

Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

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New Zealand Fly-Fishing Odyssey


The final leg of our journey took us deeper into the wild region of South-land. After a two-hour drive we came to Te Anau, a town on the eastern shore of Lake Te Anau, at the edge of the 4,830-square-mile Fiordland National Park. Most travelers use Te Anau as a base from which to visit Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, areas of astonishing scenery, or to embark on either the Kepler Track or the Milford Track, both of which are four-day hiking trails. On this trip, however, I had come to fish the Waiau River — the Anduin River in the movie “The Fellowship of the Ring” — which flows south out of Lake Te Anau, down to the Foveaux Strait at the tip of the South Island.

Fiordland Lodge is located four miles north of the town on a steep hillside, with a backdrop of the lake. The 10-room property is constructed in a North American style with hand-peeled logs of Douglas fir. Massive whole trees support the 36-foot ceiling of the main living area, where a huge fireplace of river stones faces a dramatic wall of glass. We were shown to our Deluxe Lodge Room by the hospitable manager, Andy Cunningham. This proved to be well-appointed and smartly styled but rather small. The bath, which lacked natural light, provided an effective walk-in shower, but only a single sink and no tub. I strongly recommend that you reserve the single Executive Suite if it is available; alternatively, two log cabins intended for families are situated 220 yards behind the main hotel building.

Aside from its dramatic public areas and congenial atmosphere, Fiordland Lodge is distinguished by its restaurant, where chef Steve Carson creates farm-

to-table menus featuring local lamb, beef and fish, supported by organic ingredients from artisanal suppliers, as well as produce from the hotel's own vegetable garden. Guests dine outside in fine weather, or in the glass-walled dining room; the service provided by the young staff was consistently gracious and professional.

The Fiordland region has an astonishing wealth of trout fishing and the lodge can arrange for guides on more than 40 streams. Other activities include helicopter tours, guided hikes and jet boat excursions into the national park.

I had opted to try fishing from a jet boat on the Waiau River, and after breakfast I was collected by guide Ken Mitchell, a quiet-spoken man, who seemed the living definition of a Kiwi outdoorsman. I suspected that I might dislike the noise of the jet boat's engine, but after a short while, I found that I didn't notice it at all. The Waiau is a magnificent river — clear, fast and powerful — with steep, densely forested banks. The advantage of the jet boat is that it enables you to remain stationary even in the strongest current, and to fish the slack water and small tree-shaded inlets at the edge of the flow where the trout are mostly found. Over the course of eight hours, with a break in the middle for a lunch of lobster sandwiches, I was fortunate enough to catch 15 rainbow trout between three and five pounds in weight (20-24 inches in length), all on a floating dry fly. It was precisely the kind of experience for which keen trout fishermen fly halfway around the world. 

Fiordland Lodge 90

LIKE The dramatic architecture; excellent food; obliging staff. **DISLIKE** Even the second-floor Deluxe Lodge Rooms are rather small. **GOOD TO KNOW** The astonishing scenery of Milford Sound is a 90-minute drive away. *Deluxe Lodge Room, \$860; Executive Suite, \$1,000 (breakfast and dinner included).* 472 Te Anau-Milford Highway, Te Anau. Tel. (64) 3-249-7832. fiordlandlodge.co.nz