Lord Baden-Powell* of Gilwell, 1857—1941

Founder of the Scouting Movement
Chief Scout of the World

If you want to completely understand Scouting, you must know something about the man who founded the Scouting movement, a genuine outdoorsman — Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell, Chief Scout of the World, all affectionately known to Scouts as B-P.

Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell was born in London, England, on February 22, 1857, the day Americans celebrated the 125th birthday of George Washington. His father was the Reverend HG. Baden-Powell, professor at Oxford. His mother was the daughter of the British admiral W.T. Smyth. His great-grandfather, Joseph Brewer Smyth, was born in America, lived as a colonist in New Jersey, but as a loyalist returned to England. Baden-Powell was thus the descendant of a minister on one side and of an adventurous colonist on the other. (See Two Lives of a Hero by William Harcourt, pages 12-13.)

B-P as a Boy

When Robert was about 3 years old, his father died, leaving his mother with seven children under 14 years of age. There often were hard times for the large family, but the mutual love of the mother and her children always carried them through. Robert lived a glorious outdoor Life with his four brothers, hiking and camping in many parts of England.

In 1870 B-P entered Charterhouse School in London on a scholarship. He was not an outstanding scholar but he was the Liveliest — always in the thick of it when something was going on in the schoolyard. He soon became known for his ability as a goalkeeper on the Charterhouse soccer team. His flair for drama also was highly appreciated by his fellow students. Whenever called upon, lie would put on a performance that would have the whole school in stitches.

He also was musically inclined, and artistic. His gift for sketching made it possible for him in later years to illustrate his own writings.

B-P in India

At 19, B-P graduated from Charterhouse and immediately accepted a chance to go to India as a sublieutenant, to join the regiment that had formed the right of the cavalry line in the famous charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War.

Performing excellent military service, he was a captured the age of 26. He won the most desired sports trophy in all of India for ‘pig sticking’ (wild-boar hunting on horseback with a short lance as the only weapon). You can realize how dangerous this sport is when you know that the wild boar often is spoken of as “the only animal that dares to drink at the same water-hole with a tiger.”

Fighting in Africa

In 1887 B-P was in Africa taking part in the campaigns against the Zulus and later against the fierce tribes of Ashanti and Matabele warriors. The natives gave him the name Impessa, the “wolf-that-never-sleeps,” because of his courage, his scouting skills, and his tracking abilities.

Baden-Powell’s advancement in rank was almost automatic, so regularly did it occur, until suddenly he stepped into fame. It was the year 1899, and B-P had risen to the rank of colonel. Trouble was brewing in South Africa. The relations between the British and the government of the Transvaal Republic had reached the breaking point. Baden-Powell was directed to raise two battalions of mounted rifles and proceed to Mafeking, a town in the heart of South Africa. "Who holds Mafeking, holds the reins of South Africa," was a saying among the natives.

The Siege of Mafeking

War came, and for 217 days, from October 13, 1899, B-P held Mafeking in a siege against overwhelming numbers until relief forces finally fought their way to his aid on May 17, 1900.

Great Britain had been holding its breath through those long months. When the news finally came, “Mafeking has been relieved,” the British went mad with joy. Look up maffick in a dictionary and you will find that the

* When asked the correct pronunciation of his name, Lord Baden-Powell replied, "The first part rhymes with 'maiden,' and the second part rhymes with 'noel.'"
word was created from the name of that African town, and means "to celebrate with boisterous rejoicing."

B-P, having risen to the rank of major general, found himself a hero in the eyes of his compatriots.

Scouting Is Born

The hero returned to England from South Africa in 1901 to be showered with honors and to discover (to his amazement) that his personal popularity had created publicity for his book, Aids to Scouting, which he had written for army men. It was being used as a textbook in boys' schools.

B-P saw a great challenge in this. He realized that here was his opportunity to help the boys of his country grow into strong manhood. If a book for men on scouting practices could appeal to boys and inspire them, how much more inspiring would he a book written for the boys themselves?

He set to work adapting his experiences in India and Africa among the Zulus and other tribes. He gathered a special library of books and read about the training of boys through the ages, from Spartan boys, the ancient British, and American Indians, to his own day.

Slowly and carefully, B-P developed the Scouting idea. He wanted to be sure it would work, so in the summer of 1907 he took a group of twenty boys to Brownsea Island in the English Channel for the first Boy Scout camp the world had ever seen. The camp was a great success.

Scouting for Boys

In the early months of 1908, Baden-Powell brought out in six fortnightly parts his self-illustrated handbook for training, Scouting for Boys, never dreaming this book would set in motion a movement that was to affect boyhood around the world.

B-P second Life

The movement continued to grow and by 1910 had reached such proportions that B-P realized Scouting was to be his life's work. He had the vision and faith to recognize that he could do more for his country by training the rising generation to be good citizens than by training a few men for possible future fighting.

He resigned from the army where he had attained the rank of lieutenant general, and embarked upon his "second life," as he called it, his life of service to the world through Scouting. He reaped his reward in the growth of the Scouting movement and in the love and respect of boys around the globe.

Source: Scouting for Boys, World Brotherhood edition

Wood Badge Staff Guide, 1995

BADEN-POWLL, LORD (1857-1941), ROBERT STEPHENSON SMYTH BADEN-POWELL, founded the Boy Scout movement. His experiences as a soldier in the British Army convinced him that British boys needed more physical training and experience in outdoor life than they had been receiving. This prompted him to start the Boy Scouts in England in 1907. With his sister, Agnes Baden-Powell, he organized the Girl Guides in England two years later. As scouting spread to other nations, Baden-Powell became the most important Scout leader in the world. He wrote several books on Scouting and on military campaigns.

Baden-Powell was born in London, and attended the Charterhouse school. He joined the British Army in 1876, and served in India, Afghanistan, and South Africa. During the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), his famous defense of Mafeking, in spite of famine and sickness in his ranks, earned him promotion to the rank of major general.

See also Boy Scouts.

Baden-Powell died January 8, 1941, less than two months before his 84th birthday. He was in Kenya, where he had been living because of health reasons. The British authorities wanted him to be buried in Westminster Abbey, but war conditions made that impossible. 1

His grave, in Kenya, has a tombstone with the Trail Marker shown below, which means: "End of the Trail" or "I have gone home." 2

Source: Scouting for Boys, World Brotherhood edition

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