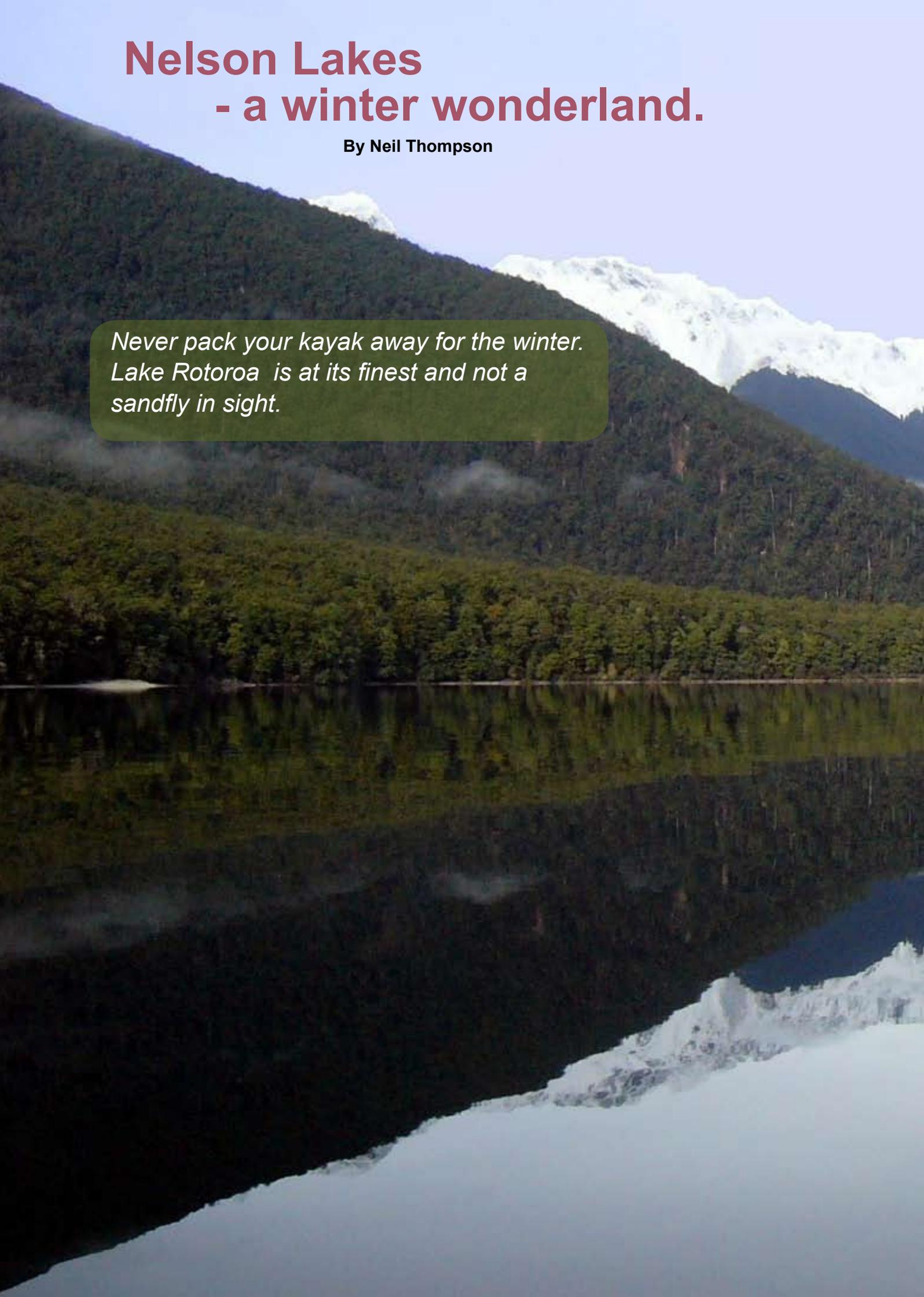


# Nelson Lakes - a winter wonderland.

By Neil Thompson

*Never pack your kayak away for the winter.  
Lake Rotoroa is at its finest and not a  
sandfly in sight.*



