

# In memory

## Barbara Roscoe (née Spark) 1936 to 2019

The field of Outdoor Learning has often expressed a slight discomfort with numerical measurement, and in particular the use of numbers to demonstrate impact. Sometimes, however, it is perhaps pertinent to consider impact not only in terms of numbers, but what those numbers mean. What am I talking about? Well, is it possible to measure the impact of one person on an area of learning during their lifetime? This article briefly looks back at the life of someone whose influence on Outdoor Education is difficult to measure, precisely because of the number of people she interacted with and what they have done since that first meeting.

The person in question is Barbara Roscoe, who sadly passed away recently. Below is a brief outline of Barbara's life, followed by some tributes and memories by those on whom she had an impact through her work on the Bangor course, for which she is perhaps most known.

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Barbara was born **Barbara Mary Spark** on April 11th 1936, in Birkenhead. Soon after the war, the family settled in Bagillt, a small village between Flint and Holywell. Both Barbara and her elder sister Jean went to Merllyn Junior School, and later to Holywell Grammar School. It was here that Barbara's sporting prowess became obvious and she made the first teams in both tennis and hockey at a much younger age than was normal and subsequently represented Flintshire Schools at hockey.

Barbara trained as a PE teacher at I.M. Marsh College of Physical Education in Liverpool, and then taught at a secondary girls' school in Liverpool for four years. During this time, she rock climbed while on courses at Plas-y-Brenin, where she first met Jo Scarr, who has remained a lifelong friend. Jo was planning a trip to the Himalayas and invited a restless Barbara to be her companion. The story of their year-long trip in 1961 to 1962 is told in the book *'Four Miles High'* by Josephine Scarr, which is soon to be re-issued by the Pinnacle Club. Their trip was a great success, involving driving a Land Rover to India and back and climbing two unclimbed peaks of 20,000 feet in the Kulu Himalaya. They taught in a pre-school in Delhi over the winter and then joined the women's Jagdula expedition to the unexplored Kanjiroba Himal in north western Nepal, making first ascents of six unclimbed peaks.

When they returned to Wales in mid-1962, Barbara became an instructor at Plas-y-Brenin.

In 1964, Barbara had a climbing accident on Pillar Rock in the Lake District when a belay gave way. The significant injuries she suffered plagued her for the rest of her life. In



The story of Barbara's year-long trip (1961 to 1962) to the Himalayas with Jo Scarr is soon to be reissued by the Pinnacle Club.

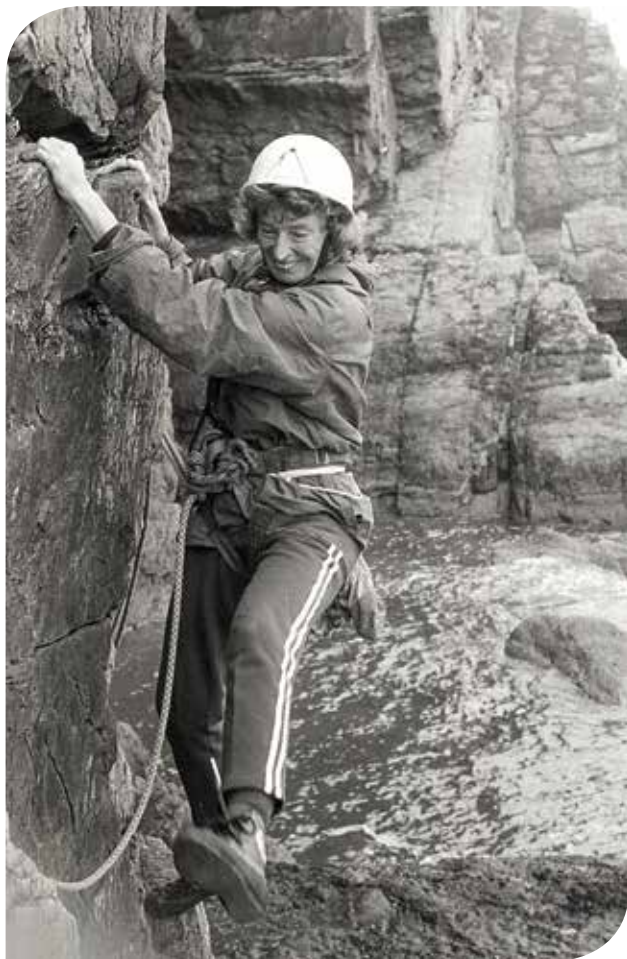
1965, Barbara was invited by Sir Charles Evans to start a PGCE teacher training course in Outdoor Activities at Bangor University, the first in the UK, where she continued her respected work in Outdoor Education until her retirement in 1983. Barbara first met her beloved Don at Plas-y-Brenin, and later worked with him at Bangor. They married in 1975 and Barbara remained devoted to Don throughout over 40 years of marriage.

