

ROSEMARY ROACH – QO and DEVON

24 September 1930 – 21 August 2021

Rosemary was one of the “founding fathers” of the sport in the South West. She was introduced to orienteering in early 1968 at a course held on the Mendips, and was immediately hooked, as soon as she realised that “going direct” was an option.

Within a year she had set up Yeovil Orienteering Club (then soon to merge into QO) and organised several events using black and white photocopies of OS maps. She also joined the committee of the newly-formed SWOA, and together with Erik Peckett (DEVON) played a large part in organising the 1970 British Championships, at Fernworthy on Dartmoor. She often said that this explained why she had acquired a striking head of grey hair at the tender age of 40!

That summer, Rosemary joined a British Senior Tour to the Jubil-O event (to mark 25 years of orienteering in Norway) in Oslo and to O-Ringen, giving her the technical skills to match her strength as a runner. Although she was always near the front of the results lists, from Veteran Ladies, W43, and W50 right through to W75, she never won a national Championships. Her best results were as runner up, at Highland Water in the 1972 British (by 16 seconds), and near Osaka in the 1999 Japanese. Each year, rivals such as Jenny Tennant (DVO), Judith Wingham (SROC), Pella Rye (SLOW), and Barbara Bradley (WCH) were always a bit too quick for her.

Rosemary’s roots in the sport were firmly in the South West, and after a family move to Paignton in Devon, she was a founder member of the DEVON club when the smaller clubs in Devon decided in 1979 to combine. Old hands such as Erik Peckett, Brian Parker, Peter King, Chris Virgo, Mike Wimpenny (all DEVON), Dave Parkin (QO, BOK and DVO), Meriel Gibson (WEY), and Ron Wilton (WIM) were all great friends for many years.

Rosemary was happy to travel further afield, often in later years with Anne Donnell (BOK), a close friend as well as rival, always making the biennial pilgrimage to the Scottish 6-Days together. Once, a grandson, waiting in the SLOW tent at Culbin before the rest of the family had finished, reported that “the grannies” had come to visit. Rosemary was also a regular member of the Global O Tours contingent at the World Masters. In 2006 in Austria she achieved her best world ranking – 9th in W75.

Rosemary was a teacher by profession, moving with age from the PE hall to the classroom for those who found maths a challenge. She was widely reported to be able to quell a class of noisy 15-year-olds just by raising one eyebrow, and for years was instantly and fondly recognised by many of Torbay’s supermarket checkout girls.

Rosemary’s husband Keith, a headmaster, was an avowed non-orienteer, although always wholly supportive of Rosemary travelling far and wide, and an excellent cook of Sunday roasts for returning orienteers. He passed away in 2015, two weeks before what would have been a diamond wedding anniversary.

In her last years, Rosemary sadly declined into forgetfulness and dementia. But to the end, she would repeat her mantra of “get out there and do it, while you still can”. Wise words for all orienteers.

Rosemary leaves two sons, five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

David Roach (SLOW and LuxOC)