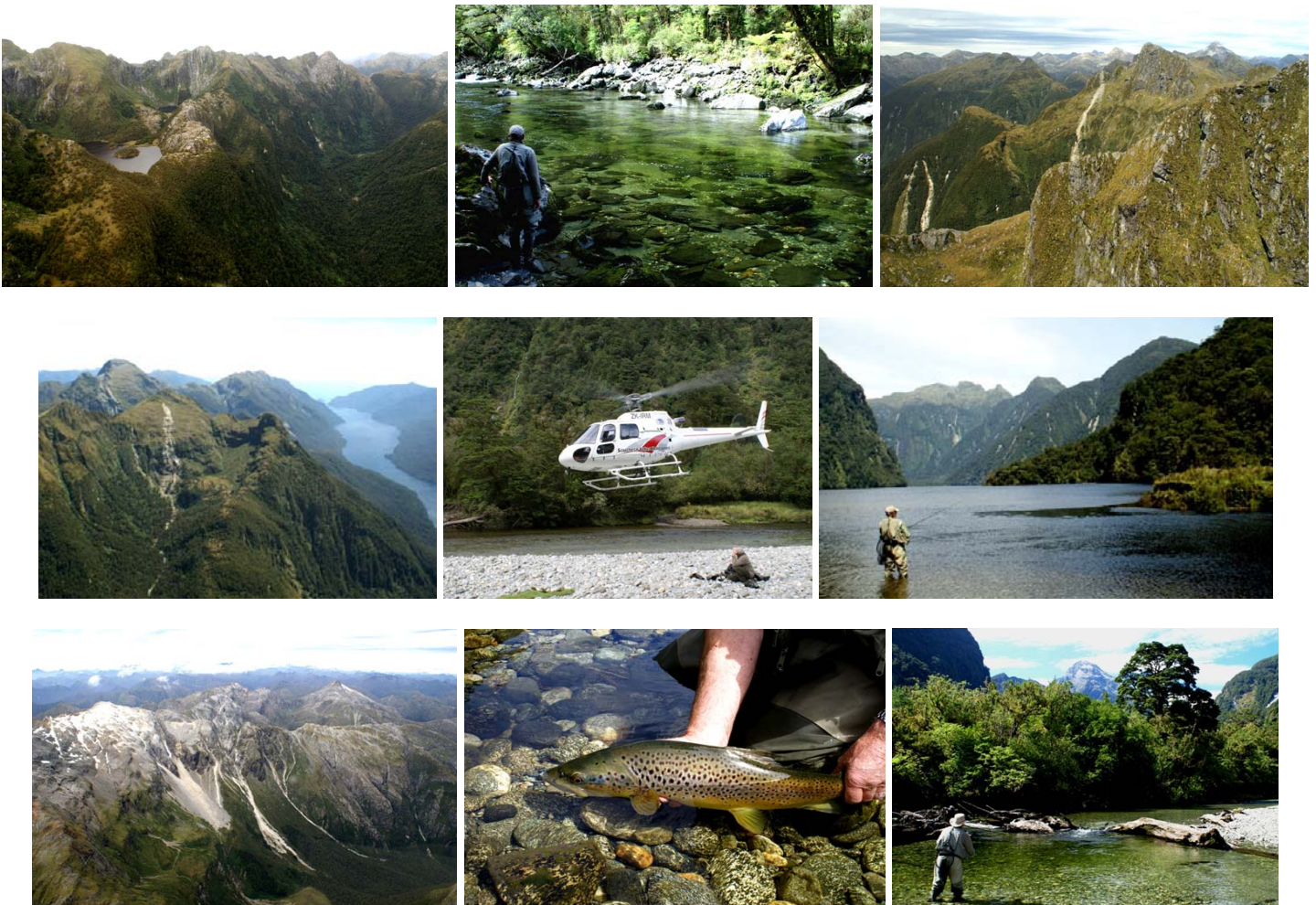




PERSONAL REPORT: For our eighth consecutive year, we made our “winter time” New Zealand pilgrimage. As usual, we combined NZ experiences we’ve enjoyed in the past with some new, exploratory ventures. For the fifth time in the last six years, we stopped for a week at our favorite “second honeymoon” hideaway in Fiji. It continues to amaze us that the Fijian tropical paradise is just a 3+ hour flight from NZ and it’s glacier capped peaks. The two of them together certainly do make for a wonderful combination and getaway from the cold, gray skies of January and February in the USA.

