

Stonefly Lodge

Carl Mickels finds luxury on the banks of the Motueka River.



Four of us from Sydney and the Snowy Mountains had long awaited our annual trip to the South Island where we had booked a helicopter to take us in to one of the remote rivers near Nelson for a week of fishing. After our first night in Nelson the pilot rang to say that he could not guarantee taking us that day because of a severe weather warning in the backcountry. He suggested that we make enquiries about staying another night. I was shocked to learn that the hotel was fully booked.

When I explained the dilemma, the pilot said he would make enquiries at a new lodge that had just opened. He returned with good news- if we didn't fly out we could stay at the newly opened Stonefly Lodge. He also suggested we drive out there and fish the Motueka or surrounding rivers and wait to see if the weather cleared in the mountains.

As we neared the lodge and it appeared out of the fog, all conversation in the vehicle stopped. Perched on a hill overlooking the river, the majestic building captivated all of us. We learned that our hosts were John and Kate Kerr, the former founding proprietors of the famous Cape Don Lighthouse in Arnhem Land. After being taken on a tour of the lodge, we all decided that it didn't matter if the sky cleared, we were definitely staying the night!

We had a discussion with John about his recommendations for fishing that day, and off we went. After getting thoroughly soaked we returned through the mists to the lodge to shed our wet-wading gear. We were greeted with freshly brewed coffee and our choice of whisky.

We were amazed to learn that John and Kate scoured Tasmania and New Zealand for two years before they found their version of El Dorado. The lodge sits on a hill overlooking the famous Motueka River and surrounding mountains. We also learned that John and Kate had a timber mill erected on the 150 acre property so that each piece of timber besides the cedar beams could be sourced from their property. Tonnes of river rock were up-loaded and transported to the site to be used on the specially built central fireplace and on landscaping.

There is a sunken lounge that faces the river and the vista, where we enjoyed Kate's homemade California rolls with local wines. Directly behind the lounge is the dining room, overlooked by the enormous cathedral ceilings. On one of the ground floor wings off the dining room is the open plan commercial kitchen which allows Kate and John to converse with their guests while preparing the inclusive 3-course dinner. The other ground floor wing holds the extensively stocked library, billiard table and bar.

Upstairs on the landing is the most exquisite fly-tying bench complete with all the equipment and material to tie any fly imaginable. On each upstairs wing there are two bedrooms which can be set up as king-singles or doubles. All have a deep free-standing bath with a separate shower- the shower head is the size that covers your entire body. Each bedroom has a balcony overlooking the river.

After an evening fish in the river below, we retired to the dining room to enjoy Kate's dinner, featuring local produce and lamb.



Early next morning we were greeted by the wonderful aroma of freshly brewed coffee. After enjoying fresh fruit we were offered our choice of cooked breakfast. We all chose John's poached eggs, from their own chickens, with bacon and freshly baked bread. After eating more than was humanly possible, we struggled to carry our gear down to the lodge's own helicopter landing pad. The pilot arrived on time and after the goodbyes were said and the photos taken we lifted off. I noticed that each of us was staring at the lodge as we headed west, marvelling at its majesty until we passed out of sight.

Whilst it was a short and memorable stay, it has made a lasting impression on all of us. In fact we have already booked ourselves in for another night of luxury on our next trip in March!

For bookings phone +64 3 522 4479 or email info@stoneflylodge.co.nz