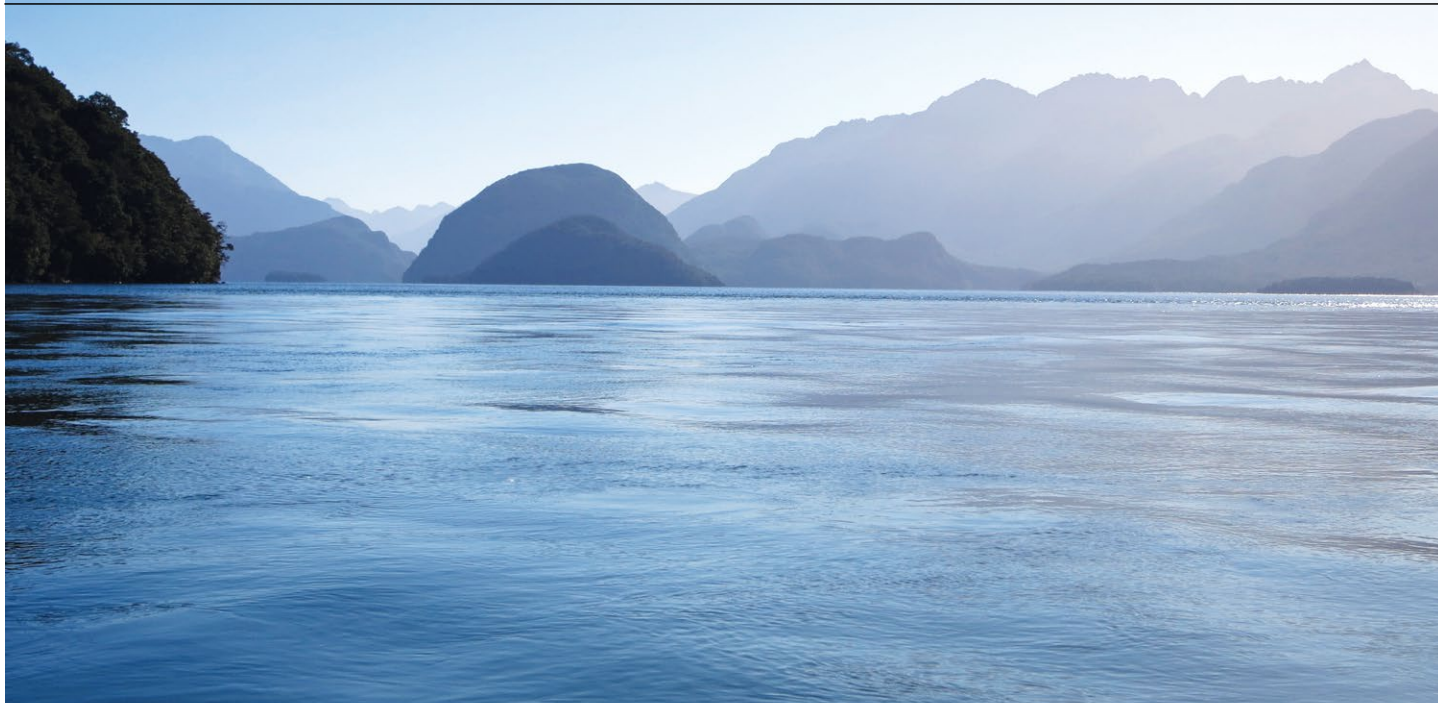


# Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

JUNE 2016 | Our 38th Year

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TRAVELING THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF TRULY ENCHANTING PLACES



TROUT STREAMS, WINERIES, MOUNTAIN SPLENDOR

## New Zealand Fly-Fishing Odyssey

For American visitors, perhaps the most extraordinary thing about New Zealand is that on domestic turboprop flights, there is still no airport security. You just turn up at the airport 30 minutes ahead of time and walk straight onto the plane. The inconveniences that the rest of the world has grown accustomed to are here deemed superfluous. New Zealand often feels like a little world apart. Separated from Australia by nearly 1,000 miles of ocean, it has a population of just 4.5 million people in an area the size of Colorado. In much of the country, crime is virtually unknown; prosperity seems more or less universal; and even relations between the Māori people and those of European origin appear to be comparatively harmonious. In addition, the mountain scenery is glorious, the food

and wine are often exceptional, some golf courses compare with the best in the United States and the trout fishing is incomparable.

