

# A History of the Western Cape Scout Band, 1975 - 1999

Synonymous with the growth of Scouting in Cape Town in 1908 was the number of Troops that had Bands, reaching 20 in 1913.

The Band, formed in 1975, gave many boys the opportunity to play an instrument, to have an interest in music and to show the public another aspect of Scouting. Over 250 Scouts have been members of the Band during the years and this, together with their normal weekly Scouting showed their dedication to the Band.



During the Band's 24 years of existence [Alan Shinton](#) was its major driving force. Together with [Atom Airth](#) they travelled thousands of kilometres around South Africa playing at over 350 engagements on many memorable occasions including tours to Outeniqua, Natal, Transvaal and Namibia.

In 1999 due to the lack of new recruits it was reluctantly decided to close down the Area Scout Band.

The following is a synopsis of the Band's history, but detailed records of the engagements and awards etc. are available in the Scout Archives.

**1975** - The idea of forming a band was discussed by Peter Daniels, a Scouter from Parow and Alan Shinton in March 1975. The concept was put to the Divisional Commissioner, Mr C J Inglis who gave his support to the idea. A proposal was prepared and presented to the Executive Committee who agreed, providing that no finance was required from Headquarters.

With this challenge the two instigators took stock of the project - no instruments, no money and no boys. At least it gave them a base to work from - things could not get any worse. Reaction from members of the Movement was varied as to the idea of starting the band - waste of time - good idea - some ridicule but encouragement enough to go ahead with its scheme.

Their first fund-raiser in October 1975 was a Band Concert by the S.A. Navy Band which enabled them to open their own bank account. Fund raising for instruments continued, though they were fortunate to be given some redundant equipment from 'General Botha'.

**1976** - In February the first practice took place and was held at the then Scout Headquarters in Bree Street. To keep everyone informed the newsletter 'The Bugle' was started.

The first Scout Band Camp was held on a farm near Paarl in April and the purpose of the camp was to weld the Band into a team and to provide some concentrated practice on the various instruments. The buglers and drummer's were split into two groups under instructors, and then later came together for marching and playing.

On Sunday afternoon, with parents present and band resplendent in Scout uniform with gleaming instruments, the display commenced. The parents were astonished with the standard of the performance which was encouraging for the boys who had put a great deal of effort into their roles.

The first Passing-Out Parade of the Band took place at the Headquarters of 1st Pinelands on Sunday afternoon of the 25th July 1976. With instruments old and new, the bandsmen in their now familiar uniforms performed for the parents and invited guests. This was the climax after months of planning and dedication, in fact the band was really "*On Parade*". The band at this time was 25 strong including instructors.



1st Annual (Passing-Out) Parade of the Scout Divisional Band

The Bandsmen belonged to ten different Troops and gave a display after which the Divisional Chairman, Mr Clifford Harris presented the Drum Major with his sash. Following a break for refreshments, the band re-formed to enable photographs to be taken and another display - by popular request.

Before the year's end the Band had played at 5 functions - Cub Fun Day, Navy Concert, Gilcape Day, Athletics and a District Cub Day.

**1977** - Over the years the Band played at most of the Scout events like BP Sunday, Awards Ceremony, Cub Fun Day, Kontiki and various competitions and also at a number of non Scouting events.

**1978** - During the year the band performed on 22 occasions and helped to show Scouting to the general public on these occasions.

The memorable event for the year was the **Scout Band tour of the Outeniqua District** during the September school holidays by seventeen members and two adults.

First stop was Riversdale where the Band paraded through the main street of the town. The next day they were taken to the Group Chairman's farm for a breakfast and a tour to see the livestock.

Then it was on to Mossel Bay where an afternoon trip on the Harbour Tug in glorious weather had been arranged. They stayed at the Scout Headquarters and that evening a display was given by the Band at a social evening in the HQ. On Saturday morning they visited the Voortrekker Museum at Hartenbos and made a tour of the lighthouse. During the afternoon the Band played at a local Gymkhana.

On Sunday they moved on to George and settled in at the Scout Headquarters and held a Scouts Own. In the afternoon an 18km hike was undertaken to the Big Tree situated along the old road to Knysna. At the end of the Hike they had a cook-out under the trees. Monday they climbed up George Peak, unfortunately clouds covered the top of George Peak, so they turned back after completing about three-quarters of the climb.

