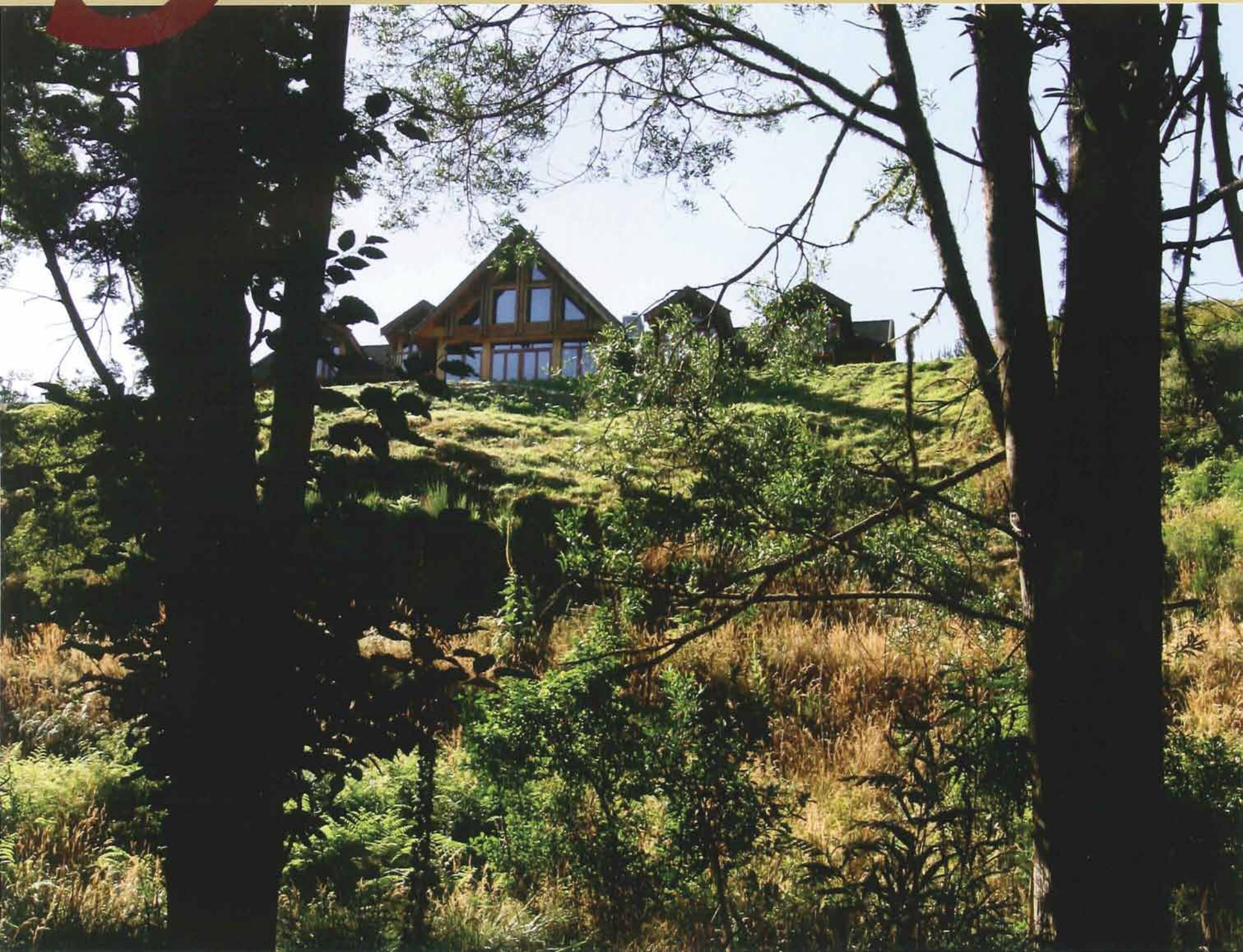




# *STONEFLY*





# LODGE

*Trevor Hawkins visits a recent addition to New Zealand's fishing lodges.*

Apart from the non-descript roadside sign indicating a lodge was located nearby, there was little indication of what I could expect at the end of the lane. It meandered beside a small trout stream, before a sharp turn brought me right alongside the Motueka River. This famous stream then followed the lane, tempting me to stop. I gave in and had a short walk along a gentle bank. The lodge could wait for the moment

