

It's YOUR History – Camp Fire Yarn 1 – Lord Baden-Powell, Where it All Began

2010 is the 100th Anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America. I will be posting some history concerning the founding of the BSA in the next few days. I hope this prompts discussion and sharing of other stories. – Bill Nelson, Salt River District, Grand Canyon Council



Let us start in England with the beginning of Scouting. It all started with a man by the name of Lord Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell (cool name!). He is the founder of Boy Scouting. He is affectionately known by Scouts throughout the world by his initials: B-P. B-P was an officer and a war hero in the Boer war (ca. 1899). He, his British military scouts and younger soldiers were responsible for withstanding a siege in a small town in South Africa called [Mafeking](#).

When the siege of Mafeking began, the British regiment was outgunned, outnumbered, and cut off from the outside world by an army of more than 6,000 Boer soldiers. But Baden-Powell was in charge of the defense, and he was an expert at the "Game of Bluff". Here are just a couple of examples of B-P's ingenuity.

Many years before Mafeking, B-P had disguised himself as a butterfly hunter in Dalmatia, and spied on the forts and defenses of the enemy. Whenever he met an enemy soldier,

"With my sketch book in hand, I would ask innocently whether he had seen such-and-such a butterfly in the neighborhood, as I was anxious to catch one. Ninety-nine out of a hundred did not know one butterfly from another - any more than I did - so one was on fairly safe ground in that way, and they thoroughly sympathized with the mad Englishman who was hunting insects." -- Baden-Powell, quoted by Hillcourt in *Baden Powell: the two lives of a hero*

What the officers did not notice was that Baden-Powell's sketches of butterfly wings included maps of their own forts and defenses.

"It is up to the Patrol Leader to take hold of and to develop the qualities of each Scout in his patrol. It sounds like a big order, but in practice it works."

Lord Baden-Powell, Founder

One of the first priorities was to prevent the Boers from storming the town, because they could easily overpower

the flimsy Mafeking defense. But Baden-Powell deduced that the Boers were afraid of minefields. So, to confirm the Boer fears, B-P convinced a number of the town's inhabitants to carry metal boxes around the town, with dire warnings not to drop or bump them. Hundreds of these were buried on the outskirts of the town, and the areas marked with warnings for the inhabitants and cattleherds to stay clear. Then he warned the townsfolk to keep inside while the new mines were tested.

With everyone safe indoors, Major Panzera and I went out and stuck a stick of dynamite into an ant-bear hole. We lit a fuse and ran for cover until the thing went off, which it did with a splendid roar and a vast cloud of dust.

Out of the dust emerged a man with a bike who happened to be passing, and he pedaled off as hard as he could go for the Transvaal, eight miles away, where no doubt he told how by merely riding along the road he had hit off a murderous mine. The boxes were actually filled with nothing more dangerous than sand! -- Baden-Powell, quoted by Duncan Grinnell-Milne in *Mafeking*

When he returned to England in 1902, he returned a hero. He could have stopped there and ended up in the history books, but he didn't he trudged on.

What did he do? Well, he almost single handedly started the worldwide movement of Scouting, that's all. Millions of boys owe a very deep level of gratitude to B-P. The following is the story of how the starting of Scouting came to be.

Gen. Baden-Powell returned to England in 1902 and was astonished to find British boys using a handbook he had written called [Aids to Scouting](#) back when he was being besieged in Mafeking. For the next four years, he studied boys' programs, including Ernest Thompson Seton's [Birch Bark Roll of Woodcraft Indians](#), and decided to start his own program.

In 1906, Baden-Powell drafted a paper called "Boy Scouts—A Suggestion," proposing a way to "help in making the rising generation, of whatever class or creed, into good citizens at home or for the colonies." The article was a smashing success. Kids read his article and convinced adults to help them start troops all over England.



