

REMEMBERING RODDY BROOKS

My family got to know the Brooks when they moved to Streatham Hill in 1959, as we were all Quakers. One day, Roddy's dad Victor charged over to our house to tell us about FSC, but my dad stopped him by saying the girls have gone for years and we were about to tell you! So, Victor applied for Roddy to go when he was eight and I went over to their garden to teach him how to put up a tent.

Many years of friendship within and outside FSC later, Mark and I were on holiday climbing Cader Idris in 1979. We got up to the big shoulder and looking out west we could see appalling weather, so we decided to retreat hastily. Approaching Radnor, we spotted Roddy's blue van and followed it so we could warn him of the coming storm. We tailed him back to site to find the whole camp packing on their last night. We offered to stay to help them clear camp. The next morning, I found Roddy's tent being ripped by the gale. It being beyond saving, I tried to keep his stuff as dry as possible, whilst Roddy steered through the clear up.

In 1987, I took over a summer camp at Shining Cliff, which included activities like canoeing and potholing. Roddy offered to lead the potholing, which I gratefully accepted on the basis that I had no wish to do it. Unfortunately for me, as I drove the campers over, he realised we were a staff member short for the session and I had to go down a hole in what I was wearing. It turned out to be fun but very muddy!

And I was on his last summer camp in 1997, when he came to tell me he was leaving camp temporarily to head off to Speedway as "they can't race till I get there". (He was the official doctor for the speedway team). He returned the following morning, having enjoyed a good session watching, without any accidents!

I have so many memories of a very dear friend, who was so good at so many things and who was so humble about all his achievements, professional and private. He was one of the most generous people I have known, he always had time for you. He was very special, and I miss him a great deal. He was definitely one in a million and I'm so glad I could call him a friend.

Roddy, your memory will live on with the great number of people whose lives you have touched.

Maggie Hudson

I was fortunate to camp with Roddy on numerous occasions in the 70s, 80s and 90s. He gave me some experiences I would not want to be without. As a Woodling I remember it snowing at an Easter camp in North Wales he was running, and staff giving us milk bottles filled with hot water to keep our hands warm. I also remember him driving an out of service London black Cab at another camp. I later staffed for Roddy many

times and enjoyed his sometimes dark sense of humour. He saw the funny side when the lodge went on a trip to a funfair, and while helping a camper use the controls on a dodgem he collided with a fibreglass figurine whilst sat on the bonnet. He was highly intelligent but never made you feel inferior. All his family were like that. Gone but not forgotten.

Louis Basi

Many happy times to remember:

"Arise, arise, the sun is in the skies, the dew is on the grass and you are sleeping still!" Roddy's tuneful arise songs coming closer then fading into another part of the field. Somehow his were always more musical than other arise songs - not forgetting the Archers theme tune!

70s Kennet and Avon Canal Work camp - was it Roddy who negotiated much appreciated showers at Devizes Barracks for the mud covered campers? - was there really an armed guard?

For me , in the 70s, 80s and 90s I can see Roddy at Horton Kirby, Haddenham, in the snow at an Easter Montgomery, in the sun at numerous summer camps and of course, teaching us at Blackdown about camping with a whole range of disabled campers new to FSC. I catered for quite a few of Roddy's camps and only have happy memories of that.

Serious and thoughtful, and funny, sage and clown at the same time. We will all miss him so much!

Caroline Martin

First meeting him at Horton Kirby in 1971 when he was 19 and still at Oxford. He was wearing Greta's old scout hat and he had brought an out-of-date stilton that he considered had been a bargain and which we considered to be very smelly.

Roddy struggling against the gale walking back along the coast up near Cape Wrath (I think) in Scotland in January carrying three kit bags after we had abandoned camp for the second time in one night. We abandoned the first camp (under a series of fly-sheets in typical Victor fashion) and took shelter in a series of old stone built sheep pens, but they didn't offer much shelter in the howling gale so we all decided (under Victor's leadership) to call it a day (or night) and get back to the Croft.

Roddy and Kira leading the Woodlings together at Montgomery in 1971 and running them up and down a hill in the evening to try to tire them out before bed-time. I can't remember whether this strategy was successful. Those Woodlings would now be coming up to 60....



