

FIRST TROOPS



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It is impossible to say with certainty which was the first Scout Troop to be formed.

Lord Baden-Powell, Founder of the Scout and Guide Movements, gave the first training in his methods of Scouting to the 5th Dragoon Guards in 1897. They were the first to wear the Scout Badge, based on the North point of the compass. Two years later, at the Siege of Mafeking in 1899, a corps of boys was formed to help in the besieged town. It was through their examples that B.-P. was able to see that boys could accept and carry out efficiently any task providing they were given responsibility.

Returning in 1901 from the war in South Africa, he found that his book, 'Aids to Scouting', was being used by youth organisations all over England. The book had originally been written for soldiers. Urged on by Sir William Smith, Founder of the Boys' Brigade, B.-P. decided to rewrite it with an intended readership of young boys. Before doing so, however, he wanted to try out some of his ideas and it was with this in mind that he brought together 20 boys at a camp on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Dorset, during the first week of August, 1907.

Having tried out his ideas, B.-P. set about writing his handbook, and the first issue of 'Scouting for Boys' went on sale in January 1908. It was published in fortnightly parts and, even at 4d a copy, its sales were terrific. Soon Scout Patrols, as suggested in 'Scouting for Boys', were emerging all over the country. In April of the same year, a special office had to be set up to deal with the large number of enquiries coming in concerning Scouting. Sixteen months after 'Scouting for Boys' appeared for the first time, B.-P. gave up his Army career to look after the Movement - Boy Scouts (to become just 'Scouts' in May 1967). A stupendous start, but we still have not arrived at the 'first' Troop.

The following extract from 'Twenty-one Years of Scouting' by Mrs E.K. Wade, for many years Secretary to the Chief Scout, records the first Troop that B.-P. visited:

"The question as to which was actually the first Troop of Scouts to be formed - excluding, of course, the Brownsea Island Troop - is one which has often been raised in the Movement.

"I should not like to say definitely that this honour belongs to any Troop, though many have claimed it.

"The first Troop, however, which the Chief Scout notes in his diary as having been inspected by himself was at Sunderland. On February 22, 1908, he notes in his diary: 'Inspected Boy Scouts at Sunderland'. This Troop became known as 'Vaux's Own', after its co-Founder.

"If this Troop was ready for inspection on February 22, one would infer that it had already been in existence for some days at any rate: and the present Scoutmaster of Vaux's Own had kindly supplied the following notes based on his personal investigations.

"In February 1908 Lt. Gen. Baden-Powell discussed his early dream of the formation of the Boy Scout Movement with Col. Ernest Vaux, with whom he was staying at his residence at Grindon, near Sunderland.

"Colonel Vaux drew the General's attention to work amongst boys already carried out by the Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors Club and induced him to pay us a visit.

"This visit was the beginning of our Scouts in Sunderland. Members of the Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors Club at first enrolled to be 'made into Scouts' under the Superintendent of this Agency, Mr Jas A. Smith.

"Col. Vaux secured the services of Captain W. Webb and Mr Fred Wood. These gentlemen came down every week to train the boys in Scouting. This went on with great success."

"At this time in their training it was very difficult for these poor boys to attend regularly owing to the sale of their papers etc.

"The philanthropic mind of Colonel Vaux soon overrode this difficulty. He agreed to pay for all the returns these boys had after 7 o'clock so that they could take up their training. This went on under the able instructors mentioned until May, when a month's camp was held at Grindon, under the charge of Captain Pearce, who brought twelve boys from other districts.

"Our local boys were given the name of 'Peewit Patrol' and were supplied with a uniform from Headquarters who also paid them five shillings per week.

"The London boys were called 'Kangaroo Patrol' and wore football outfits when they met at this camp. Immediately they saw the smart appearance of the 'Peewits' they straightaway adopted the same uniform and were fitted out from Headquarters during this month's camp.

"Whilst this camp was in progress, Major King (then Captain) was introduced to this camp, who together with Colonel Vaux, in September, commenced the wholesale enrolment of boys at Messrs. Vaux's Brewery where accommodation was placed at their disposal. This was known as the Town Troop and consisted of about 300 boys. This number, it was realised, was too many to handle and was split up into various Troops, as they are now known.