A year later, he wanted to see how a formalized "scheme" (as he called it) would actually work in practice. In August 1907, he organized a camp on a small island that was not far off the English shore called [Brownsea Island](#) to test his ideas. The camp, which involved 12 upper-class boys, from prep schools like Eaton and nine working-class boys, mostly from the popular paramilitary "Boys Brigade", was a rousing success. What we would now call a summer camp lasted one week. The boys were divided into patrols and wore a colored knot on their shoulder indicating which Patrol they belonged to - green for Bulls, blue for Wolves, yellow for Curlews (a bird), and red for Ravens. The Patrol Leader carried a staff with a flag depicting the patrol animal. The boys learned skills that are similar to the ones a Scout learns today included knots, first aid, tracking, plant and animal identification, camp cooking, chivalry, and patriotism. The boys camped apart from each other and each patrol lead by their patrol leader were completely responsible for their own campsite, their own cooking, cleaning and showing up to activities on time.

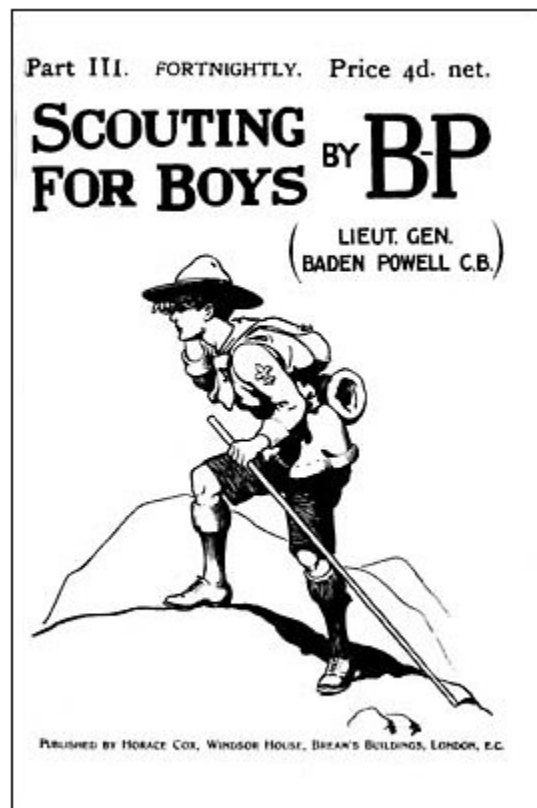
Each boy was given a brass fleur-de-lis badge which was fastened on to his coat; when he had passed a few tests (knots, tracking, the Flag) he was given another brass badge to fasten below the first, a scroll with the words "Be Prepared" on it. And so the Scout badge was invented. Kaki scarves were also issued.

The following is B.-P.'s report on the camp:

"The troop of boys was divided up into 'Patrols' of five, the senior boy in each being Patrol Leader. This organization was the secret of our success. Each Patrol Leader was given full responsibility for the behavior of his patrol at all times, in camp and in the field. The patrol was the unit of work or play, and each patrol was camped in a separate spot. The boys were put 'on their honor' to carry out orders. Responsibility and competitive rivalry were thus at once established, and a good standard of development was ensured throughout the troop from day to day. The troop was trained progressively in the subjects of scouting. Every night one patrol went on duty as night picket - that is, drew rations of flour, meat, vegetables, tea, etc., and went out to some indicated spot to bivouac for the night. Each boy had his greatcoat and blankets, cooking-pot and matches. On arrival at the spot, fires were lit and suppers cooked, after which sentries were posted and bivouac formed. The picket was scouted by Patrol Leaders of other patrols and myself, at some time before eleven p.m., after which the sentries were withdrawn and picket settled down for the night.

" We found the best way of imparting theoretical instruction was to give it out in short installments with ample illustrative examples when sitting round the camp-fire or otherwise resting, and with demonstrations in the practice hour before breakfast. A formal lecture is apt to bore the boys. "The practice was then carried out in competitions and schemes."