Pathfinder group at Shining Cliff 1969



Roddy and Greta



Blackdown Hills sports day 1973

Roddy's wonderful Venice camps, I think we did about five or six, walking along the tow path or chugging along on the narrow boat exploring the industrial areas and then picnicking among the wild garlic in the rural woodlands, and then ending up with a day at the Black Country Museum.

Roddy the King of the Boxes in the box loft at Horton Kirby.

Tea and cake with Roddy and Gilly in their comfortable sitting room after dropping Christopher off at Birmingham University for the start of term.

Meeting up near me at Stoke Bruene along the canal when Roddy and Gilly brought their boat down the Grand Union.

And many many more.

Maggie Beach

Roddy was one of my favourite people in the world.

I loved his sparkling intelligence.

I loved his particular sense of humour and his mastery of the Black Country accent.

I loved his encyclopaedic knowledge of, well it seemed, everything! I would love to tap that knowledge without ever feeling stupid.

I loved his quiet-spoken authority with kids on camp - even at the lowest register all would listen attentively.

I loved his humanity and goodness, underpinning his actions and the way he lived his life.

I admired the grace and humility with which he surrendered to the slow decline of his body, never with any sense of self-pity.

I will deeply miss Roddy, but equally I'm very grateful to have been his friend for over thirty years.

Steve Mardall

I can see Roddy clearly in my mind's eye and hear his chortle!! So here is a bit of a jumble of memories of Roddy...

Roddy was such a rock at council meetings... wise but light hearted...he held a lot of the history and ways of working of the organisation... he was called into the group that I was part of called Head, Heart and Hand.

My big memory is singing at Horton Kirby stores. Weekend after weekend we would turn up and Roddy was the box bay co-ordinator... building those robust but massively heavy boxes that protected all the equipment... some probably remain today??

I also camped with Roddy... most memorably around the barge on the outskirts of Birmingham... a brilliant camp showing how you could pootle about the edge of a city but also be in the country, move along canals that popped up in to the urban sprawl and end up at one of the best open air museums in the country.

Sheila Gore

Whenever I went to an FSC event, I was always pleased to see Roddy there. I knew I would have an interesting exchange, straightforward point of view and a laugh. I will miss you for that, Roddy.

When I was 25 I camped with Roddy in Wales on a two week camp. My first time group chief - hundreds of woodlings - it felt chaotic and stressful. Roddy was always there to listen and supported me to pull through and make a reasonable job of it. What really sticks in my mind is the crazy suggestion to go caving in the evening by way of relaxation. I went and of course, it was hugely enjoyable and just the tonic after a day in the field with lots of 10 year olds. He then nominated me to be a camp chief.

On that camp, with Julian and Francis, we had late nights round the fire singing every song in the songbook and more.

You were a special person, thank you for being in my life and making me laugh

Lucy Jaffe

Roddy was my camp chief on the first camp I staffed. He told me not to drink anything that wasn't boiled or distilled! Advice I continue to live by on camp. I think Roddy was also the camp chief on my first camp as a child but my memory is a bit hazy there. Whether it was my first camp or not, he has contributed over the years to my love of FSC and I am grateful.

Cara Keam

I trained as a young adult having been introduced to FSC by a friend at university, who would later become my partner. The first camp I staffed on was in Cornwall & Roddy was the camp chief. It was almost 30 years ago. The thing I remember most about Roddy was this brilliant nightly gesture around the staff fire - every evening he would produce a different bottle of single malt whiskey for us all to share. Being passed around the whole staff group meant a small sip each but it was the sweetest nectar; a kind & generous gesture that was a much appreciated treat.

Ellie Tallis



Staff Cuppa



Country Dancing at Longtown



By the rally circle



Lodge Common Council

I remember Roddy as the camp chief who my mum, Sue, trusted when I first wanted to camp on my own as a trailseeker. He was considered a safe pair of hands and nobody else was to be trusted with me and my brother, Tim. As a result I camped with him for the majority of my teenage years.

Looking back I don't remember much about Roddy as a camp chief. It has just occurred to me that this must be because he offered a gentle leadership where he enabled all the staff to be their best, rather than taking the limelight himself. This is the way I've tried to lead camps myself over the last few years. I'm grateful to him for being the role model I needed even if I didn't realise it at the time.

