



Chapter 5: Campouts and Campfire Programs

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 Timpanogos District
 Boy Scouts
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Last Revised:
 7-21-2000

Key Items to Learn

- Purpose of Campouts
- Campfire programs and Ceremonies

Resources

- Scoutmaster Handbook, Ch. 9, Pg. 83, The Outdoor Program

Purposes of Campouts

In 1907 Robert S. Baden-Powell experimented with his first campout for boys. The camp was held on Brownsea Island and 21 boys participated. This camp was the proto-type for all scout campouts. It lasted 7 days. William Hillcourt described the first night on Brownsea Island in this manner:

As darkness fell on 31 July, the boys gathered round their first camp fire. B-P was the camp fire leader, the song leader, the story-teller. He told them tales of India and Africa and explained some of the details of the program for the days ahead. He was at his very best. During the past few years he had associated with many groups of boys and had spoken before their gatherings. But this was different. These boys were his--his for a week, to work with, to play with, to learn from, and, if his ideas were right, to guide, to influence, to mold. . . .

As the embers faded, the boys rose for prayers, then turned in for their first night under canvas. Baden-Powell sat up a little longer, talking over the next day's schedule with McLaren. Then General and Major went to their camp-beds. Lights out. Silence in camp--with the waves sighing along the shore and the night-jars burring among the trees. [Baden-Powell: The Two Lives of a Hero, William Hillcourt, 80th birthday edition, page 268.]

During each evening Baden-Powell enthralled the boys at campfire with stories of B-P's exploits as a military scout, officer and general. Then, the following morning B-P taught the boys some of the skills that he had described in the previous night's stories. During the afternoon the boys participated in competitive events by patrol, using the skills B-P taught them that morning.

Throughout the week Baden-Powell made sure the boys had plenty of good food, properly prepared, and that camp conditions were kept sanitary.

Whether a campout is for several days or just overnight, the pattern set by Baden-Powell will serve any troop well. Campouts should be fun. They should have planned teaching sessions followed by hands-on application of the lessons and skills that are taught. And there will be numerous learning and teaching moments that will arise automatically if the leaders are

sensitive to and prepared to take advantage of those opportunities.

Camp Fires & Ceremonies

Campfires and ceremonies can be an integral part of a troop program. A campfire should build up in enthusiasm through the early and middle stages, then builds down to instill a serious or reflective mood in the scouts, and settle them down for bedtime.

It's important to remember that there are several types of campfires. One campfire might be comprised of each patrol giving a skit, while another might comprise the Scoutmaster telling stories. Campfires with songs are not uncommon. The Campfire program Planning Guide below can be used to organize the event.

Many troops develop their own traditions. Here the scout leaders are only limited to the degree of their own creativity.

"Boy, that was a swell campfire." Any Scoutmaster who has heard that comment made by one of his Scouts following a troop campfire has a real feeling of pride and satisfaction. He knows that the fellowship and inspiration of this magical time are helping him to do his real job as a molder of men.

The campfire is the catalyst in the Scout program. The adult, as well as the boy, thrills to the lilting strains of "Taps." feels the closeness of the boys as they stare into the fire and sing a Scout song or listen carefully to a good story. The boys enjoy all this, the man knows that if this is done well, his boys at this moment are storing away inspiration, memories, and ideals to last them a lifetime.

Such worthwhile results are seldom obtained on the first try. If your troop is not in the habit of having campfires frequently, both indoors and out, you will benefit from practice and, after a few simple programs, you will gain the confidence necessary to accomplish more at each successive campfire.

As in all phases of the Scout program, the adult leaders plant some ideas, smooth the way, and see that the necessary plans are made to guarantee success. The two major keys to having a good campfire are planning and good ingredients.

Involving Boy Leaders

As in planning all troop activities, the troop leaders' council is deeply involved in planning campfires. These boy leaders are familiar with the talents of the Scouts in their patrols and the likes and dislikes of all troop members, and are responsible for the development of patrol skits. Campfire leaders will probably come from this group.

The informality and spontaneity of the troop campfire make up its principal charm, so a brief outline for the campfire will probably be enough. You don't have to come up with a fancy production schedule for a simple troop campfire. If the ingredients are properly mixed and well served, everybody will enjoy them.

In the planning stage, the Scoutmaster may prefer to turn the campfire leadership over to an assistant, or to a member of the troop leaders' council, with the understanding that the leader must use all talent available and not try to run the whole show. Even though he gives the responsibility for campfire leadership to another person, the Scoutmaster will stay in close touch with all phases of the planning to make sure the program stays on a high place and involves many boys. Every patrol should have a part in the program, but one person needs to act as the coordinator and master of the campfire.

Some troops assign a campfire program to one patrol, making it responsible for getting talent together from the whole troop and running the actual program when it is in progress. Be sure to assign the service patrol early enough so that the campfire is constructed carefully well in advance. Make sure that the service patrol knows that it is to build, light, and tend the fire and

clean up afterward.

A Typical Campfire Program

Before we discuss each of the individual ingredients of a campfire, let's take a look at the shoe pattern, a sort of bird's-eye view of the whole show. Opening ceremonies should be colorful and related to the lighting of the fire. Songs and icebreakers, use folk songs, fun songs, rounds, action songs: varieties of applause, patrol and troop yells, brain teasers, gimmicks, and other ice breakers. Games and contests based on inter-patrol challenges, individual tests of skill, or quiet fun games for the whole troop. Dramatics such as patrol stunts or Indian dancing. Stories such as mysteries, tall tales, adventure, biography, and true stories of Scout experiences. Recognition awarding of camp honors, advancement awards, or other recognition of special accomplishments. Announcements, keep them brief. Closing ceremonies, Scoutmaster's minutes, quiet campfire endings and Scout benediction.

Every troop campfire will have a combination of four, five, or six of these campfire ingredients. Some campfires might have all of them, but this could make a campfire program that is too long. Develop your program around the ingredients that will do the things you want to accomplish at the campfire.

Helpful Hints for the Campfire Master of Ceremonies

It is easier to prepare a set of rules than it is to carry them out. The experienced master of campfire will follow these as a matter of course:

Secure attention: don't talk until you have it. Use the Scout hand signals.

Get the program under way on time and fast. This is the time for fire lighting ceremonies., lively songs, and cheers. Introductions of new members can be made.

Follow the fire, loud and lively material as the fire burns brightly, then more quiet items, ending with an inspirational note.

Have as few rules as possible and enforce them.

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