

## A Scout Remembers

### **(Memories of Tom Montgomery, one of the original 31<sup>st</sup> Scouts, penned by him at the time of the Group's Diamond Jubilee)**

Our first trek was not a very long one – to Cockburnhill Farm, Balerno. The trek cart was Scott the Grocer's delivery barrow. We had a smashing time, with visitors' day on the Wednesday; mothers, sisters, etc. coming up on Bryce's char-a-banc, which had solid tyres, and bringing good things to eat which compensated for salty porridge and burnt rice with prunes.

The old adage says "Self praise is no recommendation", but I was the oldest Scout agewise. Edwin Lucas had more service as he was with Bill Stevens before we started. I was patrol leader of the Beaver patrol with Mike McCaw as my second and I was the first to get my King's Scout Badge with all round cords. I think Jack Bruen also got his.

Summarising the highlights of my time with the 31<sup>st</sup> from memory, and they are extremely happy memories, they are as follows:

Our next camp was at St Boswells on the banks of the River Tweed. Although it was an experience, I haven't any vivid memories, except yanking a dead salmon of 20-30lbs out of the river and being scared of the water bailiffs, so put it back.

I then made a new trek cart for our next camp at Stoneypath, West Linton. This time it was a trek of some 22 miles, which was accomplished without mishap. It was a very exposed site, but good weather was with us.

During this time we were helping with church affairs and one very big day was when we paraded our colours for dedication, embroidered by the Women's Guild to Mrs Buchanan's design. Saint Margaret was the main theme. I think we paraded all three flags – the Union Flag, Troop colours and Scout Colours. I think that as I was the oldest I was given the honour of carrying the Troop colours. I certainly carried one of them.

Scout concerts were also becoming events in the village and one of the first had our own ideas of physical culture included. By this time J.A. Muirhead – JAM – had joined us and being an ex pt instructor in the Army, had us doing jiu-jitsu, boxing, etc. After one of my throws – I was small at this time – he landed with a bang at the front of the platform and his hand ran down the keyboard of the piano with a very effective but unrehearsed noise and frightening Mrs Fordyce (Jenny Bruce) out of her wits. Also Mike McCaw and Jimmy Mitchell gave a boxing exhibition. Jimmy unfortunately got a bloody nose, which the mothers didn't like, so this item was not repeated.

In 1929 the first World Jamboree was held at Arrow Park, Birkenhead and we were represented by a party of eight. It must have been eight, as we did an eightsome reel in the arena. We were taught to dance by the pipe major of the Highland Regiment stationed at Redford Barracks. About 50,000 Scouts from all over the world attended, as did Lord Baden Powell and King George V. It poured every day of the first week and the campsite became an absolute quagmire – so bad that we went about without shoes or stockings on. Happy days!

By this time our Rover Crew was formed and the 31<sup>st</sup> was probably at its strongest, as the Cub Pack was also in being led by Miss Clark of Woodhall Terrace and Miss Ritchie Montpelier of Baberton Avenue.

A Rover Moot was planned for Norway, but I'm sorry to say that our plans fell apart and we did not attend.

In 1930 our visit to Germany by some 28 of us Scouts and Rovers was our next highlight. We travelled from Leith to Hamburg by SS Weimar and returned on the SS Coblenz at the enormous cost of £8 (old money) each and "steerage". Memories of that trip – a rough crossing both ways. Going, I was the only one not seasick but very squeamish. On the return, three remained on their feet. Herr Otto Klint was our host and guide in Hamburg. I can't remember if he and the Rev. William Buchanan, who was a fighter pilot in the First World War, were known to each other or not, but he looked after us very well. We visited Lubeck on the Baltic and hiked through the Hartz Mountains using youth hostels, and experiencing the beginning of the Hitler Youth Movement.

I think it was the next year that Mike and I did a three week hike through the Highlands when, excluding climbing, we averaged 26 miles per day, with our biggest day from Glen Nevis to Laggan Bridge – some 44 miles. This was because a colleague of mine had, as I thought, done this walk, but was actually describing a much shorter hike. But, being pig-headed and, I am pleased to say, very fit we made it, but only just at 11pm after a 6am start. At this time Mike, Jimmy and I walked to Stoneypath via the Bore Stane and back by the Cauldstane Slap every weekend, almost without fail – every weekend April to October.

Once the Rover Crew got underway our contacts with the Scouts, the younger lads, grew less and our activities grew stronger. We acquired a cottage near the top of Belmont Avenue (now Juniper Avenue), near Anderson's blacksmith's shop. 'The Den' became the centre for the crew, which grew to about 28 strong. Edwin Lucas was quite an artist and painted a mural all the way round the Den, which made it appear as if you were in a wooded campsite. We had this place at a peppercorn rent, but to raise funds we used to make coconut tablet and sell it to friends. From memory, the experts at this were Johnny Armstrong, 'Tot' Scott, Tommy More and later Jacky Allison, but I am sure most of us had a go.

The Concert Party – that was the crew's service we would perform for any charity, hospital or anybody who needed help. We actually did one concert in Strathaven, Lanarkshire. The cast: comedian – Edwin Lucas; principal singers – Bob Fordyce and John Traill; leading ladies – Albert Bennett, Billy Tait and Tommy More; leading actors – Jack Bruen, Bill Dea and Alex Traill; chorus and small bit parts – 'Tot' Scott, Johnny Armstrong, Jim Armstrong, Jimmy Mitchell and Mike McCaw. I was stage manager and prop master. Sorry, the other names won't come to mind except of course one Mrs Fordyce (Jenny Bruce) who played the piano and helped with the musical side of things and always with a smile. We made all our scenery, portable footlights, etc. and even had a dimmer switch on the lights, but this became very dangerous when it began to boil, so it had to be abandoned. Oh, the number of times I took that portable platform from the manse stable, put it up, took it down and took it back to the stable. Happy days!

Our other distinction was that for a long time we were unbeatable in the McIllick Shield Competition Country Sports Trophy for five-a-side football, tug of war, running and jumping. The team just seemed to pick itself – football .....Scott, Monty, McCaw, Bennett and Mitchell; tug of war ..... The football squad plus the biggest of the others present; running sprints .....Albert Bennett; high and long jumps ..... Mike, Monty and Jimmy Mitchell; and the relay from that four. Bob Fordyce and 'Tot' Scott were trainers. Others who took part in some of the events were Edwin, Jack Potts, A. Trollop and Billy Tait.

Towards the end of my membership we acquired Graham the Builders yard, which was on the site of the present Scout hall. I did a little of the conversion but didn't see it completed as I moved away from the village and in 1937 suffered a very severe accident at work (nearly lost my left leg) and lost direct touch with the Troop. Although each time I was back in Edinburgh I did get some news of what was going on.

I remember that one of THE highlights of the year was the dances in the Church Hall, Dreghorn Loan, Colinton. These really were the tops. Assemble at 8.00pm sharp, sit down to a spread prepared by Mrs Dea, Mrs Traill and my mother in the lower hall; then dancing upstairs – ballroom, old time and Scottish country dancing until we went home with the milk. A buffet – ice cream, trifles, etc. opened at midnight and then we walked home.

Other names that come to mind are Duncan Campbell, Arthur McGuigan, George Brown, Harold Trollop, John Scott, Bill and Jimmy Blair, Harry Nesbit, Jacky Allison, John Orr, Jack Potts, Bill Traill, Clifford Fawkes and Alix Ferguson. Two more are Alex Stevens and Jim Stevens.