Lodge signs are a dime a dozen in New Zealand, it seems every second person you meet either owns a lodge or knows someone who does. And to be fair, mostly New Zealand does lodges far more impressively than we in Australia. But they also tend to call anything with four walls and a roof a lodge as well! And it can be rather disconcerting when driving along to see many establishments that would only pass as bunkhouses elsewhere, being promoted to the punters as lodges.

Not so with Stonefly Lodge. This place deserves the title, being built specifically to house and entertain guests, both fishing and non fishing, in a style reminiscent of a North American hunting lodge. There are a lot of magnificent river rocks and solid pine beams in its construction and all these materials have been sourced from within the 150 acres of land on which the lodge stands. If the river impresses you on the drive in, as I'm sure it will, then the lodge will most certainly seal the deal! It's a stunning structure set in a commanding position to take in a sweeping view of the river below and the mountains beyond.

## Fishing About

A lot has been written extolling the wonders of New Zealand's South Island rivers and you won't get an argument from me. For the most part, the trout are big by anyone's standards and the waters are exceptionally clear. This all makes for exciting fishing for the local and travelling fisher alike. But be warned, many of these waters aren't suitable for the novice angler or those who aren't as sprightly as they used to be. Many rivers are big and strong and often require frequent wading back and forth across larger slippery boulders.

Unlike typical Australian fastwaters that are likely to hold trout in just about every likely looking pocket, some of these rivers may only have one or two trout per few hundred metres. If you're not up to spotting them before making a cast, the day can be very long.

Unless you've done many trips to these types of waters and are adept at spotting you're unlikely to get the most from your trip. The real lesson is, hire a guide, add the costs into the trip at the start and treat it just like any other expense. You will get so much more from your fishing – more knowledge, more fun and more trout! If I was to summarise what I've learnt from the better New Zealand guides, it would be stalk more, look more and cast less.