Next stop was Oudtshoorn and the Cango Caves where, after a conducted tour, they played in the huge Van Zyl Cavern. That night they bedded down in the local Scout Hall. The next day they visited the Safari Ostrich Park and later paraded round an Oudtshoorn shopping Centre.

On Thursday they travelled to Beaufort West to hear that snow was falling. The parade down the main street was well received and soon afterwards they changed into warm clothing, and up into the mountains to see the snow. A braai of local Karoo chops was thoroughly enjoyed in the evening. The following day they returned to Cape Town.

**1979** - For the Band the highlight of the year was the Annual Parade and Prize Giving. This year over 100 parents and friends gathered in the courtyard of Cape Town Castle for the event which included a Drum Head Service.



Annual Parade - Cape Town Castle

The Band, resplendent in full uniform, marched from the outer yard through the Kat Gateway and paraded round the courtyard. The drums were then formed up for the service which was conducted by Mr Allan Fraser, a Scouter from Kenridge. Mr Fraser delivered a most inspiring address.

**1980** - During the 1980's the premier camping site for Scouts in the Western Cape was Gilcape in Eerste River and it was here that the Band held a winter training camp.

**1981** - The big event for the year was the **Scout Band tour to Natal**. The party consisted of 55 boys, a few from CW 9 and the Band plus eight Scouters.

They overnighted in Bloemfontein and the following morning headed for the Drakensberg and Mont-aux-Sources.

Tom Smyth, the Hikemaster, soon had them on the trails with hikes both challenging and enjoyable, the Seniors slept overnight in the mountains and the younger Scouts undertook two day hikes. The hiking in this area was spectacular with mountains so different from the Cape.



The Band gave a display to the campers on site and the next day they visited the Howick Falls.

Nest stop was Pietermaritzburg where they visited the 1st Scoutholm HQ. It was here that King's Scout; C J Inglis, (the then Chief Scout) spent his early Scouting days. The Band performed in the City centre, watched by the lunch-time crowds. Then on to Westville for two days of home hospitality.

On Saturday afternoon the Band played at the "Natal Area Cook-out" and on Sunday evening at a campfire-Scouts Own the Area Commissioner for Natal, Mr D Forde, gave a thought-provoking yarn.

Monday was spent on two organised tours to a local sugar mill and to the Anti-Shark unit HQ. In the evening they played host to their hosts. A campfire was held, hot chocolate and biscuits together with pancakes cooked by the Scouts were served. Each hostess was presented with a Certificate of Thanks for looking after us and a plaque was presented to the District Commissioner, thanking Westville for all they had done for us.

Next stop was Port St Johns with their base camp at Second Beach. The next day sunshine awaited them when they awoke and campers quickly had their stoves on, cooking their breakfast.

The hiking trails were soon under the boot as the various groups got under way.

The hike along this unspoilt coastline was most enjoyable



In Umtata the Band had a lunch time engagement and played to a large crowd in the gardens of the Town Hall. Overnight accommodation was arranged for us at Gilwood, East London the Border Area training ground. A six o'clock reveille, breakfast and into the town centre where the Band paraded through the shopping area. Then on to Grahamstown where the Band played in the Settlers Memorial Centre..

In Port Elizabeth the Band played on the lawns at Kings Beach then on to George where they bedded down in George Scout Hall.

Arriving back in Cape Town they had travelled over 4 000 Km.

The 1981 5th Annual Parade and Service was held in December at the Cape Town Civic Centre on the Piazza. Parents and friends were seated by the time the Band commenced its marching display.

The Drumhead Service followed, led by Blackie Dyer (S.M. 1st Ottery). Alderman and Mrs Ferry were their civic guests who deputised for the Mayor of Cape Town.

A new cup was presented by Mrs C Truscott. This cup would be given annually to the best bugler. The inspection of the band followed and the parade closed with a band display.



The Band in front of the Cape Town Civic Centre

**1982** and **1983** were fairly routine and in **1984** apart from the normal Scouting events they played for the Milnerton Carnival, Camps Bay School fete and the Edgemoed Carnival.

**1985** - A noteworthy event was the celebration around the Centenary of the Founding of Mafikeng. A 'Flame of Friendship' came from BP House in London by sea en route to Mafeking. The Band played as the Flame came ashore, and again at the church service. The Band also played at the three shows of the Scout Tattoo.

The Annual Parade was held in December at the South African Merchant Navy Academy, General Botha with nearly 100 parents and friends attending this year's parade which was held in the courtyard area.. The march past then took place, this being a milestone in the Band's history to reach its *150th engagement* on such an auspicious occasion.

