

# Owen River Lodge

*This relatively new lodge is situated right on the banks of the stunning Owen River. **Bill Clason** believes that the Owen River Lodge will fast become a favourite destination for many Australian fly anglers.*

## Owen River aims

Owen River Lodge is owned by Felix Borenstein who acknowledges that his aim is to provide his clients with the kind of luxury accommodation and excellent service that he has experienced and most appreciated throughout his own fishing travels. But equally important is his wish to provide his clients with a relaxed angling experience.



The Owen River Lodge is situated in the heart of the Nelson Lakes region on the banks of the Owen River, and offers anglers some great fishing right at its back door! The lodge lies within thirty minutes drive of perhaps fifty top-line waters, and if you care to drive for sixty minutes—the options triple. The main river system in this region is the massive Buller River, which drains Lake Rotoiti and then flows generally west for about 200 km to Westport, where it drains into the sea. Along the way there are over a dozen major tributaries that flow into the Buller and one of them is the Owen River. Having fished all over New Zealand, and especially the South Island, I believe that this lodge is ideally situated in a region that is the best for the consistency and size of the trout and weather.

## The lodge

Completed only twelve months ago after extensive renovations, Owen River Lodge offers its clients modern, well appointed, luxurious accommodation that adjoins the lodge—large apartments with magnificent views of the Owen River and the mountains. Each has a large, covered veranda that provides shelter in unseasonal weather for anglers, their waders and fishing gear.

Inside, every apartment has an ensuite, built in robes, a mini kitchenette, ironing facilities and reverse cycle air conditioning to ensure maximum comfort.

The main lodge, which has also been renovated, provides guests with meal and entertainment facilities: sitting room, dining room, lounge, two bars and a television area.

Included in the tariff are all meals, accommodation and the run of lodge facilities and surrounds. Lodge owner Felix Borenstein, has set the rates to pitch at an accessible level—with the good news that Owen River Lodge rates are much lower than most.

## Fishing options

The fishing options vary according to the time of year. The season starts on 1 October and runs until 30 April. October and November offer great fishing, some dry fly but mainly nymph fishing. There are some large fish caught during this time, which can more than make up for the

vagaries of the early season. Not surprisingly, I was told that some of the best fishing times are over December (obviously over Christmas) and January. Most of the guides work right through this period—except for Christmas Day—but they tell me there is hardly anyone out on the water fishing! December sees the start of reliable dry fly fishing, and the cicadas kick in around January and are abundant through February. The cicadas really put the condition on trout during this time.

We visited the lodge at the end of March, a time when many feel the fishing is much harder because it is at the end of a full fishing season. While at times we felt this to be the case, we still enjoyed some great fishing and fished to plenty of trout; at least a couple were over 5 kg and a number were in the 3–4 kg range. Many of the larger fish required the first cast to be spot-on, which is certainly a challenge for the more experienced anglers, but that can happen at any time of the year. Don't get put off by this, simply give it a go—sometimes you'll be surprised at how easy it can be.

## Access

The access to rivers in the region varies from using conventional or 4WD vehicles, boats, helicopter and hiking. Being located only 15 minutes drive from Lake Rotoroa means that anglers based at the Owen River Lodge can access the famous Durville and Sabine rivers, both of which are great brown and rainbow trout fisheries. Guide Craig Simpson works out of the Owen River Lodge and also owns and runs the ferry service to the top of the lake providing access to these rivers. At their choice, a couple of anglers could take the boat to the top of the lake and spend a day unguided up one of the rivers, or they could use one of the lodge guides to take them there for guided action.

Apart from the numerous fishing options accessible by 4WD (all lodge guides have 4WD), the lodge is right in the centre of the prime backcountry in New Zealand. To the northwest are the Matiri Range and the famous Karamea that boasts numerous trophy waters; to the east, the Richmond Ranges have equally impressive trophy, backcountry waters. These are most easily accessed by helicopter, and Felix



*Craig Simpson is a guide who has been fishing the Nelson Lakes area for over two decades. This was a good brown trout caught by Helen Classon in the Sabine River.*



Photo: Bill Classon

*Helen hooks up on a solid trout*



Photo: Helen Classon

*The colours of some of the river trout in the beech forest areas have to be seen to be believed*



Photo: Bill Classon

organises the closest drive-to launch sites to keep costs down.

Finally, the lodge specialises in 4WD backcountry access. The lodge guides have many favourite and sensational locations that will get anglers into the backcountry without the cost of a helicopter.

### Owen River Lodge guides

The guides who work with the Owen River Lodge are just great and certainly don't put too much pressure on you. Helen and I found them terrific, their local knowledge and pleasant manner made for a great day's fishing, even in challenging circumstances. One aspect of fly angling that I'm particularly careful about is zeroing in very quickly on what flies and leader setups work in the area. Getting this information from the guides makes their local knowledge particularly important. I've just finished writing an article for our *Flyfisher* Volume 9 on this subject, so have a good look at that piece too; it has some interesting insights into the subtleties of fly selection and correct dressings.

I don't mind if a guide wants me to use his flies—he has a reason for it, and I'll always go with that. I've been caught a few times, where I've executed a perfect first cast only to have the presentation refused because of my poor fly selection! This year I noticed that the guides

were all using very delicately tied flies—they were as near to perfect as they could get them. In many instances the guides tied their own nymphs as they just weren't able to get the exact pattern from a commercial tier.

All of the guides communicate with each other to ensure that waters fished on any day have not seen anglers for a reasonable period. Of course the more remote the location then the less angling pressure it will have seen. The waters in the South Island are getting more pressure, but not to the extent that I've ever experienced fishing onto another angler—ever. The guides manage themselves very well and it is a credit to their professionalism.

