

Tunnel Beach

Digging deeper...

Caversham sandstone

Caversham sandstone is an example of a sedimentary rock. This rock formed under water as layer upon layer of sand and silt was deposited on the ocean floor. For this reason, sandstone is a great place to find fossils of sea creatures that lived when this rock was being formed.

Local nuggets

Tunnel Beach can be enjoyed in different ways. It is a superb place for a picnic on a calm, sunny day, but it is truly spectacular with a large swell at high tide. The force of the waves crashing into the cliffs in these conditions sends spray high up into the air and can drench someone standing on the cliffs.

X marks the spot

Head up to St Clair via Middleton Road. Soon after this becomes Blackhead Road, turn left onto Green Island Bush Road. The track to Tunnel Beach starts at the end of this road.

A spectacular sea arch constantly pounded by waves rolling in from the vast Pacific Ocean. A small tunnel carved into the hill down to a beach surrounded by vertical sandstone cliffs and outcrops...

As far as local secret places go, few rival the spectacle that is Tunnel Beach. The sea cliffs are formed from the erosion of soft Caversham sandstone and a small beach is exposed at low tide. The massive sea arch sticks out from the coast, the centrepiece of the magnificent view as you wander down the track. The more adventurous can walk on to the sea arch, but be careful – the sea gets pretty violent here!

The tunnel down to the beach was dug in the 1870s by men working for John Cargill, son of Captain William Cargill, one of Dunedin's co-founders. The soft sandstone made it relatively easy work. The tunnel gave the Cargill family private access to the beach for swimming and picnics.

Closer inspection of the sea cliffs shows many different layers of sandstone. This was formed on the sea floor millions of years ago, uplifted with the movement of tectonic plates, and is now slowly being reclaimed by the sea through erosion.

Access to Tunnel Beach is via a walking track that winds down the hill through farmland. The track is closed in spring due to lambing and care should be taken at all times not to disturb the farm animals close to the track. If you wish to picnic or spend some time on the beach it is a good idea to check the tide times in the newspaper before heading off.



The tunnel, leading up from the beach



Aerial view of the sea arch and Tunnel Beach

