

History of Girl Guiding

In the early years of the 20th century, Robert Baden-Powell, a famous army general, developed a scheme for training boys. He tried out his ideas at a camp on Brownsea Island in 1907 and the following year published them in a book, *Scouting for Boys*. The book was an instant success and boys throughout the UK enthusiastically took up Scouting. As a result, Baden-Powell soon found himself organising the Boy Scout Movement.

At the Scouts' first rally, at the Crystal Palace in 1909, a small group of girls turned up. They represented hundreds of other girls and insisted that they wanted to be Scouts too. In an age when skirts were ankle length and young ladies never ran, the idea of girls being involved in camping, hiking and similar activities received a mixed response. Angry critics denounced 'girl scouting' as a 'mischievous new development', a 'foolish and pernicious movement' and an 'idiotic sport'.

However, Baden-Powell's letters from this time show that he had a scheme for girls in mind. In 1910 he formed the Girl Guides, asking his sister Agnes to look after the new organisation. A few years later his wife Olave became involved and, in 1918, was appointed Chief Guide.

Such was the enthusiasm for guiding that it soon spread worldwide and since those early days countless millions have made the Guide Promise. Today there are ten million girls and women involved in guiding worldwide.



What's in a name?

The pioneers who turned up at the 1909 Crystal Palace rally called themselves Girl Scouts, but when he founded the girls' movement, Baden-Powell decided that the name should change.

This was partly because he thought it would antagonise the boys for whom Scouting had been developed and alienate parents, who would not welcome such a tomboyish image for their daughters. But mostly he wanted to create a separate identity for the girls so that they could work for self-development independently, not in imitation of their brothers.

Baden-Powell had to think of a name, and soon he remembered that he had been particularly impressed with some 'Guides' in India. These men had operated on the north-west frontier and their main task was to go on very dangerous expeditions. Even when they were off duty the Guides were still training their minds and bodies. With this in mind, Baden-Powell decided that 'Girl Guides' would be a good name for these pioneering young women.