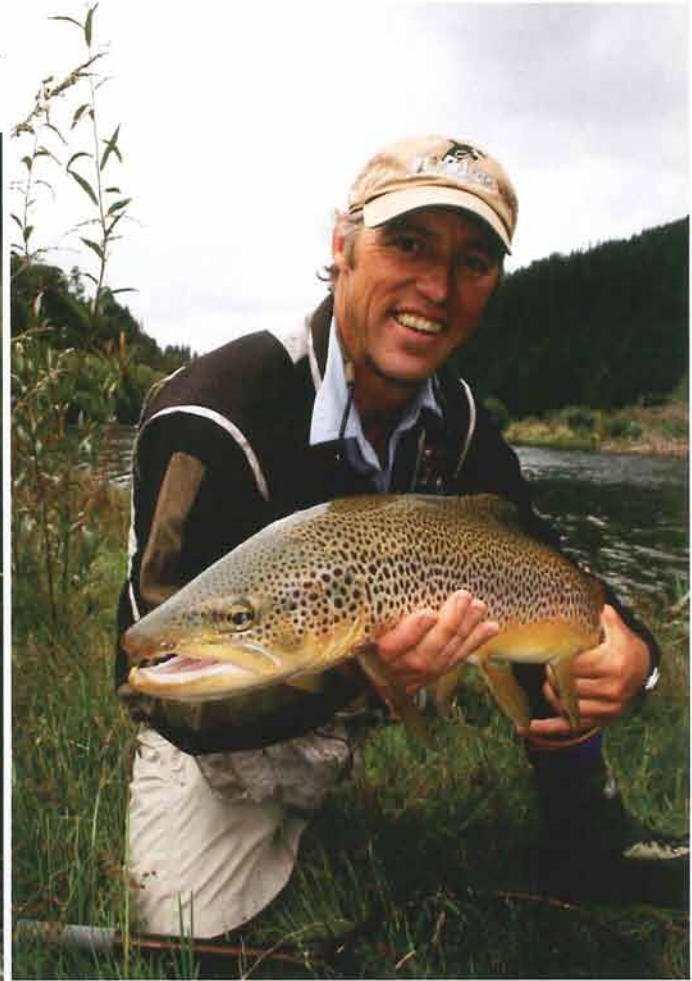
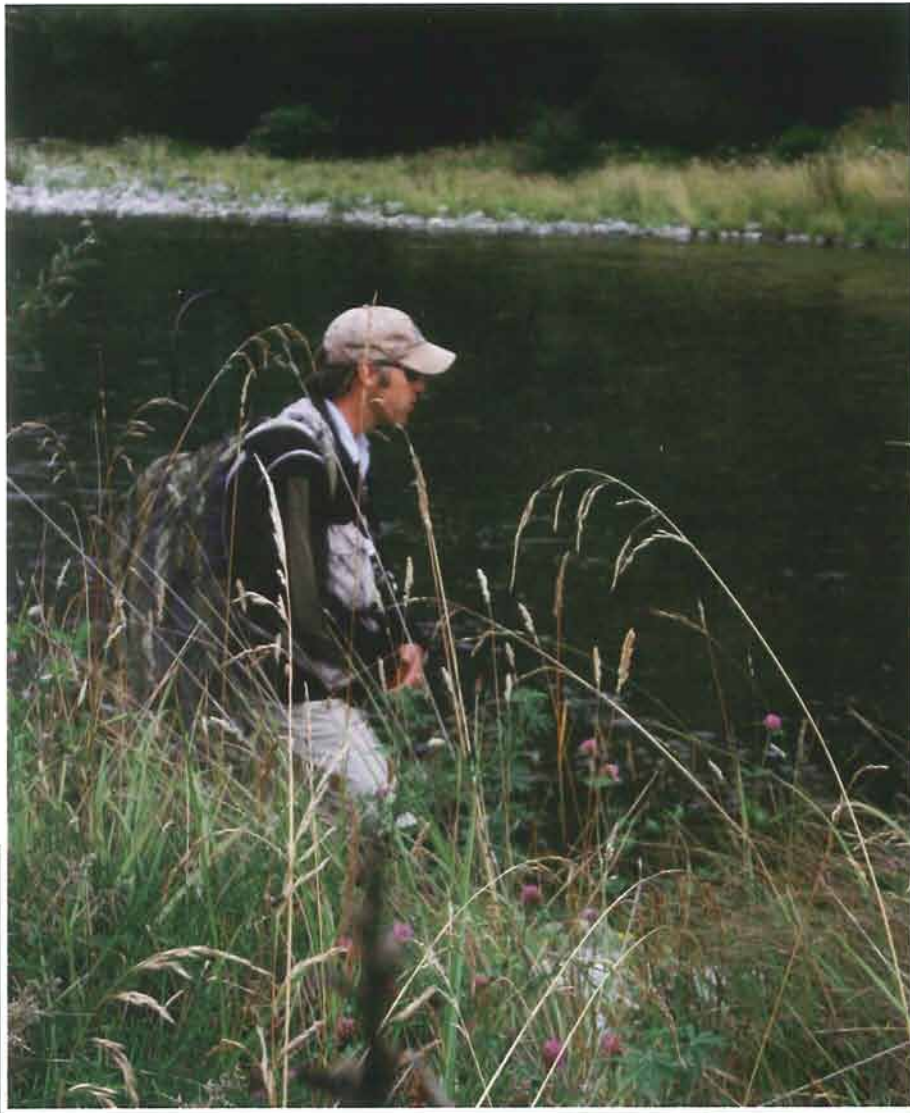
## Some Rivers

Stonefly Lodge is located on the banks of the Motueka River and visiting anglers could do worse than spending a few days just fishing this water upstream or down from the lodge. This is one river which is the exception to the rules I've mentioned above. It generally holds high numbers of trout, so carefully searching the water Aussie-style, while keeping an eye out for rises, can yield good results. The lodge stretch has very little angler traffic due to being some distance from access points.