Exploiting a creative talent which probably came from her mother, Barbara took up art after her retirement, completing a Foundation course and the first year of a Fine Art degree. Art became a passion of Barbara's; she was a prolific painter and had a number of successful exhibitions.

Barbara remained physically active well into her retirement. She and Don cycled around the world in 1988/89, following the summer through Asia, Australia, New Zealand and America. Together they fished, walked, climbed, cycled and canoed regularly until a series of knee and ankle operations in the early 2000s restricted her adventurous activity.

Barbara was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2005. Despite the limitations and challenges of her final years, She remained her positive and enthusiastic self, enjoying support from a host of friends, neighbours, family and ex-students. She was able to remain in her much-loved Bwlch-y-Fron home throughout her illness, thanks to the help of her devoted, full-time carers from 2016.

Tim Jepson (PGCE course 1974/75 and  
course tutor 1984–2013)



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I joined Barbara Spark's Outdoor Activities course at UCNW, Bangor [now Bangor University] in 1970. Although it was only part of the teacher training year for our group it quickly took over our lives through its excitement and intensity. Barbara had selected a mixed bunch, including a few mature students. Some of the group were already experienced climbers and kayakers but others enthusiastic beginners. She excelled in bringing out the skills in the group, developing a strong ethos and encouraging support for each other. There was enormous respect for her as a result of her experience, personality and clear beliefs in the value of outdoor learning.

We were challenged in different ways. We all had to make our own waterproofs; there were real adventures; many skied for the first time and on one occasion Barbara led a kayaking group (not her favourite activity) around Puffin Island in an ever-increasing swell. On a winter mountaineering course in the Cairngorms she showed great trust in the group when one night we helped with a mountain rescue in a high gully on Creag Meagaidh. Barbara held a broad view of Outdoor Learning and her teaching encompassed environmental awareness, landscape and cultural heritage. She inspired many of her course members, 'Sparklets', to become Outdoor Leaders and they have continued her influence on the development of Outdoor Education.

Geoff Cooper (PGCE course 1970)

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Barbara was a prolific painter and had a number of successful exhibitions.



Painting by Barbara, 'Aberdaron'.

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Being late for Barbara was seldom a good idea. I had to re-schedule my interview for the course and sensed a degree of irritation down the phone. Then I got hopelessly lost getting from Bangor Station to St Mary's College, arriving DOWN Lon Pobty via Minfordd Hospital (don't ask – it's a long story). I arrived just on time, but in a lather and not the state of calm composure I had planned. Barbara couldn't find me on her interview schedule so I volunteered, "Oh, I should have been here yesterday." "SO WHY WEREN'T YOU?" Once I had explained that she had agreed to reschedule my interview things went much better. However, I had definitely gotten the message about punctuality.

And then I was late again. By a year. There was a four-month open canoe expedition to Africa that I was really keen to join but it would mean postponing the course for a year. After the near disaster of our first meeting I felt sure Barbara would turn me down flat. "Of course you must go, Marcus. I'll take you next year." So provided your motivation was sound, Barbara could forgive any misdemeanour. Even being late!

Marcus Bailie (PGCE 1980–81 eventually!)

So how to close these tributes and memories? Perhaps with the news that the Outdoor Activities PGCE course that Barbara initiated at Bangor all that time ago continues to train teachers and has not only survived a recent Welsh Government review of Initial Teacher Education, but came out with a clear mandate to increase the number of teachers trained to teach outdoor activities. It is my privilege to be the current custodian of a course with so rich a tradition and history group. ■

## AUTHOR Graham French

Graham is Director of the PGCE Secondary course at Bangor University, and tutor to the Outdoor Activities PGCE group.

