## My chat with Bob Alcock – by Louise Stilwell-stage

Bob, you joined the Ramblers Association in 1979, originally belonging to the Kingston Ramblers group because it was then the nearest to your home in Reigate. You soon transferred to the even nearer Mole Valley Ramblers group when it was set up in 1980.

Q. Have you always been interested in walking?
A. Yes, both walking and cycling

Q. What is it that you particularly relish or like it about it as a hobby?
A. I have always liked being out in the fresh air and exploring the countryside

Q. Do you have any other hobbies or pursuits?
A. I have always been a keen cyclist.

I have always been interested in electronics. I used to build amplifiers and radios. We used to buy parts in Croydon or Lisle Street in Soho.

For many years I had a big garden in Abinger which kept me busy cutting hedges and bushes and sawing wood for logs.

I now do family history in sporadic bursts.

Q. Have you always been able to read a map and use a compass or was that something you had to learn? If so who taught you?
A. I have always read maps and collected them; My father taught me when I was young

Q. Do you have a favourite walking place or route?
A. I have many favourite local places: Holmbury Hill, Pitch Hill, Winterfold, Blackdown, Hankley Common and Frensham ponds

Q. Have you walked in other parts of the UK? Could you give some examples?
A. We used to go on HF Holidays in Towyn, Wales and Exmoor.
We have walked coastal paths in Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and Pembrokeshire

Q. Have you ever walked abroad? Could you give some details?
A. I often went hill walking in Austria with the family as a child.
Later we went to the Tatra mountains in Slovakia and had a walking holiday in the Cevennes, France

In 2010 you volunteered to become the Local Footpath Secretary (under the auspices of Surrey Area). Despite recently retiring from this post you are still actively involved with the survey of footpaths generally undertaken by ramblers twice a year in May and November.

Q. Could you explain the type of thing that you would generally have tended get involved with in your capacity as a Local Footpath Secretary?
A.
-- Reporting footpath and bridleway problems and checking progress on fixing them. eg blocking by vegetation, damaged gates stiles & finger posts, missing waymarks
-- Investigating proposed changes to the footpath network (eg diversions) and planning applications close to paths. Sending comments to the council
-- getting involved with any proposed threats to footpaths from any source. It is very important not to lose any part of the network

Q. What in particular did you enjoy about this role?
A. It is a rewarding job keeping the public rights of way open and useable for everyone to enjoy.

Q. Have you seen many changes during your forty plus years with the Mole Valley Ramblers group? If so can you give some examples?
A. Footpath work in Mole Valley Ramblers used to be curiously compartmentalised. There was a group of energetic blokes who met monthly and did footpath maintenance. (for example they built a boardwalk over a marsh near Leith Hill).

The Local Footpath Secretary attended area footpath meetings and wrote letters to the council. The Group Footpath Secretary, who also went on walks and led them, reported footpath problems to the council.

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Sheila Dearing was a tireless Group Footpath Secretary for many years. Footpath Wardens, like myself, trudged the paths in each parish fairly regularly and reported problems to her, who in turn sent them to the council.

Nowadays we have a much more coordinated approach to footpath maintenance and reporting. Problems are reported directly via the Countryside Access Management System and local volunteers are informed. Cuts in council budgets have meant that much more maintenance work needs to be done by volunteers.

Q. How many pairs of boots have you had over this forty year period?
A. I have lost count. I have noticed that cheap boots seem to last the same time as expensive ones. Nowadays I wear stout rubber boots in winter which avoids a lot of cleaning.

Q. What is the best part about walking with a group?
A. The companionship. I have made many good friends over the years.