

IMPROVING THE SCOUT HUT



There are five reservoirs on Table Mountain, and when the first two had been built in the last century, a village for the workers was set up. Most of the huts had been of wood and corrugated iron, and only the stone foundations remained, but some of those of stone construction had survived; the Water Overseer had one, the MCSA another, and the Scout Mountain Club one nearby.

The Scout hut was a haven in bad weather; it had bunks for eighteen boys of varying lengths, tables and forms, cupboards and lamps. We often ended up there, since we could always meet someone we knew. There was always work to do too, and with my two Scoutmaster sons, Eric and Geoffrey, I was soon involved in various projects.

The latest plan was to install a fireplace, and we joined with others to construct the chimney, which, above the roof level was built of stone. We would go up the mountain in all weathers, often at night, work for several hours, and return home by early afternoon.

Later on, we were part of a team which built a little outhouse as a bathroom. It had a shower, washbasin, and a flush toilet connected to the septic tank at the Forestry labourer's cottage nearby. The work took several weeks, and although we used local stone, and the corrugated iron for the roof was brought up on the Ranger's truck, several quite large objects came up the Kasteels Poort path.

Fellow mountaineers must have observed the strange sight of us labouring up the rocky path bearing odd objects. The washbasin and toilet basin were carried balanced on someone's head, long plastic and copper pipes were somehow taken up, while many a sagging pack held a half-bag of cement.

The bathroom when finished was a boon! Scouts staying overnight could take a refreshing shower, and what rugged mountaineer can not admit to the convenient luxury of a flush toilet. Visitors from the nearby hut of the MCSA observed all this with envy, they were still using buckets!

In 1985 I retired, and having brought my house and garden up to a high state of attention, I had spare time for other things. So while my son, Eric, who was the Scoutmaster with 4th Kenwyn Troop, was on leave, I joined him in a project to install electric lighting at the Scout Mountain Club hut.

Eric's car was loaded with lots of tools and materials, and even an extending ladder. We obtained special permission to take the car up the winding jeep track from Constantia Nek, over the dam walls, and past the house of the water overseer to the Scout hut.



An armoured cable was laid with some difficulty through the rocky ground to the Forestry workers cottage, fifty metres away. It then went under the roof edge to the end, and finally through the wall to the switch board. The electricity supply, although 240 volts, was not on the mains, but came from a generator at the Ranger's house, and it was only on during the worker's off-duty hours.

So we placed two huge six volt batteries in a ventilated locker under the sink, these would power the low voltage lighting. The batteries would then be charged via a clever relay, whenever the Ranger started the generator. We spent two days on the job, living quite comfortably, even to watching TV at night on Eric's little portable set. We were at the same altitude as the transmitter on Constantiaberg, and had excellent reception.

Once again we an advantage over the Mountain Club of South Africa, which still relied on candles and oil lamps. Everyone who used the Scout hut thought it a great improvement. The lighting was brighter, and it stopped the boys' practice of writing names on the painted ceiling with candle smoke, eliminating the possible risk of burning down the hut.

Jack Pitter 24.10.2005

Written by Jack Pitter in a letter to Ben Greyling. Jack is about 90 years old (he taught Ben about hiking) and lives in England. Jack and Ben correspond regularly and Ben often puts Jacks adventure stories on the web. Jack says it gives him something to do. Here's something Jack wrote on the present SMC Hut, which may be of interest...