

WILDERNESS LODGE NEWS

- SPRING 2004 -

A regular newsletter from Anne Saunders and Gerry McSweeney, Managing Directors of New Zealand's only two Wilderness Lodges; Lake Moeraki and Arthur's Pass. We want to keep you in touch with what is happening at the Lodges and with our efforts to protect New Zealand's wild and special places.

1. WILDERNESS LODGES AWARD WINNERS

FODOR'S CHOICE TOP 20 HOTELS IN THE WORLD-LAKE MOERAKI (Oct. 2003).

Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki was honoured by New York based Fodor's Guides on October 15 2003. We were chosen in the Fodor's Choice World's Top 20 hotels by the discerning authors who looked for setting, activities, ambience and friendly service as well as hotel location and construction. Fodors is perhaps the most respected travel guidebook in the USA. Their writers are anonymous so tourism businesses never know when Fodors makes its inspections! We are delighted with our ranking.

NEW ZEALAND TRAVEL INC. TOP TEN NZ ACCOMMODATION AWARD-ARTHUR'S PASS. (April 2004)

Travellers from the USA to New Zealand with Philadelphia based company NZ Travel Inc (nztravel@aol.com) evaluate all the accommodation houses they stay in in NZ at the end of their travels. Over the 2003/2004 season their results were tabulated to determine the top award winners. All winners must receive "Excellent" ratings (the highest rating possible) at least 90% of the time with no "Fair" or "Poor" ratings. Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass is honoured this year to be in the Top Ten Accommodation providers alongside our neighbour Grasmere, Blanket Bay Lodge near Queenstown and the Lodge at Paratiho Farm in the Nelson province.

GALLAGHER FARM ENVIRONMENT INNOVATION AWARD-ARTHUR'S PASS (March 2004)

Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass is located on it's own 2400 hectare (6,000 acre) property, half of which is a working merino sheep farm and half a protected nature reserve within which the Lodge is sited. Ours is a real farm not a dude ranch. We have over 4,000 super fine wool Merino sheep and 150 Angus cows raised for prime beef. We strive for environmental sustainability and profitability on the farm. The Wilderness Lodge farm Cora Lynn Station was this year judged a winner in the annual Ballance NZ Farm Environment Awards. In being awarded the **Gallagher Innovation Award for Nature Protection on a Large Scale** the judges commented that "*this is an exceptional example of how a high country farm can be productive and profitable, environmentally sustainable and culturally aware. Cora Lynn does New Zealand agriculture a large service by providing a hands on example of New Zealand high country farming to potential consumers of New Zealand meat and fibre.*"

Farm manager Andy Bitmead and Farm supervisor/co-owner Paul Jarman are delighted by the Award.

2. WILDERNESS LODGES GROWING

IN POPULARITY AND (a little) IN SIZE

The last 12 months have been the busiest ever for both Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass and for Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki. New Zealand's reputation as a safe, healthy and natural paradise has helped overcome some traveller's nervousness about long distance travel.

Our wild and natural landscapes have perhaps been the greatest stars of the recent movies "**Lord of the Rings**", "**The Last Samurai**" and "**Whale Rider**". Happy Wilderness Lodge clients are our best publicity and you do an extraordinary promotion job for us encouraging friends and relations to visit. Thank you.

We apologise if it is sometimes hard for you to get reservations with us because of our popularity. We will continue to do our utmost to clear our waitlists and to confirm your bookings. We are committed to keeping the style of the Wilderness Lodges small and intimate which will put pressure on accommodation during the peak periods.

Over the last year, to meet visitor demand, we have opened (or are about to open) lovely new rooms at both the Wilderness Lodges.

Garden Rooms at Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki. We have now opened 10 lovely, spacious Garden Rooms set amongst the rainforest plants. These are designed for the discerning traveller who wants wilderness discovery in style. We also still have our 18 comfortable and attractive Lodge rooms. These rooms are for those who want to economise but still delight in the rainforest, canoeing and Tasman Seacoast seals and penguins found close to the Lodge.

