

Island Bay Sea Wall

The Esplanade, Island Bay



Damage to the Island Bay Seawall (Western/Central section of the Island Bay Beach) following June 2013 storm.¹

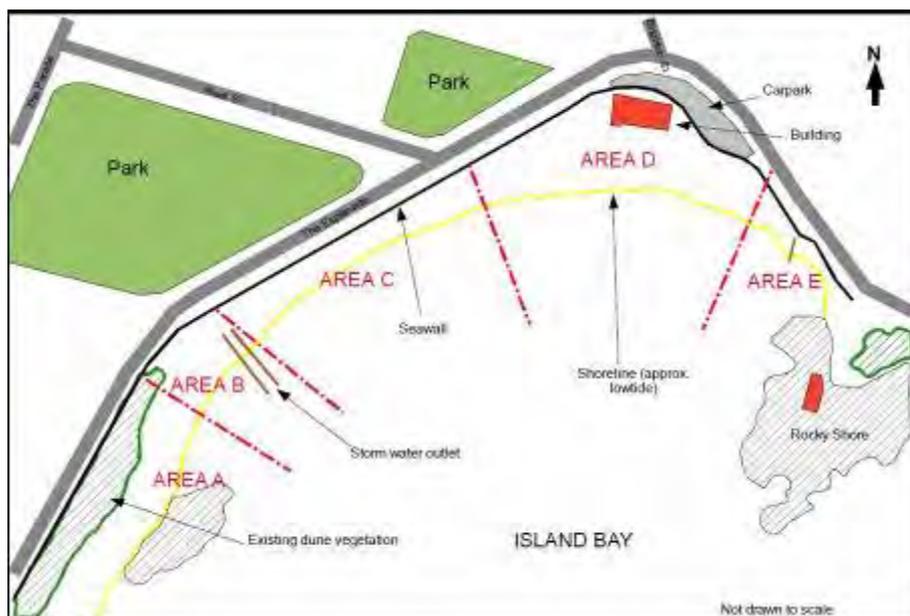
Summary of heritage significance

- The Island Bay sea wall is a simple, but elegant engineering structure designed to cope with the rigours of an extremely exposed and severe maritime environment. The curved face of the seaward face is designed to return much of the sand and spray back to the beach and is a clever design feature.
- The Island Bay Sea Wall is an important historic object which has become a feature in the Island Bay community; it helps to define the beach as well as separating it from the street. Children play on and around the wall and people use it for resting and as a meeting place. It contributes significantly to the sense of place and continuity in Island Bay.
- Together with the Lyall Bay Sea Wall and the Oriental Parade Sea Wall, the Island Bay Sea Wall is one of a number of sea walls in Wellington that were constructed to deal with the issue of sand drift and create an interesting group of early protection works in Wellington.

District Plan:	Map 4, reference 22
Heritage Area:	N/A – Tapu Te Ranga Marine Reserve (DoC)
Archaeological Site:	Te Mapunga (Island Bay) 4, M83; Uruhau Pa 4, M85 Te Mapunga Kainga 4, M82, Motu-haku Kainga/Pa 4, M84
Key physical dates:	1935-1937
Architect / Builder:	City Engineer, Wellington City Corporation
Former uses:	Sea Wall
Current uses:	Sea Wall

¹ Island Bay Marine Centre, accessed 26 June 2013, https://fbcdn-sphotos-c-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash4/p480x480/998681_566188416752724_1602502963_n.jpg

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013

Seawall marked as black line.²

1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The long sandy straight of beach facing the island Tapu Te Ranga is the eponymous feature of the suburb of Island Bay on the southwest coast of Wellington. Island Bay has a long history of settlement, both Maori and Pakeha, with the sea playing a major role in the lives of those who reside there. In the 19th century, many Europeans began to settle in the suburb and by 1905 and the advent of the electric tram, the area had become a popular spot for recreation and was known as one of Wellington's best swimming beaches. The suburb grew substantially throughout the 1920s becoming an increasingly suburban space, and making clear the need to

² Harley Spence and Dr David Bergin, 'Island Bay Five Year Restoration Plan' unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council and Greater Wellington, June 30th 2009, accessed 26 June 2013, <http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/council-publications/Island%20Bay%20Restoration%20Plan.pdf>

control the sand that would drift from the beach, particularly along the esplanade which was, by the 1920s, a busy road.

