

## **"Where it all began – The first experimental Scout camp at Brownsea Island"**

### **Preface**

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We shall hear again the inaugural kudu horn blast, like on that day long ago at Brownsea Island when B.-P. blew it to open the first Scout camp. We shall hear it again, perhaps only in our Scout hearts, when it will signal the rising of the sun on a new century of Scouting.

That blast will mix with the surfing waves – not so much those breaking on the shores of little Brownsea Island in the Channel as those on the coast of some island in the Pacific Ocean immediately west of the international date line. That is where the sun of the new dawn of Scouting is about to rise first, on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007.

Thereafter that blast will cross oceans and forests, it will whistle through the highest mountains, it will spread through steppes and deserts, it will get stronger in the great world cities, and finally it will come back even stronger to Brownsea. And there, more than 300 boys and girls coming from the 216 countries and territories where to-day the emblem of World Scouting is waving will spring out of their tents to cheer that flag which once again will be flown, one hundred years later, "where it all began".

Not very far from there, on the hills of Essex, 40,000 Scouts, while welcoming the new Scouting century together, will perhaps think: "Dear old B.-P., you wanted your first twenty Scouts to come from different social classes; look now upon us in this twenty-first World Jamboree, representing the most diverse cultures, and also all social classes, languages and religions; here are we, the citizens of the world, as you wanted us to be, united in the commitment we took with our common Scout Promise". One World, one Promise.

The blast of the kudu horn will continue to spread around the world from east to west, following the sunrise. Everywhere boys and girls will meet by the dozens, the hundreds, the thousands. They are now several millions, just as B.-P. had written: "Gradually, Scouting and Guiding have snowballed into an international Movement"; and just as he asked for, so many people have come up to help him push that snowball, which continues to grow to this day.

This first English edition of "Where it all began", which originally appeared in Italian a few years ago, is all the more timely in that it coincides with the Centenary of the first Scout camp and of the founding of the Movement, which still to-day is served by two world organisations, that of the Guides with national organisations of girls only, and that of the Scouts, with both boys and girls. Together they comprise about 38 million young people actively engaged in educational activities based on the method devised and developed by Robert Baden-Powell – known as B.-P. to all of them – in the wake of that first experiment on Brownsea Island. Many more, surely several hundred millions, are those who more or less intensely have gone through a Scouting experience. For many of them that passage has been decisive in influencing their way of being and thinking. Hence the symbolic value that the Centenary is taking, and the Brownsea adventure with it, should not come as a surprise.

Scouting is firmly rooted in the principles laid down by B.-P. and expressed in the Scout Promise and Law which every Scout refers to while doing his or her best in “trying to leave this world a little better than he or she found it”. Yet Scouting is also an inter-generational movement where adult leaders know that they have to listen constantly to the youth they are called upon to lead, so as to be able to pass the baton on to them in the best way. They have to pay attention to the changing times, and perhaps the greatest challenge of all for them is to be able to make the difference between the fads or tendencies of present-day society which looks at the young people as an important consumer group, and the genuine needs and deepest aspirations of the new generations, as well as the new challenges with which they are confronted.

Especially when one is facing the difficulty of attracting adolescents and young adults, one is often tempted to adapt the programme to the fashions and trends of the time. There is a tendency to think that, if the young people follow those models, it is perhaps because they respond to their aspirations. Then fun becomes an end in itself, and activities, reduced as they are to a merely recreational experience, lose their educational objective. Scouting’s great attraction is being an alternative to fashion.

The programme proposed by B.-P. to the Brownsea boys was indeed such an alternative. For boys of different social classes, living, working and playing together was in itself a remarkable challenge. Being considered as adults to whom responsibilities could be entrusted was a surprise to them. So was the possibility to organise themselves into autonomous patrols of boys, the challenge to prepare their own food or night shelter, the fascination of learning to observe and understand the environment around them, and the feeling of being able one day to be useful to their community by learning first aid and firemanship. Then there was that atmosphere of marvellous adventure, the camp fire and the yarns led by an adult, nay, a national hero who, surprisingly, instead of acting as a schoolmaster or instructor, had played with them during the day, like one of them. Then the picket duty, when they were on guard against non-existing dangers, but at the same time discovered the very meaning of keeping watch and lived the mystery of the night in close contact with Nature. Surely, along with those emotions B.-P. was able to pass on to them an ideal vision of the world to be translated into a commitment they had to live up to.

In this sense boys and girls have not changed: they are still ready today to respond enthusiastically to a kind of Scouting that may propose fascinating and innovating activities to them, give them responsibilities and enable them to be leading actors in creating a better world.

A hundred years later, Scouting makes millions of young people live through those same emotions again. In an era of extraordinary acceleration of the globalisation process, the Scout adventure goes on, as Mario Sica underlines, within “the only truly world-wide youth movement”, and yet, I would add, one truly rooted into the most diverse local communities and cultures.