

POLICING KIWI STYLE by Hugh Colley

Rangiora is situated in the Canterbury Region of New Zealand's South Island. It is 29 kilometres (18 miles) north of Christchurch and is a satellite town of the second largest city in New Zealand. The area's economy is largely based on agriculture, forestry, wine production and tourism.

During a recent stay in New Zealand I called into Rangiora Police Station where I met Sergeant Colin Stewart of the New Zealand Police (NZP) who answered questions about policing this beautiful part of the world.



Hugh meeting Sergeant Colin Stewart



Rangiora Police Station

Rangiora seems a peaceful, law abiding town – how do you police the area?

Rangiora and Kaiapoi are the local two major towns and I'm the Sergeant based at Rangiora performing General Policing Duties, another Sergeant is based at nearby Kaiapoi. We share a total of 20 staff i.e. five sections of four Constables per section. Our responsibility is the area around the two towns which has a combined population of about 40,000, this is growing rapidly as people are moving out of Christchurch following the earthquake.

Further afield there are six out stations and a Sergeant working out of Rangiora manages staff based at these stations. It is not unusual for staff based at Rangiora to travel to these areas as and when required which can, due to the distance involved, take up to two hours. I'm also responsible for co-ordinating searches for lost persons such as hikers by using volunteer groups and a specialist team of officers based at Christchurch. *(NZP manages nearly 2,000 land and marine search and rescue incidents each year).*

What are the requirements for joining the NZP?

Recruits must have NZ citizenship or obtained NZ Residency and be over 18 years of age – four officers based at Rangiora have transferred from UK forces and they all say that the style of policing here is very similar to the UK but the quality of life is better. One of the UK transferees made the news recently when he issued a ticket to a tourist speeding in North Canterbury. As they chatted the driver realised that the constable had also issued him with a speeding ticket back in the UK!

Recruits attend a six month residential course at the Police College at Porirua, north of Wellington where they receive training in all aspects of Police work. During the first two years, progress is closely monitored and subject to satisfactory performance the recruit is rewarded with a PA (Permanent Appointment).

When I joined in 1986, I was asked to list four stations where I would like to be stationed, as I was born and bred in the South Island I nominated stations there. As you can guess, I was posted to Wellington in the **North** Island.

And what are the pay scales for a constable?

Police officers with one to two years' experience earn 52k – 71k New Zealand Dollars (NZD) and those with at least five years' experience usually earn around 76k NZD. *(Note: to convert NZD to GBP divide the figure by two)*

Are NZP officers armed?

No, officers are not routinely armed but all I Cars, which are the first responders to incidents, carry 2 x M4 .223 calibre and 2 x Glock 9mm pistols held in a locked cabinet within the vehicle. As **all** officers are trained to use firearms, they can make the decision to draw weapons under certain conditions. However, they must inform a supervisor when they decide to draw firearms and they are then reminded of their personal responsibilities and the use of force.

What is the retirement age for officers and how does the pension scheme work?

Officers can retire after 32 years service or 55 years of age. Officers contribute approximately 11% of their salary into a pension fund which is invested in the stock market. The officer has the choice of low, medium or high risk investment and on retirement they have the choice of taking the full amount as a lump sum with no monthly pension or taking a smaller amount and receive a monthly pension.

Is there a compulsory retirement age for NZP officers?

There isn't a compulsory retirement age and this probably comes from the NZ policy of not being able to discriminate against age. However, we are required to pass a PCT (Physical Competence Test) every two years which we are encouraged to do by being financially reimbursed (known as Dash for Cash). Recently it has been made mandatory and failure to pass means you can't work front line operationally or deal with offenders, so really you are placed on light duties.

So, do many officers work on after the age they can retire?

Some carry on working and we have a Sergeant on Highway Patrol in Canterbury who is still going strong at 71 and keeps himself extremely fit. Apparently, he married an American lady a few years ago and the deal was that she would stay in NZ until he left the Police and then they would relocate to the USA. He is sticking to the deal but I suspect he's not too keen on moving to the States – a very funny guy and more like a 50 year old!

What are the main Policing Priorities for the NZP?

Road Safety is a high priority as the road traffic casualty figures in NZ are unacceptably high, the biggest contributory factors being speed and alcohol. With the return to school after the summer holiday, we will be conducting speed checks near to schools, including the use of Mufti Cars (Unmarked Cars).

The limits for drink / driving have been lowered recently to 400 mcg of alcohol per litre of breath but if a driver provides a reading of 251 – 400 they incur a 200 NZD infringement fee and 50 De-merit (Penalty) points. If they accumulate 100 or more

points within 2 years their driving licence is suspended for 3 months. In addition, the limit for drivers under 20 years is **zero**.

Misuse of Drugs – while there has been an increase in the use of amphetamine recently, cannabis is still the most widely used drug in NZ. Our mild climate and wide open spaces make it relatively easy to cultivate large crops outdoors. We regularly use fixed wing planes and helicopters to overfly the area looking for signs of cannabis cultivation. Once the plantation is found, it means hard work for the officers on the ground that have to trek and drive for hours to destroy the crop - a long, tiring job.

Four years since the Christchurch earthquake of 2011 – what was the Police role following the disaster?

Everyone can recall where they were and what they were doing at lunchtime on Tuesday 22nd February when the quake struck. It was as if a nuclear bomb had exploded with the ground shaking like jelly and buildings badly damaged or destroyed. One of our officers was making a phone call to the station from Madras Street in Christchurch and shouted that he had just seen the Canterbury TV building collapse in front of him. *(115 people died in that one building).*



Left: Rescue Teams at the Canterbury TV site

Right: 185 empty white chairs, a memorial to the people that were taken that day

This was one of the biggest natural disasters ever experienced in NZ. Police officers and members of the emergency services together with engineers and volunteers from all over the country were deployed to Christchurch. Police officers worked 12 hour shifts which eventually took its toll as the State of Emergency lasted for 10 weeks.

The earthquake caused huge damage to the infrastructure both within Christchurch and the surrounding area with communication links, power, water supply and sewerage systems all lost. The road network in the city was destroyed so transport was also a huge problem for the rescue teams.

Sadly, looters were soon at work stealing from damaged shops and homes so we also had to place a tight security cordon around damaged premises. We were assisted by the army and over 300 officers were flown in from Australia, as they had no jurisdiction in NZ they were sworn in as NZ officers and did a great job.



A badly damaged Christchurch Cathedral



In the background - Christchurch Police HQ – soon to be demolished

Within a short time, we realised that the chances of survival were slim and it became an international effort to recover and identify the bodies. Search and Rescue Teams from Australia, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, China, USA and UK took part in the operation.

Kiwis are very resilient and although it will take years to re-build the city, many of us believe that in time we will regard the 'quake as the new beginning
(A total of 185 people died and many thousands were injured as a result of the earthquake. Up to 100,000 buildings were damaged with 10,000 buildings needing to be demolished.)

On a lighter note, do you have time for any Interests outside work?

Like many of my staff I'm a keen recreational hunter and there are red deer not too far away to hunt. Also, I dive frequently and again there is very good diving nearby where I catch crayfish which taste very similar to lobster.



Catch number one – a mature cannabis plant



Colin with his catch of the day!

When I was a young Constable I played senior rugby and on my section a good number of guys also played, on the Saturday late shift we were the walking wounded. In 1983, I was selected to represent the West Coast against the British Lions at Greymouth, unfortunately I injured my ankle in the week before the match and wasn't considered fit enough to play the full 80 minutes. I spent the whole match warming the bench – over 30 years later and I'm still gutted!

Many thanks to Colin for his time (and patience) in providing an insight into policing down under.