



Kiwi estate the perfect place for short escape

By **HEATHER TYLER OF AAP**

WAIPARA, North Canterbury: Grinding over rutted tracks in a Land Rover, New Zealand's dinosaur hunter is in his element.

Richard Goord, the gracious host of the elegant Claremont Country Estate, is a geology rather than paleontology buff, but he's passionate about all things prehistoric.

He must have jumped for joy when he bought this place.

His large backyard – 971 hectares – is the Kiwi equivalent of Jurassic Park.

There's a stack of evidence from the impact of a meteorite believed to have smashed into the Gulf of Mexico 65 million years ago, with the impact of 10,000 times the world's entire modern nuclear arsenal.

In the hills behind the historic homestead in Waipara, north Canterbury, about 45 minutes drive north of Christchurch in the South Island, are limestone canyons and riverbeds yielding precious remnants of that catastrophic event when New Zealand was still under the ocean.

The Waipara riverbed is rich in the element iridium, also found mainly in Denmark and Italy. Iridium is rare on earth but abundant in meteorites.

Scattered across the Waipara property are massive rounded rocks, weighing over a tonne each, which Goord calls "God's marbles".

These 65-million-year-old spheres have at their hearts bone

fragments of prehistoric creatures that perished in the first "nuclear winter".

During a flood, Goord says, several of the giant boulders smashed against each other and one split open to reveal a dinosaur bone at its centre.

In the ancient oceans, he explains, the bones turned over and over in the tide and swell, accumulating mineral fragments that encased the bones and grew to become the giant marbles they are today.

The exposed fossil is now a museum exhibit, touted as a major geological find.

Claremont has been a source of discovery for New Zealand scientists for more than 150 years, with 134 significant finds.

Visitors to Claremont don gumboots and jackets for the prehistoric tour, and if the captive audience is awe-inspired (as we are) Goord, complete with Indiana Jones style hat, turns the sightseeing into a magical history lesson.

Along with the prehistory are views of magnificent limestone outcrops, the dazzling South Island alpine peaks, and a visit to serene canyons where pristine water flows, providing safe swimming and picnic spots throughout the summer.

Farming sheep, deer and cattle, Claremont is a high country station in the hills of the Waipara wine-growing region.

It's just 12 minutes from Christchurch if you take the helicopter.

It has serious cred. It's a five-star resort and has won

IF YOU GO

● **Claremont Country Estate is open from October to the end of March. Visit www.claremont-estate.com.**

● **Individual suites, honeymoon suites and family style accommodation are available.**

● **The heritage-listed home accommodates a maximum of 10 guests. It's 45 minutes drive from Christchurch, or 12 minutes in a chopper.**

several international awards.

Built in 1866, the limestone-hewn homestead and extensive gardens have recently been restored to former glory after falling victim to crass renovation in the middle of the last century.

There is family style accommodation in a recently-built cottage back down the long drive.

The interior of the homestead is tastefully antique colonial with modern accents.

Possessions of the owners – framed family photographs, Oriental rugs and souvenirs from their exotic travels – are personal touches but unobtrusive.

Guests - accommodated in their own suites – can help themselves to drinks and settle in front of the crackling fires in several living rooms on cooler evenings, before meeting their hosts.

The writer stayed at Claremont Estate with assistance from Christchurch and Canterbury Tourism. — AAP



►Host Richard Goord (left) a geology buff with an inexhaustible knowledge of pre-historic New Zealand, and a guest admire “God’s Marbles”, rounded stones containing dinosaur bones and weighing over a tonne each.
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