

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Almost overnight naval air operations went to the Whidbey Island Naval Air Base, and Sand Point became a Naval Support Area. Community controversy swirled over use of the remaining land at Sand Point when it reverted from federal to city use. Private planes were no longer welcome in a residential area once the airport became surplus land. Seattle wanted it to become a city park again, King County still wanted a small airfield, and NOAA, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, wanted a headquarters.

Powerful US Senator Warren Magnuson managed to make sure the government did not turn it into another airport, and Seattle voters also said no to a county airport. In 1977, 196 acres of Sand Point were dedicated as Warren G. Magnuson Park. Money was voted to begin restoration of the land to its former beauty. Most of the runways have been re-contoured and birds are returning. Vegetation is still mainly flat meadows with wild grasses and a few ornamental deciduous trees along the shore, but replanting of native species is beginning. Flocks of starlings, ducks and black-headed coots feed alongside the shore, along with Canada geese and gulls.

The **NOAA installation** at Magnuson Park has been closed for security reasons. But when it is accessible, the NOAA cafeteria and espresso bar, the Modern Day Cafe, has delicious food.

THE WALK

Walk north along a wide paved road at lakeshore level. (No bicycles allowed.) A cross-park trail at mid-point leads from playing fields to waterfront. Left-over lawns are from airbase times, but the meadows, filling in with Scots Broom and Himalayan Blackberries, thinly cover old runways. A control tower and ammo storage tank remind us of earlier uses.

Continue walking north to the swimming beach, with lifeguard tower and dock. Even in summer swimmers find the water cold. The picnic area is a vestige of the Naval officer's beach. Across from the swimming beach look for **Sand Point Kite Hill**, a grassy mound popular on windy days with kite flyers. In March stunt kites zip back and forth, and children fight to get their simpler ones airborne. An imaginative sculpture garden entitled "**Fins**" has been created below **Kite Hill** from 21 surplus submarine stabilizing fins buried at odd angles to resemble dorsal fins of whales, dolphins, and flying fish. Kids love to walk through them. Dog owners cherish the leash-free dog park.

Now an off-limits attraction, on a small knoll is the **Sound Garden**, a group of eleven aluminum towers and baffles commissioned and built in 1982. They hum and reverberate with a series of strange sounds from passing breezes. Pitches of the various towers alternate so that the sound is constantly changing, creating eerie semi-musical chords even on a still day.

Magnuson Park Urban Walk

An In-city Family Adventure with
Joan Burton



START YOUR WALK HERE 



350-ACRE NAVAL AIR STATION NOW A PARK

Magnuson Park offers walkers a magnificent stroll along Lake Washington's northwest shore. The 350-acre city park along the lake has been created from a former naval air station, with some vestiges, such as an old gunnery, control tower, and bits of runways, still intact. Expect to find 5,000 feet of level shoreline with paved paths to walk along and views in all directions. Named for an influential Washington senator, Warren Magnuson, the park has become a popular place for birders, boat launchers, hikers, dog owners, picnickers and swimmers in chilly Lake Washington.

STATISTICS

Distance: One and 1/2 miles round trip

Time: One hour

Terrain: Level

Restrooms: Below old air traffic control tower

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1875, pioneer Seattle developer Morgan Carkeek bought twenty-three acres of forested land along Pontiac Bay, planning to give it to the city as a forest park. Soon after, citizens laid the rails for the Seattle Lake Shore and Eastern Railroad along the same shore, a shipyard was built on Pontiac Bay, and the Maple Sawmill began logging operations at the site of Matthews Beach. By 1916 construction of the ship canal had lowered the lake level to create a new beach and shoreline.

By 1920 the Boeing Airplane Company was building biplanes, and King County wanted to build an airport at Sand Point to accommodate them. Although the Carkeeks had given the land to the city for a park, a small airfield was cleared in the forest at the same site. In 1924 the Sand Point US Naval Air Base was dedicated, and with it came the first foreign airmail service between Seattle and Victoria.



©2007 Joan Burton

GETTING THERE

To get there, from I-5 take the 65th Street exit and drive east on North East 65th to Sand Point Way North East and the Park entrance. Metro buses #74 and #75 will take you to the entrance. Turn in at the 65th Street entrance and head toward the water beyond the remaining naval buildings and US Geological Survey site. Park in one of three areas: **The South Parking Area:** drive past the **Naval Commissary** to a boat launch and boating center and turn right for parking below **Promontory Bluff**. **Central Parking Area:** closest to athletic fields, Junior League playfields, a baseball field and tennis courts. **North Parking Area:** farther north along the shoreline, close to a swimming beach, picnic shelter and popular off-leash area for dogs.

MORE HISTORY

The Navy had acquired all of Sand Point as an air base by 1926 and it began to clear and level the old growth forest park. The value of the Carkeek's gift was returned to the city of Seattle to help purchase another Carkeek Park. A record-breaking round-the-world flight originated here, with three of the four starting planes returning to Sand Point after a five-month tour. Throughout World War II and the Korean War Sand Point was a training base for fighter planes, bombers, helicopters, and air transports landing on runways that had to be regularly resurfaced as they settled into the lakeshore bogs. Neighboring communities of Laurelhurst and Windermere complained about noise and hazards of the planes, so after much controversy the air base was de-activated in 1970.

