

Dedicated to forestry and his staff

Morrie Benjamin 1924 - 2005

Maurice (Morrie) M. Benjamin died peacefully in hospital in Hastings on Thursday the 13th of January aged 80.

Morrie was dedicated and hardworking and gave his all to forestry and his staff throughout his career. He began work as a sign writer in Westport and moved on to the railways as a coachbuilder. He served with the RNZAF during the war and on his return joined the Forest Service. He cruised timber in the Westland and Buller forests and commented that, despite the hardships of timber cruising, after the war he "felt like a rabbit put in charge of the lettuce garden".

He subsequently moved to work in planted forestry in the Rai Valley and then to Golden Downs where he became Second in Charge. In 1963 he was appointed to Masterton as the then youngest ever District Ranger. In 1969 he was promoted to District Ranger Napier where he worked until the Forest Service was disestablished in 1987.

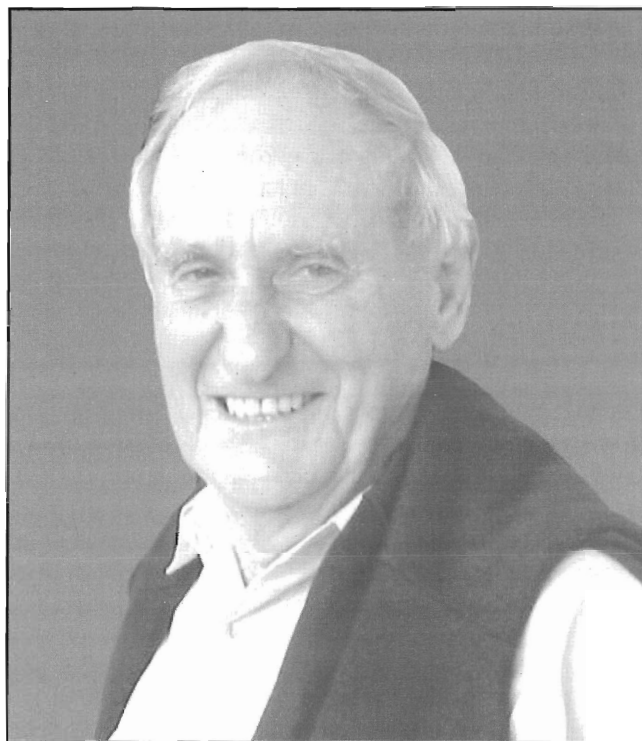
Morrie supported the Hawkes Bay Branch of the Institute serving as Chairman from 1976 to 1978 and was chairman of the organising committee for the Institute conference in Napier in 1979.

Morrie led the Forest Service in Hawkes Bay through the '70s and '80s, which were busy and demanding times. The Forest Service was given the job of increasing the scale of the industry from growing wood for local supply, which was a relatively small operation, to supplying a major export industry. The operation grew until at its peak Morrie was responsible for about 75 staff and several hundred waged workers and contractors. It was a big operation and Morrie really did give it his all. As land was bought and planted, often against pressure from farming interests, Morrie's personality made him the ideal person to liaise with farming groups and farming politicians.

Eventually, he presided over an empire including the planted and indigenous forests of Hawkes Bay, road construction units, animal control operations, a large nursery and timber inspectors and he represented the Forest Service on the Hawkes Bay Catchment Board.

Despite the pressures, Morrie always had time for his staff who could not have wished to work for a friendlier or more helpful boss. He worked very hard to manage the development of the forests, but always found time to support his staff and do what he could to protect their interests. He was devastated when the Government disestablished the Forest Service and he saw many of his skilled and experienced staff without work.

Morrie was always honest and helpful in his dealings with his staff and they appreciated his sense of humour and



forgiving nature. Over the years Morrie drove a series of green Holdens which his staff borrowed and, from time to time, dented or scraped and were forgiven. He managed his staff with wisdom and patience and would remain calm when others lost their temper.

He was a fund of good advice. One of his many pearls of wisdom to struggling young people with families to feed and clothe was, "Don't worry, as soon as the children leave home you'll have lots of money" – and so it generally proved.

Morrie was much liked and respected for his support for and commitment to his staff and to the Forest Service. He was a relatively quiet and modest person and would have been surprised at the number of colleagues and friends who attended his packed funeral.

I will always remember Morrie for being such a delightful person to work with, his dedication to the job, his achievements with the Forest Service, his friendship, his sense of humour, his good advice and his helpful, honest, kindly nature.

Morrie is survived by his wife Phyllis, children Linda, Gary, Murray, Lindsay and Stephen and his 6 grandchildren.

Barry Keating with help from Phyllis Benjamin and Bruce Cooper