levels are maintained at all times to manage and respond to any incident arising.
- Suitable for adequately fit novice hill walkers. Robust footwear is essential, and walking boots are recommended.
- Maximum group size 100 visitors (plus guides / staff). Guides are strongly encouraged to manage walkers in discrete groups, rather than one long extended chain.

○ **Waypoints**

The waypoints have been produced as an aid to navigation on the walks. In the majority of cases, these provide a tangible point to head towards in poor visibility; the ground covered between the points is at the discretion of the leader and will depend on, for example, the nature and experience of the group.

○ **Staff Experience**

Leading guides should ideally hold recognised qualifications (for example Mountain Leader Award).

All staff should be able to use GPS, map and compass and hold a current first aid qualification. Previous hill walking and guiding experience is important. Every staff member is expected to have sufficient experience to be able to independently and confidently manage and navigate a group of visitors down off a hill to safety.

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○ **Staff Equipment**

There should be sufficient equipment carried by the each staff member to keep a group sheltered from the elements, raise the alarm if necessary, deal with immediate first aid, and have the tools to navigate independently.

This should include:

- Compass and whistle
- Local area map (plus GPS as required)
- Spare food and drink
- Spare clothing
- Basic first aid kit
- VHF

As a group, the staff should ensure they carry:

- 1 Iridium phone (minimum)
- 2 GPS units and spare batteries (minimum), more are required for larger groups
- Spare walking poles
- Group shelters to accommodate the complete party distributed between staff members

○ **Visitors Equipment**

Visitor's personal equipment should include:

- Spare clothing
- Hat and gloves
- Emergency food & Drink (or access to these at all times)
- Personal medication (in case of delay ashore)
- Walking poles (if they normally used).

Careful consideration must always be given to footwear. Wellington boots should be avoided, particularly if visitors are not steady on their feet. Walking boots are strongly encouraged and recommended for this walk, due to the slippery conditions.

Guides should pay close attention to the footwear worn by the visitors.

○ **Medical Provision**

It is a requirement of visiting vessels to be self sufficient in every respect, including medical cover. The visit permit holder and leading guide must both check and ensure that there is adequate medical provision and a tested medical response plan in place to rapidly respond to any injury sustained during the walk or medical trauma incident.

All incidents, accidents and injuries, no matter how minor, must be reported to GSGSSI.

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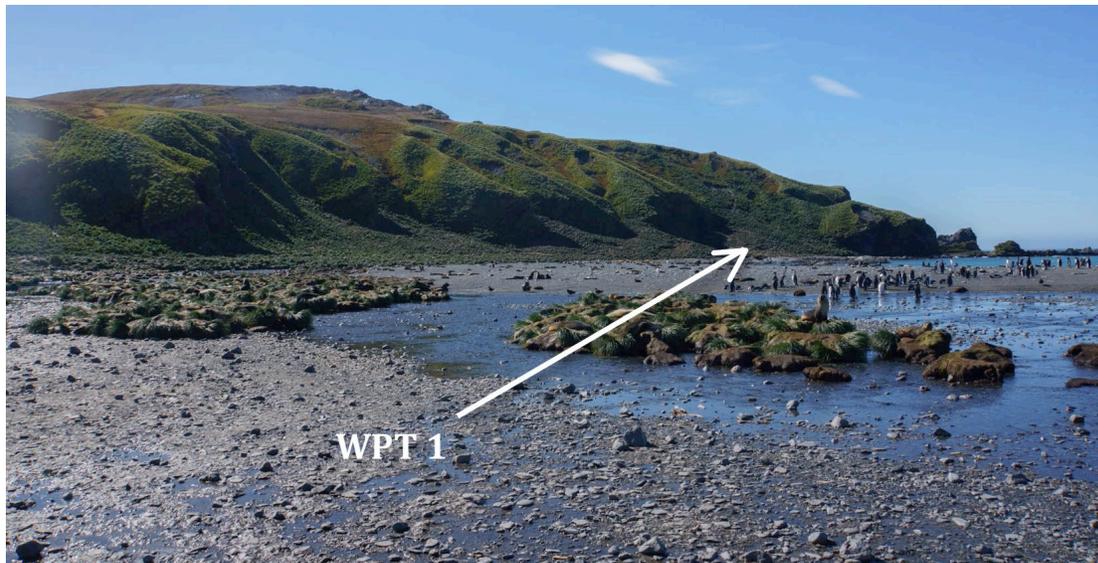


○ **Route**

Walk from beach to Gold Head

- WPT 1 Base of Wide Gully
- 54° 37.085' S
- 035° 56.168' W

This waypoint indicates the start of just one of many possible routes up to the flats leading to Gold Head. This route avoids much of the moss that is encountered if traversing the flats from the west. However, wildlife distribution is likely to dictate the route followed and group leaders should use their discretion when selecting a route up.



Hikes to Gold Head should be lead by a guide with local knowledge. Care should be taken in route selection up the ridge and on Gold Head as white-chinned petrels burrow in many of the tussac ridges and mounds and there is a large Antarctic tern colony on the Festuca grassland slope above the beach. Additionally routes should avoid the edges of the mire and bog communities, which are more susceptible to trampling.

Keep at least 10 metres from any light-mantled sooty albatross nests, and approach in small groups, taking care not to surround the nests. Hikes to the moraine ridge to overlook the Bertrab Glacier lagoon should be lead by a guide with local knowledge.

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