These attributes, combined with remoteness from the world's troubles, are doubtless what attract an ever-increasing number of affluent Americans. Indeed, the recent growth at the high end of the luxury market has inspired a new private jet terminal in Queenstown (population 13,000) on the South Island, and rates for the best suites at the leading hotels and resorts can now exceed \$5,000 a night. American affection for New Zealand is not just a recent phenomenon, however. North Carolina hedge-fund billionaire Julian Robertson has been responsible for the creation of three of the country's finest lodges — Kauri Cliffs, The Farm

### COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Lake Manapouri from the mouth of the Waiau River, Fiordland, South Island / PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER

### THIS MONTH

## Taupo to Te Anau

A two-week journey from the heart of the North Island to the tip of the South Island yielded a crop of stellar lodges and hideaways. ....1-7

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## Hawaii Small-Ship Cruise

On a weeklong trip, we visited remote islands, snorkeled with sea turtles and manta rays and enjoyed exceptional whale watching. .... 8-10

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☐ Online: Mauna Kea, Galleries and Bookshelf

**Find video and more photographs of our trips at [andrewharper.com/hideaway-report](http://andrewharper.com/hideaway-report)**

Full-service travel planning is available to subscribers at (800) 375-4685 or [reservations@andrewharper.com](mailto:reservations@andrewharper.com).

For comments and inquiries concerning the *Hideaway Report*, please email [aharper@andrewharper.com](mailto:aharper@andrewharper.com).



Clockwise from top left: Aerial view of Poronui; a typical brown trout from the Taharua River; cozy sitting area of our cabin at Poronui / TROUT AND INTERIOR PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARPER

at Cape Kidnappers and Matakauri — as well as two of its leading golf courses. California-based billionaire William P. Foley II, the owner of Wharekauhau Lodge, has invested in two Wairarapa vineyards and is building a new bottling plant. While Blanket Bay, on Lake Wakatipu near Queenstown, was the brainchild of Thomas W. Tusher, a former president and chief operating officer of Levi Strauss & Co.

I have made several previous driving tours of New Zealand, in the course of which I have visited many of the leading wineries and played some of the best golf courses. On this occasion, I decided to indulge in another of my passions: trout fishing. If the idea of a driving tour sounds intimidating — New Zealanders drive on the left and few roads have more than two lanes — rest assured that there is nothing to fear. Kiwis are extremely law-abiding when it comes to speed restrictions. The limit on most highways is 100 kph (62

mph), and few drivers exceed it. The roads themselves are well-maintained, and the signage is excellent. Above all, even the major routes are comparatively empty, so there is little oncoming traffic, and overtaking is, for the most part, unnecessary.

After the 13-hour trans-Pacific flight from San Francisco, we freshened up at the pleasant Novotel Auckland Airport hotel, before boarding a turboprop for the 45-minute flight southeast to the vacation town of Taupo.

About 30 miles from Taupo, **Poronui** is set on a 16,000-acre private estate, through which flow the Taharua and Mohaka rivers. Although it is considered one of New Zealand's premier fly-fishing lodges, Poronui is a wilderness retreat that is also suitable for non-anglers. Its impressive stables, which are part of a recreation complex that includes a gym and spa facilities, offer a range of equestrian activities, among them horse treks

into the surrounding forests and ranges. Guided hikes, mountain biking, sporting clays and archery provide alternative pursuits. For a brief period in the fall (March-April), hunters arrive to stalk red and sika deer. In addition, the property is just an hour's drive (15 minutes by helicopter) from the renowned Hawke's Bay wine region.

Poronui comprises a main lodge with seven lavish cabins; Blake House (for exclusive use), with two spacious bedrooms, plus two bunk rooms with four single bunks in each; and the Safari Camp, set beside the Mohaka River, with two tented suites, each containing two queen beds. We were greeted at the front entrance of the lodge by its manager, Eve Reilly, an exceptionally friendly woman of Irish origin. Our so-called cabin provided a large living room with floor-to-ceiling windows, a gas-log fire, leather armchairs, a writing desk and a wet bar. The bedroom contained a queen and a twin bed, while



the bright adjoining bath came with twin sinks surrounded by attractive jade green tiles and an effective walk-in shower. Best of all was the wooden deck, which was supported on the steep hillside by long stilts. The view of the rushing Taharua River, emerging from a gorge between forested hillsides, was so aesthetically satisfying that it seemed more like landscape art than scenery.