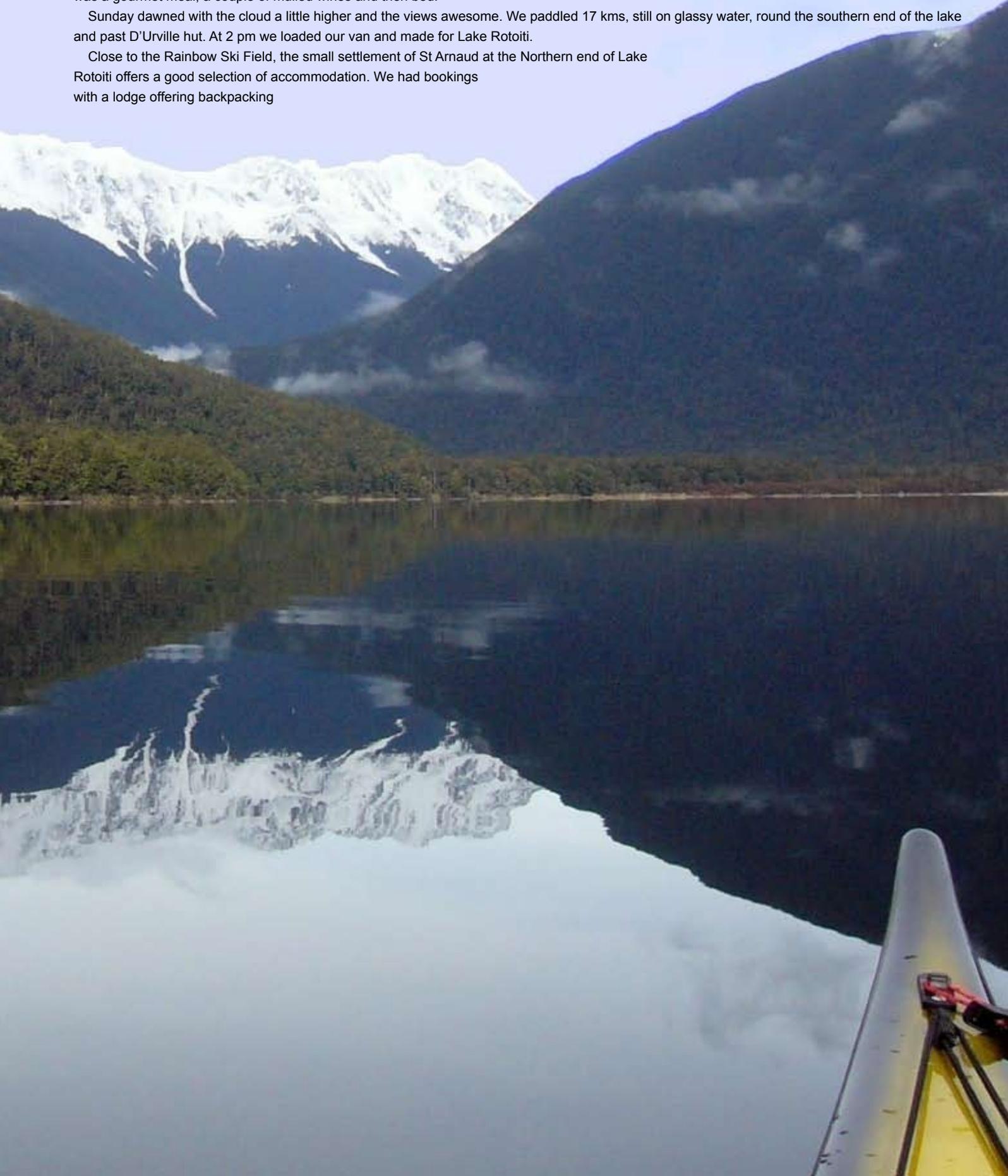
**A trip to Nelson Lakes in the middle of winter sounded a little extreme. But the promise of short distances, no tents and huts with fire places, soon filled the trip with 10 Wellington Yakity Yak members.**