The strongest memories I have of Roddy on his camps relate to songs. "Oh what a beautiful morning" for the arise song on the sunny days. And on the wettest days... "The Lord said to Noah, there's going to be a floody floody". And at Lodge Common Council Roddy always led the Lodge in singing "The Huntsman". All of these songs still have the power to change my mood, to remind me of those happy days at camp as a child. And when I hear them now, I still hear Roddy's voice in my head.

I also remember Roddy visiting us in Croydon for the weekend at some point in the late 1980s. It was notable because we didn't very often have people to stay and I remember being glad to meet Gilly.

In the wonderful way that FSC has the power to create similar memories across different generations of a family, my most recent memory of Roddy was when I sent my youngest child on what would have been the last "Venice" camp with Roddy. Sending my own child on a camp with Roddy, at about the age I was when I first met him, feels a wonderful way to have closed the circle.

Thank you Roddy for being a wonderful part of my life for so many years. Rest in Peace.

Lucy Roberts

Some memories of camping with Roddy

Harlech, an Elf group on a steam train, with Roddy waving from the platform. Sadly, the guard didn't unlock our carriage, so we chuffed off, with Roddy running along shouting the news, "Elvis is dead!".

He and his black taxi then chased the train to the next station, like a scene from a Hitchcock film.

I loved waiting each morning to hear which Arise song Roddy would wake us with. One of his favourites was, "Ar-eyes they shone like diamonds, I thought her the queen of the land"

Sometimes, with a mischievous twinkle, he'd treat the Pathfinders to a cheery, apocalyptic arise song of nuclear destruction, "Now the sun has disappeared, All is darkness, anger, pain and fear...". He relished giving them a full rendition of each gruesome verse to pep them up at the start of their day.

In the evening, there would be his curmudgeonly medley - "Are you going to Scarborough fair? NO!" "Tam Pearce, Tam Pearce lend me thy grey mare" "Not bloody likely - not after what you did to the last one!" and "My Grandfather's clock was too tall for the shelf, so we put the ruddy thing in the skip!"

Roddy relaxed at camp building ovens, with beer can chimneys, baking fine bread. He'd often be assisted by small nephews or a niece who he'd encourage to call him "Uncle Rod the Drunken Sod".

And he'd frequently be surrounded by his waywardens, especially Dave and Richard, the Farmers, David Hughes and Jo Watson, who all had a deeply instilled love and affinity for Roddy. Some of those youngsters had grown up with him, from the Bristol area, to Blackdown, then integrated into main summer camps, and finally, when they ceased to be children, given a new role in camp when Roddy innovated the idea of adult Waywardens.

Finally, I remember the special solemnity of Roddy at Lodge Common Council.

He would use words like, "As the flames rise, so the spirit within us leaps higher and higher."

Away from camp, he would often ponder the way that he didn't believe in religious rituals, but how the words and the occasion were strangely greater than his natural scepticism. How he would find himself, almost unwittingly, caught up in something profoundly affecting. It was those moments which somehow summed up the depth of what Forest School Camps meant to Roddy, and which he wanted to share with others - not least those, who, like him, had battled on thinking they were Little Teapots, before finding, at camp, that they were actually Little Sugar Bowls.

Sophie Smiley

Roddy was a great influence on me as a young member of staff especially at Peak region and when I staffed his Black country canal camps, living myself on a house boat in the area. One thing he gave to me is the delight he had of singing one song to a tune of another and even now 30 years later I still love singing "Queenie" to the tune of "the streets of new York city" and vice versa. I miss both his intelligence and his humour.

Jeremy Cossey



Rainy Lodge Walk



Map Reading



Hike by the Canal



Human Knot Game

I possibly met him before but my first memory of him is at a great weekend camp in Bayford Woods when he arrived in his black cab. It would have been mid seventies, maybe the launch of something, Associates perhaps?

Jo Murray

I took this photo and thought it was hilarious, at the time, that the sign above them says 'These animals are dangerous'. We, as a family, went to stay with Roddy and his then wife Wendy (my aunt). He took us on a tour of the West Midland's finest attractions. I had a great time and that trip has always stayed in my memory. Although Roddy delighted in calling himself my ex uncle I continued to think of him as an uncle out of fondness. I have lots of happy memories spending time with both Roddy and Gilly.