Alpine Lodges at Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass. Work is advancing on 4 lovely Alpine Lodges opening in December 2004. These very spacious and private lodges are nestled into Champagne Clearing just west of the main Wilderness Lodge. Their Spa baths and lounges open out to wide balconies where views of the Southern Alps are framed by mountain beech trees and tea trees in a wilderness sanctuary. Each of our existing 20 Mountain View rooms is linked to the main Wilderness Lodge. These rooms also have stunning views across 50 kilometres/ 30 miles of mountains and river valley.

When you book at either Wilderness Lodge...remember to specify if you want to treat yourself to the luxury Garden Rooms (Lake Moeraki) or the new Alpine Lodges (Arthur's Pass).

3. AUTHENTICITY, DISCOVERY, TRANQUILLITY AND RELIABILITY

What are the strengths of Wilderness Lodges? Why choose us from the range of tourism products in the market?

- **AUTHENTICITY:** Lake Moeraki and Arthur's Pass have both been designed by New Zealanders to introduce you to the "rainforest/rivers/seacoast" of Lake Moeraki and the "heart of the

Southern Alps/high country sheep station life" of Arthur's Pass. At Lake Moeraki your host are Kiwis **Dorothy Piper** and **Malcolm Edwards**. In their spare time Dorothy is a wonderful painter and Malcolm was in 1994 NZ's champion gold-panner and a successful goldminer! **Larissa** and **Alex** and the rest of the team will make you feel right at home. Lake Moeraki is about as wild as you can get on mainland New Zealand; no other inhabitants for 40km (25ml) radius, uninhabited beaches, your own electricity and links to the pioneering past.

At Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass you will stay on historic Cora Lynn Sheep Station dating from 1862. You are surrounded by magnificent views, your own beech forest nature reserve, uninhabited mountains, wild rivers, forests and alpine flowers. You visit a real sheep station, meet farmer **Andy Bitmead** and join in actual sheep/cattle musters and practical nature projects with nature guides **Steve Smith** and **John Charles**. You enjoy the wonderful meals of our chef **Ryan Moss** and **Susie, Clare, Jo** and **Ally** will help you have a real Wilderness Lodge experience. Both Lodges are owned by New Zealanders and staffed by local New Zealanders. **Anne** and **Gerry** live at Arthur's Pass but visit Lake Moeraki frequently.

- **DISCOVERY:** Many of New Zealand's luxury lodges focus on indulgence. We think lovely surroundings, great food and wine are extremely important too, but believe that you come to New Zealand for more than that. You come to discover and experience a magic land. You come to interact with it's people, explore it's walks, wildlife, and mountains and discover real New Zealand and its wild places. At Wilderness Lodges you will be able to join with our guides **Steve, John, Andy, Gerry, Malcolm, Caid** and **Swade** to discover all the things you love doing but in normal life often have no time to enjoy. Delight at the Lodges in canoeing, walking, exploring, fishing, shearing sheep, cuddling new-born lambs, fossicking on a wild beach for gemstones and relaxing with a lovely Central Otago Pinot Noir or Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc wine.
- **TRANQUILLITY:** At our Wilderness Lodges we have a policy of keeping the operation small scale. This means that we try to remember all your names and we encourage personal interaction. We also will not allow helicopter landings, powerboats and television to disturb the peace and tranquillity of the Lodges (but we do have phones and internet access). Our nature walks all have seats so you can walk a bit, stop, relax, listen to the birds and observe nature in all her moods. Our naturalist guided trips also take you on foot and by canoe to some amazing, peaceful spots.
- **RELIABILITY:** Tourism is an industry notorious for high staff and owner turnover. For 15 years since 1989, Anne Saunders and Gerry McSweeney have been at the helm of the Wilderness Lodges. They remain very closely involved in both Lodges. There is a high chance that you may deal directly with Anne when you enquire about staying at the Lodges and when you visit you will possibly join Gerry for a guided nature walk - something he enjoys doing even more than our visitors do! Anne and Gerry are now old hands in the tourism industry and are lucky enough to have an extremely enthusiastic and dedicated team of managers and staff who run both Wilderness Lodges.