In 1908, Baden-Powell published *Scouting for Boys*. It was published in eight parts which came out about two weeks apart. Each part cost four pence. This was, in essence, the very first Boy Scout Handbook. The movement caught on like wildfire when thousands of boys eagerly read each installment. Over the next few years, B-P watched in astonishment as scouting spread throughout the British colonies and beyond. By the end of 1908 Scouting had spread to Ireland, Australia, Canada New Zealand and South Africa. In 1913, he proposed a gathering of Scouts from around the world, planting the seeds for what would become the first World Scout Jamboree in 1920. The first Jamboree with 8,000 Scouts from 34 countries was held in London, England. When he rose to speak at the jamboree, a Scout in the audience



shouted, “Long live the Chief Scout of the World!” Thousands of other Scouts took up the call, and Baden-Powell was officially crowned the first, and only, Chief Scout of the World. Today most of us wear a round purple badge above the left pocket of our uniform in recognition that we too belong to the worldwide brotherhood of Scouting.

I WAS A BOY ONCE
(Forward to Scouting for Boys)

The best time I had as a boy was when I went about as a sea scout with my four brothers on the sea round the coasts of England. Not that we were real Sea Scouts, because Sea Scouts weren't invented in those days. But we had a sailing boat of our own on which we lived and cruised about, at all seasons and in all weathers, and we had a jolly good time-taking the rough with the smooth.

Then in my spare time as a schoolboy I did a good lot of scouting in the woods in the way of catching rabbits and cooking them, observing birds and tracking animals, and so on. Later on, when I got into the army, I had endless fun big-game hunting in the jungles in India and Africa and living among the backwoodsman in Canada. Then I got real scouting in South African campaigns.

Well, I enjoyed all this kind of life so much that I thought, “Why should not boys at home get some taste of it too?” I knew that every true red-blooded boy is keen for adventure and open-air life, and so I wrote this book to show you how it could be done.

And you fellows have taken it up so readily that now there are not only hundreds of thousands of Boy Scouts but millions about the world!

Of course, a chap can't expect to become a through backwoodsman all at once without learning some of the difficult arts and practices that the backwoodsman uses. If you study this book you will find tips in it showing you how to do them – and in this way you can learn for yourself instead of having a teacher to show you how.

Then you will find that the object of becoming an able and efficient Boy Scout is not merely to give you fun and adventure but that, like the backwoodsman, explorers, and frontiersmen whom you are following, you will be fitting yourself to help your country and to be of service to other people who may be in need of help. That is what the best men are out to do.

A true Scout is looked up to by other boys and by grown-ups as a fellow who can be trusted, a fellow who will not fail to do his duty however risky and dangerous it may be, a fellow who is jolly and cheery no matter how great the difficulty before him.

I've put into this book all that is needed to make you a good Scout of that kind. So, go ahead, read the book, practice all that it teaches you, and I hope you will have half as good a time as I have had as a Scout.



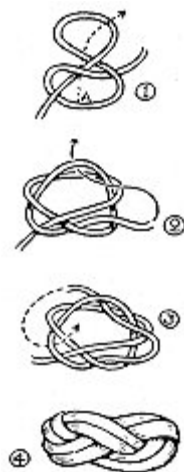
Baden-Powell of Gilwell, Chief Scout of the World

Later in life, when asked how he started Boy Scouting, B-P would say that he didn't start anything, that Scouting just happened and he enjoyed being along for the ride. In 1909 B-P was knighted by King Edward VII for his outstanding military career and for the founding of the Scouting movement.

When it became obvious that Scoutmasters really should get some kind of training, B-P held the first Scoutmaster training. It was held

Be Prepared... the meaning of the motto is that a scout must prepare himself by previous thinking out and practicing how to act on any accident or emergency so that he is never taken by surprise. – Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell

one week in September 1919 at a camp called Gilwell Park, in Epping Forest, outside London, England. He also wrote a Scoutmaster handbook that he handed out at the camp called "Aids to Scoutmastership." When they had finished their training together, Baden-Powell gave each man a simple wooden bead from a necklace worn by the Zulu king Dinizulu, which he obtained during the Boer War in the 1880s. This started the tradition of "Woodbadge" training which continues to this day. The symbol for Gilwell Park is an axe embedded in a log, this symbol has carried into Woodbadge training as well.



