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OBITUARY

W.B. MORRISSEY 1917-1976

On 30 November 1976 Barry Morrissey failed to return from a solo fishing trip off the northern end of Mana Island at the entrance to the Porirua inlet.

Barry was something of a legend at least within the Water and Soil Division of the Ministry of Works and Development, and his active support of the Hydrological Society had also made him well known in wider circles.

He was above all an individual. Born in Eire he grew up in the country, developing a passion for hunting and fishing which he retained all his life. His formal education culminated with a BE (Electrical and Mechanical) from the University of Dublin in 1939. Barry came to New Zealand via South Africa and Australia, arriving in 1950. He was touring the country on a bicycle when he met by chance E.J. Speight, who was then leading the South Island Hydraulic Survey Party based in Blenheim, and was recruited as a labourer! After several years in Blenheim the party moved to Christchurch, and later Barry was transferred to Wellington where his experience and expertise could be utilized more widely. For the next 10 years he made a major contribution to the training of technical staff and the development of field hydrology in the water and soil organization, as well as keeping the feet of younger hydrologists firmly on the ground. Over the years he acquired a tremendous knowledge of virtually every type of hydrological instrument and measuring structure in use in New Zealand, as well as knowing a large percentage of the gauging sites.

Barry had a real depth of understanding of the hydrological processes and was slightly sceptical of the necessity for data collection in many cases where, in his judgement, a careful examination of the catchment combined with a study of the records from similar catchments elsewhere would suffice for most practical purposes. Perhaps he did not accept that data are often needed and used or misused by people without his own wealth of experience in the field. It follows from the above that Barry was a staunch believer in the representative basin programme as a data base for extrapolation.

Widely respected by his colleagues for his technical competence, his published material was always worth close reading and his work on the techniques of water resources mapping in particular is frequently cited.

To casual acquaintances Barry Morrissey was a reserved man, but to those whom he knew well he was a good colleague and companion, almost loquacious at times and with a sense of humour which was Irish in the nicest sense. He had a repertoire of stories, which he told with gusto, of exploits such as skinning pythons on the Cape York Peninsula or floating deer carcasses inflated with plastic bags across rivers. There is no doubt that much of his insight into hydrological processes came from many years of acute observations while hunting and fishing. As well as his outdoor pursuits Barry was a skilled chess player and a good hand at bridge.

An immensely fit and strong man for his age, he could – and did on occasion – leave men of half his years stumbling in his wake, when carrying gear in the bush. Since living at Titahi Bay, Barry had also become an enthusiastic and experienced boatman and sea fisherman. His death while crayfishing is not only a tragedy, but a puzzle to those who knew of his capabilities.

New Zealand has lost its most experienced field hydrologist, and those who had the good fortune to get to know him are missing Barry both as a source of sound hydrological information and as an individual whose company and character are memorable.

Our sympathy goes to his wife Belinda and children Clair, Michael and Shanne.

H.R. THORPE