Anna Hudson

Quick little story about Roddy;

As a first time staff at Radnor I was on clan on our last full day in the field, that afternoon I burnt my leg quite badly with boiling water whilst getting a six gallon out of the hay box. Anyway whilst I was sat with my leg in cold water in quite a distressed state Roddy who was camp chief came over and said he had some decent pain killers in his tent and would be back in a minute. He came back a few minutes later..... I can't find the pain killers but this will do the same job as he handed me a bottle of whiskey. It was Roddy all over....

I have so many lovely memories of him and will miss him dearly.

BJ Taylor

There can't be many situations in which a recent convert to the joys of caving with Victor felt completely confident in going under ground in caves that were well beyond novice grade, led by a sixth former more than 10 years younger than me. We had a couple of wonderful excursions underground in south Wales, with a family friend, a GP as backstop, but Roddy was in charge; patient, methodical, unphased by our lamps going out in a sump, attentive and always confident of his abilities to make sure we were having fun.

On the circuit of a well known system in the Upper Neath complex, we entertained visitors to the pool where the river emerged by going round again and again, so they could watch us pop out into the open air.

Roddy's big smile looked even better from under a caving helmet.

Of course there was so much more to his achievements beyond sixth form, but these are uniquely memorable.

Unity Stack

In the second year at University Roddy and I shared a very student flat where we were early adopters of organic brown rice and a very wholefood diet. This was the flat from which the first Blackdown Hills camp was planned.

Aged 21, Roddy went to FSC council with an innovative proposal. To take children with learning disabilities to a camp where they could enjoy the same outdoor experiences which FSC offered other campers. A number of these children lived in what were then called mental subnormality hospitals, like Stoke Park where Roddy was a student volunteer. Taking children from wards to tents was ground breaking not just at camp but across society.

FSC council were at first reluctant but Roddy persuaded them, personifying Victor's phrase for the inspired young, who had 'fire in their belly'.

That first Blackdown Hills camp, on land with a Brooks family connection, also showed a huge amount of organisational skills. Roddy had created a successful model and camps of this sort have now been established part of the programme for nearly 50 years. Roddy was typically modest about this huge contribution to the charity.

Andy Freedman

Words of gratitude for Roddy:

I camped with Roddy many times as a pathfinder and then as a young member of staff (back in the 80s/90s). He was the first person, outside my family, who saw potential in me and gave me the confidence I needed to take on a leadership role both within FSC and later in my professional career. His gentle encouragement and support made a huge difference to me and I will be eternally grateful to him. I have very fond memories of sitting by the fireside and listening to him sing and hope to join others around a fire at some point soon to celebrate his life.

Leila Murray (Leila Hunt in the 80s)

I loved seeing him at various FSC events, always rather grey but just the same Roddy. I met him at Horton Kirby in about 1966. He loved taking the very young kids out for walks. After about 6 or 7 they got too "old" to enjoy in the same way. There was quite little horde of them enjoying each other's company.

Roddy was always an enthusiastic singer as a youth, if you remember, but in his rowdiness he forgot about the actual tune. Then, at Horace's Figgin Wood Easter camp (brrr!) he came into his own. We had new songs and the kids were enthusiastic. It was a delight for us all.



Easter at Montgomery 1975



Haddenham workshop



Haddenham 1980s

Finally, at a caving camp organised by Victor for staff, he was there with an independent, “real” cavers’ group of young people. We were greeted, but hardly enthusiastically. I always thought he was embarrassed to be seen with such a rabby crew. We explored Swildon’s—the only cave I felt secure in, in spite of Victor calling me a pregnant grandmother. We made it to the sump I think it’s called, and back in disgracefully slow time, according to Roddy. He was so anxious not to be shown up that he altered the time in the log book to make us seem just about OK—a matter of at least an hour!

Mary Brown

Summer 1983. I was a second year staffer on Roddy's camp in Brecon. It was also my second go at clan chiefting.

Everything was going so well (surprisingly) for the evening meal, until... the bloody semolina refused to set!

I recall racing around with the caterer, trying to find something...anything... to make that darn semolina thicken!

The film *Scrubbers* had been out a short while and those who had not seen it had most likely watched the trailer which depicted inmates bashing their tin plates and mugs on the wooden tables. Yes, me and my clan got the same treatment with an increasingly longer and more restless queue demanding their pudding. What started off to be a pleasant, warm evening soon changed when things got a bit hot under the collar!

