

Coloured Scouting History - Western Cape



Scouting among the Coloured community began when Troops were formed under the auspices of the Pathfinder Council of the Cape Division in 1934. The first Coloured Troop was the 1st Cape Town Pathfinder Troop (Silver Tree) and they were invested on the 16th September 1933 in the grounds of Hope Lodge School in Roeland Street. Scouting spread rapidly in the community and the Coloured Boy Scouts Association was formed on the 12th January, 1945.

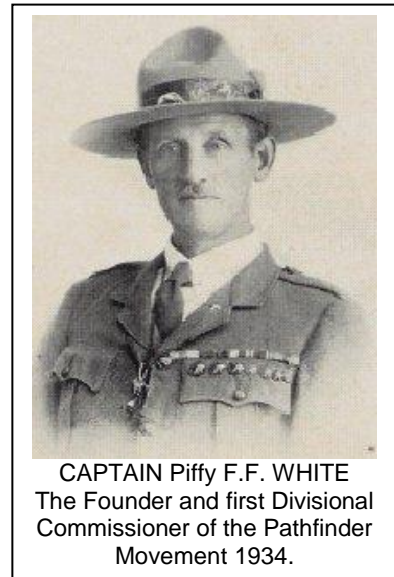


The Cape Western Division, which originally wore as a divisional emblem the Dassie of the Cape Pathfinders, was with the forming of the Coloured Boy Scouts Association changed to a Bokmakierie bird, while the National Symbol was an Arrowhead used in addition to the Scout Fleur-de-lis.

Heading up the Coloured Boy Scout Association was The Chief Scouts Commissioner, and the Chief Scout of South Africa held this position for all four parallel (Coloured, Black, White and Indian) Scouting Divisions.

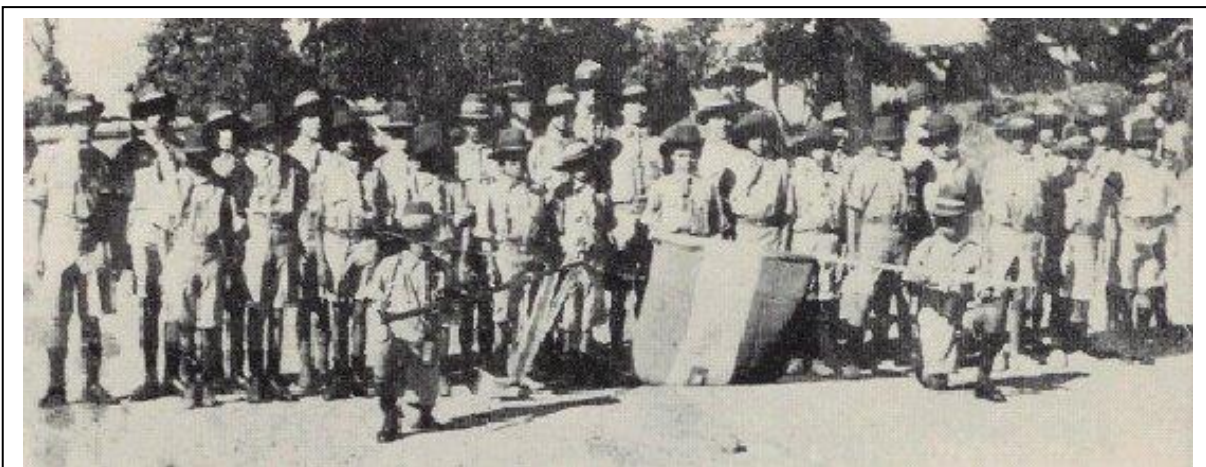
Initially Scouter training was provided by the Training Team of the European Division and in 1949 the first two Coloured Scouters qualified for all three parts of the Scout Wood Badge. In 1952 this Training Team ran the first Scout Course solely for the Coloured Division. Later the Cape Division had its own team for the training of Scouters and owned a fine training ground, 'Gilray', near Cape Town.

The Divisional HQ of the Association was in an old building in Caledon Street in the city - but unfortunately the building burnt down and many of the records of the Association were lost. The then Divisional Secretary Winston Adams recalls that for the next two years and more he worked from home - his parents telephone was the official phone of the Association. Later they were able to secure an office in a building in Athlone and then launched a campaign to build our own Scout Headquarters.



CAPTAIN Piffy F.F. WHITE
The Founder and first Divisional
Commissioner of the Pathfinder
Movement 1934.

The Athlone Scout Centre was built between 1975 and 1978 and in 1977 the Quo Vadis initiative brought about a unified Scout movement in South Africa. The centre was officially opened in 1978 when the first National Scout Council of the four combined Associations was held in the Athlone Scout Centre with Colin Inglis as the new Chief Scout of the united South African Scout Association.



