

Scouting and the 'Koodoo' horn



How many of us know that the Kudu's horns had a significant place in the story of scouting? That BP had one and used it often during the early years. You may think there is a misprint in the title of this story, but that is the way B.P. himself spelt the word Kudu.

As a colonel in Southern Africa during 1896, Baden-Powell commanded a flying column in the Matabele Campaign. It was on a raid down the Shangani River (in present day Zimbabwe) that he first heard the kudu horn. He had been puzzled by the speed with which alarms were spread amongst the Matabeles, until one day he realized that they were using a war horn of great carrying power.



During this campaign BP led his men through the Somabula Forest which BP described as "an easy place to lose your way in, and an unpleasant one on account of want of water". It was a dark, creepy and foreboding place. As they were withdrawing from the forest, Baden Powell noticed, with his keen eye, a beautiful big curled horn of a kudu lying by a tree stump. He picked it up and took it with him. BP kept the horn and soon could blow it well. It was a reminder of the tough time he and his men had in the Somabula forest in Africa.

When BP had his first Scout camp on Brownsea Island he didn't take a whistle or a bugle to camp. No, he took the Matabele War Horn, and blew that to call the boys together and to signal to them.

At the very first Scoutmasters' Training Camp held by BP at Gilwell Park in England from the 8th of September 1919 BP again brought out the Kudu Horn to use throughout the camp.

BP used it on so many occasions, but one was an unforgettable experience. It was at the Opening of the 3rd World Jamboree at Arrowe Park in July 1929. BP had brought the now well known Kudu Horn with him. At the exact moment he raised it to blow a signal to start the huge parade of Scouts moving in front of the platform, he was so overcome with both joy and excitement, that he couldn't get his lips to work and just a 'puff' of air came through the Horn! None the less, that 'silent signal' did start the whole parade and Scouts from almost all the Nations of the World marched past their Chief with flags flying. It took nearly an hour for all the Contingents to pass by, so you can imagine the wonderful emotion that welled up in the heart of BP.



That same Kudu Horn can be seen in the small but very comprehensive Museum at Gilwell Park in Surrey, England. And in the same room on the mantelshelf of the fireplace, lies a second Kudu horn with a brass plate on it and the inscription: 'From the Boy Scouts of South Africa. 15th World Jamboree, Canada. August 1983'. A number of Troops throughout the World still use the Kudu horn to start or end their meetings, and also use it at camp, just as BP did.

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