

From Flowers to Mountains to Forest

ROSEMARY WINNALL

How did I get interested in wildlife? Well, I had a rather flowery start, arriving prematurely at Northampton's Speedwell Nursing Home. Maybe that is why my younger sister born there 2 years later was called Veronica! My father provided our surname Lillyman, so our family soon became a bunch of flowers!

I have two particular memories of my time in Northampton before we moved when I was 4. There was a tree in our back garden and my parents allowed me to climb a small ladder to where there was a hole in the trunk. In this I stored all my special treasures that I'd gathered in and around the garden: small stones, colourful flowers, seeds, fruits, feathers and so on. Then there was the time when I escaped from the back garden and was 'lost' for some time until someone found me down the back lane where I'd gone off by myself to look at the pigs on the farm nearby. So began a lifetime of making collections, exploration and adventure!



Rosemary Lillyman aged 4

My father worked as an accountant with Mettoys (known for making Corgi toys) and when the company opened a new office in Swansea we moved to Mumbles on the Gower peninsular. When we arrived at this house, I remember being lifted up to look out of the bedroom window and seeing the sweep of Swansea Bay and the sun shining on the sand across the water, I was convinced that it must be Africa across the sea. It was a while before I understood that it was only Port Talbot!

As newcomers to the area my parents were eager to explore and, even though we had no car in the early days, we often set off on a Saturday morning with our

picnics to catch the bus and walk for the day, visiting different parts of Gower, enjoying beautiful scenery and fascinating wildlife; my father planned the route and my mother made the sandwiches. My mother was a very keen on wild flowers and my father was knowledgeable about birds and butterflies, so there was always something of interest to find, and I am grateful to my parents for instilling in me such a love of nature and the outdoors.

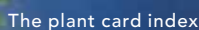
I don't remember liking my Primary School very much. With 48 in the class it must have been difficult for the teachers and discipline was strict. I remember searching for 4 leaved clovers in the field at lunchtime and helping in the school garden. When I was 9 some of us had to give a talk to our class and mine was about wild flowers. My mother kept my home-made visual aid chart (see below).



Prior to secondary school my sister and I had a Famous Five Club with friends from our road meeting in our cellar. We used to make dens, have midnight feasts under the hedge, try making scent with rose petals, organise jumble sales for charity in our garage and go out for the day up to the Common, lighting fires and dodging the wild horses. It is incredible now to think that our parents often had no idea where we were but didn't seem to worry. But all that stopped when we went to secondary school and homework took over.

Early on, holidays were always at Christian Centres in lovely places like the Quantocks (travelling by paddle steamer from Mumbles to Ilfracombe) and the Yorkshire Dales. This opened my eyes to new places of interest and I soon started joining in the long organised walks through beautiful countryside.

In my teens summer holidays were spent up in the Lake District where we joined my mother's sister (a great botanist) and her family from Northumberland. Staying in a guest house in Borrowdale, we had to be out of the house after breakfast and not allowed back in until



I don't remember being inspired by many of the lessons at secondary school but I enjoyed all the extracurricular activities, particularly music and sport. Our school choir used to enter Eisteddfodau, singing in Welsh of course. But it was sport I especially loved with netball and gymnastics in the winter and athletics, cricket and swimming in the summer. I continued my love of wildlife

by taking Botany, Zoology and Geography at A level, but turned down a place at University to read Botany to choose sport instead. After a degree in Physical Education I spent 9 years teaching Outdoor Pursuits, first at Plas Gwynant Adventure Centre in Snowdonia and then running Rhosili Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Gower for West Glamorgan LEA. This gave me the most marvellous opportunities to visit wild places, climbing and mountaineering in remote parts of Scotland and the Alps, canoeing around our coasts and rivers, caving, skiing, orienteering and sailing. Introducing young people to the countryside through these activities, and encouraging an appreciation of the wildlife we encountered, was very rewarding.

Whilst back in Gower, I joined the committee of the Gower Ornithological Society and also helped Dr Derek Thomas run the West Glamorgan RSPB group, booking speakers and organising trips to places like Skomer, Slimbridge and Grassholm (in the 1970s when you could land and watch the Gannets from the top of the island). I also helped Derek with his studies of Reed Warblers in Oxwich Marsh, spending many hours in hides at dawn checking food items brought in by the adults for their nestlings. I also met Dr June Chatfield who helped me when I visited Cardiff Museum to look through their marine mollusc collections. The late Bob Burn from Parkmill Field Studies Centre introduced me to lichens and moths and I also started my Nature Diary at this time, which I have kept going ever since.

I was invited to be one of the leaders for an expedition for young people to Iceland in 1975 where we spent 3 weeks up in the mountains helping to measure glacier retreat for the North Iceland Glacier Inventory through the Young Explorers Trust. This is where I met Tony and when we married in 1979 I moved to the Wyre Forest, and another adventure began! I feel privileged to have had such a great family and generous friends who have all encouraged my love of nature.