1st Invested Coloured Group 1st Cape Town (Silvertree) on 16 September 1933
Thomas Paries Assistant District Commissioner on the Cape Flats is back row 2nd from left .
(The full size photo can be found in our Heritage Center)

BEGINNINGS WE HONOUR TODAY

From: Celebrating 40 years of Coloured Scouting 1934 to 1974

It is a happy thought to remember that the Boy Scout Movement has its roots in South Africa. It is in fact one of the happier results of the Anglo-Boer War. As a movement which has no language barriers it could still be the force which joins our disunited peoples.

Warfare has undergone a complete change since the beginning of this century and an accepted tactical procedure of the period was the siege. The Siege of Mafeking was one of these. A Corps of boy messengers was brought into being by Lord Edward Cecil, to convey messages around the town.



Johannes Moolman the only Coloured Scout ever to receive the Cornwell Scout Badge in 1934. It was granted him for high character, great courage and endurance. Severely crippled in his back, he was nevertheless an exceptional Scout at the Maitland Cottage Home in Garden Village. The presentation was made by Skipper Charles Thebus, by the Divisional Commissioner Captain White, accompanied by the Girl Guide Commissioner Miss Earp-Jones.

Robert Baden-Powell, as we know, was in command of the beleaguered town, and the success of the boy messengers was the seed which first brought a vision to his mind. A seed which germinated and burgeoned into the world-wide movement, the Boy Scouts.

Although purists claim that the Movement did not start at Brownsea Island where Baden-Powell organised a boys' camp in 1907, as the Founder had no intention that this camp should develop into an organisation, it was here that practical Scouting had its origin.

Influenced by his Colonel, Sir Russell Baker, in later campaigns which took him to many parts of the world, B-P taught young soldiers the craft of Scouting. One of B-P's main tenets was

that small groups of men operate under their own leader as the unit for instruction and games. This of course led to the Patrol System, an integral part of Boy Scouting. His handbook 'Aids to Scouting' was originally directed to young infantrymen, but was soon being used by Youth Groups.

Because of this unexpected turn of events B-P decided to write a book directed at these organisations. Having discussed his ideas thoroughly, and acquainted himself with the ideas and methods of other youth leaders, he set to work.

The year 1906 saw the crystallisation of his ideas on paper. Initially it was meant for the founder of the Boys' Brigade, William Smith. The practical culmination of these ideas was the Brownsea Island Camp.

'Scouting for Boys' first reached the public in six fortnightly parts. The response was immediate. Patrols were started all over the country. One saw lads awaiting each instalment with the same avidity as the modern youth waits for the next instalment of his favourite radio serial.

There was by now a definite call from the youth as a result of this publication for an organised Movement. To quote from an old issue of the 'Cape Western Scouter' - "The smoke of Brownsea had crept around the world."

Nobody remembers the name of the Scout whose assistance to a fog-bound American in London led to the movement reaching the USA. The Scout's refusal of a reward as he regarded his action as his

Good Turn made such an impression on the visitor, that he sought more information about the Movement and so emerged the Boy Scouts of America. Although his name is unknown, he is remembered by a memorial at Gilwell, the Training Centre for Scouts in the south of England.

The USA was not, however, the second country with an organised Scouting Movement. For some reason which I have been unable to trace, the second country with Scouting was Chile in South-America.

B-P's ideas spread like a veld-fire, and in distant Cape Town some school-boys, one of whom is still active, who had become avid readers of 'Scouting for Boys' wrote to the author for advice on establishing Patrols. B-P must have been receiving many similar letters at the time, but he replied in a letter twenty-seven pages long. Scouting had come back to South Africa where its Founder had had his dream.

The path has been found. A path which for many years provided training in citizenship, entertainment and upliftment for many. One of these original members of the Pathfinder Movement of the South African Boy Scouts' Association is still an active Scout.

Thomas J Paries was in the first Patrol of Pathfinders. Today he still makes his presence felt in the Cape Western Division. Indeed a venerable gentlemen who joined the movement on the 15th March, 1933 and was invested on the 17th June of the same year as a member of the 1st Cape Town Troop, his Scouting history can be said to be that of the Cape Western Division.