The next thing I knew was Roddy walking up to the restless mob, ghetto blaster in hand and shoving it down in front of them.

He then turned the radio on and *The Archers'* theme blasted out. Plates and mugs stopped banging and people gathered around for a bit of *Archers'* catch-up! Our semolina struggle got sorted in the meantime. That was almost 40 years ago. Still, when I hear the *Archers'* theme, it makes me smile.

Thank you Roddy. Blue sky to you.

Ben Gritten

I only camped with him once - a fortnight plus prep camp at Teviotdale in somewhat challenging weather. I liked him so much and have such vivid memories of the way he dealt with all sorts of things which I would like to share. Every time the weather took a turn for the worse Roddy would announce at lunch that the planned afternoon activity had been postponed and was going to be replaced by community singing in the shelter tent, always a completely successful activity. The first Sunday at staff cuppa I reported finding the recorder for country dancing switched on in the first aid tent and Roddy replied in a slightly apologetic tone that he'd been recording the omnibus edition of the Archers. Roddy believed that staff time should not be used for cooking meals on prep camp and so we were to go every evening to Hawick to a fish and chip cafe. After my children's tent leaked the first night I had to leave the group in the cafe to go to a phone box and phone my husband asking him to buy a new tent and bring it the next day. After another wet night Victor was hanging his sleeping bag from a tree. Every day Roddy asked

each member of staff if they would like him to buy them anything from town and I remember him asking Victor if he'd like him to buy him a new tent. Before I went on that camp Hazel described Roddy to me as terribly sincere and that's just exactly the impression that I got. At Lodge common as the children were taking turns to speak, one boy said "Well I didn't think the weather was all that good" to which Roddy replied apologetically that there wasn't really anything he could have done about that.

Liz Grayson

I camped with Roddy as a teenager. I remember him saying that the "bale of cotton" song was a product of minstrelsy, and how white kids singing it on camp was a complicated form of blackface. At least, that was the gist of what he said. It really stuck with me and I personally didn't hear that being called out / openly discussed on camp again for more than 20 years. Roddy was a serious person and he took us seriously as people. I valued that tremendously as a kid.

Rebecca Bligh

Roddy was an inspiration to me as a young staff member, and was responsible for my dedication to FSC for many years.

I camped with him many times as staff and identified with his gentle but irreverent sense of humour. He was cheeky, erudite, and witty, and I identified with his sense of humour. I think that it is largely down to him that I persisted with FSC, eventually to become chair. I loved him very much, but sadly never said this to him. I have an enduring memory of him teaching me the song "Ale, Ale, Glorious Ale" which became a song that I loved, despite it being a modern pastiche of a traditional folk song. I miss him very much.

Will Coppola

Despite not seeing Rod often in the last years I already miss the comfort provided by the knowledge of him being himself and impacting those around him.

Though dedicated to the inseparable aspects of family, medicine, FSC, friends and hunks of machinery, this was not at the expense of an integrity towards an outlook rooted in his values of social inclusion and a refusal to capitulate to the status quo.

So, long ago, in the old ambulance, we picked up hitchhikers at every roundabout who had to join the increasingly disparate group traveling between London and Bristol, songs and a piano which, in defiance of its lack of ties, never did attempt to leave by the back door.

Rod wrote about the experience of equality induced by camping, particularly in a wet field, in the student mag. When chided to put his money where his mouth was, he hybridised FSC lore with activities for children led by "liberated medics". From the unlikely conjunction of the RAF, a long stay hospital, a student voluntary project, a beautiful farm (where trees had been planted to celebrate his adoption into the Brooks family) and FSC, Blackdown Hills evolved. Rod enjoyed how, later, characters from these camps and many others following on, enriching standing camps, as children and as waywardens. And this is just a small part of a lifetime. He leaves a rich and warm history.

Rosy Coleman



Shining Cliff 1980s



Easter in Herefordshire



Camp shower



Peak Region 1980s

So many shared memories.

He introduced me to FSC at university. We lived in the same shared house in Bristol in the 1970s. Roddy persuaded me to go to the second Blackdown Hills camp where I learnt how to feel confident working with people with learning disabilities. When Debbie repeated, 'going home Tuesday', it wasn't because she was having a bad time. It was a reassurance to herself. I organised his camp at Montgomery in 1978- another rainy number where his black taxi got stuck up the track and was on one occasion the venue for a quick game of late night bridge.

