

Couple perish in river

By AMY CROWTHER

AN Invercargill couple drowned in the Rees River, near Glenorchy, after being swept away by high, swollen waters late last week.

Margaret Elizabeth Parkinson, 51, the Southland field officer for the New Zealand Educational Institute, and her husband, Neville Charles Lawrence, 56, a Southland Boys' High School teacher, were found in the Rees River at 12.30pm on Saturday.

The couple, both experienced trampers, had gone into the area to walk along the Rees-Dart track on Tuesday and were due out on Thursday. The Department of Conservation notified police when they had not come out of the area on Friday.

Constable Chris Brooks and DOC Glenorchy field centre manager Richard Kennett flew by helicopter into the area on Saturday.

They found Ms Parkinson in the Rees River, 1.6km downstream from 25 Mile Creek, face down on gravel with her sodden pack, weighing at least 50kg, still on her back.

Mr Lawrence was found 100m further downstream. His pack had been washed a further 300m downstream.

The couple were last seen on Wednesday by another group of trampers.

"The trampers said they seemed okay then, but they had taken two hours to cover what the group took one hour to do," Mr Brooks said.

The couple had made an entry in the Shelter Rock hut intention book on Tuesday night, which said they would walk out the following day.

"They were going to camp at Clark's Slip and then follow the river and come out on the 21st (Thursday)."

The couple would have had to ford two large swollen rivers to get back to the track car park.

Mr Kennett said the Park Boundary bridge across the Rees River had been damaged by heavy rain two weeks ago and was closed.

"They would have known that before they went into the area."

All trampers have to ford 25 Mile Creek, which is usually a wide but shallow tributary. Mr Kennett suspected the couple had safely crossed the Rees but got into difficulty when they crossed the creek near to where it flows into the main river.

"During heavy rain that stream could almost be as dangerous as the Rees itself."

On Thursday, 27mm of rain fell at Glenorchy.

"You could almost double that up at the headwaters," Mr Kennett said.

The river was left high and dirty.

Mr Kennett said it was impossible to say when the accident had happened, but suspected it was on Thursday morning.

"Another person crossed the same creek in the afternoon and was nearly washed away — he lost his footing."

Mr Kennett said the trumper, a foreign tourist, had not seen anyone else on the track that day.

He described the Rees-Dart track as more difficult than the Routeburn and not for inexperienced trampers.

The bodies were flown to Queenstown and then to Invercargill for an autopsy, which confirmed the cause of death was drowning. A coroner's inquest will follow.

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City teachers remembered fondly by friends, colleagues

By AMY CROWTHER

THE Southland education sector has lost two of its best-known and respected members.

Husband and wife Neville Lawrence, 56, and Margaret Parkinson, 51, drowned in the Rees River near Glenorchy while tramping late last week.

Both were teachers in Invercargill, although more recently Ms Parkinson had been Southland field officer for the primary teachers union, the New Zealand Educational Institute.

An Australian, Ms Parkinson was an executive member of the Queensland Teachers' Union.

She met Mr Lawrence, a national executive member of the the Post Primary Teachers' Association, at a union conference in Wellington in 1981 and came to live in New Zealand.

She quickly became involved in unions in Southland while teaching at Kingswell and Cargill High Schools. She was the former president and secretary of the Southland Combined Trade Unions.

Ms Parkinson became the field officer for the NZEI in 1989.

Her job was to visit primary schools in Southland and South Otago talking to teachers and teacher aids, keeping them up to date on relevant issues and finding out any concerns they had.

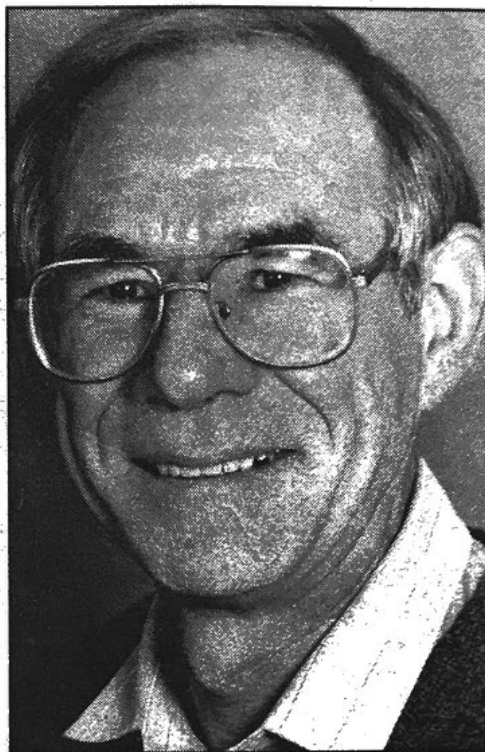
Mr Lawrence began teaching at Southland Boys' High School in 1980 after teaching in Christchurch. He became head of the English department in 1987, a job he stepped down from at the end of last term.

Next year Mr Lawrence was to have been the school's publicity and promotions director, although he was to continue teaching Latin and journalism.

He was a columnist and reviewer for The Southland Times and a former newsreader at Radio 4ZA.

NZEI Southland branch past-president and friend Jane Culhane, a former pupil of Ms Parkinson, said the couple had supported a lot of people and touched many lives.

"They really enjoyed life, packed a lot into it and got a lot out of it," she said.



NEVILLE LAWRENCE

"They were always there for people and gave so generously. They were both actively involved in making things better through education."

Miss Culhane said Mr Lawrence and Ms Parkinson were pioneers in creating the combined education sector union group.

Southland Boys' rector Rowly Currie said Mr Lawrence was a gentleman with a superb sense of humour, respected by both staff and pupils.

"He was always involved with something at the school — drama, volleyball, tramping, school trips," Mr Currie said.

"He was a very nice fellow; he got on with everyone through his nice manner or working through things."

Mr Lawrence had been looking forward to his new role as publicity and promotions person within the school, he said.

"Things were going really well for him, he was going into something he really loved — his forte was in writing and communicating."

Mr Lawrence was also a well known entertainer, singing and performing with the A Capella choir, Bob Mason and the



MARGARET PARKINSON

Apaches, Tarogan, a barbershop quartet and other groups.

He was a regular compere for H and H Cougar Brass and events including the free Christmas Cheer variety concert in the Civic Theatre on December 10.

A friend of the couple, Christine Hainstock, said they were always ready to do anything asked of them.

"They were a wonderful couple, really devoted to each other. I was proud to call them my friends."

The last time she spoke to Ms Parkinson and Mr Lawrence they were looking forward to a family Christmas in Christchurch with two of Mr Lawrence's children after they had been tramping.

Friend and fellow teacher Colin McGillivray said the couple loved the outdoors and were tremendously involved in education.

"It's going to leave a huge gap — the community will be a lot poorer for the loss."

Their funeral will be held at Southland Boys' High School in Invercargill at 2pm on Thursday.

Couple drown in NZ

A LEADING Brisbane feminist who played a major role in the peace movement during the Vietnam war years has died while hiking in New Zealand.

Margaret Parkinson, 51, and her husband Neville Lawrence drowned in a flooded stream in mountain country outside Queenstown.

Ms Parkinson, a school teacher, was an executive member of the Queensland Teachers Union in the 1970s and a leading peace activist

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QTU president Ian Mackie said he and many other teachers throughout the state were devastated by the news.

"Ms Parkinson was committed to peace and women's issues throughout the 1970s in Queensland," Mr Mackie said.

"She was well respected among all teachers and a leading light in the women's movement."

Mrs Parkinson moved to New Zealand in the early 1980s.