

TO THE NETHERLANDS SCOUTING CAME BY BIKE.

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When Baden-Powell's SCOUTING FOR BOYS had been published, Scouting spread quickly all over the British Isles and from there to all parts of the, in those days, still extensive and mighty British Empire in which - as the saying went - the sun never set.

But in other countries also, in which British communities existed, British Scout Troops were founded. In Brussels, the capital of the Kingdom of the Belgians, there was a large British society. In 1909 Scoutmaster Harold Parfitt set up the first British troop. All members were British but one who had a Belgian father and an English mother. The same happened in many other countries.

In Scouting's early years thousands of foreign nationals lived and worked in Britain and watched the phenomena and its rapid growth. Some of them considered the new Game to be very suitable to the youngsters in their own homelands.

One of them was the Dutchman Gos de Voogt (1863-1918). He was the London correspondent of one of the leading dailies in the Netherlands and he too watched Scouting grow. Shortly before he was promoted to chief editor, and had to return to Amsterdam, he interviewed Baden-Powell and became an enthusiast and thereupon surprised his readers with large articles explaining what Scouting was and how it could also be to the benefit of Dutch youngsters.

In the old university city of Oxford was operational the 16th Oxford Troop, lead by Scoutmaster Bernhard S.M. Blythe. He was in his early twenties, adventurous and he liked travelling. He was very popular with his boys and many of them thought it a great honour to be members of his troop. In 1910 he decided to take a few of his Scouts on a trip to the Netherlands and Belgium. This in those days was quite an undertaking. He communicated with people in the seaports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam and in the latter, the country's capital, he exchanged letters with Gos de Voogt. By means of a patrol competition 6 boys were selected to be taken on the trip. In general travelling, and certainly to foreign countries, was something only the higher classes could permit themselves and these boys and their leader belonged to what in those days were known as the middle and the working classes. So this adventurous trip was exceptional must have excited them and indeed it was going to be an adventure never to forgotten.

Very early in the morning of July 30th, 1910 the six boys and their Scoutleader were ready to depart. Photos were taken, a speech was made and goodbyes were said. Then they mounted their bikes and the trip began. That evening they reached Banbury where they stayed for the night. On the Sunday evening they arrived in Ullesthorpe and the night from Monday to Thursday they spent in the surrounding of Nottingham. On Tuesday evening they made it as far as Goole and on Wednesday they cycled along the river bank road to Kingston on Hull. Which they reached by noon. The steamer to Rotterdam departed at 6 pm. In five days they had covered about 300 kilometres. It is not surprising that they were tired and that soon after the ship had reached open sea they turned in.

On Thursday morning, July 30th, 1910, the vessel reached the Hook of Holland and sailed up the river to Rotterdam where it docked at 11 am. The Rotterdam contact was waiting for them on the quay but accompanied by a unit of the Royal Navy Cadet Corps with a drum and piper band. Led by the band they marched through Rotterdam to their hostel. Thereafter they went sightseeing and it was rather late before they went to bed. The next day the old city and its impressive docklands were explored again

and on the Saturday their hosts took them to Den Haag (The Hague) and its seaside resort Scheveningen with its wide sand beaches. During the evening another Navy Cadet unit came to visit.

Thanks to Gos de Voogt's articles on Scouting and the fact that he had announced the Oxford Scouts arrival, the press was much interested and on Sunday morning the 7th newspaper men and photographers came to visit. One of the photos taken appeared prominently in next week's weekly and dailies and has been saved until this very day. Yet tiredness took its toll. One of the boys stayed in bed and a second one got unwell during a church service that they attended later that day.

On Monday morning they left Rotterdam. Not by bike, as planned, but by train, as the boys were really too tired. At the Amsterdam Central Station Gos de Voogt was waiting for them. In his daily of the 3rd of August, he had once again dedicated a long article to Scouting and he had also announced their arrival in Amsterdam. It was a hot summer day and after having left the station he took the boys to a restaurant in one of the main streets for refreshments. The Amsterdammers - as always - are an inquisitive race. Of course they had never seen Scouts before and the boys with the hats, in shorts, with their scarves and staves did attract the attention. In such a way that when they wanted to return to the station to collect their bikes, the police had to come to enable them to proceed. Led by Gos de Voogt they cycled to their accommodation, on the, to them, wrong side of the road.

The next day they were shown the ancient city centre of Amsterdam and the evening was spent with a number of Amsterdam lads who showed great interest. One of them was Piet van Delft who was to be one of the first Amsterdam's Boy Scouts and - until his death well after World War - served the Dutch Movements in many capacities. The following morning they cycled to the eastern part of town, to the shore of the Zuydeerse, now cut off from the Northsea and partly reclaimed. In the afternoon they were the guests of the Amsterdam Fire Brigade.