Considered by many to be the best trout stream in the Nelson district, and one of the best in the South Island, 'the Mot' typically produces fish in the 3-6 lb range, with the odd monster. The wading for the most part is easy and safe without treacherous crossings. The evening rises are legendary.

Many more river options are available out of Stonefly for those with their own car or who are using one of the lodge guides. Most of the guides are locals with a good knowledge of access points and fishing conditions on the nearby rivers. Within an hour's drive of the lodge many rivers become available including those in the Nelson Lakes and Murchison region.

For those with the bank account and sense of adventure to match, nothing beats having a chopper land right outside the huge glass windows of the lodge on the helipad to take you just over the





range into the wilderness area of the Kahurangi National Park to access true wilderness fishing on the famous Karamea River, its many tributaries, and neighbouring streams. In fact the lodge is located only a few kilometres from the park's eastern boundary and as such allows for quick and relatively economical heli-fishing.

The lodge can arrange fully catered multi-day trips for those wishing to experience overnight or extended trips into some of these wilderness streams.

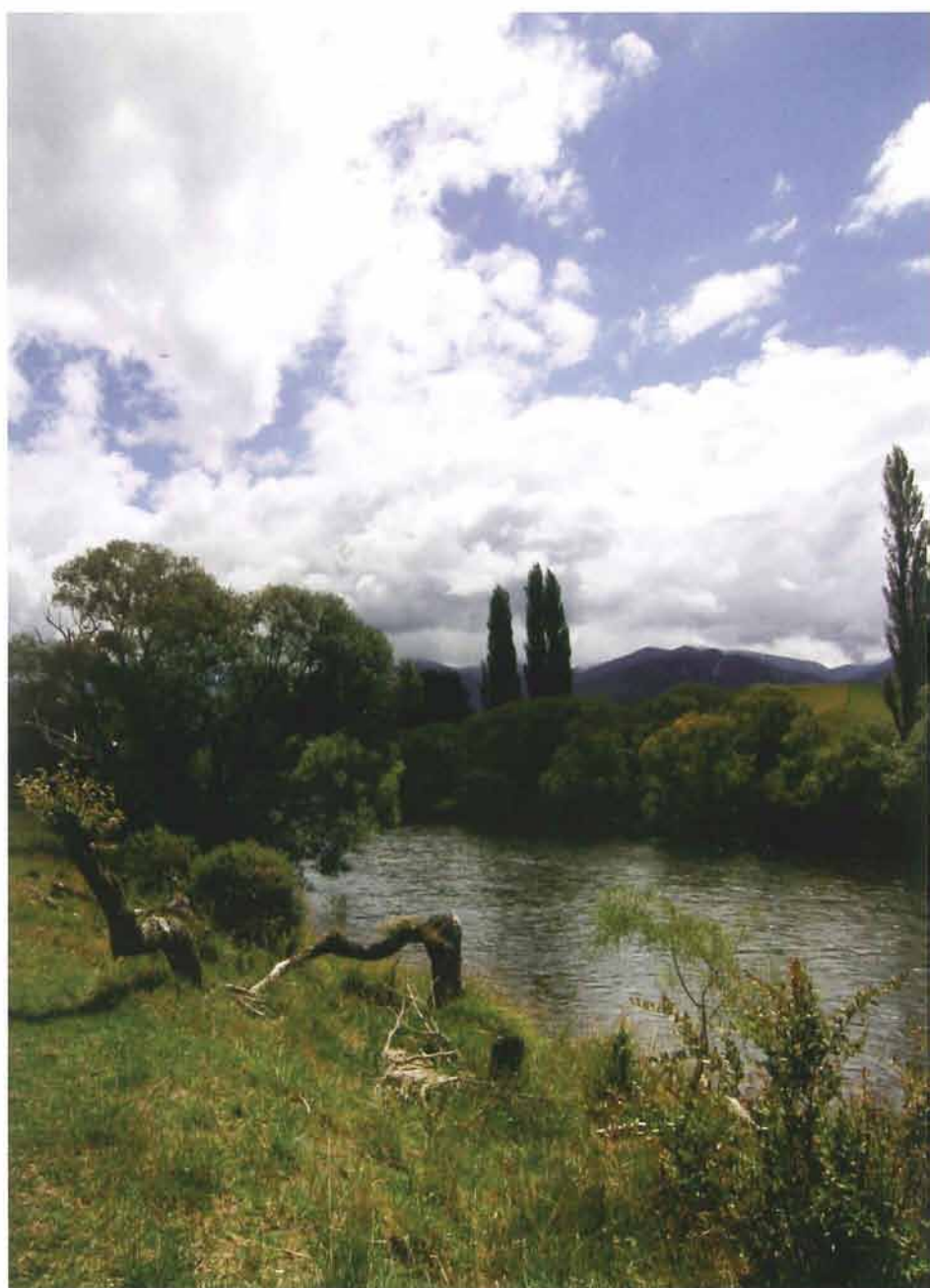
## A Few Days Fishing

Unfortunately, I had less than three full days to fish whilst staying at Stonefly Lodge in January this year and that short window was preceded by a downpour. However this didn't write-off my fishing options—there are enough streams in the district to render true 'wash-outs' pretty rare.