The Island Bay Esplanade had been laid out as early as 1881 as a part of the subdivision of land at Island Bay, but the road was not actually constructed until 1902.³ Council engineers plans from the early 1920s show that some attempts had been made to construct a barrier between the suburban space and the beachfront, but this was little more than rough rubble adjacent to the Esplanade. It was recognised by the city engineer in 1934 that, although there were no funds available, a sea wall would be a beneficial project for Island Bay, to deal with the issue of sand drift. A sea wall had previously been constructed in Lyall Bay in 1932-1933, to deal with the same issue of sand drift affecting the residential spaces along the coast. £2000 was allocated in the 1935 Street Works loan for the Island Bay sea wall and it was "intended to make a thorough job of the wall, which had been sought for a long time",⁴ although by the beginning of 1936 this amount was regarded as insufficient, and Councillor W. Appleton stated that it would "probably cost £1000 more than was provided for, but this could be put on the next year's estimates".⁵ Although the sea wall was viewed by many as a vast improvement and a marker of civic progress in the city,⁶ some residents of Island Bay were initially dissatisfied with the performance of the sea wall, stating that it did not prevent sand from being blown into the residential areas of the suburb.⁷

The sea wall extends for approximately 340 meters around Island Bay, starting close to Shorland Park, and following the Bay past the surf lifesaving club building to the eastern end of the Bay. The wall appears to have been constructed in concrete in two sections. The top section is approximately one meter high as measured from the Esplanade and has a moulded cap. There are small holes in the wall at the footpath periodically to allow water to drain from the road to the sea. There are also holes noticeable on the top of the wall that once held electric lighting, it is not clear when this was removed, but it appears to have been some time after 1950. The face of the wall along the footpath was also originally fitted with steel handrails, but these have also been subsequently removed, with the railing cut flush with the concrete.

The construction appears to be very similar to that of the Lyall Bay sea wall, constructed in 1932-33, cast in-situ concrete with steel reinforcing and an off-form concrete finish. The casting consists of a concrete foundation wall taken down to a founding level below the sand and cast to a height of approximately 400mm above the beach sand level. The lower section of the wall is of an unknown depth and thickness, but it is likely to be at least as wide as the base of the upper sections. The foundation was poured in long sections and appears to be of mass concrete. The steel reinforcing in the lower sections of the wall had shown no sign of deterioration in 2002. The concrete face of the wall has weathered over time, and in many places has generally eroded and the rounded aggregate used in the concrete mix has been exposed. The foundations show little damage in the form of cracks or deformation, although erosion has taken place. The upper section of the wall is constructed in a 'classic sea wall shape' and is cast in lengths of approximately four metres in concrete with steel reinforcing bars.⁸ The wall facing the sea is curved, presenting an upswept glacis to the beach side overtopped with a heavy moulded coping that serves to turn much of the sand and spray back onto the beach. Below this the lower section goes down into the sand and is visible from the beach. There are six pedestrian entrances through the seawall to the beach; the most westerly opening is above the storm drain, moving

³ Wellington City Archive 00002: 10: 679.

⁴ 'Island Bay Sea Wall, *Evening Post*, 14 February 1936, Page 5, accessed 26 June 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19360214.2.23.9&srpos=1&e=-----10--1--0intended+to+make+a+thorough+job+of+the+wall-->

⁵ 'Island Bay Sea Wall' *Evening Post*, Issue 38, 14 February 1936, Page 5, accessed 26 June 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19360214.2.23.9>

⁶ 'Civic Progress', *Evening Post*, Volume CXXII, Issue 152, 24 December 1936, page 10, accessed 26 June 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19361224.2.102&srpos=110&e=---1934----10--101---0Island+Bay+Sea+Wall-->

⁷ 'Island Bay Sea Wall, *Evening Post*, 14 February 1936, Page 5, accessed 26 June 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19360214.2.23.9&srpos=1&e=-----10--1--0intended+to+make+a+thorough+job+of+the+wall-->

⁸ Spencer Holmes Ltd, 'Report on Sea Wall at Esplanade Island Bay', unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council, June 2002, 1.

east there are three additional openings before reaching the surf club building. Each of these four openings has concrete stairs leading down to the beach. A plain cut was made into the sea wall to accommodate the stairs for the surf club. An additional entrance is at the east end, with the original concrete stairs replaced with a concrete ramp. Except for the unornamented opening at the surf club entrance, the openings are marked with a capped pilaster at each end, and each end of the wall also is capped with a pilaster.

