

SCOUT STAVES

For thousands of year the walking stick or staff has been a basic tool for the outdoor traveller. It has been a symbol, weapon, record, and support for tired feet and legs of the wanderer. It has hundreds of usages.

For centuries, labourers used the staff to support loads and defend themselves against man and beast. Egyptian hieroglyphics picture travellers with sticks in hand. The Bible is full of references to staves. The ancient Druids, who believed each copse had its own living spirit, apologized to a tree before cutting it for a staff.

The staff is a symbol of authority and power. Moses used his to part the Red Sea and to get water from a rock. In Egypt, the staff and the shorter rod were the Pharaoh's symbols of office. Today, the mace, an ornate and stylised version of a staff, symbolizes the power of English Parliament. At the same time, the staff, especially a staff with a crook, has always represented the humble shepherd.

Record keeping is one of the oldest uses of the staff. The ancient Norse used the notched stick called a skor to keep track of numerical information, and the word stuck around to become today's "score."

The Scout Staff

The staff, plural staves, is an important part of a Scouts equipment especially when hiking or camping. It is 1.7m (5'6") in length and is decorated to record the Scouts achievements.

The staff was adopted by the Founder, Lord Baden-Powell, because of its usefulness during one of his early military campaigns in the jungle country of West Africa. He used it for testing the depths of swamp holes and dark streams; for guarding his face when pushing through heavy bush; for feeling his way in the dark; and for carrying bundles over his shoulder when wading a stream.

Scouts have found many other uses for the staff. It can be especially useful when used with other staves as poles for making an emergency shelter; for signalling; for improvising a flagpole; for building a light bridge; as handles for an improvised stretcher; for the forming a barrier to control crowds, and for jumping ditches.

The staff should be carried slung over and behind the right shoulder. The thong is passed through two small holes about or 25cm apart in the upper third of the staff, so placed that the staff clears the ground by several centimeters. The thong is secured by small stop-knots.

Making a Scout Staff

1. Select and cut straight, 2m sapling, approximately 3cm diameter at thick end
2. Store in cool dry spot for 3-4 weeks.
3. Trim to 1.7m length.
4. Remove bark.
5. Trim knots and smooth.
6. Mark top (this can be the thick or thin end as preferred) 20cm at 2cm intervals.
7. Mark the bottom in 50cm intervals.
8. Decorate top with Troop, Patrol, or personal symbols.
9. Treat with oil stain or preservative.
10. Cover bottom end with crutch tip or similar.

