

Baden-Powell and the Scout Movement



The foundation of the movement lies in the South African Boer war (1899 – 1902) and especially in the siege of Mafeking. The commanding officer of the garrison in the town was Colonel Robert Baden-Powell. The British forces faced far superior numbers and to assist his troops he mobilised the boys of the town into a mobile cadet force. The town survived a siege of 217 days before relief arrived and his cadet force proved to be a valuable asset to defences. On his return the UK Baden-Powell was acclaimed a national hero. He wrote a book outlining his training methods for the cadet corps entitled " Aids to Scouting " and this became a best seller and an influential resource for teachers and other youth organisations.

A few years later Baden Powell was introduced to the American author Ernest Thompson Seton who had written another influential manual "The Birchbark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians". The two men combined their ideas on youth training programmes and in 1907 Baden-Powell rewrote his earlier book for younger readers. In order to put his ideas into practice Baden-Powell arranged a camp for 28 boys on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Dorset, England. As part of the exercise he selected his recruits from very mixed backgrounds.

The camp proved BP's theories and his re-written book was published in January 1908 as a part work under the title of "Scouting for Boys". The book was immediate success and the Scout movement was born. It developed rapidly in the UK as boys formed troops of their own after reading BP's ideas. The movement soon spread overseas and developed other sections Wolf Cubs (for the younger boy), Sea Scouts, Air Scouts and later Rover Scouts for the 20 to 26 year olds. Girl Guides, an allied movement for girls, was also introduced. The Scout movement is now the largest uniformed youth movement in the world with over 28 million members in 216 countries.

More information on history, current organisation, aims and activities of the Scout movement in the United Kingdom can be found at www.scouts.org.uk