

Below is a travel article which was written by Brisbane journalist Alex Tilbury who visited the Lodge with Wairaurahiri Jet. It appeared in "The Courier Mail", which is Queensland's main daily newspaper.

Twist and shout in secret

Experience NZ on an intimate jet boat tour with experts, writes **Alex Tilbury**

YOU have probably ticked the Shotover River jet boat ride in Queenstown off your bucket list. It's a fast thrill ride through the narrow canyons of the icy river in Southland, New Zealand and ideal for tourists who have half an hour and a \$NZ100 to burn.

But if you want a real jet boat ride in Southland, then head further west to a completely secret hidden gem.

In the Fiordland National Park, you'll find the amazing Wairaurahiri River jet boat tour operated by Johan Groters and Joyce Kolk.

Your jet boat adventure starts at 10am at Lake Hauroko — the deepest lake in New Zealand — where your guide Johan hands you a funny woollen hat. You might think he's mad but this Rasta-style beanie ties under your chin and will keep your ears warm.

Johan runs his broad aluminium strengthened craft, powered by twin Lexus V8 motors, for 92km down and back on the Wairaurahiri River, which drains Lake Hauroko, to the Tasman Sea.

He knows every rock to dodge and every branch to swerve past because, depending on how deep the river is running, it's a dice with death.

My family recently had one of the best days of our lives on this jet boat adventure.

We'll never forget the adventure as we got to hike some pristine ecological wilderness, in all its beauty, too.

We even got to collect lots



HIDDEN GEM: The Wairaurahiri River jet boat tour; (above right) Lachlan Hood, 10, enjoys the ride and (below) the barbecue lunch of wild venison and sausages prepared by the guide.

of beautiful paua shells on a deserted beach, at the halfway point in the day-long trip.

Johan knows the lake, the river and the beach like the back of his hand.

In his quiet understated way, he shepherds you on this awesome ride, stopping to check stoat traps and explaining about the forest.

He cooks a great barbecue lunch at Waitutu Lodge of wild venison and sausages.

We had spent a fortune in a posh Queenstown restaurant for some dry tough venison, only to be delighted with Johan's whole rump cooked just right and then served as venison steaks.

You can, in fact, rent a bed at the lodge — a beaut back-

packers retreat — for \$NZ30 per person per night, which is ideal if you want to base yourself there and go tramping.

Kiwis love a good tramp and the Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track (humpridge track.co.nz) is nearby for those interested in bushwalks.

The Hump Ridge Track is a three-day loop that takes hikers along the south coast, up to the sub-alpine zone of the Hump Ridge.

The caretaker told us that the day before two blokes had been at the Lodge, none other than AJ Hackett and Henry van Asch, the duo who created the bungy jump.

I was half expecting to see Bear Grylls rapel out of a nearby tree, given he had been to

the nearby Fiordland's Routeburn Track.

I cannot rate this little-known jet boat adventure highly enough — it is family owned by this former deer hunter who knows the area intimately.

He's professional and safety conscious and my boys loved being allowed to stand up in the back of the jet boat.

Last tip: make sure you lather on insect repellent to ward off the sand flies in the rainforest too.



TRAVEL MATE

GETTING THERE: Virgin flies direct from Brisbane to Queenstown daily. More flight info: bne.com.au

STAYING THERE: Waitutu Lodge provides six bedrooms with 22 beds, mattresses and pillows. The kitchen/dining room has gas cooking, all cooking utensils and crockery, and hot and cold running water. There are flush toilets, hot showers, bath, solar-powered lighting, and an airing room. A walk-in chiller suitable for fish and game has been installed. Book ahead of time so there's a bed made ready for you. Info: waitutu.co.nz

MORE INFO: This all-day jet boat adventure costs \$249 per adult, \$149 per child. Trampers drop off or pick up \$189 per adult, \$95 per child. Info: wjct.co.nz