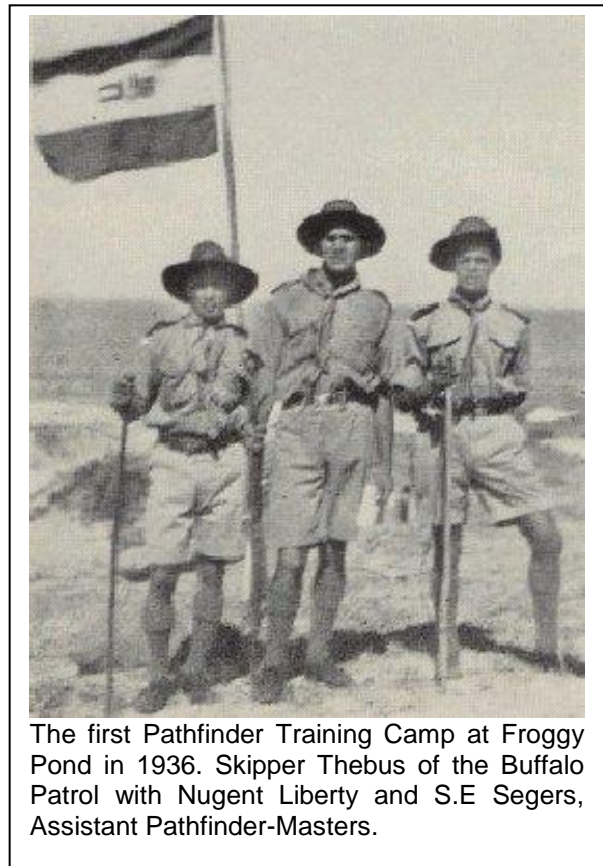
He was a member of the Silvertree Boys' Club and regularly paid his weekly subscription of one Penny. Proudly he had indicated on his application form that Scouting was the form of activity he most wished to enjoy. The 15th March, 1933 could thus be said to have been the birthday of the Pathfinder Movement, forerunner to the Cape Western Division and although only formally registered in 1934, 1st Cape Town Pathfinders Group was born.

'Tom' Paries remembers receiving a booklet 'First steps in Scouting' and being instructed to delete the word SCOUT and replace it with the word PATHFINDER. Today there is no longer a Pathfinder Movement. Thomas Paries is a Scout just like every other member of this Movement.

Another man inextricably woven into the tapestry of Cape Western Scouting is Charles Thebus, 'Skipper' to all, who 'went home' in 1972, having spent the last years of a very full life as Warden of Gilray, the Cape Western Training Ground. This gentleman creditably represented his country at World Conferences and reached the rank of Chief Scout's Commissioner.

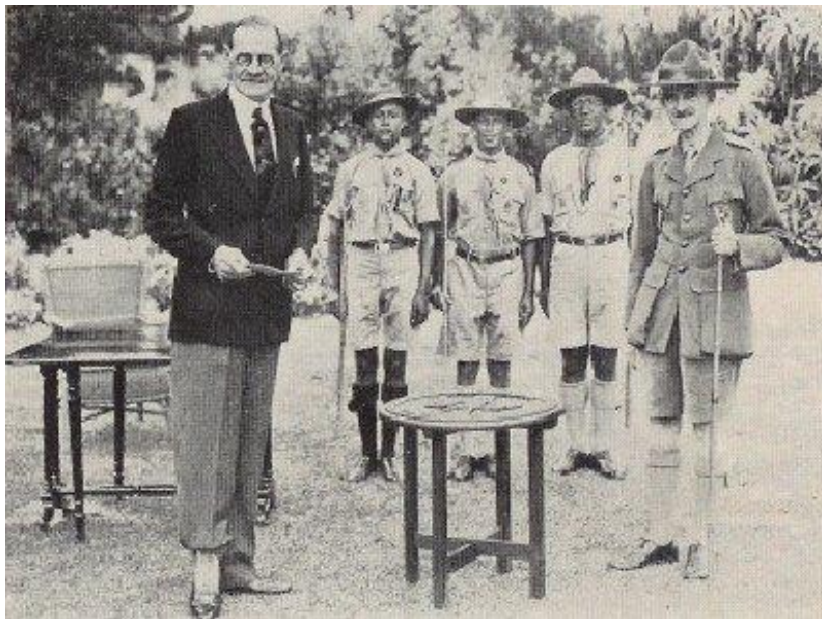
Charles Thebus's introduction to the Movement was at 79a Roeland Street, Cape Town where Thomas Paries had started a while before him. Charlie had been sent there to get ideas to start a boys' club and arrived at the Silvertree Club on a Pathfinder meeting night. He became so interested that through him the Movement reached the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. He was responsible for the formation of the Troop which is today our oldest existing Troop and one which this year celebrates its 40th Anniversary - 1st Wynberg. One of Skipper Thebus's original Scouts at 1st Wynberg was Norman Koff who until recently was Divisional Treasurer and who is still directly associated with the Movement.

Other pioneers of the Movement in our association were James Gallant, Alex Philander (Jakala),



The first Pathfinder Training Camp at Froggy Pond in 1936. Skipper Thebus of the Buffalo Patrol with Nugent Liberty and S.E Segers, Assistant Pathfinder-Masters.

