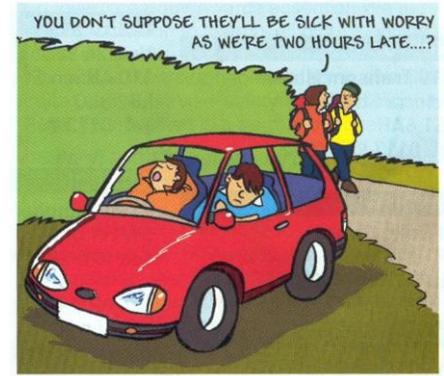


## 4<sup>th</sup> Newbury Scout Troop, Annual Report 2015-2016

So as our Annual General Meeting has slipped to a diary date later in the year, I find it necessary to have a quick look and remember where I left off after last year's report and that was around April 2015. Lots has happened since then!

May saw us on a weekend camp at Thirtover. The weather was kind and a good weekend was had by all. Over the weekend those participating completed a day hike and some air rifle shooting as well as the usual Scout tasks of cooking and taking FOREVER to put up a patrol tent!



We also had our traditional Rafting night on the canal which has become a highlight of the annual programme. The caveat is as always, learn to tie the knots in the hall first then we have more time on the canal. While the event is always well attended – the attention the week before learning clove hitches is always something that needs improvement. However, on the plus side – this year the barrels did stay attached to the raft – always a good step forward.

In July we added a new event to the calendar, the Berkshire Country Dragon Boat Regatta held at the Wokingham Waterside centre. Berkshire County Scouts have run this event for a few years and the date has just never worked for us – but this time it did and we took 11 Scouts along, for our first attempt a very good performance was put in and all that took part had a great day (and came back a little sunburned)

In preparation for Summer camp, we had a Monday night up at Snelsmore Common in July building bivvys (shelters of natural materials) in preparation for Summer Camp – **Lesson 1**, if the weight of the bivy exceeds the tolerance of the string holding it up, the conclusion is inevitable. Smaller branches needed next time please!

July also saw some of the Scouts complete their Expedition Challenge which is a two day hike with an overnight stop and they need to carry all their equipment as they go. Those who took part made an excellent job of it, just goes to show that all that navigation practice for the Alamo pays off in the end.



Summer Camp was at Blacklands Farm in Sussex, a Girl Guide site offering a range of on-site activities – and various excuses to 'socialise' with the Guides ☺ We took the opportunity to do some off-site blue-ribbon events during the week too, these included a bivy sleepover at a nearby Scout site – I think some of the Scouts thought if they didn't build it they'd magically get taken back to their tents for the night – this isn't Wash Common Scouts you know, such things do not happen. In the end the bivvys got built and the

baked potatoes got cooked. Everyone slept out and survived the night.

**Lesson 2** – If the fire is downhill when you go to sleep, make sure you don't roll over in the night...

Another highlight of the week was the Wakeboarding at Hove, where the Scouts donned wetsuits and risked drinking salt water, all in the pursuit of speed. **Lesson 3** – some leaders need the act their age! Also squeezed into the week was Sailing, Crate Climbing, Climbing, Kayaking, Canadian Canoes, Trampolining, oh and did I mention the Guides...



September always sees a few faces leave and few more arrive, but the Scout Troop has maintained healthy numbers throughout – we aim for ~24 Scouts at any time as that is a good number for the Hall and external activities.



One part of the award work we always struggle with is finding out about/visiting a community facility. October saw us visit the Town Hall for an evening and find out what the Town Council is responsible for, it also gave the more exuberant Scouts the opportunity to dress up in the mayoral robes. **Lesson 4** – the camera is always watching... **Parents** – if anyone has other places we can visit on a Monday evening, please let me know – we struggle ticking this box!!

