



The Birth of Scouting

Scouting's history really goes back to the turn of the century with a British Army officer, Robert S. S. Baden-Powell. While stationed in India, Baden-Powell found that his men didn't know basic first aid or outdoor survival skills. They couldn't follow a trail, tell directions, read danger signs, or find food and water. In 1896, Baden-Powell drew upon his background as an army scout to write a small military handbook *Aids to Scouting*. He hoped to teach his men resourcefulness, adaptability and the leadership qualities demanded by frontier conditions.

Baden-Powell became world famous during the South African Boer War in 1899. He held the small town of Mafeking during a 217 day siege. The enemy force was estimated to be ten times the size of his defending garrison. He returned to London a national hero and was promoted to Lieutenant General. In many of the news stories of the day, he was referred to as B-P, short for Baden-Powell. This abbreviation was widely used in public and private references to him for the rest of his life.



When B-P returned to England, he found that his little handbook had captured the imagination of English boys and was widely read. In August of 1907, he began a test of an idea that had been growing in his mind for years. He gathered 22 boys from all parts of England. Some were from exclusive schools, others from the slums, shops or farms. He took them to Brownsea Island in a sheltered bay off England's southern coast. Along the shore they set-up a camp which was their home for the next 12 days.

The boys had a great time! They were organized into patrols. They played games, took hikes, cooked without utensils, learned stalking and pioneering skills. In the evenings, around the magic of a campfire, they were spellbound by B-P's stories of his army adventures. Scouting had begun in earnest and was destined to spread around the world.

After the Brownsea camp, B-P rewrote his earlier handbook and called it *Scouting for Boys*. He incorporated many ideas from two American programs for boys: The Woodcraft Indians, and The Sons of Daniel Boone. Scouting for Boys was first published as a five-part series of magazine articles. People liked the series so well that it was published as a book in 1908. B-P also published a booklet for Scoutmasters and a weekly magazine for boys called "The Scout". That same year, 10,000 boys attended the first Scout gathering at the Crystal Palace!

SCOUTING COMES TO THE UNITED STATES

About the same time, the seeds of Scouting were growing in the United States. Our rich pioneering traditions had caused Indians and frontier heroes to be part of every boy's life. Some creative youth leaders saw an opportunity to develop qualities of independence and resourcefulness in boys, as well as skill in nature lore and outdoor activities.



On a farm in Connecticut, a naturalist and author named [Ernest Thompson Seton](#) was organizing a group of boys called the Woodcraft Indians. He sent Baden-Powell a copy of his book, *The Birchbark Roll of Woodcraft Indians*. In it, he told how American boys formed "tribes" of Woodcraft Indians, about the games they played, and the Indian lore they practiced.

In addition to Seton, another American was working to bring boys and the outdoors closer together. Daniel Carter Beard, an [artist](#) and writer, organized the Sons of Daniel Boone, which soon became the biggest boys' club in the United States. In many ways the two organizations were similar, but they had no connection with each other. And the boys who belonged had never heard of Baden-Powell or of Boy Scouts, and yet both groups were destined to become Boy Scouts one day soon.



The Unknown Scout



In 1909, a Chicago businessman and publisher, William D. Boyce, was lost in a London fog. As he groped his way through the fog, a boy appeared and offered to take him to his destination. When they arrived, the American reached in his pocket for a shilling tip. But the boy stopped him by courteously explaining that he was a Scout and could not accept payment for a Good Turn.

Intrigued, the publisher questioned the boy and learned more about Scouting. The boy took him to Baden-Powell's office, and once there, disappeared into the fog. No one knows what happened to him. He was never heard from again, but he will never be forgotten. At the Scout

Training Center at Gilwell Park, England, a statue of a buffalo was erected in honor of this "UNKNOWN SCOUT." His Good Turn is what brought Scouting to our country.

As Boyce interviewed Baden-Powell, he became captured by the dream. When he boarded the transatlantic steamer for home, he had a suitcase filled with information, uniforms and ideas.

The Early Years

And so, on February 8, 1910, Boyce incorporated the Boy Scouts of America. Shortly thereafter, a group of public-spirited citizens set up an organization. Seton became the first chief Scout of the Boy Scouts of America, and Beard was made the national commissioner.

A search began to find an executive officer. The man chosen was James E. West, a young Washington lawyer. He had a tragic boyhood. His father died before he was born, and his mother died when he was 7. He was sent to an orphan home where it was discovered that he had an incurable disease in one leg that made him physically impaired for life. In spite of his handicap, he put all his ambition, ability, and energy into becoming a lawyer. He succeeded and dedicated himself to helping all children, healthy, sick, or handicapped, to have a better life. He led the Boy Scouts of America for 32 years as the Chief Scout Executive. He was a strong, wise leader who helped build Scouting into the largest boy movement in the country and in the free world.



