



Darryl Wilson's family have been associated with Abel Tasman National Park for seven generations. Seawater flows in their veins.

FOUR CORNERS

EDITED BY JOANNA WANE

MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS

Around the Abel Tasman coastline, the Wilson family go back a long way.

Darryl Wilson admits he comes from a long line of eccentric hoarders. And with his family's association with the Abel Tasman National Park going back seven generations, it's no wonder their two tourist lodges at Awaroa Inlet and Torrent Bay are jam-packed with historic photos and nautical memorabilia. "Messing about in boats is just how we grew up," he says. "Showing people around links into our heritage. We know this area so well because we've had so much to do with it."

As CEO of the family business, Wilsons Abel Tasman, Darryl arranges the guided walks and marine side of the operation, which includes kayak trips, water taxis and the 140-passenger catamaran Abel Tasman. Younger brother Craig – who ran Soho's famous Freedom restaurant in London and has contract-cooked for the likes of Pavarotti and Paul McCartney – is in charge of catering at the lodges.

The Wilsons are directly descended from the Hadfields of Awaroa and the area is rich with their family history. A dying cabbage tree removed recently from the front of their homestead had a carving on its trunk with a heart enclosing the date 7/1/1916 and the initials ES (Eileen Spears) and EH (Everend Hadfield). Childhood

sweethearts, the couple were due to marry, but Everend drowned after rowing boxes of Christmas cherries out to a passing steamer.

The family weathered more than their fair share of tragedy, including the murder of Everend's mother, Adele, by her second husband in 1906. After years of research, Lynette Wilson (Darryl and Craig's mother) published a history of the Hadfields, *Awaroa Legacy*, in 1999.

Sea water continues to flow in the family's veins. Lynette's husband, John, still tinkers about with boats that fill their yard in Riwaka, while their other son, Mark, services the company's fleet through his marine maintenance business at Port Motueka. Wilsons Abel Tasman is also a founding member of the Birdsong Trust, which runs a stoat-trapping programme and has reintroduced kakariki into the bush.

At 22,530ha, the Abel Tasman, at the top of the South Island, is New Zealand's smallest (and sunniest) national park, with long golden beaches, sculptured granite and opalescent waters. Although there are seasonal peaks, Darryl says even those are characterised by ebbs and flows as boats drop off day-walkers. "Half the year there's virtually no one around," he says. "It still gives you the feeling we operate in a pristine environment." **GERARD HINDMARSH**

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