Later that afternoon they left Amsterdam on their way to the city of Nijmegen near the German border in the eastern part of the country. Three boys and the luggage were put in a motor car, the others and the bikes travelled by train. Their Nijmegen host was an Englishman Mr Whiteside. In his garden he had erected a tent in which they spent the night. The next day they were shown the old city of Nijmegen situated on the wide river, and they had lunch in a restaurant on a hill giving them a view of adjoining Germany. At about 4 pm they boarded a train and two hours later arrived at the city of Tilburg in the southwest. They were met by members of a local marksmen association which for its junior members had introduced certain elements of SCOUTING FOR BOYS in its training program. But not so that the boys could be said to have been the first Dutch Boy Scout.

Friday was used to see Tilburg and during the evening hours they met the junior marksmen. On Saturday the 13th they boarded a train which from Tilburg took them across the border into Belgium and to the city of Antwerp. They were given accommodation on board a British vessel. On the Sunday they rested, relaxed and took it easy. But early Monday the 15th a train carried them from Antwerp to Brussels, the Belgian capital. At the station British Scoutmaster Harold Parfitt and some members of his troop met them. They visited the beautiful city centre and later were taken to Waterloo and its monument where they were told how the French Army lead by Emperor Napoleon I had been defeated by the united forces of Great Britain, Prussia and the Netherlands on June 18th, 1815. Then they returned to Antwerp.

The very next day was another day of rest though some of the elder boys went into Antwerp again.

On Wednesday the 17th they travelled by train from Antwerp to Rotterdam. They boarded the steamer that during the night brought them back to England where they arrived early in the morning. The plan

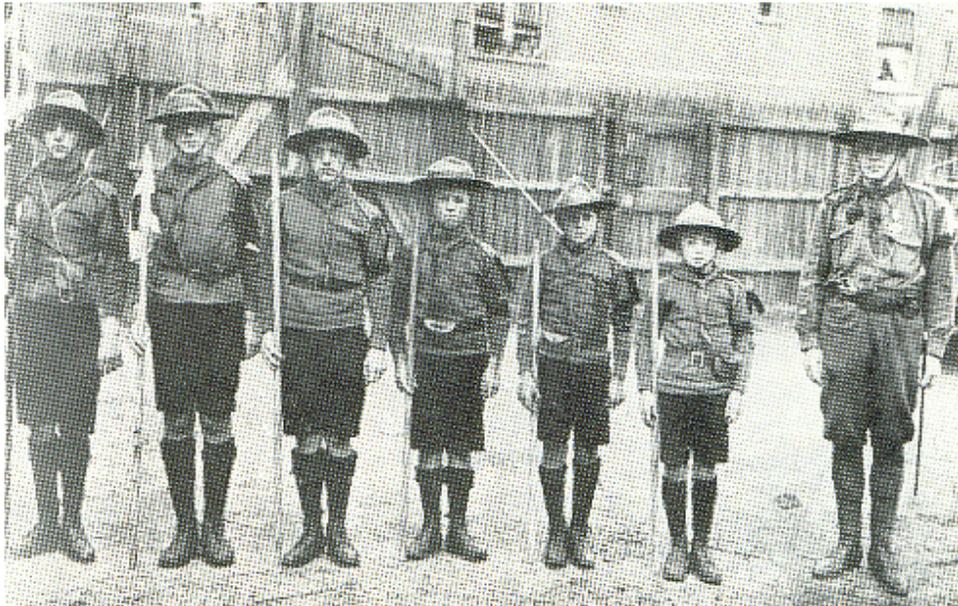
had been to cycle from Hull back to Oxford but some of the bikes broke down and one of the boys felt really sick and so it had to be decided to take a train to Oxford and so, earlier than expected, on Friday morning the 19th of August they were back at Oxford's station.

No doubt all participants must have been tired. Yet as was proven in later years they all looked back on their adventure with great pleasure. But at the time they may not have been aware of the fact that they were the first Boy Scouts ever seen in the Netherlands and that they had sown the Seed of Scouting.

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During and after the Oxford boys' stay in Amsterdam Gos de Voogt paid a lot of attention to them and to Scouting. The Amsterdam boys had watched and got interested. Some played Boy Scouts and some were taken under the wings of Wim den Ouden, who formed a patrol. A twen with a Dutch father and a British mother, bilingual, he had read SCOUTING FOR BOYS. He trained the patrol. He thus became the first Dutch Scoutmaster ever and his patrol the first Dutch patrol. Uniforms were bought in Britain. The activities attracted other boys who also wanted to join in. Gos de Voogt became one of the promoters. A few months after the 16th Oxford's patrol had visited the number of Amsterdam Scouts was large enough to found no less than 7 troops. They were numbered 1 - 7 and it so happens that the no 1 troop still exists. In Amsterdam, on January 7th, 1911 the Nederlandsche Padvinders Organisatie - NPO (Netherlands Pathfinders Organisation) was founded.

But in other parts of the country Scouting troops had also been formed. On December 11th, 1915 they all merged into one NSO, the Vereeniging de Nederlandsche Padvinders - NPV (The Netherlands Scouting Association). All thanks to some cycling British Scouts.



The Six Oxford Scouts and their Scoutmaster in Amsterdam.