

Obituaries

Réamonn Criostóir (Ray) Ó Cinnéide 1942 – 2018

On 18th May 2018, just two days after his 76th birthday, Ray Ó Cinnéide passed away peacefully in Skibbereen Community Hospital, surrounded by his family.

The third of four children, Ray was born in Cork City on 16th May 1942 to Réamonn and Máire (née Lucey). He received his primary education at the Model School, Cork and his secondary education at Presentation College, Cork.

As a boy, and through into early adulthood, Ray was actively involved in the scouting movement and it is probably here that his deep interest and love of nature developed. He spent much time hunting and fly fishing in the hinterland of Cork City. He had a particular fondness for the area around Ballingearry, and during his youth he spent many long, contented summer days there fishing for “breac dearg” in the secluded lakes hidden amongst the hills above the town where he could indulge his love of fishing without interruption.

Ray spent the first two years of his forestry course at UCC where he studied General Agriculture. He then transferred to UCD to complete his forestry studies and graduated in 1965. Ray spent a year studying forestry in Norway and while there he immersed himself in the country’s language and culture. He liked to joke that after the year there, his standard of spoken Norwegian had risen to that of a four year old. He remained interested in the country and its language throughout his life.

Ray was one of twelve students in the class of 1965. This was an unusually large number of students for the time. Only one member of the class emigrated, the majority of them worked in the public service in Ireland. Ray was the first member of that class to be appointed and he was assigned to the then Forestry Division of the Department of Lands, specifically to Research Branch, Dublin where he worked on the Census of Woodland (now known as inventory). The output of this census of woodlands was known as the “Red Book” – a familiar phrase among foresters of a certain age!

1970 was designated European Conservation Year by the Council of Europe, and Ray was transferred to the public information section of the project. Soon after, he was assigned to the mobile exhibition which toured Ireland visiting every county to spread



a message of the value of nature conservation. It was during one of these trips that he encountered George Burrows, a journalist who penned a nature column in the *Irish Times* in addition to presenting a daily “nature” slot on Radio Éireann. In one of his articles, Burrows had the misfortune to refer to him as Ray Kennedy - the anglicised version of Ray’s name. This drew a swift response and culminated in Ray writing to Burrows asking him how he’d feel if he was referred to as George Rabbit-Holes!

In 1972 Ray was transferred as assistant district inspector to Castlebar where he worked with Tomás de Grúinéil, with whom he developed a lifelong friendship founded on their shared interest in the Irish language. Ray was committed to using his native language wherever possible and he translated all the forest names in the District to Irish.

Although he greatly enjoyed his time in Co. Mayo, the attraction of a return to Cork proved irresistible and in 1980 he transferred to Skibbereen as district inspector. Here he spent many blissful years in a location he really loved.

Following a restructuring in Coillte he was promoted to the post of Regional Environmental Officer. He relished the job in the environmental field and he made many new friends throughout the country. Reportedly he would visit forests in the extremely early hours, arriving before dawn to assess the songbird populations.

In 1997 Ray opted to avail of the voluntary severance scheme offered by Coillte and thereafter he enjoyed many contented years of fruitful retirement until his health began to fail.

He was a keen sea fisherman and spent many happy days on fishing expeditions with his family. Aside from his family, forestry remained Ray’s main interest, and he frequently managed to combine both these interests, with family walks through the damp mossy woods.

When describing Ray, a word that immediately springs to mind is “Gentleman” for he was gracious, gentle and courteous. A superb raconteur, he possessed an impish sense of humour.

To his wife Hannah, his son Ray, daughters Denise and Aoife and his siblings Cáit, Donncha and Criostóir, his grandchildren James, Danny, Conor, Hazel and Jessica we offer our sincere sympathy.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam

John Mc Loughlin