

Hunua Falls

The Hunua Ranges forms a block of hills south east of Auckland. They cover some 250 square kilometres (100 sq mi), containing 178 km² of parkland and rise to 688 metres (2255 ft) at Kohukohunui.

More than 14,000 hectares of native forest filters about 2300mm of rain annually into four dams which supply most of Auckland's water. The four water supply dams include the Mangatangi Reservoir which is New Zealand's largest water supply dam and second largest earth dam. The extensive 169-hectare lake holds 37 million cubic metres of water and has an average daily yield of 101,100 cubic metres. The Wairoa River flows over the Hunua Falls as it runs along the Wairoa Fault-line. The Hunua Falls are held up by the remnants of a basaltic volcanic plug. The land on the east of the fault has been pushed higher than that on the west.

Fishing for trout is allowed in the Mangatangi and Mangatawhiri Reservoirs. New Zealand Fish and Game Council fishing licenses are available from sports and fishing shops. Fishers are also required to complete a Watercare Access Permit that is available free of charge from the information kiosks at the dam sites.

The Hunua Regional Park is popular for family picnics and swimming in the swimming holes. There are several tracks that explore the ranges and many of these cross small creeks draining into the Wairoa River. The Hunua Ranges is also home to Auckland's only mainland population of one of its rarest birds - the Kokako, a refuge for the native Hochstetter's frog (pepeke) and North Island Robin.



Hunua Falls
before (L) and
after (R) rain

Source: i-SITE
Franklin



Hunua Falls and water safety

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

Swimming is possible in the Wairoa River below the falls. It is not recommended that you swim in the pool of the falls as the bottom drops away suddenly and there have been drownings. There is no diving or jumping in from the top of the falls. The area around the top is restricted and 'no access' signs are located on both sides. It is important that all children and non-swimmers are supervised.

The water plunge pool is stepped down and at its deepest is 30 feet – as deep as the waterfall is high. Signs at the falls indicate that there are sudden changes of depth in the area in front of the falls so be aware and supervise children at all times.

As the Wairoa river crosses forestry and farm land when it runs high or floods it becomes very dirty (full of suspended sediment). Never swim in, or try to cross, a fast flowing dirty waterway.

(For further information see ‘Key Water Safety Messages’ and Rivers and Water Safety Guides)

Aerated water

This is produced by agitating the water and is found naturally in waves and waterfalls. This water contains more air bubbles than non-aerated water so it is less dense and therefore buoyancy is less in this type of water. This means it is easier to sink and more difficult to float on top of this type of water. Some drinking water reservoirs have air blown through them. Such water supports aquatic life and prevents the growth of putrefying bacteria and this lessens the risk of pollution. However a small boat may sink in these waters. All of the Hunua Ranges’ dams are aerated and all are unavailable for swimming. This ensures that the drinking water is of high quality.

Recent accidents at the Hunua Falls (as related by a Hunua Ranger)

There have been 14 drownings at the falls.

In 2008 there has been one death and one serious injury (paralysis). The death was a Samoan man who was swimming across the pool to his family on the other side. The paralysis was to a male who jumped from the top and hit the side on the way down. Access to the top of the falls is prohibited.

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Figure 3: Mangatangi Reservoir, Source: Wikipedia