As it was now well past lunchtime, we wandered over to the main lodge building, where boards of cheese and charcuterie, plus a bottle of Pinot Noir, had been set out on the long communal dining table. Behind a wide bar counter, the chef and his assistants were hard at work in the open kitchen, chopping and peeling in preparation for dinner. At one end of the living area, a log fire smoldered in a stone fireplace. A leather sofa and armchairs, polished floors, bright area rugs and crowded bookshelves all helped to create an atmosphere that was both cozy and civilized.

After a couple hours' relaxation in our cabin, we reconvened to meet our fellow guests and to discuss the program for the following day with our engaging fishing guide, Sean Andrews. A selection of canapés was followed by a scallop carpaccio appetizer, and a main course of chateaubriand, both of which were utterly delicious and graciously served. A lively ebb and flow of conversation was sustained by Reilly, who had a natural gift for encouraging general participation. All the staff members were unmistakably

happy in their work, which also contributed to an exceptionally enjoyable evening.

Even though our stay at Poronui was at the height of the trout-fishing season (November through February), we were unlucky. A late summer storm brought a night of torrential rain, and at breakfast Sean was looking gloomy. He pronounced the Mohaka River unfishable, and even remote high-altitude streams accessible only by helicopter had, apparently, been

“*In many mountain streams, the water is usually so limpid that every fish is visible. This means you can sight fish, or cast to a specific trout that you can actually see feeding.*”

written off by the deluge. From the lodge balcony, the Taharua looked clear, but Sean insisted that it, too, was carrying unwelcome quantities of silt.

The trout fishing in New Zealand is considered the best in the world for a number of reasons. In many mountain streams, the water is usually so limpid that every fish is visible. This means that you can sight fish, or cast to a specific trout that you can actually see feeding. The brown and rainbow trout, which were introduced from North America in the late 19th century, here grow to immense sizes and on average are double the weight of their cousins in the blue ribbon streams of the Rockies. And for some reason, which no fishing guide has been able to

explain to me, large trout in New Zealand greatly prefer the headwaters of streams and chase the smaller fish downriver. As a result, there are relatively few trout in the upper reaches, but they are all big.

We set out more in hope than expectation and after a 10-minute drive reached a placid stretch of the Taharua. Although we could still see to the bottom, the water looked slightly murky. In New Zealand, you don't just start casting in likely spots. Here, you walk stealthily upstream until you spot a fish, which you then stalk, often using the bankside vegetation as cover. Fishing becomes more like hunting. For me, and fellow addicts, the experience is almost unbearably exciting.

That morning the river seemed strangely empty. Those fish that were out in the open had silt in their gills and were sulking and unresponsive — with one exception. After a couple of hours, we found a solitary trout rising regularly. Sean crept up the bank for a closer look and pronounced it “a good fish,” which in New Zealand means one about 24 inches long, or five or six pounds in weight. My fly landed as intended, and a huge swirl was followed by the brief appearance of a large caudal fin. Of course, in response to the morning's frustrations, I struck too hard and snapped the fly off the end of the leader. Sean said nothing. Sometimes I feel profoundly sorry for fishing guides, and this was one such occasion.

Having no wish to weary non-anglers, I have written more extensively about my fishing experiences online. In general, Poronui is an exceptional retreat. The cuisine, staff and accommodations are all exemplary. Blake House, with its capacity of four adults and eight children, would be ideal for a family gathering. On my next visit, however, I plan to stay at the Safari Camp, where the trout in the Mohaka River will be just a few feet from the flap of my tent.

#### HOTELS AT A GLANCE

### Poronui 97

**LIKE** Beautiful location; large, comfortable accommodations; delicious food; delightful staff; superlative fishing.  
**DISLIKE** Nothing. **GOOD TO KNOW** When the hunters arrive in March, they run on a parallel track to the fishermen, though the two groups do meet up for dinner. *Lodge Room, \$1,215 for two (all meals and beverages included). Taharua Road, Taupo 3379. Tel. (64) 7-384-2080. poronui.com*