The trip also coincided with a mouse year. Reports were coming through of some seriously big fish on most of the rivers with beech forest sections, so the trout would be fat. (On the Mot, talk was that the average size had jumped a good pound.) I was hoping for the cicadas to be out and about, but while they were on song near many waters, the trout hadn't quite focused on them.

The streams we fished were close to or back to their normal summer heights and clarity but the higher flows had obviously pushed the trout around. The two guides I fished with, Aaron Ford and Paul van de Loo, both mentioned that fish which had been stationed in certain spots only days before the floods, were no longer present. The fishing was tough compared to previous trips to the region even with these local guides, but over two and a half days we still managed to bring to net trout up to 7 pounds and have shots at a couple that would have pushed ten. On two separate days, once with Aaron and once with Paul, we fished to a monster for over an hour. Both trout were feeding and both ignored everything we threw at them!

Though the numbers of trout seen were down, the quality of those caught was magnificent. The rain had seriously slowed the insect activity and most of the trout encountered preferred a nymph to a dry. These I presented on long leaders from fifteen to eighteen feet, using very small indicators. When we located fish it was exciting



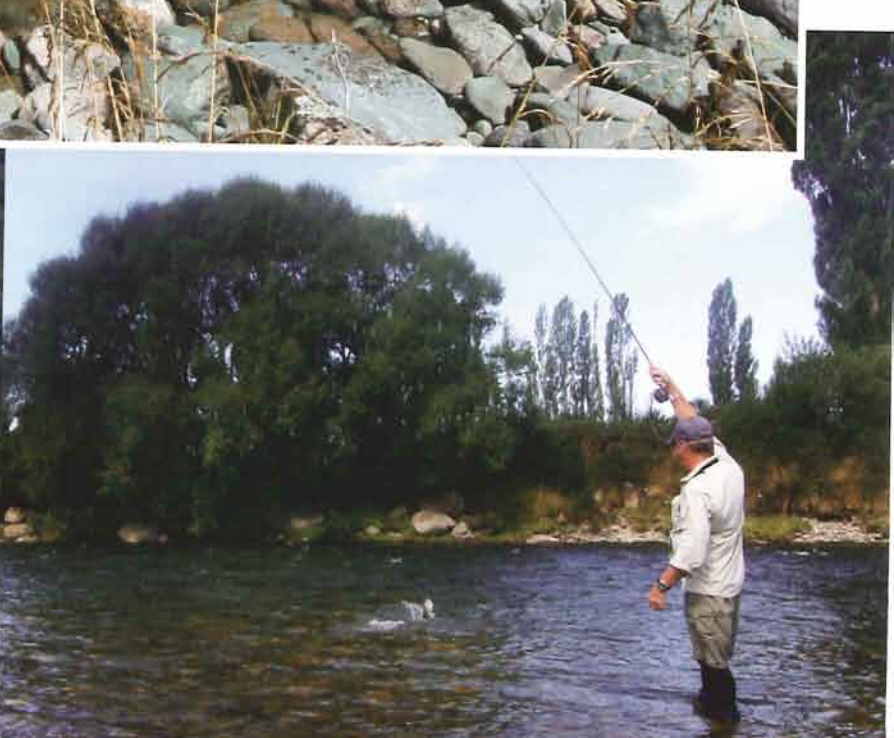
fishing and the company and professionalism of my two lodge guides just added to the quality and enjoyment of each excursion.

