

## **Firearm Safety, A Trip Down Under**

### **By Rod Slings Iowa DNR**

It was an opportunity of a lifetime to share important information with other countries. It seems everyone is familiar with the television show CSI. That was how people could relate to the IHEA Hunting Incident Investigation Academy techniques of investigating hunting related shootings at the 2006 International Firearms Safety Conference in Christ Church, New Zealand last February. That was my mission and my presentation to share.

People from around the globe were summoned to share their thoughts via paper and presentation at this conference on all aspects of firearm safety. The collection of speakers came from all aspects of the firearm community including the anti-gun position. I was representing the hunting community on behalf of the IHEA and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

As luck would have it, IHEA's old friend Bill O'Leary from New Zealand was my host, my travel companion and my friend on this adventure. The trip began for me with an airplane ride from Des Moines to Dallas, then Dallas to Los Angeles. The next part the trip was a long one, from L.A. non-stop to Auckland, New Zealand on a 747 with 431 other passengers. We left L.A. at 9:30 p.m. and arrived thirteen hours later. The next short hop was from Auckland to Nelson, which was only one hour and forty minutes. New Zealand is made up the north island and the south island. Auckland is located on the north end of the north island and Nelson is located on the north end of the south island.

Nelson is the home of Bill O'Leary. Bill has attended IHEA conferences in Missoula and in San Diego. It was great to see a familiar face after a long journey. Thirty-five hours from my door at home to Bill's home. We soon enjoyed deer on the Barbie (BBQ) after arriving, with Bill's family and then on to Bill's "hunt camp" to stay overnight south of Nelson. The next day we traveled over to the west coast of the south island to Greymouth, the town where Bill grew up. After a couple of short stops we travel across the island toward Christ Church on the east side of the island where the Conference was to be held. The landscape from the west coast to the east was post card perfect. The blue water and bright green colors of the bush were unlike anything I had ever witnessed. The mountain ranges were beautiful and the streams were clear and pure. Traveling with Bill, a native of this paradise provided a history lesson that included the biology of not only the fish and game, but the bush. He shared many stories of his life there. There was no question of his success as a teacher, mentor to many and life as a conservationist. We shared many ethics discussions about our own worlds and philosophies of the hunt.

The days in Christ Church were very busy and I took a new look at many things. The only regret is not having enough time to catch some fish or share in the hunt. Keeping an open mind was difficult at times when it came to things as simple as gun ownership and the things we take for granted here in the United States. It was a lesson in many things. The people of New Zealand are very welcoming and their hospitality was extraordinary.

