

Memorial to Hilary James (Larry) Harrington (1924–2015)

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Hilary James (Larry) Harrington died in Canberra, Australia, on 1 August 2015. He was a family man, a teacher and mentor, a raconteur who loved jokes and a glass of wine, a mountaineer, and an Antarctic explorer. But, above all, he was an inspirational and visionary geologist, who embraced not just one, but many facets of his chosen profession.

Larry was a second-generation New Zealander, born 10 May 1924, in Wellington, the elder child in a family of English–Irish Catholic descent (his sister, Sheilaigh, was born a year and a day after him). His father, Hilary, was a police sergeant and his mother had emigrated to New Zealand from Manchester, England, with her family, just before the First World War. Both families farmed in New Zealand. His mother was a nurse at Hawera Hospital, in Taranaki, and met Larry's father there.



From the age of nine Larry wanted to be a geologist, and having matriculated from Whangarei Boys' High School, he entered what is now the University of Auckland, aged just 15. He graduated in 1942 with a B.Sc. at age 18, gaining one of only 11 science degrees awarded that year. He supported himself during his university years by working as a stevedore at night on the wharves, and during the holidays he assisted with the geological mapping necessary to build the Waikato River hydroelectric dams. In 1944, he graduated with an M.Sc. from Auckland University.

Larry worked for the New Zealand Geological Survey from 1944 until 1959, with interruptions for army service—he was conscripted for 1944/1945 and trained as an artillery officer. For the rest of his life, he was good at estimating distances by sight. His officer's compass became a useful geological tool.

While at the survey, Larry was sent to run coal mines in Southland and also to help evaluate the geology for the Central Otago hydroelectric dams. A keen mountaineer, during this time, he joined the New Zealand Alpine Club and this gave him many lifelong friendships.

In 1951, he married Shirley Anne Rose, who had just graduated in botany from what is now Victoria University of Wellington, and they caught ship for the United Kingdom and Oxford, where Larry completed a D.Phil. and the first of three daughters, Jane, was born. This time in England also gave them their first taste of European travelling and mountaineering. In 1954, Larry led an Oxford University expedition to West Nepal, which traversed the Himalayas to the Tibetan side and climbed five peaks of more than 20,000 ft (6000 m).

Larry was supremely lucky in his marriage to Shirley Anne; it was a partnership where Shirley Anne willingly gave huge support for Larry's various enthusiasms. Without her support, he could not have managed to pursue his interests, writing, and everyday comfortable life.

Back in New Zealand, Larry was closely involved in the planning of the International Geophysical Year and Antarctic scientific work, and was leader of the first two New Zealand

expeditions to Antarctica in 1957–1958 and 1958–1959. During this time, he was on the first successful ascent of Mt. Discovery at the head of McMurdo Sound. He was awarded the Polar Medal in 1969, and is also commemorated in the Antarctic by Mt. Harrington (2610 m) on the west side of the Whitehall Glacier, in the Victory Mountains, Victoria Land, named for him in 1960 by the New Zealand Place Names Commission. In 1965, he published the *Geology and Morphology of Antarctica*, which has been widely used.

In 1959, Larry and his family left New Zealand for Australia, to take up a lectureship in the geology department of the University of New England (UNE), at Armidale, New South Wales. He spent 20 years at UNE, which included time (1964–1965) as visiting professor at the University of Illinois and several shorter overseas visits. Larry was, from the beginning, a firm believer in continental drift and, while in the United States in 1964, he supported New Zealand-born, South African Lester King, when he was being derided by an American audience.

While on holiday during their stay in the United States, the family drove thousands of miles to look at national parks, with geology the focus, of course. All three daughters became keen on national parks, mountains and camping, and outdoor activities. “We climbed mountains, saw wildlife and ate ‘hash,’ beans and eggs, and answered Dad’s ‘penny questions’—a way of ensuring we remembered what we had seen.”

At UNE, Larry taught a wide range of geology courses at all levels. He liked teaching and especially the excursions and camping that geological teaching involves. Both he and Shirley Anne were deeply committed members of the university, and Larry contributed considerably to the Armidale community during his time there, particularly on the board of one of the residential colleges. He also participated in the planning for geological content in new science courses in New South Wales secondary schools, and visited schools to advise students on university courses.

Larry’s research in Australia concentrated on the Tasman fold belt, the major geological tectonic province that makes up the eastern third of the Australian continent, and he produced many papers and maps. He also continued to work in Antarctica, travelling there for the summer seasons in 1967 and 1969.

It was while he was at the University of New England that Larry, by now an Australian citizen, sowed the seeds for something of which his family and Australian geoscientists should be exceedingly proud.

In 1964, following his earlier involvement in the International Geophysical Year, Larry wrote to 50 of the world’s leading geoscientists with a proposal for an international project to “prove or disprove the theory of continental drift,” by testing geological correlations between the southern continents. This was well received and, subsequently, at the request of the secretary-general of the International Union of Geological Sciences, a small committee was established in Australia to develop the concept, which was expanded into the Northern Hemisphere. This proposal ultimately evolved into UNESCO’s International Geological Correlation Program, now known as the International Geoscience Programme (IGCP).

In 2012, the director-general of UNESCO stated, “At this time of global environmental change UNESCO’s International Geoscience Programme has never been so important.” What a legacy to leave!

In 1980, Larry left the University of New England, and moved with Shirley Anne to Canberra, to join the then–Commonwealth Bureau of Mineral Resources (now Geoscience Australia), where his task was to head a major review of the black coal resources of eastern Australia. This was published in 1989 (*Permian Coals of Eastern Australia*: Bureau of Mineral Resources Bulletin 231), and was much used during the following coal mining boom.

Larry retired in 1990, but continued research on detached portions of the Tasman fold belt in the Lord Howe Rise, Norfolk Ridge and New Zealand, publishing a review paper on them in 2008, when he was 84. In all, Larry published, either as sole author or with others, almost 100 papers and

maps. He was a member of the Geological Societies of America, New Zealand (founding member), and Australia; the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy; the Australian and New Zealand and American Associations for the Advancement of Science; the American Geophysical Union; the Australian Petroleum Exploration Society; and many more.

Larry Harrington was married happily to Shirley Anne for 58 years and they had three daughters, Jane (Green), Elizabeth “Tibby” (Chamley), and Sue (Harrington), and four grandchildren.

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