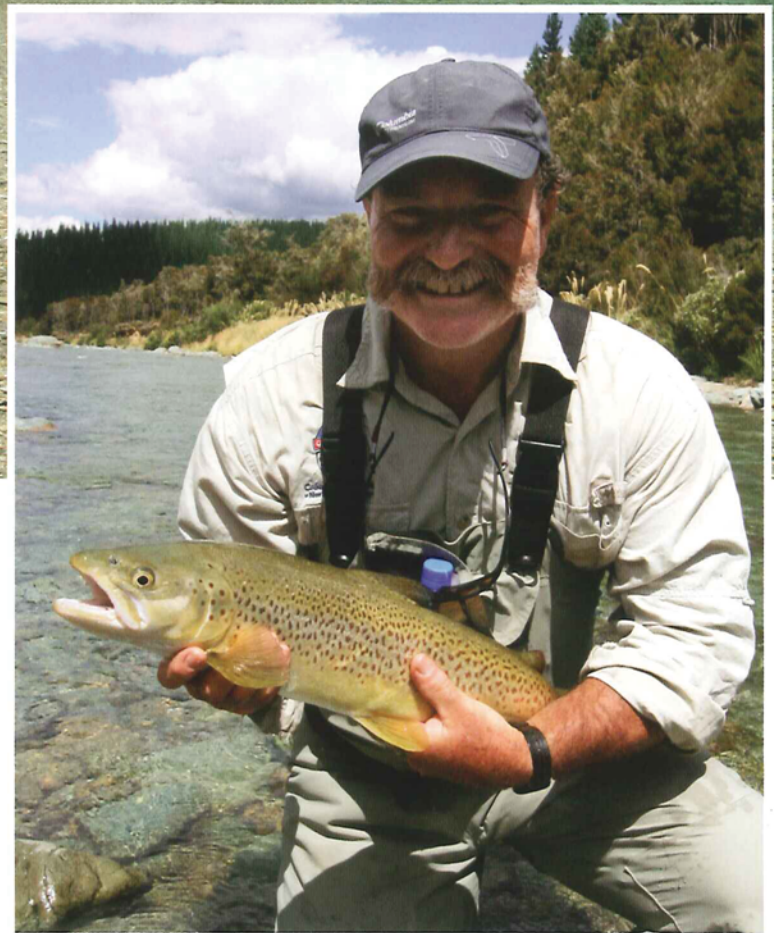
## Gearing Up

Anyone that has been on a fishing trip with me will know how much gear I take, especially when travelling overseas. By the time I've packed two rods and reels, plus vest, plus waders and boots and ancillary items, I often find I'm paying excess baggage. Fortunately, Stonefly Lodge carries a range of gear for guests to use including Simms wading boots, waders (for those who don't want to wade wet) and Sage rods and reels.

