

South Africa's First Scoutmaster Looks Back 40 Years.

Discipline of Boys Today Is Not What It Used To Be

"The Chief's idea was: You show me a boy who sees somebody wearing a Scout badge, and he fails to salute him, and I will tell you what sort of a troop he belongs to."

By

Headquarters Scout Commissioner W. ("BILL") BAKER



The late Chief Scout, Lord Baden-Powell, presenting the King's Flag to Mr Baker at Cape Town in 1912.

I can remember calling on Mr French, telling him to fill in the registration form for his troop, which we had decided to call the 1st Claremont; mine was the 2nd Claremont. He had a big snake in his pocket; he was always keen on them.

I had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to send the form in, and I had a job to make him sit down then and there and fill in the form.

Meanwhile, the 1st Observatory troop was registered as the 1st Cape Colony. Then came the Simonstown troop, with the present Mayor, Mr L. C. Gay, as a patrol leader. They were a fine crowd of lads—all dockyard apprentices. Next was the 1st Cape Town troop, which started in Annandale Street.

Both Mr French and I received our Scoutmasters warrants at the same time, and both had the same date, October 22nd, 1909. These were the first ever issued to any men in South Africa, and I still have mine, which I keep as a souvenir.

In those days people used to chivvy me and laugh when I went out with the boys. They called us the "broomstick warriors."

The second outing of my troop was a week-end hike, when we trekked along the flats to Strandfontein, slept the night there, and returned next day.

St. Patrick's Day. I wrote to Scout Headquarters in London telling them we had two troops formed at Cape Town, and they wrote back, asking me why not call my troop the First South Africa.

SCOUTING has been my one hobby since I took it up, and I have given up all my spare time to it. Even now, I am willing to have a cut at any work that our headquarters likes to give me. In my spare Saturday afternoons, I attend the meetings of the Air Scouts at Young's Field, Wynberg, and lend a hand.

At one time I was running three troops, at Muizenberg, Observatory and Claremont. Scoutmasters have always been hard to get.

Let me tell you how the movement really started in this country. It happened in Claremont, at the Cape, where I have all my life been connected with the Scouts.

A boys' paper was published in England called the Union Jack. Two boys in the Claremont Public School who took it regularly, read the articles about Scouting which Baden Powell had started to write, and they, with their friends, started to play at Scouting.

My boy Joe, and a couple of other fellows in the Feldhausen School at Claremont, asked if they could not be Scouts, too. So I became their Scoutmaster, and my friend, Mr George French, a schoolmaster at the Public School, became the leader of the other troop.

Both troops started on March 17th, 1908, which was



The writer, who, at 79, is probably the oldest Scout still actively serving the youth of South Africa. He is now helping with the newly-formed Air Scout troop at Wynberg.

That was the first of many outings, which were very popular with the Scouts, and provided good training. In the early days, there was more OUT in Scouting.

The first medals for life-saving were won in Easter, 1908. During that week-end, I had been out on a hike with my boys to Kommetjie. Some of my Scouts were at Fish Hoek. A boat was being beached by somebody who did not know how to do it. He got it broadside on the waves, and it turned over, pinning a man underneath.

The three Scouts who were watching the operations with all the usual boyish curiosity, saw what was happening,

nipped in and got the man out. I think these boys were named MacKenzie, Seaton and Blanckenberg. There was no recommending them for a medal, but they got it.

A report of the deed appeared in the newspapers, and must have caught the eye of the Governor-General. Lord Gladstone, who sent his aide-de-camp to get the particulars from me. I was acting secretary of the movement at the time, and enquired into it. The result was a Silver Medal award to each boy.

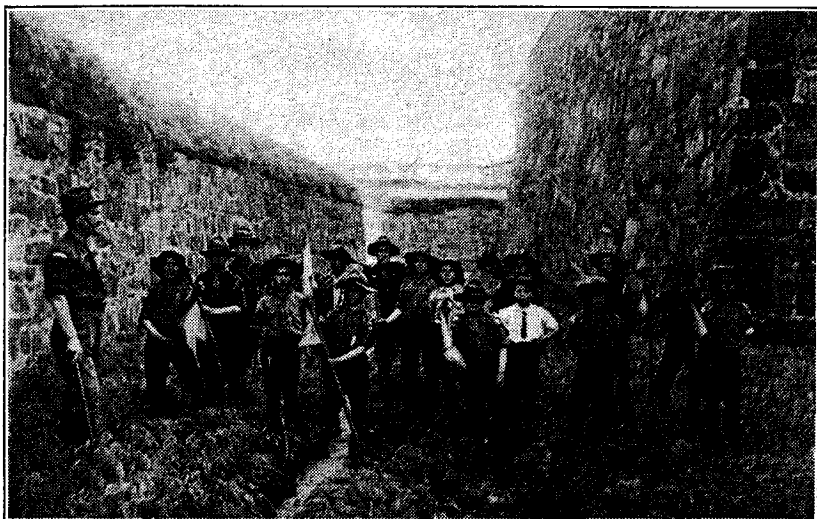
Very shortly afterwards, another Scout, Herman Wickens, saw a drunk man lying across the railway line, and managed to roll him off just in time before a train came along. He was awarded the Bronze Medal.