The sea wall in the past decade has been reported as being in fair to poor condition; crumbling in some places with some major separation cracks between the upper and lower sections of the wall. It was noted in 2002 that the western sections of the wall are extremely exposed to the sea which in ordinary conditions reaches the base of the wall and in storm conditions will swamp it. Some of the upper sections had also moved, rotated, and settled relative to the foundations due to erosion of the joints between the upper and lower sections. On the footpath face of the wall, the original electrical cables had also become exposed and the asphalt footpath behind the wall was failing close to the wall. It was recommended that these issues should be repaired, in particular the eroded joints.⁹ By 2004 this had not occurred, and although the wall had not suffered any unusual deterioration, it was again recommended that the eroded gaps in the western sections of the wall should be repaired and that the corroding reinforcement in the upper section of the entire wall be treated.

In 2004 it also appears that the pilaster cappings on either side of the opening to the immediate west of the boat club had been damaged. The mouldings had been sawn off at the wall. In 2009 approximately 65 meters of the sea wall was repaired around the eastern section of the wall. This length of wall is a masonry block retaining wall.

In June 2013 parts of the western end of the sea wall were severely damaged by a storm with parts of the upper sections coming away from the lower, damaging the asphalt and other areas of the sea wall. Long sections of the damaged wall have been removed and temporary shoring, using rubble and boulders, have been installed to stabilise the road. The storm damage has somewhat lessened the aesthetic and architectural heritage values of the wall, and it is unclear when, or if, the sea wall will be repaired or reinstated (November 2013).

Despite the 2013 storm damage, the Island Bay sea wall is a simple, but elegant engineering structure designed to cope with the rigours of an extremely exposed and severe maritime environment. The sea wall contributes a significant amount of visual amenity and a sense of history to the area; further to this it is also a strong object that makes clear the demarcation between beach and road. The wall has a carefully considered profile and its finishing provides visual interest to what is otherwise a prosaic and utilitarian structure. Its style and evident age contribute to the sense of establishment in the Island Bay area, making it clear that the beach has played a long and important role in the life of the community and Wellington in general. Each of these qualities is evident from the landward and seaward sides of the wall, although the landward side offers a greater impression of the extent and continuity of the wall.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1935-1937	Original construction
2004	Damage to pilaster cappings
2009	65m repair to eastern section of sea wall
2013	Severe storm damage & temporary repairs

1.3 Ownership history

Not assessed

1.4 Occupation history

Not assessed

⁹ Ibid, 2-3.

1.5 Architect

City Engineer, Wellington City Corporation

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Island Bay sea wall is a simple, but elegant engineering structure designed to cope with the rigours of an extremely exposed and severe maritime environment. The wall appears to have been constructed in concrete in two sections. The casting consists of a concrete foundation wall taken down to a founding level below the sand and cast to a height of approximately 400mm above the beach sand level. The lower section of the wall is of an unknown depth and thickness, but it is likely to be at least as wide as the base of the upper sections. The foundation was poured in long sections and appears to be of mass concrete. The top section is approximately one meter high as measured from the Esplanade and has a moulded cap. There are small holes in the wall at the footpath periodically to allow water to drain from the road to the sea. The upper section of the wall is constructed in a 'classic sea wall shape' and is cast in lengths of approximately four metres in concrete with steel reinforcing bars.¹⁰ The wall facing the sea is curved, presenting an upswept glacis to the beach side overtopped with a heavy moulded coping that serves to turn much of the sand and spray back onto the beach. Below this the lower section goes down into the sand and is visible from the beach. There are six pedestrian entrances through the seawall to the beach; the most westerly opening is above the storm drain, moving east there are three additional openings before reaching the surf club building. Each of these four openings has concrete stairs leading down to the beach.