4. THE MOERAKI VALLEY AND

COASTLINE-A HAVEN FOR RARE BIRDS.

New Zealand faces huge challenges to protect our native birds and special native plants from introduced pest animals and weeds. 700 years ago when Maori first arrived in canoes from Polynesia, this was a land with no native land mammals (except for 2 bat species). With the first human settlement (700 years ago) and the subsequent arrival of European settlers (235 years ago) all that changed. Introduced rats and human hunting have had a devastating impact on the ground and tree nesting birds that were the dominant large native animals. Stoats and ferrets, (members of the weasel family), cats, dogs and the clearance of the rainforest and wetland drainage also had a severe impact on birds. Introduced browsing mammals such as the Australian possum, deer, pigs and goats have also pushed many plant species close to extinction.

The Moeraki Valley and coastline around the Wilderness Lodge is a rare haven of nature because it has been isolated from most of the impacts of human settlement. It is a World Heritage Area and all around the Lodge is being managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) as one of a few special areas in NZ where introduced pest numbers are kept at a very low level. That is great for the forests, for the wildlife and for our human visitors.

The native forests are in superb condition. The ancient rainforest trees in the Moeraki Valley carry more perching plants than any others measured in New Zealand. Silver beech trees are covered in scarlet mistletoe surviving here because of low numbers of possums. The Moeraki river headwaters are one of the last South Island strongholds of the whio/blue duck who are the focus of a special rescue programme. Along the forests of the Tasman seacoast nest Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguin. DOC and Wilderness Lodge are trapping predators to make these penguin colonies safer for the penguin chicks. 50km/30miles south of the Lodge is another DOC special rescue programme for NZ's rarest kiwi, the Haast Brown kiwi/tokoeka..

Join our nature guides at Lake Moeraki to discover some of these special threatened plants and animals. There are guided penguin walks every day (June to December), trips to the Upper Moeraki river every second day and special rainforest walks radiate out from the Lodge.

5. BLADE SHEARING OF MERINO SHEEP AT ARTHUR'S PASS

For hundreds of years sheep were shorn manually with sharp blades. The advent of machine shearing in the early 1900s replaced the manual blades over much of the world. In the New Zealand high country where storms can strike at any time of year, a small number of sheep farmers still favour the old fashioned blades because it is kinder to the sheep. Blades leave about a warm inch of wool remaining on the sheep unlike machine shearing which cuts the wool very close to the skin.

On Cora Lynn Station owned by and surrounding Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass every spring (September) we still shear our sheep with the blades. An itinerant shearing gang run by Kerry Nolan comes to the Lodge for about a week to shear all 3500 adult sheep apart from 100 that we save to shear later on with our Lodge visitors.

Throughout the year if you visit the Wilderness Lodge and stay for two nights we guarantee that you will get to see a merino sheep being shorn with the blades. Even better, because manual shearing is a slow patient process, you have the chance to try shearing yourself. To our knowledge we are the only place in all of New Zealand and Australia that blade shears sheep on a regular basis for visitors— the other farm tourism shows use machine shearing which means it is dangerous and impossible for visitors to help.

Come and stay a couple of days at Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass and try your hand at shearing. You will also get to meet our Border Collie hosts Skip (age 8) and new "host in training" Tess (age 10 months). They will muster large flocks of sheep. You also get to cuddle our new lambs and feed the giant horned merino rams.