Gerard Hermans, Arthur Williams, Jack Allies - the first Chief Scout's Commissioner in our Association - and 'Attie' Arthur Pietersen who took Scouting to the country areas and established the first Troop at Paarl. Martin Lewis was in the 1st Paarl Troop and is today the Assistant Divisional Commissioner for the Country Areas.



The Gov-Gen and Chief Scout of SA – the Earl of Clerendon – receiving a farewell gift in the grounds of Groote Schuur in 1937, from the Divisional Commissioner, Rev, Councillor S.J. Fort, who was accompanied by Norman Koff, founder member of 1st Wynberg Troop, District Scoutmaster Charles Thebus and Arthur Pietersen who was District Scoutmaster for Paarl and the man who took Scouting to the Country Areas.

We cannot say that Cape Western Division has reached its peak. When one has scaled a peak, there is always another, higher one, but when one has reached the highest peak, only one direction remains, downwards to a plateau. Why cannot all heights be like our Table Mountain where, reaching the summit, one is left with a vast stretch to be explored?

Our strongest growth point has strangely enough never been urban. Our present development is at its most forceful in the country areas. This is the hinterland that will bring us the most fruitful return. The earlier years of the division proved this. One could claim that rural enthusiasm has waned, but every movement has

its period of doldrums and this we must accept. Fair winds always await a becalmed craft.

In this year 1974 of Jubilee we think both ahead and back. May the mistakes of the past be pointers to a glowing future. Today we have a uniform enrolment of two thousand members besides hundreds of parents and supporters. The Division stretches as far as the Worcester District which has three Troops including one at Montagu. Once there existed a 9th Cape Town, but with the movement of families from the various environs of the city, there is only one small group left in Cape Town. The Cape Flats teems with a latent Scouting' population of thousands. The appointment of a full-time Field Commissioner in the Western Cape is imperative, but this demands money. We can but hope that the fervour of existing Troops be infectious.

All South African Boy Scouts are organised in the same way in the various Associations and the same scheme of work is followed. The former Chief Scout, Carveth Geach, introduced the 'Think Link' scheme. Members of the Movement had to realise that on an International level of communication all Scouts were brothers. No one was an island entire to himself. Members had to remember to keep this essential dictum before them.

To start this a youth conference - Pitso - was called in the Transvaal. Boys from all Associations were invited and highly successful discussions were held by African, Coloured, Indian and White Scouts. This proved a spur to the meeting of the Youth Presidium, a similar conference held by the Cape Western Division at Gilray, our Training Camp.

A very important part of the work carried on, with far too little publicity, is that among handicapped Scouts. There are two Districts where these Groups exist. At the Maitland Cottage Home for cripples, the yeoman service of Mrs Connolly cannot be praised too highly. A member of the 1st Claremont Parents' Committee, she was awarded the Medal of Merit for organising Scouting at this home single-

handed for many years. Scouts from the 1st Wynberg Group now run the Troop at the Home. There is also a Troop at the St Joseph's Cripple Home in Philippi in the Northern Suburbs which is doing well under Scouter David Trout. There is also a stable Troop at Klaasjagersberg, a Government Institution for boys from broken homes. This Troop points the way for the future. In the artificial social surroundings created at such institutions, much can be done to assist its members to become good normal citizens when they rejoin normal surroundings at their discharge from the Institution. The dedication of Scouter Connie Petersen in this new challenge is what has made this venture so successful.

Association with other organisations is encouraged. The Red Cross Society has been of great assistance to the Movement. They have provided lecturers and examiners in First Aid. With their expertise, they have kept the Boy Scouts abreast with their knowledge of new methods of approach and treatment. Work with the sister organisation the Girl Guides of South Africa led to the first-ever Guide-Scout Camp. This was such a success that there has been a call for more such combined activity.

The Church Lads' Brigade is another organisation with whom Cape Western has links. Not only does the Church Lad Brigade very often provide the music for Scout parades, but Scout Leaders are often called in to help Church Lad Brigade members with camp-craft, etc.



Present and Past Chief Scout's Commissioners Skipper [Charles Thebus](#), who rose to the highest rank of Chief Scout's Commissioner, with his successor (on right) [Aaron Domingo](#) and a former Chief Scout Colonel Johnston (centre) in 1968.



1972 Thomas Paries (Founder Member), [Alex Philander](#) (Div Comm), Sophia Oliver (ADC Athlone) and Joseph Manual (DC Athlone)

Sea Scouting is gaining popularity and links with the Sea Scout training sections at Sandvlei already exist. This year of celebration should strengthen these links. The Commissioners attached to Sandvlei have run courses at Gilray and practical Sea Scouting facilities have been shared at the Sandvlei Base.

Today, 40 years on, we can all stand proud as we honour our beginnings, achievements and great leaders who have paved the way for Coloured Scouting to grow and flourish in the Western Cape.