



News Article

## Scout Mountain Club (SMC) Hut Officially launched on Table Mountain

**Saturday 10 April 2010** saw 43 people travel up from Constantia Nek in perfect weather and gather on the 'Back Table' of Table Mountain, for the first official re-launch of the now newly re-vamped Scout Hut. In attendance were representatives from the National Parks Board, Cape City Council and South African Scout Association. It was an honour to have in attendance as well, Neville and Coleen Weller, the founding members of the Scout Mountain Club as it became known and established on 29 July 1951. Proceedings were officially opened at 3.30pm by Western Cape Provincial Commissioner Llewellyn van



Property Chairman Aussie Raad with Councilor Beverley Cortje-Alcock



Aarde outside the Hut, situated in close proximity to the Woodhead Reservoir.

Councillor Beverley Cortje-Alcock representing the Mayor, then expressed appreciation with praise as to what Scouting had achieved with opportunities being offered to our youth. Vice President Garnet De La Hunt of Scouting SA then highlighted historic milestones reached by the SMC and thanked all for their outstanding efforts. Claude Steenkamp representing Table Mountain National Park, concluded with book gifts

to guide Scouts in the study of nature for the Hut, where after the hut was officially declared open to all and refreshments served, with some spending the night on the mountain after the rest had made their way down again.

The Provincial Scout Association of Western Cape has just spent the last three months and almost R100 000 on revamping the entire hut back to it's former glory. The roof, ceiling, fireplace, bed bunks and entire floor were replaced, and a new 2 000 litre water tank added. The hut is extensively used by not only members of the South African Scout Association, but by many other youth organisations from here as well as abroad. The site and various routes up and down to and from the hut, offer many challenges, team building and adventures to youth and adults alike in becoming more aware of the outdoors, nature, respect for the environment and self discipline.



The Scout Hut on Table Mountain forms part of the history of the mountain, dating back to the period 1887 to 1907, when the 'Back Table' of the Mountain slowly became a village alive with activity, as construction took place on one of two mountain tunnels and five major dams

or reservoirs. These tunnels and reservoirs were to later supply the greater Cape Town and Wynberg areas with water, which to this day still do. All that now remains of this era are some railway tracks, the Woodhead Rangers House, cable car remnants, the SA Mountain Club Hut, Scout Mountain Club Hut and a museum housing other remnants near the Hely-Hutchinson Reservoir.



Andre Foot, Buzz Macey, Garnet de la Hunt, Neville & Coleen Weller (Founder SMC members), Prov Commissioner Llewellyn van Aarde

This was however not originally the Scout Hut. The original Scout Hut was given to the Scout Association by the Cape Town Municipality in 1941 and at that time stood in Diamond Valley (today known as Ash Valley). This came about after Sea Point Scouts volunteered their services at the Round House Hotel fire. The Municipal Forester saw the potential of having Scouts on the mountain assisting as lookouts for fires. At that time, the hut was basically a ruin of four walls.

From here on, regular enthusiastic work parties toiled up and down the mountain and on 2 January 1945, 49 people gathered for one of the greatest moments in Scout History as the Dommissie Hut, named after the then Divisional Commissioner of the Cape, was officially opened. This hut saw many visitors over the years, some spending a day while others spent days and nights in this vast silent wilderness.

However, although the hut was ideally situated and frequented regularly by many various Scout hiking parties, the site was extremely isolated. It was the type of place that when you arrived you were either lost, totally off course or stumbled upon it by a stroke of luck. It was not on the regular paths frequented by hikers, well off the beaten track, an ideal hidden site for Scouts, but then so also for vagrants to destroy without any interruption. After the start of the 1960's, vandalism of the hut and theft of equipment had reached such unbearable proportions, that Council was approached for another hut to use in place of the existing hut.



Thomas Schrick (3<sup>rd</sup> Pinelands & Hut Team) accepting the gift from Claude Steenkamp (National Parks)

Thus the existing hut was returned to Council in exchange for the present SMC Hut on Table Mountain in 1965. Once again it was an abandoned derelict building and the Scouts over the years set about restoring it back to its former glory. There was no official opening of this new hut obtained, from records it would appear that the swop was made without ceremony as with the first. Which is why Saturday marks another great moment in Scouting history with the final Official Launch of the present Scout Hut on Table Mountain, 65 years after the first.

Anyone interested in joining or getting involved with the South African Scout Association, should contact our Western Cape Provincial Headquarters, Milton Road, Goodwood, 021 591-6842/3 or visit our website <http://www.scouting.org.za/capewest> for more details.

Written up by Andre Foot - more pictures at <http://picasaweb.google.com/westcapescout>