**1986** - This year was another milestone in the Band's history - *its 10th birthday*. This event was celebrated by three events, a Cheese & Wine evening for the old boys, a formal dinner and a Band Parade at the 1st Pinelands HQ to commemorate where the Band first went public in 1975.

The Band played at 16 engagements during the year and was delighted to be invited to play at the Cape Cadet Band Championships as a guest Band. The total number of engagements performed by the Band to date was 168.

**1987** - This could well be classed the most exciting year the Band experienced.

- It entered its second decade.
- By the end of the year the Band had completed its 200th engagement.
- An ambitious 16-day tour of the Transvaal performing in 11 towns which means the Band had been seen and heard in 38 towns around the country.
- The year ended with a short tour to George to celebrate the Group's 75th anniversary.
- The Band gave a record number of performances during the year including those given on the tour. The total was 33.

Craig Driver, Richard Schmidt and Anthony Solombela brought up to 38 the number Bandsman who have gained their Springbok Scout Award.

The 1987 **Band tour of the Transvaal** started on 25 June 1987 and after 16 fine sunny days ended on 11 July 1987. The coach travelled nearly 6 000 km while visiting Kimberley, Mafikeng, Sun City, Johannesburg, Nelspruit, White River, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Graaff Reinet and George.

The Band performed in most of these towns they visited and was well received wherever it played and complimented on the smartness and high standard. The Scouting folk who they met during the tour were most helpful and kind and interested in their Band, and they made many new friends.

Most of the places they visited were new to them and the Eastern Transvaal was a pleasant surprise. The Scouting side of the tour included a boating day on Florida Lake, sightseeing in the Kruger Park, hiking on the 47 km Gold Nugget Trail at Barberton and they were the first Scouts to hike on the newest hiking trail in South Africa, the Kaapschoop Trail in the Berlin forestry area.

The Band had memories of an exciting tour. The Mine Museum in Kimberley - the visit to Mafikeng with its Scouting connections - a day at Sun City - early morning jogging around Florida Lake with frost on the ground - the wild life they saw in natural surroundings and the pleasure they got on their hikes with the beautiful Lowveld as a back-drop.

The meetings they had with the Mayors of towns they visited to hand over greetings from the Mayor of Cape Town and the excitement of performing in new surroundings. The 06h00 breakfasts - the late night braais and the companionship they shared throughout the tour - the laughter, will all be part of their memories for years to come.

The 11th Annual Parade was held at General Botha where the Band then gave a polished display which was enthusiastically received by the guests.



The 1987 Annual Parade at General Botha

**1988** - Two 80th Anniversary parades were held one for 1st Observatory and the other for 1st Riversdale. A parade down Franschoek main street celebrated the Huguenot 300th celebrations and November saw the Band at the opening of the 1st Edgemoed Headquarters.

**1989** - The Band played at 13 engagements during the year both for the Movement and for private occasions. The 1st quarter saw the Band playing in Rondebosch Park for the Girl Guides 'Splish splash' sports day and at the Edgemoed High School fete and another 80th anniversary this time for 1st Bellville.

**1990** - This year was a momentous year for the Band for two reasons. Firstly it was the 15th Anniversary since the Band's formation in 1975 and secondly the Band undertook its fourth tour, this time to Namibia.

The Band undertook 19 Engagements during the year, 10 of which were during the Namibia Tour.

The objectives of the **Namibia Scout Band Tour** were to promote Scouting to the public in Namibia and they made contact with many friendly people and the Band were first class ambassadors of South African Scouting.



Parading down Swakopmund Main Street

They left on 23 March 1990 and their first performance was in Keetmanshoop where the Band played on the lawns at the Town Hall.

The next two days were spent in and around Windhoek visiting historical places of interest, shopping sorties and the Gross Barmen resort. They also played for Scouters and supporters who were most impressed by the Band's performance.

Then followed three Parades:

- Okahandja and a Mayoral reception where they were well received and the civic head was most interested in the Band and Scouting generally and hoped that Scouting could start in the town in the future.
- Swakopmund where the mayor was an ex Queen's Scout and was pleased to relate his Scouting experience of years past. They stayed at the local Scout HQ.
- Walvis Bay for a parade round the town and yet another Mayoral reception with the Deputy Mayor who was delighted to have visitors from Cape Town.

A visit to Dune 7 where the Bandsmen climbed the highest sand dune in the world.