First, New Zealand. Our focus this year was on the southern half of the South Island. We were determined to do something we tried to do last year in Fiordland, but weather interfered (as it sometimes does in this area). We did find a day this year where the weather was just barely stable enough to allow us to charter a copter for a full day – the intent was for the copter to stay with us so we could get into Fiordland for some aerial photos and fish two different rivers and one lake. With the exchange rate at almost \$1US = \$2NZ, this was a comparative “value,” at least in relation to the exchange rates of the last several years which have been as bad as .82US to \$1NZ. We did have a spectacular day capturing the following photos:





The day (copter day in Fiordland) pictured above resulted in presenting to 14 fish, had 7 fish eat, and netted 6, from 3# to a pair of 5.5# browns (4 on dry flies). We were staying at one of our favorites, Fiordland Lodge (above right, being dropped by the copter). This eco-tour lodge has a terrific Fiordland “feel” to it and offers 90% of NZ’s top accommodations at about half the price. Very comfortable stay.

While in Fiordland, I fished with both of our favorite independent guides for this area. One of them is a friendly gentleman with lots of guiding experience while the other may be as good a technical guide as anyone I’ve ever fished with (and great eyes)...however, short on warm and fuzzy feelings. One of our fishing days, we walked the river which flows into Lake Te Anau from the North. Good day with 12 fish presented to, 5 eats and 5 in the net, from 3.5# to 6# - all dries. On the one day we didn’t fish, we just relaxed, rested my bad knee, and enjoyed the ambiance of Te Anau and Fiordland. The fourth day saw a cold front blowing in from the south. Most of the fish we saw were hunkered down and not feeding and if it wasn’t for one beautiful 7# brown, the day would have been a zero in the “caught category.” That fish, which turned out to be my top fish of the trip, was in a small, gin clear spring creek, a tributary to the famous river we fished...spent 90 minutes with this fish...exciting and tense fly fishing adventure which, after several refusals, resulted in his nose breaking the surface and sucking in a size 14, blue-bodied blow fly. The story in photos – guide with fish:



We moved from Fiordland to a lodge north of Wanaka, about two hours from Queenstown. Cedar Lodge has a unique approach – they take just 6 anglers at a time and have their own copter. Their package includes daily copter flyouts in the price (the only NZ lodge to take this approach) and they are one of just a few NZ lodges that charge in US \$\$ (with today's positive exchange rate, this is not a bargain). For a variety of reasons, our three nights at Cedar was just our first stay with them.

Our conclusions include that this should be on the “A” list of places to consider for the hard core angler or certain angling couples. They have access (some of the access is limited to their operation, a credit to their 20+ years in operation) to a great selection of waters, including all the rivers in the area, some of them “top notch” streams that drain the back side (eastern slope) of the Alps. They also access the headwaters of many of the most productive rivers on the West Coast, waters that begin near the crest of the Alps and are not easily reached. In other words, they are in a great location to fish some of New Zealand's top water. There are a few drawbacks for couples where only one of them is a passionate fisherman – these should be discussed further before considering adding this lodge to an itinerary.

I had one very interesting day sharing the water and a copter with Gary Martin, a terrific angler with over 20 years experience fishing NZ, most of them utilizing Cedar Lodge as his base. The day was “interesting,” but not for the usual reasons. We had lots of fish eat (to be exact, six fish each, a total of 12 potential netted fish). The result was just one fish that made the net, a nice 6 pounder taken by Gary (photo center below). The “fishing gods” seemed determined to humble two veteran NZ anglers on this day.....and humbled they were.