6. LAKE MOERAKI HYDRO-ELECTRICITY SCHEME PROVIDES RENEWABLE ENERGY BUT SAFEGUARDS FRESHWATER FISH.

At a time of sky-rocketing oil prices, Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki is largely powered by the ultimate in renewable energy, a small hydro-electric turbine installed in 1979. It takes water from the Moeraki River in front of the Wilderness Lodge restaurant, then drops it 2 metres (6 feet) through a turbine before returning the water to the river below the Moeraki rapids 100 metres downstream. The scheme generates 35KW which managed carefully is enough to power the whole Lodge which is so remote that there is still no national electricity grid to this area.

Over the last year, we have been monitoring any impact on native freshwater fish that might be caused by the hydro. Following a study by fisheries scientists, in November 2003 we installed a fish trap beneath the hydro to help any fish that has difficulty swimming up-stream. Every two days our nature guides Swade and Caid lift the trap and carry the small number of native whitebait, bullies and shrimps in the trap up above the hydro and release them into Lake Moeraki. The scientists are of the view that there is very little fishery impact from the power station. We have also been working with the local Maori sub tribe, Te Runanga o Makaawhio to make sure the hydro does not harm any fish.

You can visit the hydroelectric station on our Lake Moeraki "Living in the Wilderness" guided walk offered every second day from the Wilderness Lodge.

7. ARTHUR'S PASS NATIONAL PARK CELEBRATES 75 YEARS.

September 2004 is the 75th Anniversary of the Arthur's Pass National Park that surrounds Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass. Opened in 1929, the National Park now totals 114,839 hectares (287,098 acres). It was established after a vigorous public campaign to safeguard the beech forests and scenery along the Midland Railway Line linking Christchurch and Greymouth on the West Coast. **(You can still travel this railway line on the famous Tranz-Alpine train which each day departs at 8am from Christchurch to the West Coast and returns in the late afternoon. We will collect you from the train at 11am or 4pm at the Arthur's Pass Railway station).**

Arthur's Pass National Park, one of only 14 in New Zealand, extends from the West Coast rainforest and lakes across the high peaks of the Southern Alps and east to beech forest and dry tussock river valleys. It has been the training ground for many of NZ's finest mountaineers and is a playground for trampers (hikers), alpine flower enthusiasts and generations of nature lovers. It remains one of our few National Parks (another is Mt Egmont/Taranaki) where the dominant users are New Zealanders rather than international visitors.

The Anniversary celebrations over the Sept 11/12 weekend include a special train chartered from Christchurch, historic evenings, guided walks with Wilderness Lodge guides and a commemorative beech forest community tree planting to restore a degraded natural area along Broad Stream.

8. GREAT SPOTTED KIWI, ORANGE-FRONTED PARAKEET, YELLOWHEAD, CRESTED GREBE AND MISTLETOE-THE VERY RARE SPECIES OF ARTHUR'S PASS.

For 8 years we have maintained a hugely successful mistletoe rescue project around the Wilderness Lodge. Giant **red and yellow mistletoe** spill from the mountain beech trees where we have protected these vulnerable plants from possum browsing.

Just west of Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass, Highway 73 traverses the Bealey and Otira Valleys, southern-most stronghold of the **Roroa / Great Spotted Kiwi**, NZ's largest kiwi species. Sadly it is almost impossible to see these secretive nocturnal birds but at night their shrill shrieks often echo across the mountains. A major community effort involving trapping and poisoning is underway in Arthur's Pass to protect kiwi chicks from being eaten by introduced stoats (weasel family). Sadly, without human intervention, stoats will otherwise kill 95% of all kiwi chicks.

At Lake Pearson/Moana Rua just east of the Wilderness Lodge, our tourism

business has funded and in partnership with the community maintains a network of stoat traps to save the endangered **Crested Grebe**. A Jan 26th 2004 survey found that there are only a total of 330 adults of these handsome diving waterbirds. Lake Pearson is their third most important NZ stronghold.

