

## **WILDERNESS LODGE NEWS**

### **- SPRING 2005 -**

*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.*

## **WILDERNESS LODGE NEWS**

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### **1. WILDERNESS LODGE ARTHUR'S PASS**

- i. **New Alpine Lodges** On Christmas Day 2004 we opened 4 magnificent new Alpine Lodges. These are large and stylish. All have alpine views and are nestled into the sandstone rocks and mountain beech forest so outside your windows, native birds surround you. They have Spa Baths with views, their own lounges and gas log fires. The Alpine Lodges feature rock, natural woods and earth-tone furnishings. They are more expensive than our Mountain View rooms but have created a Luxury Lodge product in a wilderness setting. They are ideal for those who want to treat themselves to a private retreat for their anniversary, honeymoon or a long stay holiday with us.
- ii. **New Arthur's Pass Road:** Fodor's Guide 2001 page 201 said of the old Arthur's Pass highway "***this may be the most hair-raising paved road you'll ever drive***". Since those words were first thought up, everything has changed. The Arthur's Pass highway road is now an easy and relaxed drive. Forget the tortuous mountain road of the past. Since 1997, \$50 million of road improvements; a viaduct, double width roads and a series of wider bridges as well as guardrails have transformed Arthur's Pass into an relatively easy drive suitable for drivers of all ages and moderate skill. **Wilderness Lodge is 2 hours/90 minutes drive from either Greymouth or Christchurch or 3 hours travel on the daily Tranz Alpine Passenger Train from both towns. The train line runs through our property for 10km and we pick you up from the train at Arthur's Pass Village.**
- iii. **Explore the Wild Heart of the Southern Alps with our DOC Licensed Guides:** On March 31 2005, we received a new 5 year Conservation Department (DOC) guiding licence (CA 15048). Gerry McSweeney and David Webster will now continue to guide our visitors through the 500,000 acres of National Park, Forest Park and Tussockland Park that surround our own 6,000 acre merino sheep station/nature reserve.  
More than 4,000 guests joined our Arthur's Pass nature guides this year to walk, canoe and explore the Southern Alps. We are the only guides resident in this region licensed to walk visitors to the glaciers of Arthur's Pass National Park, through the amazing limestone landscape of Kura Tawhiti/Castle Hill and licensed to guide canoe safaris on tranquil Lake Pearson. The limestone of the Flock Hill/Castle Hill area will become even more famous in December 2005 with the release of the big budget Disney movie "***The Lion,***

***the Witch and the Wardrobe.*** "This was filmed amongst this limestone over late 2004.

- iv. **Neil, Leonie, Clare, Ted, Skip and Tess:** Neil Woods is the new Farm Manager of our Cora Lynn Station. **Neil**, his wife **Leonie** and their two daughters have been with us for the last 4 months and come from Glynn Wye Station near the Lewis Pass. They replace **Andy** and **Jo Bitmead** who managed our farm since 2000 but who in December 2004 took up the Managers job at the much larger Castle Hill Station, just down the road from us. We still see a lot of Andy and Jo. Andy has a big responsibility at Castle Hill working with his new neighbours, the Conservation Department, who are protecting for conservation two thirds of the historic Castle Hill Sheep Station.
- Every 2 days, Neil shears our super fine merino sheep for our visitors (who can also help) using the old-fashioned blade shears. **Clare** and **Ted** are Neil's old and very experienced heading dog and huntaway dog. **Skip** is Gerry and Anne's very experienced 10 year old heading dog that has starred in several TV shows (Jackass/Wildboyz, Maggies Garden Show) and is fondly remembered by many of our visitors. **Tess** is our new (16 month old) heading dog and a delight for every visitor to the Lodge. These sheep dogs all show our visitors their extraordinary skills in mustering large flocks of Merino sheep. You also get the opportunity to cuddle and feed our new and orphan lambs.