"Major King resigned his Commissionership in 1925 after 17 years, and in his retiring speech he outlined the beginning of the Scout Movement in this district. He touched upon the Grindon camp, stating: 'This initial and experimental camp was, in effect, the birthplace of the whole Movement, a fact which Wearsiders may not generally appreciate. Sir Robert Baden-Powell was heartened and encouraged to proceed with the organisation, and soon after the formation of the Sunderland Scouts, similar organisations sprang up all over the country.

The first official Troop, pointed out Major King, in the Imperial and therefore the Sunderland records, is the Lambton Street Troop (Vaux's Own).

Another 'first Troop' to vie for the title was the 1st Glasgow which has in its possession a registration certificate dated January 26, 1908, and was founded by Mr Robert Young.

In another entry in his diary, the Chief mentions that, on February 4, 1908, he arranged for the

starting of three Scout Troops in Nottingham - under Mr Hemmingway of the YMCA - so the Nottingham Scouts ran the Sunderland and Glasgow ones pretty closely in the matter of 'firstness'.

The Hampstead Troop, known as 'The Firsts' was another Troop very early in the field and they, with their Scout Leader Captain Colbron Pearce, took part, with the 1st SW London Troop, in the first inter-Troop competition to be held. This took place on Wimbledon Common in May 1908 and involved competitions in cooking, tent-pitching, fire-lighting and tree-felling.

The Scout Leader of the 1st Hampstead then went on to tour in the provinces with his demonstration Patrol, the Kangaroos. They went first to Sunderland where they took part in the camp alluded to in the notes of the current Scoutmaster of Vaux's Own.

Later they went to Barnstaple and Westward Ho! and claim to be the first Scouts to appear in the west of England.

These factors all prove how difficult it is to say exactly which was the first Troop to be formed. The spectacular growth of Scouting from a handful of boys at that first camp on Brownsea Island in 1907, to a world Membership of around 25 million in a phenomenon unequalled in world history. The Movement has grown so fast that only minutes could have separated the first Troops.

Here is a list of Troops and Groups who claim to have started in 1908:

1st Birkenhead (YMCA)
8th Stockport (with a break from 31.3.48 to 30.6.49 - date of resignation)
8th Southport
1st Henley-on-Thames
1st Newport (The Old Guard)
1st Parkstone (Lady B.-P.'s Own)
1st Reading (YMCA)
1st Nottingham (YMCA)
6th Eccles (1st Worsley)
1st Hunts (Hartford)
1st Wolverton
1st Cheadle Hulme
1st SW Leeds (St. Luke's)
3rd Epping Forest South
11th North London (1st Stoke Newington)
151st North London (1st Bounds Green)
3rd Sunderland (Vaux's Own)
1st SW Herts (Countess of Clarendon's Own, Watford)
3rd Portobello (St. James' Church)
1st Don & Dearne (Goldthorpe)
1st Bishops Latimer (107th Birmingham Central)
13th Lanarkshire (1st Larkhall)
1st Arundel (Earl of Arundel's Own)
2nd Kensington
2ns SW Leeds (Wortley Parish Church)
3rd Grimsby
2nd Bristol (1st Ashton)
1st North Devon (Barnstaple)
1st New Cross (The Greys)
1st Colchester
1st Jarrow (St. Pauls)
1st Romsey
1st Croydon
1st Streatham Common
1st Hednesford
5th Wolverhampton
1st Weybridge (Brookland's Own)
3rd Glasgow (Waverley)
1st Hirst (Ashington, Northumberland)
1st Rochdale (St. James)
1st South Lambeth (Blackstaves, West Norwood Brotherhood)
89th Lanarkshire (1st Coatbridge, Garturk)
1st Toxteth (8th Liverpool, YMCA)
3rd Wallasey (Emmanuel)

1st Hanwell (St. Mary)
Duckworth Street Congregational
1st Chiswick
2nd Chesterfield
1st Hythe
90th Lanarkshire (2nd Coatbridge)
6th Lanarkshire (1st Carluke, St. John's)
1st Isleworth
1st Stirlingshire
1st Dereham
1st Shanklin (Isle of Wight)
4th Woking (Christchurch)
3rd Fulham
1st Wigan
1st East Putney
1st Cleethorpes
1st Westcliffe (Essex)
1st Market Harborough
9th Edinburgh
1st Buxton
1st Plymouth
1st Islington
2nd Islington
3rd Islington
4th Islington
5th Islington.
12th North London
23rd North London
1st City of London
20th/28th Paddington
1st Malvern Link (1908). Hereford/Malvern County.