Windhoek was the last big parade and included a meeting with the Mayor. That evening, on their return they packed for their journey home.

In Keetmanshoop they played at their last official function. They met the mayor who gave them lunch and welcomed them to the 'capital' of the South. They handed over their last official Letter of Goodwill from the Mayor of Cape Town Alderman Gordon Oliver.

On to the Fish River Canyon where they stayed their last night of the tour at Ai Ais where they slept under the stars in tranquil surroundings. The tour really ended when they marched from the Namibian Border Post across the Orange River to the south African side - they really played themselves out - a fantastic 11 days.

**1991** - The Band's *250th engagement* was the Founder's Day parade at the Cape Town Civic Centre. Some of the other events during the year were Cub Fun Day at Maynardville, the National 'Pow-Wow', the Join-in-Jamboree and even at the Tygerberg Zoo.

**1992** - The year had difficult periods which were overcome and was a reasonably successful year for the Band. Due to a lack of Instructors and a lack of commitment by some Bandsmen they did not make the progress hoped for. Due to a number of Bandsmen leaving during the year, they ended 1992 with only 20 Bandsmen.

The Band played at 12 functions including at the Cape Town Museum for the Cape Town Festival and the usual Scouting events. They were complimented on the performances wherever they played.

**1993** - It was said that since the Bands formation it had travelled over 30 000 kms, undertaken four major tours and played in nearly 50 towns in Southern Africa.



The Band in December 1993 paraded along the Sea Point promenade

The Band played at the Pinelands Blue School fete, made their debut at the Waterfront and at the launching of 'Rotary Scout'. An exhibition was held at Area HQ, Bree St Cape Town in August to show the various aspects connected with the history of the Band. The 17th Annual Parade was held on Sunday 5 December 1993 at the 1st Monte Vista Scout Hall.

**1994** - The *300th engagement* was reached when the Band played at the Area Awards ceremony at the Cape Town Civic Centre on the 2nd March.

**1995** - The Band played at the Farewell to the Jamboree Contingent and at the Scout Awareness day on 9 December in Sea Point. The 19th Annual Parade was held on Sunday 12 November 1995 at the SAS Unitie Cape Town Docks.

**1996** - The year started off with 30 Bandsmen and 7 instructors and Alan handed over the reins of Bandmaster to Atom (Anthony Airth). The Band was 21 years old and to celebrate this a formal dinner was held in November and was attended by 50 past and present members. The Band undertook 7 engagements.

**1997** - The Band played at the Area Awards and Founders day services and Tafelberg School. The 21th Annual Parade was held on a very hot Sunday 30 November 1997 this time at the Area Headquarters Bree Street Cape Town.

**1998** - This was the Area Scout Band's "23rd Birthday" and during that time it had played at 335 engagements and over 200 boys had marched along during this time.

The Band like any Troop, has its highs and lows and it went down to only 15 members, they needed some new recruits to strengthen the team but all efforts to recruit new members failed.

To ease the travelling for members, the Band moved to an LA Hall on Liesbeeck Parkway, Mowbray and then relocated again to the 1st Claremont Scout Group.

*At the end of October 1999 after 24 years, 350 engagements, and 250 bandsmen passing through it's ranks, it was reluctantly decided to close down the Area Scout Band.*

### **The Drum and Fife Scout Band**

In October 1998 a meeting took place between Scouters, Parents and the boys whereupon it was decided to go ahead with a new section of the Band.

This second band was to be a Drum and Fife Band and would meet at Monte Vista Scout and Guide Hall. The Band met regularly and had their Inaugural Parade on Sunday 31 October 1999.

Based on documentation available the last Annual Parade was held on Sunday 11 February 2001 and at this parade the Band thanked Atom Airth for his long a loyal service to the Band and bid him farewell as he was emigrating to Scotland.



Monte Vista Drum and Fife Scout Band

The last official engagement seems to have been the opening of the Area Museum on 25 November 2001.

*Regrettably the Drum and Fife Scout Band also closed down.*



Very little has been found in the Scout archives regarding Scout bands from the very early days of Scouting in the Western Cape even though many troops did have bands.

Neither was the writer able to find much on bands from the Coloured Division as many of their records were lost in a fire.

The picture on the left shows some of the action during the 1976 annual "Scout Week" programme organised by Cape Western Coloured Division. In the photograph the 2nd Claremont Group's Scout Band leads the march, after the Scout's Own Service in St George's Cathedral.

*Western Cape Scout Heritage*  
2014

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