Typical
Turk's Head
Woggle

Speaking of Gilwell, we have a story about Gilwell we can share. It is the story of the beginnings of the neckerchief slide. When Baden-Powell visited the Western United States he saw how useful the bandana was. He insisted it be standard issue for Boy Scouts. Early Scouts wore them around their necks and called them neckerchiefs or neckers, however they did not have neckerchief slides. Instead they tied a square knot in their neckerchief to keep them on their necks. The ends of the neckerchief stuck out when they did this, and creases that were hard to get out resulted. In the Boy Scouts of America experimentations were made with rings made by slicing a bone and hollowing out the center, or with rope or wood to hold the neckerchief. Boys in the BSA called those devices "boon-doggles." Yes, that's where the term came from. B-P liked the idea but hated the name and thought surely the British Scouts could come up with something better. Around 1923, a young Scout, Bill Shankley, who was responsible for running a workshop and developing ideas for camping equipment at Gilwell Park, became aware of the American rings, and set out to

create something similar. He fell upon an obvious, well obvious to any knot expert anyway, solution. [A Turk's head knot](#). The Turk's head knot is a decorative knot that is used in many places on land and at sea. One of the important purposes of a Turk's head knot at sea is in its placement on the main wheel (or helm) of a ship. A Turk's head knot is often used to mark the "king spoke" of a ship's wheel. That is to say, the spoke that when vertical indicates that the rudder is amid-ship and steering the ship in a straight course. Bill Shankley made a number of neckerchief slides that were Turk's head knots made out of sewing machine leather belting. Shankley called them woggles. B-P loved them and the name stuck. Now the official neckerchief slide of scouting throughout the world is the woggle (see the knot embossed on [the official BSA medal neckerchief](#) slide almost every Cub Scout or beginning Boy Scout receives).

By the way, original neckerchiefs were 32" x 32" square. *Scouting with a Neckerchief* is a wonderful pamphlet written by Commodore WE Longfellow for the Boy Scout Service Library in 1927. It describes in detail the history, etiquette and practical uses of the Scout Neckerchief.

B-P lived a long life and died in 1941. In Scouting parlance, he "went home." B-P thought of Scouts even at the end of his life. He left a letter when he died for all Scouts to read. Here is how it ends:

Nature study will show you how full of beautiful and wonderful things God has made the world for you to enjoy. Be contented with what you have got and make the best of it Look on the bright side of things instead of the gloomy one.

But the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people. Try and leave this world a little better than you found it and when your turn comes to die, you can die happy in feeling that at any rate you have not wasted your time but have done your best "Be prepared" in this way, to live happy and to die happy-stick to your Scout Promise always-even after you have ceased to be a boy-and God help you to do it.

Your friend,



Baden-Powell of Gilwell

References:

Aids to Scouting by Col. Robert Baden-Powell

<http://www.thedump.scoutscan.com/A2S4NCO&Men.pdf>

Brownsea Island Scout camp

http://en.allexperts.com/e/b/br/brownsea_island_scout_camp.htm

The Bownsea Island Camp – The First Camp

http://www.thescoutingpages.org.uk/first_camp.html

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<http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/1001/a-founders.html>

B.-P.'s Experimental Camp on Brownsea Island

<http://www.usscouts.org/usscouts/history/brownsea.asp>

Baden-Powell Farewell Letter to Scouts

<http://www.thescoutingpages.org.uk/message.html>

Aids to Scoutmastership

<http://www.gryfensee.ch/books/aids-to-scoutmastership.pdf>

Further Reading:

Boer War:

The Great Boer War by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Goodbye Dolly Gray by Rayne Kruger

The Boer War by Thomas Pakenham

The beginning of Scouting:

The First Ten Years

<http://www.thedump.scoutscan.com/first10yrs.pdf>

Scouting for Boys

<http://www.thedump.scoutscan.com/s4b.html>

Baden-Powell – Two Lives of a Hero by William (Green Bar Bill) Hillcourt

Scouting with a Neckerchief

<http://www.pinetreeweb.com/neckerchief.htm>

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