2.2 Materials

- Cast in-situ concrete
- Steel reinforcing

2.3 Setting

The Island Bay Sea Wall is an important element of the heritage and history of the beach at Island Bay and Shorland Park. The sea wall is an important part of the chain of sea protection along the curve of Island Bay that controls the erosion of the land, protects the road, and constrains the spread of the beach onto adjoining residential areas. The sea wall enhances its setting in the local streetscape and landscape by defining the Esplanade and demarcating the beach from the road.

The wall is flanked by a number of structures that relate to Island Bay as a recreational beach, as a community, and to the fishing industry that all contribute to the setting of the sea wall. The Island Bay Lifesaving and Surf Club and the Bait Shed contribute to creating a sense of place at the shore, and the close proximity of Shorland Park and the Island Bay Band Rotunda has important functions for the community. These buildings, along with the sea wall, have a high level of visual amenity and sit well together in the setting.

¹⁰ Spencer Holmes Ltd, 'Report on Sea Wall at Esplanade Island Bay', unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council. June 2002, 1.

Sources

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Papers Past

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Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

The Island Bay sea wall is a simple, but elegant engineering structure designed to cope with the rigours of an extremely exposed and severe maritime environment. The curved face of the seaward face is designed to return much of the sand and spray back to the beach and is a clever design feature. The wall is characteristic of the time in which it was constructed and is similar to many of the other sea walls constructed in Wellington to deal with sand drift.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The Sea Wall has a distinctive form and structure and marks a key promenade that is often used as a meeting place. It has significant townscape value as the defining feature of the Island Bay Esplanade.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

Together with the Lyall Bay Sea Wall and the Oriental Parade Sea Wall, the Island Bay Sea Wall is one of a number of sea walls in Wellington that were constructed to deal with the issue of sand drift and create an interesting group of early protection works in Wellington.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The Island Bay Sea Wall is associated with the engineering response to sand-drift—a common problem associated with increasing sea-side suburban living in Wellington. As the trams grew in popularity, and Island Bay became not only a popular residential suburb, but holiday spot, the sea wall was required to stop the sand from invading sea-side properties, and from damaging the tram machinery. The Sea Wall contributes significantly to the historic character of Island Bay and is associated with the growing popularity of the beach for recreation, with the fishing industry, and with the development of the suburbs in Wellington.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

There are a number of archaeological sites associated with the Island Bay Sea Wall including Te Mapunga (Island Bay) 4, M83; Uruhau Pa 4, M85 Te Mapunga Kainga 4, M82, Motu-haku Kainga/Pa 4, M84.

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

The Sea Wall has educational value for what it can demonstrate about the ways in which the issue of sand drift were dealt with between the 1920s and 1940s.

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The Sea Wall construction, including the reinforced concrete wall structure and the plaster finishes and details, has technical value as an example of early 20th century municipal engineering. The wall was designed specifically for its extremely exposed location and the severe marine environment, and to deal with sand drift into the adjacent residential areas.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

The Island Bay Sea Wall is an important historic object which has become a feature in the Island Bay community; it helps to define the beach as well as separating it from the street. Children play on and around the wall and people use it for resting and as a meeting place. It contributes significantly to the sense of place and continuity in Island Bay.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The Island Bay Sea Wall is a good, representative, example of a sea wall built between the 1920s and 1940s.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The Island Bay Sea Wall maintains a high level of historic integrity and authenticity as it retains a significant amount of original materials, despite the recent storm damage of 2013.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

The Island Bay Sea Wall is a locally important historic object due to its long history as a part of the Island Bay community and for the contribution that it makes to define the Island Bay Esplanade and the streetscape. It is also important for its construction and design, which effectively addressed the problems of sand drift. As one of a group of sea walls associated with early protection works this sea wall presents an interesting element of Wellington's development and responses to the environment. It retains a significant amount of original fabric despite the removal of original features, the loss of material, and repairs.