



**Easy does it:** Ashley Rural Fire District's principal rural fire officer Graeme Knight abseils through the hole in the rock assisted by Castle Hill outdoor instructor Heather Tate in the Rural Firefighters Challenge held at Castle Hill, North Canterbury.

Photo: STACY SQUIRES/FAIRFAX NZ

## Firefighters battle for NZ honours

New Zealand firefighters battled it out in North Canterbury to become one of the country's top rural firefighting teams.

About 35 crews, involving 139 firefighters from South Westland to Northland competed in the three-day 9th annual Rural Firefighters Challenge at Castle Hill, which finished on Saturday.

Ashley Rural Fire District principal fire officer Graeme Knight said firefighters had to take part in 11 tasks, which involved skills including first aid, navigation, and abseiling.

In one of the tasks the firefighters

had to work while paintball guns were being fired at them.

Knight said the competition was all about team-building, decision-making and reinforcing what the firefighters had learnt during the years on the job.

Canterbury West Coast Regional Rural Fire Committee deputy chairman Allan Grigg said it was fantastic to see so many disparate agencies work so closely together.

The winners were the Department of Conservation (DOC) South Marlborough, DOC Waimakariri and the High Country rural fire team.