**Leaving Friday evening, a van full of eager clubbies and a trailer full of kayaks took the ferry and road to Blenheim. We wanted to make the most of the short daylight hours and had an early breakfast on the road.**

Lake Rotoroa, enclosed by mountains, 15 kms long and only 2 kms at its widest, was first of two lakes we wanted to paddle. The day was overcast, the water flat and glassy. As we paddled the eastern shore the clouds lifted to reveal the beauty of our surroundings and the snow covered tops. The view was fantastic and we didn't hurry to Sabine hut at the south end of the lake. At 2 pm we unloaded gear and walked a couple of kilometres to a foot bridge over the Sabine River where deep crystal clear water runs through the gorge. A beautiful spot and well worth the walk! Back at the hut there was a gourmet meal, a couple of mulled wines and then bed.

Sunday dawned with the cloud a little higher and the views awesome. We paddled 17 kms, still on glassy water, round the southern end of the lake and past D'Urville hut. At 2 pm we loaded our van and made for Lake Rotoiti.

Close to the Rainbow Ski Field, the small settlement of St Arnaud at the Northern end of Lake Rotoiti offers a good selection of accommodation. We had bookings with a lodge offering backpacking



## Feature

accommodation, but to our good fortune they had a plumbing problem and upgraded us to more luxurious hotel rooms. Shame! Fine dining and good company made the prospect of Monday night in a hut seem rough.

Lake Rotoiti, 8 kms long, is the smaller of the two main lakes in the area. West Bay adds another 6kms to a circuit. Entering the Bay we kayaked past the source of the Buller River, an insignificant beginning to the substantial river at Westport.

Still surrounded by snow topped mountains I was harassed by reference to a photo I had used to promote the trip. It showed snow down to lake level.



*What does a Yakity Yakker do when confronted with a kayak covered in snow?  
A (near) naked snow angel of course!*

One midnight snowfight coming up.



Under threat of legal action for false advertising (a lawyer in the group was open to the highest bidder) I told them not to panic. The trip wasn't over yet...

3 km from the Coldwater hut we stopped at a stream and walked a track to stand under Whiskey Falls. The spray is very cold! Make sure you wear good wet weather gear. Some of us were chilled when we returned to the kayaks and continued to Coldwater hut. First thing on the 'to do list' was to start the fire. Plenty of people put up their hands for the task, but when you have a volunteer fireman, stand back, he will climb over you to get the matches.

Some people went for a walk while the rest just thawed. Then it started to rain. An hour later rain turned to sleet. "Snow damn you". At 9 pm a few were still playing cards, listening to the rain on the roof when the noise stopped. Fingers crossed I went outside and to my relief it was snowing. Court case avoided!

The snow got deeper and at 11 pm sleepers were woken by the thud of snowballs hitting the hut. A snow fight was all on. Yeah ha. One crazy

clubby, I won't mention his name (Dave Wills), was dared to do a snow angel in his birthday suit on the jetty. Within a minute he was down to his boxers and performing. Not quite naked, but it was cold. Something about shrinkage he said. Nice work Dave.

Next morning 4 cms of snow was down to the lake edge and covering the kayaks. Without sounding too corny, it was one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen.

Some of us cleared the snow off their kayaks. The rest left it on for a snowball fight all the way back to St.Arnaud where the last to land got smashed by snowballs right on the lakes edge. They were sitting ducks, me included!

We sorted out gear, changed clothes and drove to Picton for the ferry home.

It had been a memorable, enjoyable trip with a great group of people and a lot of humour. If you ever get a chance to paddle this area, how about doing it in the winter? You avoid the sandflies and get some great scenery. Just dress up warm.

No guarantee on the snow though.

Grant & 'The Dave' with snow on their kayaks. It came in handy for the snow ball fights.



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