## **2. WILDERNESS LODGE LAKE MOERAKI...**

- i. **Riverside Restaurant Expansion:** This season, the Lodge's popularity has put pressure on our restaurant. In response we are opening a second restaurant along the banks of the Moeraki River ready for the 2005/ 2006 summer season. This small building project is being completed during our winter-spring quiet period. It will provide a more private dining haven for families and for the many small group walking and cycle tours who visit us( Backroads, B&R, VBT, Country Walkers, Trek Travel).
- ii. **Giant Eels:** No you don't have to swim with them! As part of our "Life in the Rainforest Rivers" we take guests daily to see whitebait, shellfish, giant brown trout and an array of freshwater animals in the lake and river that surround the Lodge. The highlight of the tour is feeding up to 30 giant Long Finned Eel including "Whale" who is nearly 2 metres long and possibly a hundred years old.
- iii. **Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki...Licensed for 5 years to Guide Tawaki Penguin Tours, rainforest, seal and seacoast walks and kayak/canoe trips.** After 12 months of investigations and negotiations to reduce the possibility of any detrimental visitor disturbance of Tawaki penguins, we are being granted a further 5 year guiding licence from the Conservation Department (DOC to explore the World Heritage rainforest and seacoast around the Lodge. One wildlife centrepiece of our tours is our guided trips from July to December to view **Tawaki**, the world's rarest penguin totalling around 5,000 birds.
- These are found only along the Southwest NZ coastline. Under the careful control of our guides; **Swade, Cade** and **Malcolm** two small groups of visitors each day are permitted to view these very special flightless birds on the Tasman Sea coastline or you can walk to another beach on your own to possibly see them. Our guiding also

explores ancient kahikatea forest (NZ's tallest tree), kayaks to the Tasman Sea and walks the seacoast to see seals, gemstones and the world's Smallest dolphin (Hector's Dolphin).

### **3. 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, they found 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 our 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 around the Lodge the forest is being managed by DOC as one of a few special areas in NZ where introduced pest numbers are kept at a very low level.

Our 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 rare whio/blue duck, the focus of a special rescue programme. Along the forests of the Tasman seacoast nest Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguin.

**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 9), trips to the Upper Moeraki river every second day and special rainforest walks and canoe trips radiate out from the Lodge.**

### **4. 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 a warm inch of wool remaining unlike machine shearing which shear the wool very close to the sheep's skin. Animal welfare is paramount in our sheep management.

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 with Lodge visitors.

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 difficult for visitors to help.

## **5. 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. We have just received a 15 year consent to continue the operation of our hydro power station.

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

## **6. ARTHUR'S PASS NATIONAL PARK CELEBRATES 75 YEARS.**

September 2004 was 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 that

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. Most of our longer guided walks from the Wilderness Lodge traverse the forests, rivers, peaks and glaciers of this wonderful National Park.

## ***7. GREAT SPOTTED KIWI, ORANGE-FRONTED PARAKEET, YELLOWHEAD, CRESTED GREBE AND MISTLETOE- THE VERY RARE BIRD 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 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 river 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 cannot promise sightings of kiwi, yellowhead and orange-fronted parakeet.

## **8. GOURMET FOOD AND WINE IN RELAXED AND STYLISH COMFORT**

Just in case you worry that all this fresh air, healthy exercise, kayaking and wildlife might get a bit too energetic for what is, after all, your holiday, we want to remind you about the gourmet food, great wines and views from our restaurants, lounges and accommodation to die for! A guest once asked us "Are the trips compulsory?"

In fact quite a number of our guests who are stressed from their work, from planning the trip and from travel will happily spend their first one or two days at the Lodges just relaxing, eating great food and sampling some of our vast range of New Zealand wines. Others will get into nature adventures from the moment of arrival. We have even had overseas guests arrive at the Lodge from Christchurch at 9 in the morning, so keen were they to start our walks and trips.

We have designed both Lodges so that you can don't have to do anything. The Lodges are set amongst native forest with great views of mountains and rainforest. Our chefs specialise in the best of fresh New Zealand meats, fish, fruit and vegetables with a range of healthy and indulgent dishes. We also specialise in meeting any special food needs you may have...although all the mountain air and exercise usually means that the main requirement is lots of food!

## **9. WE LOVE THE WILDERNESS LODGES.**

*To:  
Sent: Monday, November 15, 2004 2:07 PM  
Subject: Wilderness Lodges*

*Dear Anne and Gerry,*

*We just returned from a 2 1/2 week vacation to New Zealand (we live in New Jersey, USA) and out of all the places we stayed, the two Wilderness Lodges topped the list. We especially adored the Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass and are already talking about when we can visit again! The sheer beauty of the area amazed us and we have many happy memories of the area. We did many walks in Arthur's Pass and did the Penguin tour, feeding the eels tour, and went kayaking on the lake at Moeraki. I'm attaching below one of our favourite pictures of our entire trip. Thanks for being such great*

*hosts and developing 2 precious lodging experiences.*

*Sincerely,  
Naomi and Dave Klein*

## **10. 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.

## **11. 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 New Zealand nature and wildlife. Lodge Managing Director Gerry is in his 4th year as the elected National President of Forest and Bird. This year Forest and Bird has been working closely with Prince Charles in global efforts to save albatross from being killed through long line fishing in the Southern Oceans. Check out the Forest and Bird website [www.forestandbird.org.nz](http://www.forestandbird.org.nz)

Anne Saunders & Gerry McSweeney

**Managing Directors, Wilderness Lodges NZ**