

Major RJ (Bob) Aitken 1935 – 2016



Bob Aitken is arguably best known at Bisley as the large genial Scotsman who would descend upon shooters wherever they were gathered together.....and, rain or shine, he always had a wad of raffle tickets on him! Bob would engage in good natured banter and shooting gossip yet somehow always got his fiver from each of them to support Scottish Target Rifle teams abroad. And for some unrecorded reason he was known to many as “Big Bad Bob”.

Bob's death represents the loss within weeks of two giants in Scottish target shooting circles. Alistair Munro was the left handed (one handed) shot who established the West Atholl rifle club on its beautiful range at Blair Atholl and promoted the use of electronic targets. And now Bob Aitken is gone.

Coming to Edinburgh after a military career, he worked in Insurance for the Royal Bank and set about using his considerable administrative and leadership skills to the benefit of Scottish shooting. After leaving the Royal Bank, Bob was General Secretary of the Scottish Sports Association for over 10 years and it was entirely appropriate when he won the 1999 Scottish Sports Council award for Scottish Volunteer of the Year across all sports, beating Jim Telfer of rugby fame.

At club level, he was the East of Scotland Rifle club. He was Captain and Secretary for over 40 years. He negotiated tirelessly with police and military to retain target shooting for club members at Dreghorn and latterly Castlelaw Ranges to the south of Edinburgh. He produced rifles and ammunition for every evening shoot and his energy level was enormous. Every year he ran an open championship in September - most recently on the electronic targets of Blair Atholl range. In later years he combined some of the shoots and was still able to get through the programme of championship events in a single day. Shooters got used to firing 17 shots in competitions, when the norm was still 10 or 15 counting shots.

Bob was particularly supportive of young shooters and his advice and humour assisted many in the sport over the years – his immense pride at those went on to represent county or country at the highest levels of competition was reward enough.

Passionate about all sports, Bob had been active in 5 favoured sports over time - athletics, football,

hockey and basketball and only latterly target shooting.

Bob was a fine shot in his own right. He captained Scotland for 6 years, represented Scotland in the National match on 26 occasions and in the MacKinnon on 21. He was a member of numerous Scottish teams touring abroad and he had a particular affinity with Canada and British Columbia. He was made a vice President of the NRA and he captained a GB Team which toured to NZ in 2003 where he enjoyed some of his best competitive shooting - winning the Veterans gold medal and coming 4<sup>th</sup> overall. An experienced team coach – he loved to tell the story of how he started coaching in 1979 with his United Banks team in a long range match at Bisley. The others were all small bore shooters. They had one rifle between them - Bob's trusty P14. He scored a healthy 68 ex 75 but then coached the others to scores of 75,75,74,73 and 72. His success was observed by the captain of the following year's GB team to Canada and the next thing he knew he was on that GB team as a coach!

But it was on the Scottish National target shooting scene that he most excelled. He was a founder member in 1965 of the Scottish Shooting Council which combined all the disciplines of target shooting for the first time. He was appointed the Target Shooting Facilities manager for the 1986 Commonwealth games in Edinburgh and worked tirelessly to find a suitable venue for the small bore events.

Eventually during the Games he was travelling 200 miles a day between Barry Buddon for full bore rifle; Kippen for shot gun and Musselburgh racecourse for the small bore events. One of the teams turned up with a very large container which required a fork lift truck to move it. Inside were neatly packed pistols and a very large quantity of beer. The team withdrew because of apartheid issues but only the pistols got home.

Bob was a strong supporter of Commonwealth Games shooting and embraced the opportunity that it gave for the smaller countries to compete against the larger nation's athletes on a level range. He twice went to the Commonwealth Games as part of the Scottish team management – including the 1994 games in Victoria, where the Scottish shooting team won a record 7 medals. Later Judging roles in the Manchester, Kuala Lumpur and Melbourne games kept him on the move.

He was Chair of the Scottish Shooting Council/Scottish Target shooting in 1987 to 1995 and worked hard with all the disciplines - promoting strongly the ideal of a combined range for all target shooting disciplines. It is a matter of regret for his many Scottish shooting friends that this wish is only now in 2016 possibly about to become reality at a combined range near Falkirk.

Bob is survived by the ever supportive Margaret, a well known figure to many at Bisley, and the five children of whom he was always immensely proud - Alan, Alison, Carol, Colin and David, all of whom enjoyed life with Bob on the ranges over the years.

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