

Stonefly Lodge

Peter Gill gets excited in the South Island.

In November 2009 I hooked up with a great mate, John Greenwood from Cairns, at Sydney Airport and flew to Christchurch NZ for a week of male bonding and adventure. John Kerr, the owner of Stonefly Lodge was waiting for us at the airport with a warm welcome and a friendly grin beneath his handlebar moustache.

On the hour-long drive to the lodge John told us he could also organise a helicopter transfer. We locked eyes and made a mental note to book this for next year. Next year? We hadn't even begun but were already planning next year!

Turning off the highway toward the lodge we glimpsed the Motueka River right beside the track in spots, and I was jumping out of my skin. I could have leaped out of the car there and then, wetting a line in the crystal clear flowing waters. However, I contained myself.

Finally we saw Stonefly Lodge, sitting high and commanding in its prime position overlooking the Moteuka. We toned down our excitement to a dull roar, not wanting to look like two little schoolboys with their first fly rod. We were met by two ladies—John's wife Kate, the lady of the house who would be in charge of our meals (I made a mental note to make friends with her) and Sophie, a gentle giant of a German Shepherd. Both became great companions for the week.



The lodge was nothing short of stunning. In some respects it has all the things we expected, but delivers them with a punch—from the stone fireplace, each stone handpicked by Kate, to the amazing timbers, all procured from this very land and milled on site, to the thoughtful set out of the luxurious guest quarters, common areas and relaxed feel. It hits the mark exactly for a combination of luxury and at-ease comfort—not easy to achieve.

We settled in with a drink from the well stocked bar and a game of pool in the fire-warmed lounge area. We prodded John for how to go about this adventure but learned that there was nothing for us to plan—it had all been arranged. We checked out the supplied gear in the well-organised



mud-room—Simms waders and boots, Sage rods and reels with a large selection of flies tied by John. It seemed that we were in good hands.

Our experienced guide, Aaron Ford, was arriving at 8 am the next morning, although he apparently often turns up early in hope of one of Kate's legendary breakfasts. These two old geezers were excited! We couldn't wait until the morning.

Dinner was served at a long solid wooden dining table and the view as the sun set was stunning, the food and company awesome. We listened at leisure to John's stories of trout, helicopter adventures, how the lodge was planned and built, flies and equipment. We asked the all-important question "What are our chances of catching a wild brown?" John, and even Kate, seemed very confident.

Up and ready early, we tentatively came downstairs, hoping not to wake anyone. Then we smelled it—the unmistakable aroma of bacon and eggs. Entering the dining room we saw the table set, Kate in the kitchen well on her way to serving up a hearty breakfast and a young man loitering hopefully, "You must be Aaron", we said.



The three of us spent three days together on different aspects of different rivers, each day truly amazing and exhilarating. Aaron sighted and gave us over 30 opportunities on fish ranging from 4lbs – 9lbs in size.

The total catch (and release) was five browns. We have already booked our return visit next year, complete with the helicopter transfer from the airport. Oh, and some heli-fishing as well.