

4th Newbury Scout Troop, Annual Report 2013-2014

The 2013 AGM was a little later than usual, so when I started writing this report I found there weren't many things that I could talk about from the Summer Term in 2013 that I hadn't spoken about before. But it is worth briefly mentioning our Backwoods cooking night at Angels Corner where the Scouts cooked kebabs over wood fires and our shelter building at Snelsmore. The point of a bivouac of natural shelter is to protect you from the elements in a survival situation. It's supposed to be small, low and thick to protect from rain and wind. I think the Scouts were thinking more on the scale of a hotel when construction began – big, tall and open plan. Luckily as the evening went on, the merits of a smaller design were quickly discovered – less work for starters!

Summer Camp is always the highlight of the Scout calendar. Last August we camped at Huish Woods near Taunton. A Scout campsite operated by Somerset county and offering a variety of on-site activities. Activities during the course of the week involved the on-site aerial runway – going down was always popular, pulling the apparatus back up for the next person never seemed to have the same appeal. A day out to Cheddar Gorge caves, where the Scouts donned overalls to protect their obviously pristine camp attire before negotiating some of Cheddars massive cave network. For those left outside the caves, the challenge was more to find shelter from the torrential rain and thunder and lightning. Another day out was to the nearby Fleet Air arm museum in Yeovil, where the drama queens of camp were quickly identified when the question was asked, 'Who wants to dress up in the pilots uniforms'.

The highlight activities of Summer camp were undoubtedly the evening gliding session in the Mendip Hills on a beautifully clear night, offering excellent views over the rolling countryside. I was very pleased to see all the Scouts take part despite some hesitant looks as they were strapped in to the Gliders and told how to bail out if required! A close second would be the day of activities at the Blackrock Activity centre which had a high ropes course, canoeing lake, and water balling.. Water balling, now there's a great activity for a Scout Leader. It wasn't the double skin doughnut shaped things you see for zorbing. These were air tight hamster balls. Why did the leaders like them so much, well simple really – when zipped into an air tight ball the noise level goes down. Unfortunately being air-tight, the activity was time limited, something to do with running out of oxygen, so the peace was short lived, but worth if according to all the Scouts as it was 'awesome'





One of the more quirky on-site activities was the Woodland Crafts where the Scouts get to use hand and power tools to make woodland creatures from wood sourced around the campsite. Hedgehogs seemed a very popular design choice.

Summer Camp is where possible, a cook on wood week. Huish wood had a healthy supply of logs allowing the Scouts to play with fire. By the end of the week they'd finally learned that if you play with the fire the night before, cooking breakfast is always going to be a struggle without dry kindling. Here's hoping they'll remember this the next time around.

September heralded the start of a new year, some old faces moved up to Explorers and some new faces appeared from Cubs. With the dark nights rapidly approaching this tends to be a more indoor term and many of the Scouts completed their First Aid Stage 3 proficiency badges during the course of the term. Other events of note were the District Archery competition – we ain't got any budding Robin Hoods in the Troop, that's for sure. Remembrance Parade, I'm always pleased to see so many members of the Troop make the effort to turn out –the weather was fair, which always helps. Our now annual Winter Camp took place at Angels Corner – the weather had been pretty windy beforehand so there was a good supply of wood to help stave off the cold weather. The reindeer made another appearance at our Festive Craft sessions, which always seems to be popular along with cracker making. And to round of the year, the Annual Christmas event – which on this occasion was filled with some Scouting sketches for those with dramatic flair.

2014, wet! The weather at the beginning of the year really did take its toll on the term's programme. Snelsmore forestry work didn't happen, the Alamo didn't happen and doing anything outdoors was a gamble. That said, we persevered and prepared an Alamo Team, and I think all were gutted when the event was cancelled at the 11th hour – although on the plus side, hopefully they'll be better prepared for next time! And to prove a point, we went out on our own just to give those that wanted to, an opportunity to get a feel for what the event should have been.

Since Easter, the weather showed signs of improving. We camped... It rained... Not that it stopped us, and camp saw the Scouts rifle shooting, completing their mechanics badges and making scones (in theory) in cardboard ovens. As a leader team, we were dead chuffed with those – we've now had 3 goes at it – and a 66% success rate. Maybe we've learned something too.



Rafting on the canal is another staple of the Summer Term. The weather was very kind to us, even if the midges weren't. The rafts held together for the evening extremely well. Lasting long enough for 6 new Scouts to be invested into the Troop while floating in the middle of the canal!

As we're now well into June, the Scouts naturally start thinking about their Summer holidays, the Leader team are focused on Summer Camp. This year see's us heading north to Chamboree near Chester where we will take part in an International Scouts Jamboree with 4000 other participants from around the UK and overseas. All indications so far suggest it should be a great week and we hope all the Scouts are looking forward to it as much as we are!

That brings me neatly to the end of my thoughts about the last year's Scouting programme and only leaves me with one thought. That's hoping that the next 12 months will provide equal, if not better quality of Scouting for the Troop!

Bruce.

4th Newbury (St. Johns), Scout Leader