At the eastern end of our farm is the Hawdon Valley in Arthur's Pass National Park. Here Department of Conservation (DOC) are engaged in a last ditch effort to save New Zealand's rarest parakeet, the **orange-fronted parakeet** which numbers in total perhaps 100 birds in the whole world in three valleys from the Hawdon northwards. Also found here is the endangered mohua/yellowhead. DOC's rescue work involves trapping rats and stoats and securing some young parakeets for a captive-reared population as an insurance against all the wild birds becoming extinct.

We guide walks every day to see mistletoe (and in autumn to help plant mistletoe) around the Wilderness Lodge. We also offer canoe trips every day to explore Lake Pearson and to see Crested Grebe (and to service our stoat traps!). Every day we also offer guided trips to the Hawdon, Bealey and Otira Valleys but do not promise sightings of kiwi, yellowhead and orange-fronted parakeet.

9. WILDERNESS SNIPPETS

Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe filming near Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass. This southern spring, October to December 2004, a Disney linked team is filming CS Lewis' "*Kingdom of Narnia*" classic story amongst the Cave Stream limestone 32km (20 miles) east of the Lodge.

Stunning South West USA. After 15 years of caring for American visitors at the Wilderness Lodges, Managing Directors Anne and Gerry made their first ever trip to the USA, May 10-June 16. We explored the magnificent high plains of the South-West from New Mexico to Oregon. Everywhere we went we discovered warm, welcoming local people. Half the time we camped - including our coldest night ever at 10,000 feet on Cerro Vista in Kit Carson State Forest, Santa Fe. We were delighted everywhere by the landscapes, alpine flowers, Ponderosa pine forests and the animals. We thought that visitor services are of an extraordinary quality in the US National Parks, National Monuments, State Forests and State Parks.

Anne's Favourite Parks? Canyonlands National Park/Valley of the Gods State Park Utah, **Gerry's Favourite Parks?** Redwood National Park /Yosemite National Park California. **Favourite function?** Meeting 140 Kiwi Specialist Agents at the Kiwilink Trade Show in Los Angeles. **Favourite Hosts ?** Kiwi Travel Specialists Mike and Nancy McClelland of Westwood, Los Angeles www.bestofnzflyfishing.com

Lake Moeraki Managers Malcolm and Dorothy have also just returned from North America. They visited British Columbia in July to see relatives and also to explore more rainforest!

New Zealand will never be easier to get to.

From November 2, 2004 you can fly direct with Air New Zealand Los Angeles-Christchurch only 2 hours drive away from Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass. Air New Zealand have also just started direct San Francisco--Auckland flights. This year they have doubled the number of seats across

the Pacific between North America and New Zealand compared to last summer. A range of new airlines have also started between Australia and New Zealand including Emirates and Pacific Blue.

Bookings made easy

If you want to stay with us at either Lodge, use the enquiry form or the secure booking form on this website. If you need help planning your New Zealand holiday or air/land travel contact us and we will refer you to a New Zealand specialist agent that covers your geographic area.

Wilderness Lodges supports Forest and Bird

We strongly support the work of New Zealand's largest nature conservation group, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. 82 years old, Forest and Bird has 40,000 adult members and 18,000 children also get the Kiwi Conservation Club newsletter for junior nature lovers. Forest and Bird has 3 major campaigns in 2004; protecting nature in the South Island high Country, a marine campaign to get marine reserves and sustainable fishing and a campaign to restore NZ's forests and wildlife from the impact of introduced pests.

We donate funds and a large amount of time to working with Forest and Bird to protect nature and wildlife. In June 2004 Gerry was re-elected for his 4th year as the National President of Forest and Bird.

Check out their website www.forestandbird.org.nz

Anne Saunders & Gerry McSweeney

Directors

FOR ANY COMMENTS OR QUERIES ON THIS NEWSLETTER CONTACT GERRY ON arthurpass@wildernesslodge.co.nz or gerry@wildernesslodge.co.nz