While I'd rather use my own rod, the option of lodge waders and boots is a real blessing. It saved me considerable time and effort coming through both Australian and New Zealand quarantine, not to mention cutting my luggage weight.

It turned out that I mostly waded wet with a lanyard during





the trip and carried little more than my rod and camera. Before setting off each day I asked the guides to select any flies from my gear they thought we might use on top of their own, and that was it. I took two rods to Stonefly, a 5 and a 6 weight, but I only used the 6 weight, a 4 piece Redington which has travelled with me on many trips to New Zealand. It just seems to be the perfect rod for throwing everything from long fine leaders with minute flies, to big cicada patterns in windy conditions. The 5 weight is my everyday rod back in Australia so I know that at a pinch I can fall back to using that.

As for other bits & pieces, Stonefly Lodge guests can check the website prior to travelling for a handy list of gear and clothing that might be needed. An email can soon sort out other smaller items (such as tippet and flies) that the angler may wish to bring.

## Dream into Reality

Readers who've been with us since issue 1 may recall an article I wrote about fishing out of Cape Don in the far north of Australia. John and Kate Kerr were the pioneers of Cape Don Lodge and I recall our conversations all those years ago about a block of dirt they'd bought in New Zealand on the Motueka. It had a little batch minus plumbing or electricity they would live in while they built this new lodge. We made it a date at that time that if their plans came to fruition, I would visit and write it up in the magazine.

For years John and Kate travelled the world during their off season, staying in lodges both in Australia and New Zealand as they looked to purchase an existing business, and got a 'feel' for how other lodges operated. They were about to give up their quest for another year when on their last day in New Zealand, they were shown their

present property and signed on the bottom line. It has taken them three years living in that batch, day in day out, summer and winter without so much as a short break to get to where they are at today. A wonderful achievement, brought about by persistence and hard work. If you visit, ask them about some of their trials and tribulations when building and I think you will be as in awe of them as I am.

From the outset Kate and John wanted a building that was totally self-sufficient in its power consumption by using alternative energy. This has been achieved using wind, solar and hydro power. Meanwhile water tanks and springs water the property. And best of all, unless you were told about these features, you wouldn't know – no creature comforts are missing!

The lodge has been designed to take in the environment, which seems to wrap itself around the whole building. Four guestrooms occupy the total upstairs area of the lodge save for the

central fly tying area at the top of the stairs and the open central vestibule looking down upon the dining and front lounge area below. All of the guest rooms have en suites with shower, bath and heated towel rails. The raked ceiling bedrooms each feature a walk out balcony with sweeping views over the river and ranges beyond.

Downstairs is designed along a cross shape with the entrance and view-commanding lounge opposite each other. The dining area takes up the centre of the cross with the kitchen on one side and the games/ reading /snooker area and Matai bar taking up the other wing. Off this wing is a separate wader room with a wash area and toilet leading to the angler pickup on the outside of the lodge.

Along the front of the lodge is a grassed area running off decking. To one side of this is a path dropping down to a BBQ and then down to the helipad. It's a stunning vista from here as the land drops away to the river.

The lodge would suit smaller corporate gatherings and functions as it has a wonderful open plan design downstairs. It would also be ideal for a group of 4 couples to book out the whole lodge. The anglers could break to go fishing while the rest could check out the local wineries or Nelson shopping only 50 minutes away.

## Conclusion

Stonefly has an extremely friendly atmosphere. John and Kate want you to feel as if you are at home when staying with them and they

mean it. They're there if you want something but other than that they leave you to relax or wander at your own leisure. When I visited, Kate was doing all the meals and they were superb (see 'In the Kitchen' this issue) – nothing over the top or too trendy, just good solid meals that make you want to linger, relax and chat about the day's proceedings over a good local wine. I reckon they've got the mix just right and I wouldn't be waiting too long before booking in with them. I feel they may well end up with more non fishers than fishers simply because it is such a special relaxing retreat not far from the big smoke of Nelson.