Next we moved east to fish with an independent guide I believe has the finest selection of waters, without using a copter, in NZ. His waters include two spectacular, massive river valley's which drain the backside of the Alps (many scenes from Lord Of The Rings were filmed here) plus access to a wonderful selection of “farm rivers.” Over 30 (apprx 10%) of the photos in THE HUNT were shot on these waters. Add in a very comfortable and welcoming farm stay and this is one of our favorite spots in NZ.

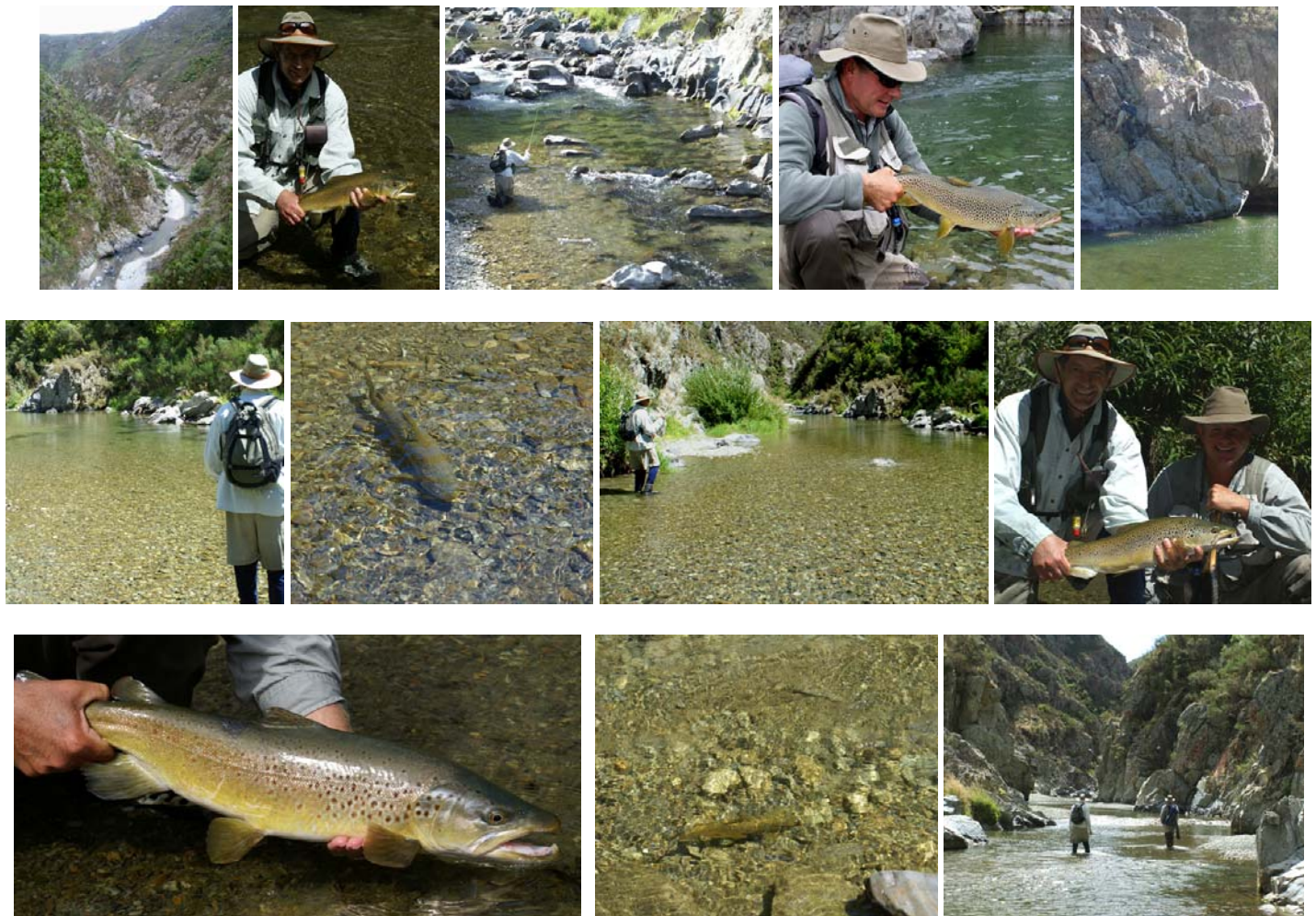
The three days we fished here took us in three different directions: one of those aforementioned river valleys, a farm stream, and a rocky gorge section of a small river. Despite the weather being uncooperative, we averaged fishing to 14 fish a day, getting 7 to eat and releasing 5. The numbers were similar each day and all the fish, except one, were taken on dries. They ranged from 3# to a trio that exceeded 6#....all good stuff.