As the nights drew in and the days got much shorter one event was looming on the horizon, spoken with hushed tones in all other Scout Troops but cherished by 4<sup>th</sup> Newbury.... The Alamo! An overnight navigation and incident hike in a secret location. We entered 2 teams who had been well drilled in navigation (and walking through very wet fields during the practice hike **Lesson 5** – Goretex or leather walking boots are no match for a footpath through a very wet cabbage field). We entered.... The teams started... The mercury plummeted... The leaders held their breath, quietly optimistic... The morning after, and through somewhat sleepy eyes the results were announced. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>! Awesome work by all who took part and an expensive trip to Tesco for Krispy Kreme doughnuts for me.

Christmas came, our bottle band had a cameo performance at the 4<sup>th</sup> Newbury Christmas Event and the tune was recognisable. An amazing achievement if you had heard the practice nights. Time for a well-earned break....



### 2016 arrives...

With a new programme officially launched, some new bits start to appear in the programme this term including a Country Code night and a couple of Team Building evenings as we tailor our programme to the new awards (<http://members.scouts.org.uk/supportresources/search/?cat=7,64,781>). However, the regular events keep happening, including Scrub bashing at Snelsmore Common. With a new Countryside Warden we thought this might have ended this year, but we were back and received glowing feedback for the amount of work put in by the Scouts (which ticks one of those Award requirements).

The Swimming Gala was back this year – the Scout under 12's came home with the trophy and the over 12's were robbed of 1<sup>st</sup> place by one point. **Lesson 6** – if you want to win, you need to enter. We need to see more people entering this in the future if we want to keep hold of our success.

March saw us camping at Rushalls Farm – a bit late in the calendar for our traditional winter camp, but very well attended at a new site to us. Although a bit damp underfoot, the weather did not dampen the Scout spirits and a good weekend was had by all. The new egg chucking game seemed a bit too popular. **Lesson 7** – Oak may be a great cooking wood, but only when the fire is started. It's rubbish as kindling.



April always sees Scouting celebrate St. George's Day as we all renew our Scout promises. This year the Group made a decision to visit Brownsea Island (site of the first Scout camp) and renew our promises where it all began. The weather was kind but chilly and everyone had a good, enjoyable (albeit long) day out. The red squirrels are still strong on the island and for the naturalists this presented a rare sight during the day.

Now I find myself repeating some bits at the beginning of the report, we were back on the canal rafting – still popular, and a good night. June saw us back at Thirtover for the weekend as a training session for Summer camp which included Air Rifle Shooting and Grass Sledging. We also had another go at the Dragon Boating. We had a few too many so we helped out Inkpen and Kintbury (very Scouting of us) so they had enough people too. The Result, 4<sup>th</sup> Newbury = 1<sup>st</sup>. Inkpen & Kintbury = 2<sup>nd</sup>. We weren't popular with the Maidenhead and Theale groups who'd been practicing. Oopsy 😊



We finished the term with a 2<sup>nd</sup> unseasonal visit to Bracknell Ski slope for some snow tubing which seems to be quickly becoming a firm favourite in the diary, then it was time for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Summer Camp in this report. Another new site to us, Botany Bay in Wales. This was a different type of camp from our usual summer fare, as we were the only people on site. However I think it was enjoyed by all, the 'proper' abseiling in the Wye valley and the caving were particular highlights along with the mountain boarding and dirt scooting. A visit to Goodrich castle proved the Scouts would be rubbish Pikemen in warfare. **Lesson 8** – knowing your left from your right is useful when doing

drill, never mind that the pointy end goes forwards. The on-site rope swing proved incredibly popular during the week, especially when there was washing up to be done. We also had our own camp Olympics during the week just to make sure no-one missed out on the Olympic build up.

Now the new term is gathering speed, the programme till Christmas is written and the activities are coming together nicely. It has been a good year for the Troop. A year that would not be possible without the efforts of the other leaders and my thanks goes out to Nigel, Gemma and Dan – without whom, we wouldn't be able to offer the 4<sup>th</sup> Newbury Scout Troop experience that we do. Here's hoping for another successful year of Scouting for the young people in the next 12 months. **Lesson 9** – if you build it, they will come (*Kevin Costner – Field of Dreams*).



Thanks for reading!

Bruce Meldrum

Scout Leader, 4<sup>th</sup> Newbury (St. Johns) Scout Troop