Ruth Illingworth

Roddy was the camp chief who I camped most with as a child. I have one idea for a memorial for Roddy in the Summer edition of Org 4. There will be a feature about identifying the animal constellations around Orion. It would be nice to create a constellation for Roddy.

Peter Francis

Multiple memories, most about Roddy in his twenties.

Roddy, part owner of Brigstocke Road, singer, reader of national train timetables, black cab driver, old ambulance driver, part time cooker of bean stews, eccentric, storer of caving helmets, intelligent, a maker and mender of FSC boxes, a progressive, trusting, a man of multiple skills, a great story teller, a narrow boat owner and a man of many mini disasters. When I last spent significant time with him in Bristol, he talked about his latest escapade of falling into the canal.

I met Roddy early in 1973. He was wise beyond his years. He was later in July the 21-year-old camp chief at Blackdown Hills, scene of the first FSC camp for kids with Special Needs. He had immense belief of the young, innocent and committed, like me. He trusted you, he supported you and that wonderful camp educated and influenced many of the life choices I made after that. He helped influence me to spend my life as an educator.

Three years later Roddy was still supporting experimental projects. He ran a camp at Montgomery that challenged the dietary habits of both big and small people. The caterer wanted to rid the camp of all additives, eliminate meat, coffee, tea juice and E numbers where possible. There was to be jumbo oats, brown flour, brown rice and organically grown vegetables. Graced by good weather this camp had every element that makes a community vibrant. We argued into the early hours, the discussions centred on making the food more palatable. We built an oven, we baked our own bread, baked and made our own baked beans, made pizzas, brown flour only. This exciting and memorable camp was full of debate and challenges. The staff broke first, a member of staff walked miles to get tea bags and after hike the caterer was mobbed when he returned with Spam. It also included an epic Night Walk that involved a long walk, a night swim and sleeping kids being carried when we did not arrive back at the campsite until after 02.00. I do not think it ever rained on this camp.



Horton Kirby 1972



Dulwich 1972



Brigstocke Road Bristol 1975

My final Roddy story involved contact with Roddy outside FSC. He offered to take Rosy and I pot holing at Priddy Green as we had never been. All was well until we reached the waterfall and the dreaded ladder. I, unfortunately crushed my fingers, got scared and was unable to descend the dreaded, swinging ladder, I was left behind. My lamp chose to go out and what seemed like an endless wait occurred in the pitch dark. They returned and with no fuss we made a quick and easy exit. Before too long we immersed ourselves in a nearby pond, full of tadpoles. I remember having to extricate them off my body before it was safe to dress.

I will miss him. I will miss his fascinating and sometimes long stories.

Chris Potter

As an Elf I was only allowed to go on my first FSC camp as long as Roddy was on the same camp. Arthur Cobb was my Group Chief and Chris Lee was staffing Roddy in the Woodlings. I got dreadfully homesick on our wet hike in a bracken-shelter and on our return Roddy was summonsed to see what he could do to comfort me. He lent me his favourite woollen jumper, some clean, dry socks and a pair of track-suit trousers. It was only once we got home that he told me he had more than a full set of dry, clean clothing to lend because he'd never un-packed his bag and had been wearing the same set of clothes he arrived in all camp.

I remember Roddy's glee and mischievous grin as he recounted to the rest of the staff at Blackdown Hills the exploits of David Booth and Richard Grey who he had found removing the wheel from the farmer's tractor. Having been caught out by Roddy they roundly swore at their Camp Chief with the most heinous taboo of curses "Cigarette!" Thereafter Roddy nick-named them "The Farmers".

When Roddy first graduated as a doctor he used his first wage packet to buy his wee sister what she really needed . . . a Blacks of Greenock, down sleeping bag. I still have it.

Jan Binnie

Songs

Roddy loved singing. In 2004 he was in Ireland and visited Nico Brown. Nico recorded Roddy singing some favourites from the Horton Kirby era. Hear Roddy singing now at

https://www.fsc.org.uk/r/RoddyBrooks_sings.m4a or https://www.fsc.org.uk/r/RoddyBrooks_sings.mp3

Many thanks for the photographs which were taken by Daphne Carre, Lucy Shepherd, Dave Monk and others