

Scouts

The Scout Section is the heart of the Scout family. Scouts are boys and girls aged between 10½ and 14. In the 1997 census there were 132,326 Scouts.

For several years following the Movement's foundation in 1907, there were only Scouts. At that time the Section catered for the 11-18 year age range.

The other Sections did not come into being until the Wolf Cubs for younger boys were formed in 1914 and Senior Scouts for young men in 1917. The titles of both these Sections have changed in the meantime. But the Scout Section has been there from the start and, what is more, the principles of its structure and organisation have changed little over the years in spite of the updating of actual activities.

What is particular about the Scout Section is its own creation because therein lie the foundations of the whole Movement. It happened after Sir William Smith, founder of the Boys' Brigade, persuaded Robert Baden-Powell to develop a training scheme which would be attractive to members in the Brigade and other youth organisations. Baden-Powell tested his ideas at an experimental camp on Brownsea Island in 1907, the success of which led to his explaining his methods in 'Scouting for boys' which was serialised in fortnightly parts the following year.

The appeal of 'Scouting for Boys' exceeded all expectations and its readership extended far beyond the established youth organisations for which it was originally intended. All over the country boys seized upon Baden-Powell's ideas and formed themselves into Scout Patrols. They found adult Leaders (Scoutmasters, as they were then called) to give guidance and training assistance. Patrols amalgamated to form Scout Troops and so a new Movement was created and has continued to grow ever since.

The Patrol System

The Patrol System, borne out of Baden-Powell's imagination and given substance by boys (and now girls) themselves is really no more than the 'gang' instinct directed towards socially constructive ends but it is fundamental to the Scout training method. Each Scout Troop consists of small units of six to eight Scouts, one of whom is a Patrol Leader who shares with the adult Leader responsibility for maintaining standards and training other Patrol members. Together, all Patrol Leaders in a Troop form a Patrol Leaders' Council which takes the acceptance of responsibility a stage further to cover some aspects of the functioning of the Troop, planning activities and monitoring Members' progress.

Activities

Outdoor activities feature prominently in the Scout Troop. The highlight, for most Members, is the annual summer camp or expedition and much of the rest of the year is devoted to preparation for this. Even in winter there may be Patrol hikes or short weekend camps. Map reading, camp cooking, first aid and other skills can be practised at

any time of the year. Often there may be adventurous activities like rock climbing or pioneering and orienteering where Members gain experience in the use of equipment.

Also important to training are community projects which had their origin in the 'Scout's Good Turn' - a simple means proposed by Baden-Powell for encouraging Members to think of others and to look out for opportunities to help those in need. Today this might mean joining a local conservation scheme, fund raising for charity, or being entirely involved in some local community activity.

Because the age span in the Section, 10½ to 14 years, takes a youngster virtually from childhood to the threshold of adulthood, with all the involved physical and psychological changes of adolescence, the task of providing a training programme to meet every need is considerably harder than in any of the other Sections.

One answer has been to broaden considerably the choice of activities on offer. Today it may be possible for Scouts to take up electronics, amateur radio, computing, car mechanics and other pursuits with a technological content in addition to the traditional outdoor activities. Cultural activities are also encouraged so as to provide a balanced programme for personal development for the purpose of making an individual contribution into the community. Scouts want ACTION, they want to be DOING THINGS. The Programme aims to answer both needs.

As it was in the beginning, the Scout Troop remains the fulcrum of the Movement because it takes the youngster from having everything thought out and planned for them to the time when they can think, make decisions and act on their own behalf. When functioning at its best, it becomes a magnet for Cub Scouts and a springboard into the Venture Scouts. It trains young people to take on real responsibility for themselves and their activities.