B-P came to the United States in September, 1910, to meet with all of BSA's early supporters. He would return many more times for Jamborees and other events -- always inspiring with his vision, enthusiasm, wisdom and stories.

The Boy Scouts of America received its first national charter from the Congress of the United States in 1916. President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt gave his support as a vice-president of BSA and Chief Scout Citizen.

Wolf Cubbing Begins

Back in England, Boy Scout troops were being bombarded by younger boys who were eager to become Boy Scouts. In 1914, Baden-Powell began experimenting with a program for younger boys, based on Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Book". In 1916, he made a public announcement of the Wolf Cub program, and since that time it has spread with very little change to other European countries.

How Cub Scouting Started



As early as 1920, The Boy Scouts of America, saw a need for a program for younger boys and their families. In 1925 Dr. Harold W. Hurt, a research psychologist and veteran Scouter working with Ernest Thompson Seton studied other clubs for younger boys. They recommended that the BSA adopt a program for younger boys, with older Boy Scouts as leaders, to tie into home, church, school, and Boy Scouting. In 1929, after four years of studying and planning, Cubbing (it wasn't called Cub Scouting until several years later) was taking shape. It was introduced as a demonstration project in a limited number of communities. Its structure was similar to today's Cub Scouting, except the dens were led by Boy Scout den chiefs. The plan included a neighborhood mother's committee to encourage Cubs and their den chiefs.

In 1930 Cub Scouting was formally launched. In 1933 all experimental restrictions were removed and the first national director of Cub Scouting was appointed. Cubs advanced from Bobcat (for all new members) to Wolf (age 9), Bear (age 10), and Lion (age 11), and joined the Boy Scout troop at age 12. In 1949 the age requirement was lowered to include boys from 8 to 10 years. In 1941 the Webelos rank was added. It was for the 11 year old boy who had completed his Lion badge and had also completed certain requirements for the Boy Scout Rank of Tenderfoot. The Webelos badge at the time looked like the Arrow of Light patch we know today. In 1986 the age requirement for Cub Scouts was lowered again to include second grade boys.

In 1967, the Lion rank was replaced by the Webelos Scout program. This was for the 10 year old Cub Scout and offered him a program with fifteen activity badges in a variety of areas such as geology, engineering and sports. The Webelos program pointed the Webelos Scout toward the Arrow of Light, Cub Scouting's highest award. The Webelos Scout program also better prepared the Webelos Scout for the transition to Boy Scouts.

The Tiger Cubs program was introduced in 1982 and is a program for first graders (or 7-year olds) who register with an adult partner who is at least 18 years old. The goal of the program was to bring the boy and his parent closer together by providing a program to allow quality time with the boy while sharing his experiences with others in his Tiger Group.

In 1985 BSA introduced an expanded program. Prior to this time, age had been the primary factor for determining a boy's eligibility to join. Starting in 1986, with a phase-in that lasted through 1991, grade

became the primary factor, with age as a backup requirement. This phase-in added the second year to the Webelos program and meant that a Scouting program is offered to all boys of grades 1 through 12. These changes also made it easier for boys to remain with the same peer group all through scouting.

The Chief Scout Says Farewell

Baden-Powell remained active in scouting throughout his life. B-P was knighted and created a baronet, Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell, in recognition of his vision and tireless efforts on behalf of Scouting. During his later life, he was revered as Chief Scout of the World. In 1938, heeding his doctor's advice, Baden-Powell and his family moved to Nyeri in Kenya. His health gradually lapsed, and on January 8, 1941, he died peacefully. Scouts of different races carried him to his final resting place in a small cemetery at Nyeri on the slopes of the Aberdares, facing Mount Kenya. Today, in Westminster Abbey, a tablet records his name, along with the names of the greatest Britons of all time, but his final resting place is marked with a simple headstone which bears his name and the Scout sign for "I have gone home."



After his death, [a letter was found in Baden-Powell's desk](#): a letter he had written to all Scouts. In it he said: "Try and leave this world a little better than you found it." These words are a fitting epitaph, for as he won the respect of the great by his strength, he won the hearts of youth by his own example.

The Movement begun by Baden-Powell now exists in almost every country in the world. From 22 boys camping on Brownsea Island in 1907, it has grown to more than 25 million members.