### Lake margins

As well as the numerous rivers, I must also mention the lakes. Generally, the New Zealand guides aren't too fussed about fishing for lake trout, so at first it was hard to gauge the potential of the lake margins. The main lakes in the area are Rotoiti and Rotoroa, the two huge natural Nelson Lakes. The main claim to fame of Lake Rotoroa is featuring in *A River Somenbere* mini TV series in which Rob and Tom travelled to the top of the lake and explored the rivers flowing into the lake—the Sabine and the Durville.

The lake edges have the opportunity for sensational polarising in the margins if the lake

**“If it's a “mouse year” then expect plenty of fish in the 4–5 kg bracket.”**

is high. After rain, when the lake is high, about 100 m of lake margin on its south eastern shore floods where these rivers flow in. Anglers can take the water taxi to the top of the lake and then wade the shoreline using Tasmanian polarising techniques. Australians used to Tasmanian lake fishing will have a ball in these conditions, with some of the browns going to 3–4 kg at times.

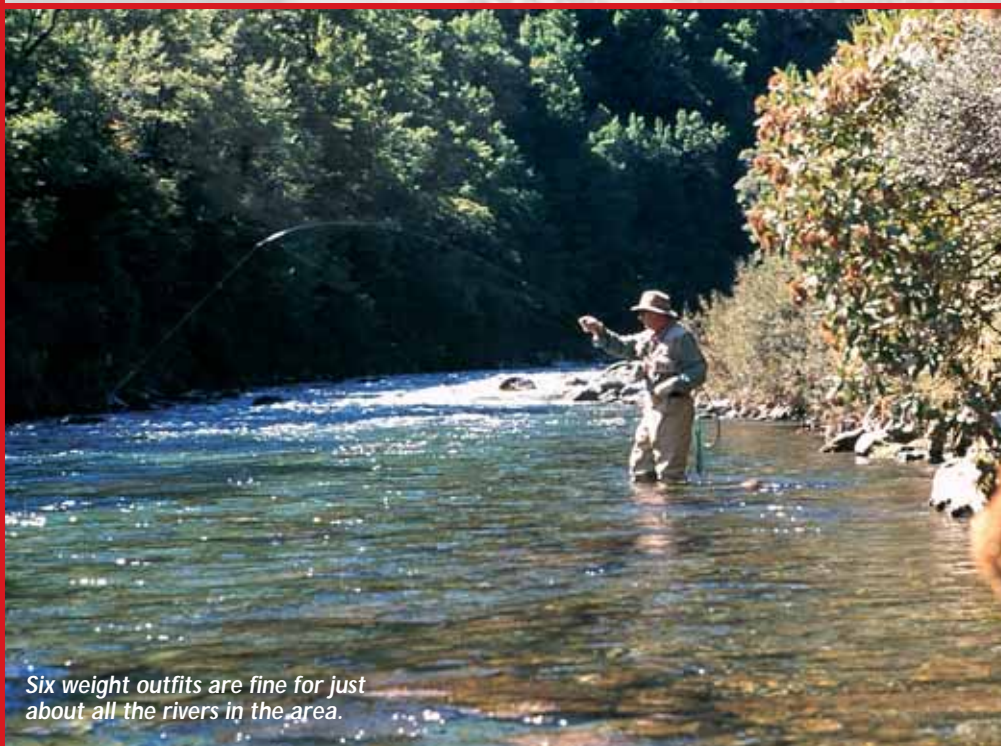
### Fit out

One of the unique features of this lodge is that Felix can provide Simms GoreTex waders, wading boots and Simms wet weather gear for his guests use during their stay and this is included in the tariff! This is a real bonus as the added weight and bulk of waders can cause anglers to compromise in the gear they carry on planes.

### Fishing 'mouse' years

If it's a 'mouse year' then expect plenty of fish in the 4–5 kg bracket. Mouse years are not an old wives' tale, but an event every five or six years when the three beech tree species of the Nelson Lakes region all seed at the same time. The native mice and rats feed voraciously on the seed and will move at night from one area to another as they eat an area out. They have no hesitation in swimming across any river in their pursuit of the seed and the trout have no hesitation in walloping them at every opportunity! Trout can put on 2 kg in a few weeks on this diet! The last mouse year was in the 1999–2000 season so another one is due soon!

Lodge owner, Felix Borenstein fishes a deep pool on the Owen River.



Six weight outfits are fine for just about all the rivers in the area.

Photo: Helen Classon

The mouth of the famous Sabine River.



Photo: Bill Classon

## Contact details

The Owen River Lodge can accommodate up to ten anglers but usually only books eight. As an example, the lodge has a package deal special available for October 2004 or April 2005—four nights accommodation, four full days fishing with two of them guided, twin share on the room and guide for \$1600 per person.

Felix Borenstien can be contacted on 64 3 523 9075. The lodge address is Owen Valley East Road, Murchison, Nelson Lakes, South Island, or visit the web site [www.owenriverlodge.co.nz](http://www.owenriverlodge.co.nz). Email: [info@owenriverlodge.co.nz](mailto:info@owenriverlodge.co.nz)

## Owen River fishery

The Owen River itself is a very good fishery and any stay at the lodge should include a

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day fishing one of the beats on the river. Felix monitors who is fishing the river and exactly where, so his advice is invaluable and

he can direct a couple of anglers to a section that will produce a great day's spotting and fishing. You can use a guide should you choose but this venue is ideal to a fish unguided. Another option includes the water around the lodge—there is a wonderful gorge that takes a good day to walk and has great fish and fishing.

There are also two very good, full day beats above the gorge before the road access terminates at the farm at the top of the river.

The fishing options are almost endless and the fishing is just terrific, so have a long think about this option if you can get away!