The river valley (above) contained several rivers and streams. Most of the water is fed by glaciers, hence, the aqua-gray tint to the water and also the fish; the exception being a few clear water spring creeks. The second day found us on a river which runs through a very large sheep farm – several thousand acres. On the day we fished it (below), they were mustering their 10,000 sheep from the pastures and mountains of the property and herding them to the main yard of the farm. We got stuck behind the mustering effort on our way out, causing a delay in departing the farm (10,000 sheep do form a formidable road block).



I shared the third day with a fly fisher many of our readers would recognize as the “permit guy,” Art Hinckley (the man with 50 permit released). We fished a rocky gorge section of a local river that provided a fun experience (below). Getting out of the gorge at the end of the day included some verticle rock climbing (below right) that was almost too much for this gimpy old guy but it did add to the adventure. Note: Art is just as good with his trout rod as he is with his crab flies.



Our final stay was Grasmere, a five star eco-lodge on a large tract of land which doubles as a high country working farm. Grasmere is one of the two primary lodging options on the eastern side of Arthur’s Pass, about 90 minutes from Christchurch. Our purpose here was some R & R to wrap up our trip and to do some fishing with a long time local guide who fishes this section of NZ from coast to coast as well as operating his own B & B. That fishing day produced the incredible story of the “three time” rainbow (pictured below) that was in our February newsletter. Grasmere offers an array of accommodations ranging from their Lakeview Deluxe rooms and Junior

Suites to the Cottage and Mountain Chalet. Our Junior Suite is below right; the two bedroom cottage, perfect for families, is below center; the Mountain Chalet has a “great room” flanked by two suites (second row, left).....top drawer! Outstanding cuisine and service is the order of the day here.



FIJI

The organizations that rate the world’s great resorts have finally discovered Qamea Resort and Spa. They are a little slow – we discovered this little gem six years ago. What attracted us was the isolation, quality Bures, cuisine and service, and the “world class” reef for snorkeling and diving literally right in front of our Bure – no boat trip necessary. We actually enjoyed our stays here BEFORE I found a way to catch the Giant Trevally pictured below last year (one of two we took on fly rod poppers). – prior to that fly rod success, our previous three trips had produced little in the way of meaningful fly fishing results at Qamea.

Referencing recognition, Qamea was the only Fijian resort to earn recognition as *MOST EXCELLENT RESORT* by Conde Nast in their 2008 Awards For Excellence. Meaningfully, Conde Nast says Qamea is one of those rare properties that rates “Five Stars, but with a Four Star price.” The Robb Report named Qamea Resort and Spa one of the World’s Top Ten Luxury Exclusive Hideaways

The last two years, Qamea has had a special for the months of January and February, the best months to tie in with a NZ trip - paying for five five nights earns you two free nights!

This past year, they concluded the building of their Jungle Spa (first three photos below) – literally built into the base of the tropical rain forest covered mountain at the back of the property. This has been a significant addition and one we used daily during our stay.



Qamea is not the place to go if you are looking for golf, shopping, etc. This is seclusion – no roads on this island and it’s only accessed by a short boat ride from the nearby island of Taveuni which has an airport. A great spot for rest and relaxation with a second honeymoon environment.

Photos below, left to right: Bures near the beach settled into the palm trees, the front of our secluded Super Bure with plunge pool (20 yards from the waters edge), interior of that Bure, Qamea beach with the coral reef just offshore.



2010: we already have our itinerary almost complete. It will include a stop in Fiji at Qamea and several wonderful New Zealand experiences. If you have the time and travel budget, it's difficult to top this pairing for a place to "hide out" when we are in the throes of our cold and nasty winter.

Don Muelrath
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