

# Obituary

*Edward Hugh Latimer 27 April 1926 – 2 July 2009*



**The following is edited from an autobiography written by Hugh Latimer and read at his funeral service on 4 July 2009.**

Born in Timaru I was the sixth child, having two brothers and three sisters. I used to swim a lot and frequently visited local towns as a junior grade team swimmer. In 1938 I attended the New Zealand champs at Dunedin winning the 100 yards Junior Championship.

I went to Timaru Boy's High School in early February 1939 where I joined the drum band and progressed to be lead drummer.

In 1943 the family moved to Nelson and in 1944 I joined the Treasury Department in Wellington as a clerical cadet – with a pay of 95 pounds per annum plus 35 pounds boarding allowance. Naturally there was never enough left out of each bi-monthly pay to do much. I stuck with this to the end of my cadetship and then resigned.

I returned to South Canterbury in 1945 with the aim of saving enough money to put myself through Lincoln College.

I worked on three farms, Westgarths at Fairlie, Gray at St Andrews and John Anderson at Albury. Lincoln was a two part operation with one week of farm duties and one week of lectures. I worked diligently and on passing out

at the end of 1949, I was awarded the College Gold Medal as top student.

I then joined the Department of Agriculture as a probationary Farm Advisory Officer and was first stationed at Flock House Farm of Instruction doing a lot of experimental trial work, arranging student work rosters, giving lectures, running the projector for the Saturday night films, driving the football team around and acting as Housemaster. In short I was a proper jack of all trades and greatly imposed upon by the Department.

I was then transferred to the Auckland Office and used to visit farms mainly in the South Auckland area. After about a year there I was transferred to Kaikohe to set up an Office to service the Bay of Islands and Southern Hokianga areas.

The farmers did not really want, or need, management advice; they wanted free soil analysis of their properties to set up a topdressing program. It was hard to set up a new advisory area.

In 1952 Bev and I were married, and in the following year (July 1953) I transferred to the Justice Department stationed at the Waikeria Farm which comprised 3000 acres of beautiful country with five dairy units each milking 120 cows on cream supply, a six acre garden supplying vegetables to other prisons, a ten acre orchard of apples, plums, pears and peaches, a sawmill harvesting and sawing up pine and eucalypt trees, 3000 sheep and 120 head of breeding cattle. Altogether, a huge job for a young man.

In August 1959 I joined the Cornwall Park Trust Board as Park Director. Cornwall Park was a shambles, with large unmown areas, roads blocked with morning and evening traffic and more so when the Auckland airport opened.

I spent a lot of time walking every inch of Cornwall Park figuring out what I could do to at least put its name on the map.

In 1961 I went on a tour of New Zealand parks starting at Invercargill and finishing at Hastings. I became aware that anybody who was anybody in the parks world was qualified with a National Diploma in Horticulture so on returning home I made enquiries as to how I too could become qualified because I realised that the future of Cornwall Park lay in horticultural rather than agricultural development.

Next came a tour of Australian parks and reserves in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. That was in the first year of my studies which I pursued with determination finally completing the seven year course in four and a half years.

Some of the New Zealand and Australian parks people I met on these tours became very special and lifelong friends. The New Zealand people were aware of my new qualifications and I think they respected the effort I had made to join the best of them and hold my head high with the lesser qualified ones.

At this time I was elected to the NZ Institute of Parks and Recreation Executive as Auckland representative, a position I held for more than 18 years.

In 1975 I went to my first international congress on Parks and Recreation travelling through Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago, New York, and then on to Canada for a 10 day tour finishing at Vancouver for the congress.

On the way home I stopped over at San Francisco with my main interest being in Golden Gate Park which was supposed to be the place after which Cornwall Park was designed.

Shortly afterwards I was appointed, in addition to my Park work, to establish the Green Belt surrounding the newly developed steel mill. Six dairy farms were taken and set up as a sheep and cattle unit plus a multitude of tree planting.



In subsequent years I attended world congresses in Canberra with Bev, Barcelona which was my longest trip covering Singapore, Hong Kong, Rome, Florence, Paris, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, London then Barcelona. After the congress I went on the ten day tour around Spain finishing in Madrid.

On the way home, I went first to Geneva then on to Nairobi where I spent a week looking at wild game in three National Parks. From there to Mauritius for a wind down of six days (which I did not enjoy) then on to Perth before returning home.

Our final trip was to America at North Carolina. We stopped off at San Francisco then down to Corpus Christi then after the congress travelled home via Miami, the big Igasu Falls, on to Rio then on to Buenos Aires then home.

In between all of this travelling various stages of development of Cornwall Park took place culminating in the development of the old hospital area as a purely passive area of parkland.

This finally made Cornwall Park the jewel of Auckland's Parks and represented my reason for staying there as Park Director for 31 years with the Park being well known, and used, both in New Zealand and internationally.

In 1987 I chaired the committee for the staging of an International Federation of Parks and Recreation world congress in Auckland and was here made an Honorary Life Member of the NZ Institute of Parks and Recreation.

I had earlier (1980) been made an Associate of Honour of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture.

**The editors thank Hugh's son Brett Latimer for providing a more comprehensive autobiography upon which this obituary is based.**