We must remember that the experimental camp on Brownsea Island was not the real date the Scout movement started. In England it began in February, 1908, and we started out here in the following month.

At first everything had to go to England for registration, but in 1911 we started registrations in Cape Town, for the Cape of Good Hope, and this was all done in my drawing-room at home, which was the Scout Headquarters. A number of warrants for troops still bear my signature.

In 1912 we opened an office in Castle Street, Cape Town, and I was made District Scoutmaster for Cape Town. The following year my title was Chief Scoutmaster of the Western District, Cape Province.

The year 1912 brings back memories of the first important occasion in Scouting. This was the year when Baden-Powell, (Continued on page 85)



The early days of Scouting at the Cape. The photograph was taken during a parade of Cape Town Scouts at the Castle.

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the founder of the movement, made his first inspection tour to South Africa after having retired from the Army and gone into Scouting as a full-time job.

But before telling you the excited things of the rally, you might like to hear something of my previous contacts with the Chief.

When I was a boy, we lived near the Castle, at the old military hospital. When Baden-Powell's servant took out his polo ponies for exercise, I would often ride one, and the servant mounted the other. I don't think Baden-Powell ever knew of this.

Later, when I was working on the construction of the telegraph line to Vryburg, I met him when he was going to Matabeleland.

But it was in 1912 when I first met him as Scout meets Scout. I went down to the boat. By then I had been awarded the Silver Wolf decoration, but had forgotten to put it on when I went to meet the Chief. When he greeted me, he took the Silver Wolf off his own neck and put it on to me. "That is your reward for organising Scouting in the Cape of Good Hope," he said, and after seeing something of the boys, stated that he could see we were carrying out the ideals of Scouting for Boys.

Major J. C. Hanna, R.A., was the first Commissioner for the Cape of Good Hope, and at the time was Adjutant of

the Cape Garrison Artillery. He went to the Rhodes Memorial at Mowbray, with the Chief Scout and others, but there was not a soul in sight.

Suddenly Major Hanna said: "Would you like to see some Scouts?" The Chief nodded. "Then blow your whistle," instructed the Major.

He did so. This was the signal for hundreds of boys who had stowed away in the forest. They broke ground and ran out from all directions for the Memorial. When they assembled, Baden-Powell addressed them, and inspected the King's Scouts and patrol leaders.

During this visit, the Chief Scout presented the King's Colours to me for South Africa. This flag was for the troop with the biggest percentage of King's Scouts. The Cape held it for three years, then the Bellevue Troop in the Transvaal had it. Eventually the flag was sent back to London.

During a lecture on Scouting, in the City Hall, Cape Town, I remember the Chief's tactful reply when a Coloured clergyman wanted to know if anything could be done for the Coloured boys. He said, "That is a matter for your local people here to deal with. I can only refer you to the Fourth Scout Law, but local conditions must govern."

Years later, Scouting was given to the Coloured boys, and

I gave them my support and assistance.

I next saw Baden-Powell at the Hyde Park rally in 1919, just before I returned to South Africa from war service. He invited me on to the rostrum and what a sight it was to look down on those Scouts. I was to meet him again in 1936 at the East London Jamboree, but the old Chief was too sick to say much to anyone then.

Nevertheless, my experiences there lead me to think that a South African Jamboree is something worth cultivating.

People often wonder how I got my Scout name of Umhlanga—pronounced Omslong-er. It was given to me by the Basuto boys who were in the contingent that went overseas with me in 1915. My O.C. asked me to take some of the Sub-Chiefs up Table Mountain to see the big river. They meant the sea.

I took them up, and we slept the night at the top of Skeleton Gorge. We were up at daybreak, and I took them over the ridge. All the quorks and clicking were to be heard, when they gasped in amazement at the big, wide river.

Next day, on parade, the interpreter I had kept using the word Umhlanga. I never knew what it was for. Afterwards I discovered it was my Native name.

Whether it is true or not, I cannot say. But I was told it meant, "The man from the mountain." So I kept it as my Scout name.

Among my happiest memories are of the combined Scout camps at the Woolwash, Paarl, where every year as many as 500 boys would be in camp. At one of the Easter camps, we sent a heliographed message from the Paarl Rock to the Castle on Easter Sunday morning. Within twenty min-

utes we had received a reply from General Thompson. He had been expecting something like this, but it was all done by the Scouts.

I was a Sergeant-Major when I took up Scout work. The training and discipline helped me a great deal. The discipline of the boys today is not a patch on what it used to be. The Chief's idea was: You show me a boy who sees somebody wearing a Scout badge, and he fails to salute him, and I will tell you what sort of a troop he belongs to.

Very often now I salute a boy first, and I only get a grin from him.

When the late Sir Patrick Duncan was appointed Governor-General, and was made Chief Scout for South Africa, I had the honour of investing him as a Scout, so that he could lead the Promise at the Coronation Day Parade of Scouts.

This was a surprise to me, because Dr Domisse should have done it. He, however, asked Sir Patrick if the oldest Scouter in the country could do it. He agreed, and he put me at ease straight away.

Now I am in my seventy-ninth year, and have served young South Africans through Scouting for forty years. My biggest regret is to see so many fellows who have got so much out of Scouting, and have never come back to put anything into it.



Mr Baker as he was in 1911. He is wearing the Silver Wolf badge.

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