

What Are Cub Scouts?

Publication of Robert Baden-Powell's 'Scouting for Boys' in 1908 was the signal for boys all over Britain, and soon all round the world, to form themselves into Scout Troops and, under adult Leaders, to put into practice the training methods recommended in that best-selling book.

Baden-Powell's intention was that Scouting should be for boys between the ages of 11 and 18. But younger boys, seeing the fun and adventure older brothers and friends were having as Scouts, began asking to join in too. Many a sympathetic Scoutmaster turned a blind eye to the rule about minimum age of admission and thousands of these youngsters did, in fact, become Troop members.

However, the physical development and interests of boys differ considerably over and under the age of 11 and Baden-Powell appreciated that training must therefore be designed on quite separate and distinctive lines although being complementary to each other.

(Note: The terms Scoutmaster and Cubmaster, which appear later, are no longer in use. The present day equivalents are Scout Leader and Cub Scout Leader).

Junior Scouts

In announcing, in 1914, his plans for 'Junior Scouts' to cater for boys under 11 years old, B.-P. said:

"It will meet the view of a large number of Scoutmasters who have been anxious to take boys under 11 years of age; it will

open a number of elementary schools to Scouting; it will give a groundwork of Scout knowledge to boys before becoming Scouts such as will help to raise the standards of efficiency while reducing the instructional work of the Scoutmaster. It will bring boys under Scout discipline at an earlier and more receptive age."

The Jungle Book

Baden-Powell at once set to work on a handbook for the guidance of the new young Section. In this task he had the collaboration of Rudyard Kipling, author of 'The Jungle Book', who had already shown his interest in the Scout Movement by writing books for it.

B.-P. could see in the stories in 'The Jungle Book' an ideal basis for character training. The stories encouraged an interest in nature and outdoor activities, appealed to boys' love of romance and adventure and the characters had a strict code of behaviour and loyalty, fair play and clean living which could well serve as a pattern for real life.

Accordingly, 'The Jungle Book' provided the background and the new handbook, published in 1916, supplied the plan of action. It was entitled 'The Wolf Cubs Handbook' following the 'Junior Scout' Section changing its name to 'Wolf Cubs' in that year. Demand for 'The Wolf Cubs Handbook' was phenomenal and the first edition was quickly sold out. The Wolf Cub Section was an immediate success and this

is all the more remarkable since it was launched whilst the country was embroiled in a devastating war.

On June 24, 1916, the first Conference of Cubmasters was held at the Headquarters of what was then The Boy Scouts Association in Victoria Street, London. The Chief Scout and Lady Baden-Powell attended together with some 80 Leaders, men and women being represented in roughly equal numbers.

The practical experience of Wolf Cub activities which these Leaders brought to the Conference was of immense value in establishing principles and general recommendations for the future development of the Section which, at the time, had a membership in Britain of between 6,000 and 10,000.

Wolf Cubs

In December 1916, in London's Caxton Hall, a large audience attended the first public demonstration 'to inaugurate the Wolf Cub organisation and a Junior Branch of the Boy Scout Movement'.

'Cubbing' went on growing in popularity. Its activities and proficiency tests went on developing and, when the first Official Census was taken in September 1917, membership in Britain had risen to 28,450 - with thousands more overseas.

At the First World Jamboree, held in Olympia, London in 1920, Wolf Cubs had a place of their own. They gave demonstrations daily of the 'Grand Howl', games, handicrafts, dancing, tumbling and other activities. 500 of them were quartered in a special camp at Shepherds Bush. What has attracted young people to join the Cubs in ever increasing numbers? The short answer is that it appeals to

their natural instincts for fun and adventure. But there are other things.

The active, predominantly outdoor life offers something quite different from what the boys might do in school or even at home. There are opportunities to develop physical and practical skills, to investigate new hobbies and find new interests. There is the sense of 'belonging', of being able to share with friends of the same age and in all kinds of constructive activities, including giving help and service to the local community.

These appeals have endured with the passing of the years but the conditions in which young people grow up have changed a great deal in the meantime as a result of great social, economic and environmental development. Scouting has had to adapt constantly in response.

Cub Scouts

In 1966, as a result of the Advance Party Report commissioned by the then Chief Scout, the late Lord Charles Maclean, the Scout Movement in Britain introduced a number of sweeping changes in preparation for meeting its foreseeable needs in the years ahead. These changes affected Wolf Cubs in common with all other Sections.

Amongst other things, their name changed to Cub Scouts. Cubmasters became Cub Scout Leaders. 'The Jungle Book' continues to give the newcomer an introductory background of Scouting but has now less emphasis as they progress as a Cub Scout. New proficiency schemes have been introduced and many programmes have taken on a fresh appearance.

The Cub Scout Law and Promise have been revised and, today when a Cub Scout is invested, they must repeat the commitment as follows:

The Law: Cub Scouts always do their best, think of others before themselves and do a good turn every day.

The Promise: I Promise that I will do my best to do my duty to God and The Queen, to help other people and to keep the Cub Scout Law.

By coincidence, 1966 was also the Cub Scouts Golden Jubilee Year and, to celebrate, they launched a National Good Turn in which, by collecting silver paper, they were able to donate enough money to buy 23 Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Since then, Cub Scouts have rallied enthusiastically behind countless local and national appeals - from buying trees for public gardens to providing hospital equipment. As a change from raising money, they also make things. Bird boxes for an old people's home or knitted blankets for overseas relief, for instance. They get fun out of it all and, in the process, they learn personal responsibility and to be mindful of the needs of others. And that, in essence, is what Scouting is all about.

1991 was a very important year for Cub Scouting. As well as a new modernised Cub Scout Programme based on 'Challenge & Adventure' being introduced, it was the 75th anniversary of Cub Scouting, when the Section celebrated by raising

£125,000 for the RNIB. It was also the year that girls could join the Cub Scouts.

In 1994 a Cub Scout Road Safety Activity badge was launched which became the most awarded programme badge. The influence of this badge on road safety was recognised by award of the premier award of The Prince Michael Road Safety awards for the year.

In 1996 a series of special events and activities were held to commemorate the 80th birthday including contacting over 700 Cub Scout Packs in New Zealand and Australia.

So over eighty years on, the magic is still as strong as ever. In the 1997 Census, there were 202,018 Cub Scouts (8 - 10½ year olds) in Britain, and there could be many thousands more but for the lack of sufficient adult Leaders in certain areas.

Where men and women will offer themselves as Leaders, there is nothing to suggest that young people will ever tire of Cub Scouting and this augurs well for the future. Because, by being a Cub Scout, a young person sets out on a journey full of adventure, interest and activity which, taken together, will help prepare them to be a responsible member of adult society.